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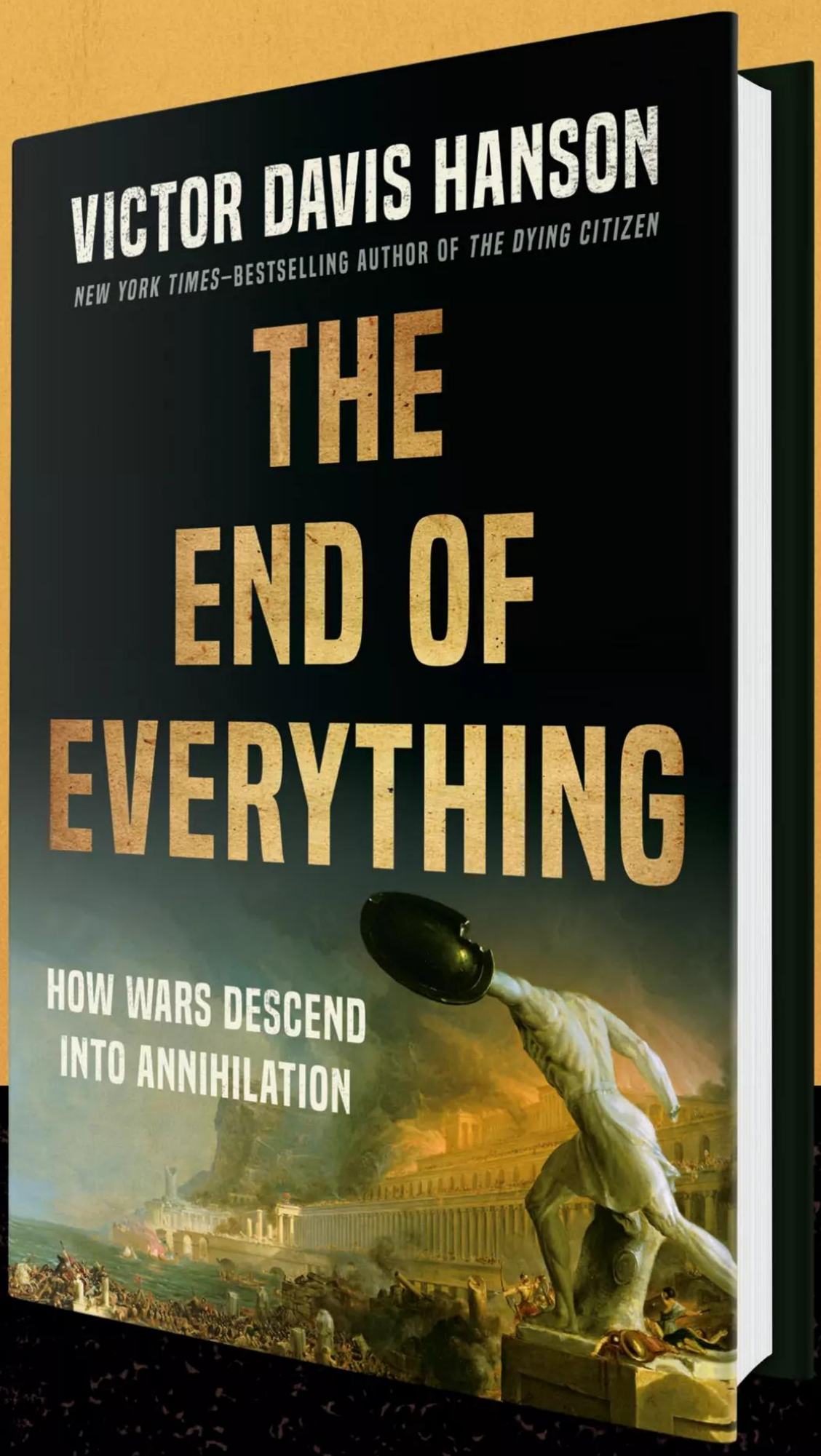
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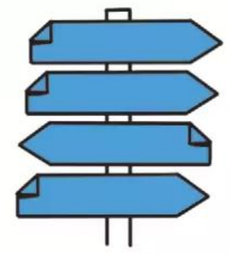
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COVER: LUBA MYTS

National Review (ISSN: 0028-0038) is published monthly by National Review, Inc., at 19 West 44th Street, Suite 1701, New York, N.Y. 10036. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices.
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VOLUME LXXVI, NO 5

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MAY 2024 ISSUE; PRINTED MARCH 28

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# THE WEEK

■ **Biden just put $6 billion** of student debt from 78,000 public employees on the shoulders of taxpayers. Lay off the 78,000 public employees, and we'll call it even.

■ **President Joe Biden** and former president Donald Trump secured the presidential nominations of their parties, setting up the first rematch between presidents since Benjamin Harrison vs. Grover Cleveland in 1892. Among the differences between that race and this: Former president Cleveland did not claim to have won the contest in which he had been defeated. Neither he nor the incumbent Harrison served regular helpings of word salad in their public statements. Harrison was not a shuffling oldster, and Cleveland was not a ranting one. The two sets of contestants have one thing in common, however. Harrison was hobbled by disaffection in normally GOP states, and Cleveland had bad relations with the Democratic stalwarts of Tammany Hall. Similarly, Joe Biden is scrambling to hold onto Muslim voters in Michigan and Minnesota who view him as too pro-Israel, while Trump has consistently lost a significant share of Republican primary voters even after his opponents dropped out. Even factoring out party-switchers, that is not great for an acknowledged party leader. This year democracy, to amend Mencken, is giving the people what they don't want, good and hard.

■ **On January 6, 2021,** Mike Pence defied Donald Trump. This was critical. Pence now says he cannot endorse Trump for another term as president "in good conscience." It is startling that, in a general election, a former vice president has declined to endorse the president alongside whom he served. Whatever one may think of the choices Pence made between 2016 and 2020, he has behaved with a bold independence in the years since. Last summer, when he was running for the GOP presidential nomination, Pence traveled to Ukraine, to express his solidarity with that people under siege—this despite the fact that he must have known it would do him no good with the GOP electorate. He continues to remind Republicans who do not wish to hear it that the national debt is rising dangerously and that entitlement programs need reforming because of it. He is also standing firm on the right to life at a time when many Republicans are blaming that cause for the party's political travails. On all these issues, he differs with Trump in a way that speaks well of him—and of a brand of conservatism that deserves renewal.

■ **An era is ending** in the United States Senate. Mitch McConnell announced that he is stepping aside as Republican leader, bringing to a close an extraordinary run as the longest-serving GOP leader. He will be remembered as one of the most skilled Senate leaders ever. He was a lonely but farsighted advocate of robustly free political speech and an opponent of the execrable McCain-Feingold campaign-finance legislation. He slowed and blocked as much of the Obama agenda as possible. He kept open the Antonin Scalia Supreme Court seat, despite intense pressure to buckle. He then famously pushed the accelerator on judicial confirmations during Trump's presidency, leading to a historic raft of new constitutionalist judges on the bench. In addition, he preserved the Senate filibuster, and he has been a mentor to countless conservative legislators and jurists in Kentucky and around the country. Lately, he's been a vocal proponent of Ukraine funding and of our traditional alliances, pushing back against the isolationist tendency on the right. Whoever comes next will have the burden of filling the shoes of a man who deserves to be considered one of the lions of the Senate.

■ **In early March,** Arizona senator Kyrsten Sinema dropped her bid for reelection as an independent, which she had been since leaving the Democratic Party in December 2022. Though Sinema voted with President Biden 94 percent of the time, she had her limits. She opposed Biden's signature $3.5 trillion Build Back Better plan and rejected left-wing proposals to pack the Supreme Court and to blow up the Senate filibuster. The latter stance, in particular, enraged the Left; activists even swarmed Sinema in a bathroom. But her bipartisan inclinations made her toxic among Democrats without endearing her to enough Republicans, leaving her unviable in the forthcoming Senate election. Her exit, following the announced retirement of Senator Joe Manchin and the decision of Senator McConnell to step down as Republican leader, means that yet another defender of the filibuster is leaving the Senate. Though the filibuster does not explicitly appear in the Constitution, it is one of the few remaining ways of ensuring that significant changes have overwhelming and geographically broad support, something that concerned the Founders. Most of the Left and even parts of the Right now oppose the filibuster for this very reason. The prospect of its disappearance should worry all those who still care about limited government. Which is reason enough to lament Sinema's imminent departure from the Senate, whatever our disagreements with her.

■ **Senator Bernie Sanders** (I., Vt.) wants everyone to get paid the same for doing less work. Many entrepreneurs throughout human history

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**Maybe if you're an 82-year-old socialist who has worked only in politics your entire life, you lose touch with what it means to be a productive member of society. The rest of us wouldn't eliminate work even if we could.**

have wanted this same goal. In fact, they set their sights higher, wanting everyone to get paid more for doing less work. So they invented various labor-saving devices that allow humans to get more done in less time. What is Sanders's plan to contribute to the great human endeavor of becoming wealthier while working less? Does he have an idea for the next automobile, a better management strategy, or the power loom for the 22nd century? No, Sanders wants to write words on a page and have a couple of hundred people vote for it. He has introduced a bill to mandate a 32-hour workweek "with no loss in pay." It would amend the Fair Labor Standards Act to reduce the definition of full-time work from 40 hours per week to 32 hours. Pay wouldn't go down, because the bill says employers "may not reduce the total workweek compensation rate." Working hard is a core part of being human. Maybe if you're an 82-year-old socialist who has worked only in politics your entire life, you lose touch with what it means to be a productive member of society. The rest of us wouldn't eliminate work even if we could.

■ **The House Republican caucus** is in danger of giving away a majority it doesn't appear to like using. Kevin McCarthy resigned after being deposed as speaker, and his seat won't be filled until May. Marjorie Taylor Greene is now trying to do the same to Mike Johnson, bringing another motion to vacate the speaker's chair after Johnson averted a government shutdown by striking a budget deal opposed by more than half of House Republicans. Johnson's caucus is down to 218 members and drops to 217 when Mike Gallagher's resignation becomes effective April 19. George Santos was expelled and replaced in a special election by a Democrat; he now says he's leaving the GOP. Bill Johnson resigned in January to run a university, and his seat won't be filled until June. Ken Buck, like Gallagher, resigned in disillusion with the state of the House. Buck's seat will be open until June; Gallagher's won't be filled before November. Kay Granger, retiring at the end of the session, is stepping down early from running the Appropriations Committee, a post that members once clung to for dear life. Gallagher's will be the fifth Republican resignation this session, and the sixth departure if Santos is counted. Twenty other retirements include veterans such as Patrick McHenry, Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Jeff Duncan, and Doug Lamborn. Who would want these jobs?

■ **President Biden has been getting** increasingly hostile in his rhetoric toward Israel in recent weeks, particularly when it comes to Israeli plans to finish the job against Hamas by invading Rafah, a town in southern Gaza. Vice President Kamala Harris chastised the planned Israeli offensive, claiming, laughably, that she had "studied the maps" and decided that Israel's plan to evacuate civilians from the area wasn't feasible. Then the administration betrayed Israel at the United Nations by allowing the Security Council to pass a resolution demanding an "immediate ceasefire" in Gaza while Hamas remains in power and still holds 130 hostages. The text of the resolution "demands an immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan respected by all parties leading to a lasting sustainable ceasefire," which in effect would mean leaving Hamas in power and allowing it to rebuild so it can carry out more attacks against Israel. The resolution makes no mention of the October 7 massacres, and while it "also demands the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages," it does not make the cease-fire conditional on their release. Unsurprisingly, Hamas rejected the current "ceasefire" proposal hours after the resolution passed. Why accept any concessions knowing that the U.S. is pressuring Israel to give up its fight anyway?

■ **Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer** likes to portray himself as an unwavering supporter of Israel, but a recent speech seems to prioritize protecting his own position in a Democratic Party that is increasingly hostile toward the Jewish state. Schumer, in a speech on the Senate floor, lumped together Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Hamas as two of the four biggest obstacles to peace in the region (the others being "radical right-wing Israelis" and Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas). He then argued that "the Netanyahu coalition no longer fits the needs of Israel after October 7" and said that there should be a new election to replace him. The reality is that whatever their reservations about Netanyahu, Israelis overwhelmingly support the ongoing war effort. Instead of butting into Israeli domestic politics, Schumer would do well to confront the anti-Israeli radicals within his own party.

■ **It was always** a forlorn hope that courts would boot Donald Trump from the ballot on the ground that he had "engaged in insurrection," as Section 3 of the 14th Amendment puts it. With almost no judicial precedent to guide it on that constitutional provision, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that state courts cannot disqualify candidates from federal office—at least, not unless Congress authorizes them to do so, which it has not. Given the shoddy handiwork of the Colorado supreme court and the Maine secretary of state, the U.S. Supreme Court balked at letting state courts enforce Section 3, which could have triggered a retaliatory cycle. It allowed state courts to enforce Section 3 against candidates for state office but not federal office—a distinction found nowhere in the text and one not significantly debated during the drafting and ratification of Section 3. It is left unclear whether other qualifications for federal office are unenforceable by states. The Court would have been on sounder legal footing to rule that Trump simply didn't engage in insurrection within the terms of the provision. Instead, there

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**There is substantial evidence that Trump exaggerated the value of his assets, but the wildly disproportionate 'disgorgement' penalty for this wrong is grist for a constitutional claim of excessive fine.**

may be another round of divisive controversy if it comes time to certify a Trump victory. No court will now decide whether Trump is an insurrectionist. None of the dozens of criminal charges against him accuses him of being one. The decision will be made by the voters.

■ **New York judge Juan Merchan** set April 15 for jury selection in the first-ever criminal trial of a former American president—one who happens to be the presumptive Republican presidential nominee. It's the case brought by Alvin Bragg. Ostensibly, it centers on the dubious 2017 recording in Trump's books of $130,000 in "hush money," paid prior to the 2016 election, to a porn star who claims to have had a tryst with Trump in 2006. At most, that should be a misdemeanor and non-prosecutable since the two-year statute of limitations lapsed long ago. Bragg, however, inflates it to 34 felonies (separately charging each invoice, check, and book entry) by claiming Trump did it to hide a second crime: nondisclosure of campaign expenses. That's a federal crime that Bragg has no authority to prosecute and that the responsible federal agencies declined to pursue—because the payment was technically not a campaign expense and, even if it had been, no disclosure would have been required until after the election (though Bragg insists Trump stole the election by withholding this information from voters). It's New York, so the case's absurdity hardly assures an acquittal for Trump.

■ **A New York appellate court** slashed by two-thirds, down to $175 million, the amount that Trump must post to bond to block the state from enforcing an astronomical $454 million judgment. Judge Arthur Engoron, an elected progressive Democrat, set that judgment at a recent civil-fraud trial in which Attorney General Letitia James proved no fraud victims. The reduction was a setback for James, another progressive Democrat who campaigned vowing to use state power against Trump and who has been chirping about the still-mounting judgment (on which interest accrues at more than $112,000 per diem) while publicly coveting Trump's New York properties. The appellate court's ruling means James will not be able to force Trump to sell some of his real estate (likely at fire-sale rates) or to watch the state seize his properties to auction them off. The court's intervention was appropriate. There is substantial evidence that Trump exaggerated the value of his assets, but the wildly disproportionate "disgorgement" penalty for this wrong is grist for a constitutional claim of excessive fine.

■ **It was a Pyrrhic victory** for Fulton County district attorney Fani Willis. Georgia judge Scott McAfee declined to disqualify her from further participation in the state RICO prosecution of Donald Trump and 18 others. He opined that an "odor of mendacity" enwraps the case, arising out of her hiring of special prosecutor Nathan Wade, with whom she had a romantic affair, benefiting from the high salary she paid him by accompanying him on luxury vacations. Worse, although McAfee could not bring himself to make a conclusive finding, he noted the considerable evidence that Willis and Wade gave false testimony to conceal their relationship. The ruling makes no logical sense: McAfee held that Wade had to be disqualified

THE STAT

# 2040

2040—the year when the number of deaths in the U.S. will begin to exceed the number of births, according to the long-term budget outlook from the Congressional Budget Office.

The CBO nonetheless believes the U.S. population will continue to increase over the next 30 years, from 342 million to 383 million. It projects net immigration will more than compensate for the decline in population due to deaths exceeding births. Population growth will be only about 0.4 percent per year, which is roughly half the average annual rate over the past 30 years. The aging of the population will continue apace over the entire 30-year window, the CBO projects. The proportion of Americans over the age of 65 will gradually increase from 17.8 percent this year to 22.3 percent in 2054. The proportion of Americans aged 24 or younger will gradually decline from 31.1 percent this year to 27.7 percent in 2054. The problem with funding the current entitlement system for seniors—too few working people paying in and too many retired people taking out—is projected to steadily get worse for at least the next 30 years. *by Dominic Pino*

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# Americans can finally grow thick, lustrous hair

# "This will help your thinning hair and receding hairline in just 30 days" says top US Doctor

*Clinical trials show a new hair loss breakthrough can help both men and women naturally regrow a thick, full head of hair – without drugs, surgery, or side effects*

Thousands are rushing to get a new hair restoration method based on surprising new studies from the University of California.

It is the world's first and only hair loss solution that revives dead hair follicles. And studies confirm it helps men and women regrow a thick, full head of hair, even after years of balding.

Now, with news of this breakthrough spreading like wildfire — the manufacturers are struggling to keep up with overwhelming demand.

That's because, unlike other methods, it is prescription-free, drug-free, and has no side effects. And while hair transplants can cost $4,000 or more, this new approach costs pennies on the dollar and doesn't involve going to the doctor's office.

Instead, it leverages cutting-edge technology to prevent hair loss, fills in embarrassing bald spots, and **Re-Nourishes** thinning hair — with results you can see and feel in 30 days or less.

As Jeanne F. from San Diego, CA reports: "When my husband began to use this product, all he had on top of his head was fuzz. His hair began to grow after 30 days and now it is about 2 to 3 inches long!"

## Surprising Truth About Hair Loss

It is commonly believed that hair loss is hereditary.

Unfortunately, most people think there is nothing they can do to stop it. However, while many doctors will tell you that thinning hair, a receding hairline, and bald spots are due to your genetics, this is not the whole story.

"While genetics play a role, it's not the main reason you lose hair," says Dr. Al Sears, the nation's top anti-aging doctor. "And surprisingly it's not just your age, thyroid, hormones, stress, or a vitamin deficiency, either."

The latest scientific research reveals that hair loss is primarily caused by the stem cells in your hair follicles dying.

"This discovery is a true breakthrough because by reviving these stem cells on your scalp, you can stop hair loss dead in its tracks and trigger new hair growth, even in areas that have been thinning for years," explains Dr. Sears.

Now, at his world-famous clinic, the Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine in Palm Beach, FL, Dr. Sears and his team have used this game-changing discovery to develop a brand-new hair restoration formula that is taking the country by storm.

Sold under the name **Re-Nourish**, it is flying off the shelves with men and women of all ages raving about the results it delivers.

**Breakthrough** research proves this discovery helps fill in bald spots, re-nourishes thinning hair, and leads to noticeable growth in as little as 30 days.

"I have seen a significant improvement in hair growth. Previously, you could see thinning areas at the back of my head and now hair has grown over it," says Peter W. from Ontario, Canada.

And Susan D. from Fort Pierce, Florida reports, "My hair was thinning. So, I began to use **Re-Nourish** every day on the front part of my scalp. Now I have thicker hair."

## Regrows Hair In Just 30 Days

Scientists now know that stem cells are the lifeblood of your hair follicles.

Research from the University of California shows they're the reason you're able to grow hair. However, these stem cells aren't always active. In fact, studies reveal they're only active during certain phases of the hair growth cycle.

"Your hair grows in three phases," explains Dr. Sears. "First, you have the anagen phase, the hair growing phase. Then the catagen phase, when hair gets ready to shed. And finally, the telogen phase, where your hair is pushed from the follicle and falls out."

As you get older it becomes harder for your hair follicles to complete this three-phase cycle. The results? Your hairs get stuck in the telogen phase. This is when they start falling out and stop regrowing, no matter what you try.

This process doesn't happen overnight, says Dr. Sears.

"At first, your hair dries out, becoming brittle, thin, and harder to style. Then, you start finding hairs on your pillow and down the drain. Finally, you're left with bald spots that age you prematurely."

Fortunately, **Re-Nourish** puts a stop to this. It revives the dead stem cells in your hair follicles and reactivates your hair's three-phase cycle, triggering new growth in as little as 30 days — even in areas that've been balding for years.

## Reawakens Dead Hair Follicles

For years, scientists couldn't figure out why hair follicle stem cells died.

However, a study from the University of California finally found the answer.

It has to do with T-cells — an important immune cell in your body. The researchers discovered these T-cells are the only way to command hair follicles to grow new hair.

More importantly, they showed that T-cells helped revive the stem cells in your hair follicles — spurring new growth, filling in bald spots and natural hairline.

**Re-Nourish** uses a unique blend of all-natural ingredients. By spraying it on your hair once per day, scientific studies show you can revive dead stem cells and improve the appearance of thicker, fuller hair.

For example, the key nutrient of **Re-Nourish** was tested on a group of severely balding women.

After 6 months, nearly 70% of the women saw significant improvement in hair growth. Their hair was noticeably fuller, thicker, and healthier looking. Most exciting of all, they grew new hair on parts of their scalp that had been bald for years.

In another study, Italian researchers gathered a group of both men and women with thinning hair and applied the core ingredient of **Re-Nourish**. After 12 weeks, they reported a staggering 74% increase in hair growth.

"It's really mind-boggling that my hair started growing back," says Zan R., another **Re-Nourish** customer.

With results like this, it's no surprise that demand for **Re-Nourish** is soaring. Thousands of men and women are scrambling to get their hands on the limited supply available.

**Re-Nourish** is not currently available in any store at any price. But we've secured a small batch for our readers.

## Try Re-Nourish 100% Risk-Free

To secure the hot, new **Re-Nourish** formula, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-586-0693** TODAY. "It's not available in retail stores yet," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer." Dr. Sears feels so strongly about **Re-Nourish**, all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. "Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I'll send you all your money back."

Call NOW at **1-800-586-0693** to secure your supply of **Re-Nourish**. Use Promo Code **NRRN424** when you call. Lines are frequently busy, but all calls will be answered!

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**Politics is a contact sport, and there have been rougher metaphors than Biden's chains or Trump's bloodbath. On the other hand, Trump did sit on his hands while all of those 'unbelievable patriots' swarmed the Capitol, some of them violently.**

but that Willis could remain, even though it was their joint conduct that created the appearance of impropriety that undermined the integrity of the proceedings. Trump and his co-defendants are seeking to appeal the decision allowing her and her office to continue leading the prosecution. Legally, that makes sense. Practically, Trump should spring for a limo to make sure Willis gets to work every day—she's his best hope for acquittal.

■ **Following his primary victories,** Donald Trump replaced the merely Trump-backed leadership of the Republican National Committee with members of his family and campaign. North Carolina GOP chairman Michael Whatley and Trump's daughter-in-law Lara Trump were voted in as RNC co-chairs. Trump-campaign senior adviser Chris LaCivita took over as the RNC's chief operating officer. On their first business day in charge, the new team sacked more than 60 RNC staffers, telling our Audrey Fahlberg, "This is one team. There will not be redundancies." Meanwhile, the RNC could not agree to vote on a proposal to bar its funds from being redirected to pay Trump's legal bills. For now, Trump fundraisers are directing donations first to max out money to Trump's campaign, then to give to his legal defense, and only then to give what's left to the party. Accountability is good: Trump has played a double game of backing Ronna McDaniel while his allies blame her for the party's financial woes and election setbacks. There will be no question now where the buck stops. But the party is supposed to serve more than the interests of one man. In an election year when Democrats are likely to outspend Republicans by a wide margin, the RNC may regret making Trump's legal defense a priority.

■ **It is a testament** to the upside-down nature of our political moment that after his State of the Union address, Biden let himself be pressured into issuing an apology to an alleged murderer. The suspect, illegal immigrant Jose Antonio Ibarra, crossed the border into Texas in 2022. Exploiting the loopholes in our immigration system, he managed to stay here even after multiple arrests. Then he allegedly murdered Laken Riley. Confronted during the State of the Union with jeers from Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, Biden said that Riley had been murdered by "an illegal." Within days Biden sat for an interview and backtracked on this moment of relatable passion in the speech. "I shouldn't have used 'illegal'; it's 'undocumented,'" Biden said. Trying to distinguish himself from Donald Trump, Biden averred, "What I won't do. I'm not going to treat any, any, any of these people with disrespect." Referring to Ibarra as an "illegal" was telling the truth about his immigration status; calling him "undocumented" is using a political euphemism. Why in the world does the president of the United States feel compelled to apologize to him?

■ **Trump rallies now feature** a particular ceremony. It was played out recently in Ohio. An announcer said, "Ladies and gentlemen, please rise for the horribly and unfairly treated January 6 hostages." Then a recording of the "J6 Choir" played. The recording has the choir singing the national anthem, interspersed with the voice of Trump, who is reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Trump saluted all the way through. When he took the microphone, he said, "Well, thank you very much, and you see the spirit from the hostages, and that's what they are, is hostages." He twice described the convicted rioters as "unbelievable patriots." Real patriots uphold the Constitution.

■ **At the same rally,** Trump said, "If I don't get elected, it's going to be . . . a bloodbath for the country," prompting Biden to tweet, "This guy wants another January 6." Predicting a bloodbath is pretty incendiary stuff, but no more than accusing one's opponents of wanting to reintroduce slavery, which Joe Biden, then Barack Obama's veep, told a black audience in Danville, Va., in 2012 was the desire of Mitt Romney and the GOP: "They're going to put y'all back in chains!" When the Romney campaign complained, an Obama spox primly replied that Biden "was using a metaphor" to describe what would happen if banks were "unchain[ed]" or deregulated. Trump as it happens was using a metaphor too, predicting disaster for the American auto industry if a reelected Biden mandates a shift to EVs. Politics is a contact sport, and there have been rougher metaphors than Biden's chains or Trump's bloodbath. On the other hand, Trump did sit on his hands while all of those "unbelievable patriots" swarmed the Capitol, some of them violently. Boxers who fight dirty look bad when they cry foul.

■ **The House of Representatives** voted overwhelmingly (352 yeas, with 50 Democrats and 15 Republicans opposed) to pass H.R. 7521, informally known as the "TikTok bill." It would force platforms controlled by hostile countries, currently defined elsewhere in law as China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran, to divest from their operations in the United States. TikTok's Chinese controllers—functionally speaking, the Chinese Communist Party—would have to transfer it to new owners not hostile to America. Otherwise it would face a ban in our markets. The bill is narrowly drawn to accomplish its goals without the potential for later government abuse, implicates no First Amendment speech concerns (ownership and control by a hostile government being the legislatively stipulated issue to be corrected), and addresses a grave national-security crisis: the vast stockpile of personal information that a hostile government has compiled about U.S. citizens over years of




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concerted effort. Trump and Elon Musk have expressed opposition unblemished by any familiarity with the legislation. Chuck Schumer should bring the bill to a vote in the Senate, and senators should pass it. China should be forced to disgorge TikTok to prevent future attempts to "phish" the nation. It's an urgent priority, senators: Tick tock.

■ **The mandate that the EPA** has granted itself to remake the U.S. auto industry is a step too far legally, and many steps beyond what the government should be doing as a matter of principle. While it does not, strictly speaking, ban the sale of "traditional" cars (that's surely on the drawing board for another day), it will make it increasingly difficult for Americans to buy the types of cars that they like and that have served them well. It takes little account of consumer choice or of economic, technological, logistical, or geopolitical reality, an exercise in arrogance that will have highly destructive consequences. Adding pointlessness to injury, the mandate will do little or nothing for the climate. China's automakers, however, will be grateful.




ROMAN GENN

■ **The Supreme Court** heard two lawsuits challenging Food and Drug Administration approvals of the mifepristone-based chemical-abortion pill known as RU-486. Breathless press coverage notwithstanding, the suit threatens no ban on the pill. It challenges 2016 and 2021 decisions stripping the safety precautions for do-it-yourself, at-home chemical abortion, which not infrequently sends women to the hospital or requires further medical treatment. The FDA, under the past three Democratic administrations, has strained to expand the pill's availability, insulate the FDA from judicial scrutiny, and time its actions to limit political accountability. Thus, the pill was approved in 2000 by the Clinton administration under a fast-track process meant for AIDS drugs. A legal challenge filed against the FDA in 2002 was left unresolved for nearly 14 years, thwarting judicial review while the pill's market share expanded. Then the Obama and Biden administrations loosened regulatory restrictions in 2016 and 2021, first scaling back reporting requirements for health complications, and then eliminating rules for in-person medical consultations. The lawsuits may fail if the justices believe that doctor groups don't have standing to sue. That may even be the right legal call. But it will remain true that the pill-pushers have acted without regard for the law or ethics.

■ **The Alabama supreme court** set off a national furor by . . . siding with several couples who were trying to have children via in vitro fertilization. The couples said that the clinic had been negligent in letting a patient destroy embryos in which they had invested their hopes. They sued under the state's wrongful-death law, and the court agreed that the law covers embryos even when they are outside the womb. Some fertility clinics said they could not operate facing such liability. Democrats, including President Biden, said that the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision had enabled Republicans to wage war on IVF. The truth is that the court's decision had almost nothing to do with *Dobbs*: Nobody, including the dissenting justice in Alabama, doubted that the wrongful-death statute applied to embryos within the womb even when *Roe v. Wade* was in effect. The further truth is that Republicans

ADVERTISEMENT

# Popular CoQ10 Pills Leave Millions Suffering

## Could this newly-discovered brain fuel solve America's worsening memory crisis?

**PALM BEACH, FLORIDA** — Millions of Americans take the supplement known as CoQ10. It's the coenzyme that supercharges the "energy factories" in your cells known as *mitochondria*. But there's a serious flaw that's leaving millions unsatisfied.

As you age, your mitochondria break down and fail to produce energy. In a revealing study, a team of researchers showed that 95 percent of the mitochondria in a 90-year-old man were damaged, compared to almost no damage in the mitochondria of a 5-year-old.

Taking CoQ10 alone is not enough to solve this problem. Because as powerful as CoQ10 is, there's one critical thing it fails to do: it can't create new mitochondria to replace the ones you lost.

And that's bad news for Americans all over the country. The loss of cellular energy is a problem for the memory concerns people face as they get older.

"We had no way of replacing lost mitochondria until a recent discovery changed everything," says Dr. Al Sears, founder and medical director of the Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine in Palm Beach, Florida. "Researchers discovered the only nutrient known to modern science that has the power to trigger the growth of new mitochondria."

### Why Taking CoQ10 is Not Enough

Dr. Sears explains, "This new discovery is so powerful, it can multiply your mitochondria by 55 percent in just a few weeks. That's the equivalent of restoring decades of lost brain power."

This exciting nutrient — called PQQ *(pyrroloquinoline quinone)* — is the driving force behind a revolution in aging. When paired with CoQ10, this dynamic duo has the power to reverse the age-related memory losses you may have thought were beyond your control.

Dr. Sears pioneered a new formula — called **Ultra Accel II** — that combines both CoQ10 and PQQ to support maximum cellular energy and the normal growth of new mitochondria. **Ultra Accel II** is the first of its kind to address both problems and is already creating huge demand.

Over 47 million doses have been shipped to men and women across the country and sales continue to climb for this much sought-after brain fuel. In fact, demand has been so overwhelming that inventories repeatedly sell out. But a closer look at **Ultra Accel II** reveals there are good reasons why sales are booming.

### Science Confirms the Many Benefits of PQQ

The medical journal *Biochemical Pharmacology* reports that PQQ is up to 5,000 times more efficient in sustaining energy production than common antioxidants. With the ability to keep every cell in your body operating at full strength, **Ultra Accel II** delivers more than just added brain power and a faster memory.

People feel more energetic, more alert, and don't need naps in the afternoon. The boost in cellular energy generates more power to your heart, lungs, muscles, and more.

"With the PQQ in Ultra Accel, I have energy I never thought possible at my age," says Colleen R., one of Dr. Sears's patients. "I'm in my 70s but feel 40 again. I think clearly, move with real energy and sleep like a baby."

The response has been overwhelmingly positive, and Dr. Sears receives countless emails from his patients and readers. "My patients tell me they feel better than they have in years. This is ideal for people who are feeling old and run down, or for those who feel more forgetful. It surprises many that you can add healthy and productive years to your life simply by taking **Ultra Accel II** every day."

You may have seen Dr. Sears on television or read one of his 12 best-selling books. Or you may have seen him speak at the 2016 WPBF 25 Health and Wellness Festival in South Florida, featuring Dr. Oz and special guest Suzanne Somers. Thousands of people attended Dr. Sears's lecture on anti-aging breakthroughs and waited in line for hours during his book signing at the event.

### Will Ultra Accel II Multiply Your Energy?

**Ultra Accel II** is turning everything we thought we knew about youthful energy on its head. Especially for people over age 50. In less than 30 seconds every morning, you can harness the power of this breakthrough discovery to restore peak energy and your "spark for life."

So, if you've noticed less energy as you've gotten older, and you want an easy way to reclaim your youthful edge, this new opportunity will feel like blessed relief.

The secret is the "energy multiplying" molecule that activates a dormant gene in your body that declines with age, which then instructs your cells to pump out fresh energy from the inside-out. This growth of new "energy factories" in your cells is called mitochondrial biogenesis.



**MEMORY-BUILDING SENSATION:** Top doctors are now recommending new *Ultra Accel II* because it restores decades of lost brain power without a doctor's visit.

Instead of falling victim to that afternoon slump, you enjoy sharp-as-a-tack focus, memory, and concentration from sunup to sundown. And you get more done in a day than most do in a week. Regardless of how exhausting the world is now.

Dr. Sears reports, "The most rewarding aspect of practicing medicine is watching my patients get the joy back in their lives. **Ultra Accel II** sends a wake-up call to every cell in their bodies… And they actually feel young again."

And his patients agree. "I noticed a difference within a few days," says Jerry from Ft. Pierce, Florida. "My endurance has almost doubled, and I feel it mentally, too. There's a clarity and sense of well-being in my life that I've never experienced before."

### How To Get Ultra Accel II

This is the official nationwide release of **Ultra Accel II** in the United States. And so, the company is offering a special discount supply to anyone who calls during the official launch.

An Order Hotline has been set up for local readers to call. This gives everyone an equal chance to try **Ultra Accel II**. And your order is backed up by a no-hassle, 90-day money back guarantee. No questions asked.

Starting at 7:00 AM today, the discount offer will be available for a limited time only. All you have to do is call TOLL FREE **1-877-506-2896** right now and use promo code **NRUA424** to secure your own supply.

**Important:** Due to **Ultra Accel II** recent media exposure, phone lines are often busy. If you call and do not immediately get through, please be patient and call back.

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**The right course is for Republicans to clarify that stopping IVF is not on their agenda, but also to block sweeping immunity laws for an industry that should face at least as much scrutiny as those that do not create and destroy human lives.**

have no intention of waging war on IVF: They have differing views, the issue is complex, and the practice is entrenched. Some Republicans have, however, endorsed vaguely written "personhood" bills that can be read to entail opposition to IVF—even though those bills have no chance of passage and would have no legal effect even if enacted. Panicked Alabama Republicans quickly passed a law immunizing the clinics for any misconduct. Republicans in Washington, D.C., have so far shown a little more spine. The right course, under the circumstances, is for Republicans to clarify that stopping IVF is not on their agenda, but also to block sweeping immunity laws for an industry that should face at least as much scrutiny as those that do not create and destroy human lives.

■ **Sure, sure, free trade** for most things, but steel is different, some say. Steel is needed for defense production, the argument goes, so protectionism is justified. Never mind that the top proponent of that view in the Trump administration, trade representative Robert Lighthizer, was previously a highly compensated steel-industry lobbyist. The protectionists also want you to ignore a recent article from William Greenwalt, who was deputy undersecretary of defense for industrial policy—not the sort of job doctrinaire libertarians hold—from 2006 to 2009. He points out that the Pentagon usually buys less than 1 percent of U.S. steel output in a given year, so blanket protectionism doesn't seem wise. More crucially, he argues that steel protectionism *weakens* national security. Complying with the various bureaucratic hurdles to source steel drives up costs for the Pentagon and slows the speed at which equipment can be produced. For the MRAP (Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected) program—it was, he wrote, likely the largest defense-related steel order since the Liberty ships—Greenwalt ended up sourcing a lot of the steel from Sweden, Germany, Israel, and Australia. "When DoD urgently needed more steel, the US industry basically told Uncle Sam to pound sand," Greenwalt writes. Any time the steel industry comes knocking for more privileges, Uncle Sam should return the favor.

■ **Social media were set ablaze** by the news that Wendy's was going to start "surge pricing." But that wasn't really what happened. The company never used the term "surge pricing," which commonly describes charging more at times of high demand and less at times of low demand to better allocate scarce resources. Wendy's wouldn't really have to do that, since, like all restaurants, it has predictable peak times of demand at mealtimes and can plan around them. Scaring away customers at mealtimes is a pretty bad way to run a restaurant, and Wendy's is pretty good at running restaurants. All the company really planned was digital screens to display prices, which would make it easier for individual locations to change their prices. That would mean they could offer promotions or try new pricing strategies without having to make new menu boards. A sensible modernization, rather than a nefarious plot.

■ **Back in 2022,** free-market advocates were shouting to anyone who would listen that baby-formula shortages were happening because the government had screwed up the market. Now, the Federal Trade Commission—no friend of free markets in recent years—has put out a report in large part agreeing with that argument. It found that because of the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) program, the U.S. essentially has 50 separate baby-formula markets, each dominated by one producer facing negligible competition. WIC is supposed to subsidize formula for families in poverty, but it has expanded to cover a majority of formula purchases in the U.S. Individual states sign single-supplier contracts to earn steep discounts on formula, and unsubsidized customers pay higher prices to compensate. The supplier that wins the WIC contract ends up with nearly all formula sales in the state. The FTC pointed to an example from California in which winning a contract took one supplier from 5 to 95 percent market share in about a quarter. Similar trends have been recorded in 29 other states. Would anyone tolerate this kind of government failure in the market for food for grown-ups? The market for baby formula, like any other, needs reliable price signals, and it needs them now.

■ **Terrorists attacking rock fans** at a concert hall outside Moscow killed 137 and set the building ablaze. It was the worst terrorist strike on Russian soil since the Beslan school siege in 2004. Credit was claimed by ISIS, most likely its Khorasan affiliate, active in central Asia (the first four alleged perps the Russians arrested are Tajiks). The folly of trusting the Taliban to combat terrorists on its turf was demonstrated in blood. The United States warned Russia in early March of ISIS chatter indicating a possible concert attack; Emmanuel Macron confirmed that French intelligence has also fingered ISIS. Vladimir Putin admitted that "radical Islamists" had carried out the slaughter, though he suggested, as have lesser Kremlin spokesmen, that Ukraine was somehow involved. Russian media claimed early on that the terrorists used a van bearing Ukrainian license plates (photos of said van actually showed Belarusian plates). Was the Russian regime itself involved? One should not underestimate, either, the force of mere neglect. But Moscow is one of the most heavily surveilled cities on earth, and false flags have been a Putin MO since the apartment bombings of 1999 that propelled him into the presidency. Meanwhile the hearts of all decent people go out to the afflicted.

**A woman compared Navalny and Putin: 'One sacrificed himself to save the country, the other one sacrificed the country to save himself.'**

■ **Putin has "won"** another "presidential" "election." He will "serve" a sixth "term." Boris Nemtsov was once his main opponent. Nemtsov was killed in February 2015. Then Alexei Navalny was his main opponent. Navalny was killed in February 2024. Another opponent, Vladimir Kara-Murza, is now in a Siberian isolation cell. (He was a lieutenant to Nemtsov.) When Putin "won" in 2018, President Trump congratulated him. This year, the United States did no such thing. Xi of China congratulated Putin, however. Modi of India offered "warm congratulations." In Italy, the deputy prime minister, Matteo Salvini, said that "when people vote, they are always right." (Salvini is a long-standing and unblushing admirer of Putin.) Most touching were the Russians who took their ballots and laid them on the grave of Navalny.

■ **Thousands of Russians gathered** at Navalny's funeral in Moscow. This was a brave thing to do, especially considering that hundreds had already been arrested for laying flowers at Navalny memorials all across the country. One man at the funeral said, "I'm afraid, of course, but despite the fear, a man died in prison and we are here." A woman compared Navalny and Putin: "One sacrificed himself to save the country, the other one sacrificed the country to save himself." Plenty of police agents were on hand. They and their cameras did their work. After the funeral, more people were arrested, having been filmed or photographed. (A precise number is hard to get a fix on.) One expert said that Moscow's facial-recognition system allowed the authorities to "trace the path of every individual right up to his door." At the funeral, the crowd had chanted such slogans as "Russia will be free" and "Russia without Putin." Bold statements, from brave souls.

■ **In a strike on Odesa,** Russian forces killed at least 20 people and wounded at least 70. They did this in a "double tap." Russian forces have been "double tapping" in Syria for many years. They strike once, killing some and injuring others. The injured may be trapped in rubble. Then the rescuers come—and Russian forces strike again, killing and injuring them, too. Thus, the "double tap" is complete. This is an outstanding evil from a regime outstanding for its evil.

■ **Ireland's project of excising hints** of Catholic social teaching from its constitution and replacing them with progressive alternatives came to a surprising halt in two referendums. A proposal to include "durable relationships" other than marriage in the constitutional definition of the family was rejected 67.7 percent to 32.3 percent. Another proposal sought to excise the following statement from the constitution: "The State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home." The proposed replacement erased all reference to women, noted that "members of a family" care for one another, and promised that the state "shall strive to support" this care. Voters rejected this change by a margin of 73.9 percent to 26.1 percent. While these proposed changes did not promise legal transformations similar to those from recent referendums legalizing gay marriage and abortion, the depth of the rejections was seen as a rebuke to progressive Ireland. *Politico*'s headline blamed "confused Irish voters." The results have put fear in elected politicians. The Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, resigned as leader of his party. And the largest opposition party, Sinn Féin, has reversed itself and now opposes the draconian hate-crimes legislation it supported unanimously eleven months ago. Just as the Irish seemed to be settling into a role as obedient subjects of a progressive overclass, they demonstrated their famed propensity for sudden and surprising rebellion.

■ **Princess Catherine,** Britain's potential future queen, became the subject of speculation and conspiracy theories after she disappeared from public life following abdominal surgery in January. Kensington Palace made matters worse on March 10 (U.K. Mother's Day), releasing a manipulated photograph of the princess meant to reassure the public. Kate herself made an apology on social media for causing "any confusion." The rumor mill continued to churn. On his show, Stephen Colbert gleefully peddled rumors of Prince William's alleged infidelity as an explanation for her absence. Three staff members at the hospital where she was treated allegedly attempted to access her medical records. Finally, the 42-year-old mother of three addressed the media frenzy in a short video, revealing that tests after her "major abdominal surgery" revealed that "cancer had been present." She graciously thanked the public for their "wonderful support and understanding," expressed gratitude for having William "by my side," and explained that the desire for privacy came out of concern to protect her children (ages ten, eight, and five). Unwanted publicity may be a price tag of royalty. But it takes a cold heart to fault someone with cancer for mishandling public relations.

■ **On March 22,** the *Daily Wire*, co-founded by conservative commentator Ben Shapiro, announced that its relationship with Candace Owens had ended. Although Owens had "staked [her] entire professional reputation" (her own words) only the week before on her claim that the wife of French president Emmanuel Macron was in fact a male-to-female transsexual, most believe that her history of increasingly obvious antisemitism to be ▶

**NASA is using low-cost contracts with private companies to deliver equipment to help prepare the way for a lunar base. Let us endeavor to boldly go where government, by itself, can't.**

the primary cause of the break. One suspects more was going on underneath the surface; for well over a year now, Owens has behaved like someone seeking to get fired. Her escalating rhetoric was a means of forcing the *Daily Wire* to give her a "martyrdom" story that will springboard her into a new career. We can be sure she will find the audience she deserves.

■ **Humanity's irrepressible desire** to explore will take us only so far into space if we rely on governments to get us there. The private sector is, especially with the success of SpaceX's Falcon rockets, beginning to normalize space travel in our immediate neighborhood. The impressive launch-by-launch progress of SpaceX's Starship promises something far grander to come. In late February, Intuitive Machines' *Odysseus* became the first American spacecraft since Apollo 17 to manage a soft landing on the lunar surface. A giant if clumsy leap for free enterprise (it landed on its side), it was also the first privately owned vessel to touch down on the moon. However inconveniently positioned, *Odysseus* was still able to fulfill some of its duties before shutting down for good. *Odysseus*'s mission was part of a program in which NASA is using low-cost contracts with private companies to deliver equipment to help prepare the way for a lunar base. Let us endeavor to boldly go where government, by itself, can't.

■ **Standing outside the gates** of the Israeli embassy in Washington, Aaron Bushnell, a 25-year-old U.S. airman, set himself on fire while dressed in his uniform and live-streamed it. "I will no longer be complicit in genocide," Bushnell declared. "I am about to engage in an extreme act of protest. But compared to what people have been experiencing in Palestine at the hands of their colonizers, it's not extreme at all." Bushnell then doused himself in a flammable liquid and self-immolated. "Free Palestine!" were his last words. He died hours later. Bushnell's actions were deranged and tragic, as some of the reactions have also been. Cornel West praised Bushnell's courage, and activist Aya Hijazi lauded Bushnell as "a hero and a martyr." Jill Stein heralded Bushnell's "extraordinary sacrifice." But his actions weren't heroic. They were an embrace of nihilism and a demonstration of mental illness's ravages. May Aaron Bushnell find the peace he could not in life.

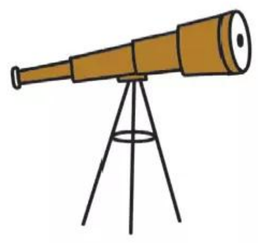
■ **Shohei Ohtani is arguably** the best baseball player of all time, and he still has plenty of time left in his career, which makes recent allegations about sports betting by his translator so troubling. Initially, his translator, Ippei Mizuhara, claimed that Ohtani helped him to pay off $4.5 million in gambling debt that Mizuhara had accumulated with an illegal California bookie. Then the story changed so that Ohtani did not know anything about Mizuhara's debts and the money was stolen from Ohtani without his knowledge. Mizuhara maintains that he did not bet on baseball, and Ohtani that he did not bet on sports at all. It's hard to see how this will shake out, but it would be on the level of the Black Sox scandal if Ohtani were somehow culpable.

■ **Philippe de Gaulle** was the son of the French general and president. He fought bravely in World War II. He became an admiral. Then a senator. It was not easy being de Gaulle's son. Philippe was amazingly gracious about this. Interviewed on his 100th birthday, he said, "I would have preferred to give some of my longevity to my father.'" Admiral de Gaulle has died at 102. R.I.P.

■ **"Martin Greenfield,** Tailor to Sinatra, Obama, Trump and Shaq, Dies at 95." You would expect an amusing obituary about a celebrity tailor—or a tailor to celebrities. (Actually, Mr. Greenfield was a bit of a celebrity himself.) And it was. But the *New York Times*, in that obit, told us much more than that. Greenfield learned to sew at Auschwitz—and it enabled him to survive. They are now going, the survivors. Soon they will all be gone. Their stories will live, one can hope: to amaze, to inspire—and, of course, to caution. R.I.P.

■ **Of the nearly 250 people** taken into captivity by Hamas on October 7, 2023, some 130 are still held in Gaza; at least 34 are dead. Most of the hostages are Israeli, and some are dual U.S.-Israeli citizens. The names of the five American hostages believed to be alive deserve to be better known. Edan Alexander, 19, grew up in Tenafly, N.J., and volunteered for the Israeli army after graduating from high school. He was serving near Gaza when kidnapped. Omer Neutra, 22, from Long Island, N.Y., volunteered for the Israeli army after a gap year in Israel and was planning to return to attend Binghamton University. He was serving as a tank commander near Gaza when kidnapped. Hersh Goldberg-Polin, 23, born in California, immigrated with his family to Israel. He was wounded by a grenade at the Nova music festival. Video of his capture shows him missing his left arm below the elbow. Sagui Dekel-Chen, 35, a dual citizen, was seized while trying to protect his community at Kibbutz Nir Oz. His pregnant wife and two daughters survived. Keith Siegel, 64, from North Carolina, was abducted from Kibbutz Kfar Aza. The body of Itay Chen, an IDF member and dual citizen killed on October 7 at age 19, is being held; so too are the bodies of dual citizens Judih Weinstein Haggai and Gadi Haggai, grandparents in their 70s, Kibbutz Nir Oz residents who were shot while out for a walk; their deaths were confirmed in December. R.I.P. ●

BY ROB LONG



# The Long View

UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT
*MSNBC LIVE!*
JANUARY 6, 2025

*Cross talk*
*Music intro*

**CHUCK TODD:** If you're just joining us, we are live here in the MSNBC studios in Washington, D.C., watching an unprecedented demonstration here on Capitol Hill as some very angry people are making their voices heard as the United States Congress officially counts and tallies the Electoral College votes—

**JOE SCARBOROUGH:** It's not totally unprecedented, I mean, we've been here before—

**RONNA McDANIEL:** Not really—

**JOE SCARBOROUGH:** Can I finish? Ronna? Can I finish? What's clear to anyone watching now is that there were serious problems with the vote tallies in a lot of states and that Vice President Kamala Harris has the right, well, actually the duty to—

**RONNA McDANIEL:** Oh she does not, Joe, there's no spot in the Constitution that gives the vice president the authority to send the votes back to the states—

**JOE SCARBOROUGH:** That's not what legal scholars say, Harris could be guilty of treason—

*Cross talk, unintelligible*

**CHUCK TODD:** Can I break in here? I think part of what we're seeing is ordinary citizens who went to bed on Election Night pretty sure that Joe Biden had been reelected and then somehow, overnight, the vote numbers went—

**RONNA McDANIEL:** Chuck, this has been investigated and investigated and there's zero evidence that—

**JOE SCARBOROUGH:** C'mon! Biden lost Pennsylvania? Seriously? This whole thing was rigged from the beginning and—

**RONNA McDANIEL:** It's called democracy, Joe. You guys are like in a cult or something—

**CHUCK TODD:** Can I break in here? We have Andrea Mitchell with us live from the Capitol steps. Andrea? What's happening there right now?

**ANDREA MITCHELL:** Chuck, the crowd here is fired up and very angry. You can see behind me the signs and placards they're carrying—very much in support of the idea that the election was quote unquote stolen and urging Vice President Kamala Harris to do the right thing and—

**UNIDENTIFIED PASSERBY 1:** Stop the steal!

**ANDREA MITCHELL:** As you can hear, very energized and—

**UNIDENTIFIED PASSERBY 2:** Stop climate change!

**ANDREA MITCHELL:** Of course some other issues are pressing as well, but the key message the crowd wants to send—

**UNIDENTIFIED PASSERBY 3:** Trans People for Gaza!

**ANDREA MITCHELL:** No violence is predicted by Capitol Hill police, and so far the crowd seems to be limiting itself to slogans and calls for the vice president to exercise her constitutional right to reject—

**CHUCK TODD:** Andrea, if I can break in here. We're getting word from local law enforcement that the east entry doors of the building have been breached and that some of the protesters are creating havoc inside the Capitol itself—

**ANDREA MITCHELL:** I don't see that here, Chuck. The people I'm seeing and talking to are patriots who are just trying to take back their country.

**CHUCK TODD:** Andrea, can you confirm that the vice president is still in the building? We see a figure that looks a lot like her in a harness dangling from a rescue helicopter. Are you seeing this?

**ANDREA MITCHELL:** Chuck, what I'm hearing is that that person is Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, who as you know was leading the charge to reject the—

**RONNA McDANIEL:** Chuck, can we get real for a minute? Where is President Joe Biden during all of this? He gave that speech earlier today when he used instigating and trigger language to encourage this mob action, this—let me finish, Joe—this insurrection—

**JOE SCARBOROUGH:** C'mon, Ronna! What President Biden delivered was a very enthusiastic call for unity—

**RONNA McDANIEL:** Joe, he said, and these are his exact words, "I want an ice cream sandwich, mama, who is that big balloon for, Mr. Pebbles? I did a stinky." And I think most Americans know a dog whistle when they hear it. This is on him, Joe, and it's his responsibility to tell that crowd to leave the Capitol building immediately.

**JOE SCARBOROUGH:** And when he wakes up from his afternoon rest I'm sure he will. But in the meantime, we still don't have any clear idea of what happened to the absentee ballots in Michigan that were found stained with grease from a local Kentucky Fried Chicken, which suggests that members of the MAGA movement physically touched the votes of six counties—

**RONNA McDANIEL:** Just irresponsible to be saying that and calling the system into question—

**CHUCK TODD:** Ronna, Joe, please stand by. Andrea, wondering if you're hearing what I'm hearing at this moment. President-elect Donald Trump issued a statement moments ago on social media calling on the National Guard to restore order to the Capitol. Do we have that TikTok? In the control room, do we have that TikTok?

*Cross talk, unintelligible* ●

# The New Education Politics



## Covid and the culture wars delivered a chance for reform

BY FREDERICK M. HESS & MICHAEL Q. McSHANE



KLAUS VEDFELT / GETTY IMAGES

**Once upon a time,** education was how politicians courted the middle. From the late 1980s through the middle of the Obama years, in the era of soccer moms and NASCAR dads, education policy was where Democrats showed that they cared about personal responsibility and Republicans that they were serious about equal opportunity. In a post–Cold War era of tech-fueled prosperity, education was a kitchen-table issue that spoke to shared values and aspirations.

That's decidedly not the case today. And that's okay. Indeed, while today's polarized politics are troubling on many counts, they offer a chance to start getting education right.

For close to three decades, the Reagan-era report *A Nation at Risk* framed the issue of education. It was a matter of national security, and on topics such as standards, testing, teacher evaluation, and charter schooling, there wasn't much daylight between education reformers on the left and those on the right.

In 1988, George H. W. Bush pledged to be the "education president" as part of his commitment to a "kinder, gentler" conservatism. Four years later, education was integral to Bill Clinton's "New Democrat" persona as he jettisoned Walter Mondale's tax-and-spend vocabulary in favor of a promise to expand opportunity for those who "work hard and play by the rules." In office, Clinton embraced charter schools and school uniforms in lieu of grand societal critiques and ambitious spending plans.

In 2000, when education took on unprecedented salience in issue polling, George W. Bush's bona fides on Texas school reform became the cornerstone of his "compassionate conservatism." In office, he partnered with Democratic senator Ted Kennedy to pass the No Child Left Behind Act, supersizing Washington's footprint in schooling and boosting federal school spending at a historic rate. When Barack Obama claimed the White House in 2008, his education agenda was, in many ways, an extension of Bush's. Obama embraced charter schools, fought with the teachers' unions, and pushed teacher evaluation and new data systems (and more spending) through his "Race to the Top" initiative.

The result of all this was a sense that education is a naturally centrist issue. There was a strong whiff of early-20th-century progressivism's insistence that there was no Democratic or Republican way to run a school.

Well, things have changed. Today, there's little interest in courting the middle. And that has had profound consequences for schooling.

This shift was presaged by the Common Core fight that exploded during the Obama years. Back then, the education-"reform" community got behind federal reading and math standards, with the Obama administration, establishment Republicans, the teachers' unions, and

major funders all rowing together. State adoption of the standards—often by way of barely noted state-board votes—was pushed by Obama education officials eager to manipulate every lever at their disposal.

Resistance to Common Core standards was thus relegated to the fringes and the nonprofessionals. It fell to the likes of comedian Louis C.K., a passel of Indiana moms, and a handful of ornery academics to raise hard questions about the program. By the time that some of the more disconcerting elements of the Common Core became well known (such as its "conceptual" math worksheets), membership in the bipartisan-school-reform club was contingent on one's willingness to dismiss the critics as tinfoil-hat-wearing know-nothings.

Laid bare were divides that had long been covered over, prompting a burst of overdue introspection about the state of the education alliance. As one of us observed in the pages of NATIONAL REVIEW a decade ago, school-reform "bipartisanship" had long demanded far more of the Right than of the Left: Conservatives "accepted a massive increase in federal authority, an expansion of race-conscious accountability systems, and a prohibition on talk of parental responsibility" while their progressive allies had only to temper "their demands for new public programs" and agree not "to accuse their conservative allies of bigotry."

But by the end of the Obama era, progressive reformers seemed positively thrilled to brand Republicans as racists and no longer were willing to rein in spending.

Hillary Clinton, in her 2016 presidential campaign, renounced her old "school reform" stylings and instead cozied up to the teachers' unions, attacked charter schools, and called for big new federal outlays on pre-K and college. Four years later, in 2020, candidate Joe Biden unveiled his education platform at a town hall organized by the American Federation of Teachers. Biden promised to triple federal school spending but with none of the overbearing attention to results that characterized the Obama years. Once in office, Biden catered to his progressive base, embracing DEI, pushing student-loan "forgiveness," and, in the name of equity, resurrecting second-term Obama attacks on school discipline. Meanwhile, after the appearance of Black Lives Matter in 2014 (a movement whose original organizers included Teach for America members), progressive reformers grew increasingly infatuated with the dogma of "antiracism."

A mirror-image dynamic has been seen on the right. In 2016, the Trump education agenda amounted to little more than enthusiasm for school choice and hostility to the Common Core. In 2020, when there was no official Republican platform, Trump had little to offer other than hyperbolic jabs at school closures and woke excesses. This go-round, Trump has campaigned on shuttering the U.S. Department of Education, called for defunding woke schools and programs, and proposed a hefty college-endowment tax to finance a federally operated online college.

Little of what Trump and Biden offer the electorate today is likely to reassure centrists or win new voters. They are mostly stoking their bases. That's because value-neutral meritocratic concerns (such as the need for standardized testing) have less traction in a political environment where tribalism runs high while schools and colleges have taken center stage in raging public debates about gender, race, and identity.

Where does that leave us? For one thing, it suggests that education reformers eager to resurrect the Bush-Obama model are likely to come up disappointed. The old alliance flourished in the political context of stronger parties, less polarization, and more institutional trust. This made it easier for elected officials to cooperate without fear of getting primaried. Today, except in very red or very blue states, it's just a lot harder to legislate.

It's also now clearer that, as noted above, the old bipartisanship wasn't all that good a deal for the Right. It was born of the Right's crisis of confidence. The GOP spent the 1990s getting battered on education as the issue gained political importance. Conservatives leaped at opportunities to ally themselves with cool center-left groups such as Teach for America, charter-school entrepreneurs, and achievement-minded urban superintendents. But these new allies were centrist only in the sense that they cared about improving outcomes for low-income and minority students. Otherwise, they expected conservatives to accommodate their technocratic and cultural sensibilities.

What now? While the Right's reformers have racked up some impressive state-level wins in the past few years—on race and gender issues and reading instruction—they may be hitting a ceiling. Their wins have been concentrated in red states, and they haven't done much to forge a coalition that can triumph in purple states or go national. And even the wins have too often been accompanied by stumbles in rhetoric, statutory language, and implementation.

Pandemic frustration and broken trust have fueled an appetite for education choice and for new models of K–12 and college education. Justified skepticism of education "experts" has curbed the appetite for bureaucratic solutions. And progressive activism in public schools has alienated huge swaths of traditional-minded Democrats and independents. All of this has created a landscape in which a new coalition can form around empowering parents, challenging top-down dictates, and defending shared values—even if it is not the old Bush-Obama bipartisanship. Such a coalition should adopt four principles.

First, it's time to embrace shared values unapologetically. The bipartisan coalition sought to tiptoe around value questions. Today, by lopsided margins, the public leans right on hot-button cultural disputes concerning race, gender, and American history. Outrage impresarios lean into these fights, spewing audience-pleasing rhetoric that seems almost calculated to alienate normal people. Shared values should instead lead to thoughtful discussion and practical solutions. Traditional disciplinary norms can help restore order to chaotic classrooms, a commitment to free inquiry can counter campus groupthink, and a return to rigor can address out-of-control grade inflation.

Second, take on the education cartels. The field is rife with self-serving rackets: teacher-licensure requirements, college accreditation, sweetheart union ▶

contracts, and more. Busting up these arrangements makes room for more-promising models and new allies. Education choice is the classic illustration: Seventy percent of parents (including hefty majorities of black and Latino parents) support school vouchers and education savings accounts. Reforms such as tackling administrative bloat, cutting red tape, and ending DEI fiefdoms in K–12 and higher education have won broad support.

Third, pay more attention to substance and less to bureaucratic machinery. For a long time, conservatives focused on questions of accountability, federalism, and statutory constraints while leaving textbooks and classroom instruction to a progressive blob of professors, diversity consultants, teacher trainers, foundation staff, and curriculum writers. In a familiar one-way ratchet, progressive officials established new mandates and programs, and conservatives spent their tenures struggling to undo what had been done. Today's reformers should take a page from Governor Ron DeSantis in Florida and lean aggressively into their oversight roles on matters such as board appointments, curricular standards, and guidelines for textbook adoption.

Finally, fiscal stewardship is crucial. For decades, conservatives wore the green eyeshades even as it became painfully clear that there was little appetite for reducing top-line education outlays. And when it comes to teacher pay or funding the Department of Education, even Republicans generally oppose cuts. A more promising path is to hold the line on spending while shifting dollars to priorities such as education choice and phonics-based reading instruction. Rather than funnel dollars into union-friendly step-and-lane pay scales or hefty pensions, we should pay teachers according to performance, workload, and skill set.

The new landscape of education politics offers an extraordinary opportunity to reimagine education reform. To make the most of it, conservatives should reject both the performative teeth-gnashing of the current opinion-monger caste and the zero-calorie stylings of the old bipartisanship in favor of something principled, practical, and promising. ●

ARTICLES

# Sexual Devolution



## Progressives are rediscovering old truths about commitment and monogamy

BY NOAH ROTHMAN

**Modern revolutions**—those we know to have failed—share an impractical conceit. In the minds of their architects, the establishment of a wholly new social contract has meant renovating human nature itself.

France's revolution, which begat the utopian tradition, was predicated on the assumption that humanity unshackled from superstition and guided by pure reason would enter a new epoch of Enlightenment. That utopian ideal was carried forward by the Paris Commune and, eventually, the Soviets, who sought to erase from the human experience concepts such as property, enterprise, and individuality. Throughout, the revolutionaries' ambition was matched only by their contempt for the world as it was. Robert Owen, the founder of one similarly ill-fated experiment in utopian design, in America, professed that the social reformer's goal is to stamp out "that greatest of all errors, the notion that individuals form their own characters."

It's no coincidence, therefore, that the modern revolutionists who convinced themselves that they could remake mankind according to design experimented with radically new forms of relations between men and women. The ideologically zealous sort in more-bohemian quarters believed that perfecting the human condition required liberation from all restrictive social constructs, romantic endeavors very much included. Freeing the body and freeing the mind from convention were two complementary aspects of the same project.

But the liberality of interpersonal relations in postrevolutionary periods reliably gave way to a backlash when the consequences of intemperance became tangible. From the Jacobin "sex panic" of the 1790s to the Bolsheviks' renewed emphasis on conventional familial forms (a corrective after the widespread orphancy and delinquency that resulted from "free love" and communal child-rearing), the old ways have a habit of making a comeback.

Our most recent quasi-revolutionary period followed a similar trajectory. Amid the tearing down of the statues, the struggle sessions, and the ritual denunciations of the ancien régime's illegitimacy, a transgressive set of carnal mores swept aside the preceding strictures. As that fervor subsides, however, the old-fashioned ideals are returning to vogue. And yet those who are resurrecting the old ways are desperate to avoid the recrimination of their more subversive peers. No one wants to be branded a reactionary. So a familiar dynamic has reemerged. The rediscovery of the old morality is being framed not as a counterrevolutionary act but as a mere reinterpretation of the radical project. Those who have tried to thread this needle have made amusing spectacles of themselves.

* * *

Radical social reformers have long nursed a preoccupation with gender roles. In an earlier age, gender-specific societal expectations were branded a suffocating anachronism and condemned as obstacles to equality. In our own time, they are perceived to be a source of great offense to those who don't believe they fit within that binary rubric. Gender itself, we are so often told, is artificial. Therefore, it's only right that gender-specific behavioral norms be cast aside, not just in the professional and domestic spheres but in

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**'Women,' Nerkar's date informed him, 'earn less than men in the workplace, spend more time getting ready for outings and pay more for reproductive care.' Men must therefore pay a cosmic ante in penance for their undeserved good fortune.**

courtship rituals as well. But as a reported item in the *New York Times* recently discovered, that ideal conflicts with reality.

"My date, a 27-year-old woman I matched with on Hinge, said gender equality didn't mean men and women should pay the same when they went out," *New York Times* reporter Santul Nerkar related. That age-old practice of men paying more cannot, however, be chivalric. It must be an outgrowth of the enlightenment to which only the members of a sophisticated vanguard are privy. "Women," Nerkar's date informed him, "earn less than men in the workplace, spend more time getting ready for outings and pay more for reproductive care." Men must therefore pay a cosmic ante in penance for their undeserved good fortune. Indeed, there is "an expectation" even among the most au courant that "the person who did the asking out—usually the man—should pay for the date," which explains why researchers have found that young men still pick up the tab roughly 90 percent of the time. Still, Nerkar remained unconverted. "When the date ended," he confessed, "we split the bill."

The *Times* reporter's modest sociological study comports with broadly observable trends. Amid the wave of heterodoxy that overtook American political culture in and around the annus horribilis 2020, sex—its provision, its withholding, and its redefinition—was said to hold its own revolutionary power. American politics is tainted by "our corrosive sexual shame," the author Dave Madden wrote for the *Guardian*. "So many of us believe that the work of our genitals is far less noble than the work of our minds," he lamented. Hence the proliferation of sexual proclivities—all of which have their own names, flags, and political agendas—that seem to have little to do with gratification. Rather, sexual orientation became a form of political activity, what reporter Olivia Goldhill described in *Quartz* as one of many "quietly revolutionary" acts between the sheets.

Despite appearances, this superficially permissive outlook toward sex is not in conflict with the strict codification, in either law or institutional covenant, of what it means to consent to intercourse. Around this time, a panic about the unseen prevalence of criminal sexual misconduct led the stewards of America's institutions to seek to standardize the concept of "affirmative consent"—verifiable, sometimes written, and even "ongoing" proof of explicit pre-authorization ahead of an amorous encounter—to deter prosecutable violations of personal autonomy. Yet, despite all the social engineers' efforts, attraction and courtship remained a nebulous phenomenon that could not be forced to fit within the confines of contractual negotiations.

To hear young women tell it, the social strictures that liberal columnist Ezra Klein hailed for making men "feel a cold spike of fear when they begin a sexual encounter" had the effect of rendering men timid and, therefore, unattractive. The new consequences of pursuing a partner boldly and assertively had their intended effect, but no one much liked the new status quo. And so, without admitting as much, the younger generation quietly abandoned the revolutionary ideals that they had briefly adopted.

"Some students do practice affirmative consent, but many others use a range of social cues to make sense of whether or not a sexual encounter was consensual or nonconsensual," the trend-setting venue *Teen Vogue* observed. The outlet recognized the "cognitive dissonance" in good progressives who nevertheless "operate within an implicit framework in which men are the ones who move the sexual ball down to the field," but the curiosities of attraction just would not comport with the new affirmative-consent paradigm.

By loosening the constraints associated with pair-bonding amid a society-wide effort to crack down on sexual and emotional abuse within relationships, the engineers of the new ideal created a permission structure for even more abuse. Polyamory—a modern twist on the 19th century's "free love" movement—is a cause célèbre in the press. Accordingly, it has been festooned with the trappings of revolutionary political activity, complete with "a poly flag, poly symbols and poly pride celebrations," as the Christian ministry Focus on the Family remarked. "Ethical non-monogamy" has been the subject of apple-polishing write-ups in mainstream venues from *Vanity Fair* to *Newsweek*, and it has found its way into conventional media fare such as HGTV's *House Hunters*. But the practice of polyamory has not lived up to its promise.

"At a time when non-monogamy has become a drop-down option on dating apps," the *Times* recently reported, upstart institutions that "push the boundaries of sexual norms—or flout them altogether—in the safe company of like-minded people" have flourished. But at one venue for polyamorous encounters, profiled by reporter Sarah Maslin Nir, the members began to feel more like "victims of sexual or physical assault."

Readers of deviationist tracts such as Nir's are treated to a lot of pseudoscientific jargon designed to recast the rank hedonism they criticize as a species of sophistication. They are aware that their modest critiques risk offending their more committed comrades, but their criticisms ring true nonetheless.

Of course, sexual assault and misconduct are attributable to their alleged perpetrators alone. But tales of abuse like those Nir chronicled also allow

progressives to make note of the narcissism, emotional manipulation, and dehumanization that the industry devoted to promoting open relationships can encourage. Such observations can now be spoken aloud even by progressives in good standing, so long as they are couched in the language of therapy.

"After many months and lots of experiences both great and difficult, my partner and I had a long discussion about the future and decided to become monogamous together," one essayist confessed in the Vox Media outlet *PopSugar*. Ultimately, she wrote, "the transition from a polyamorous relationship into monogamy . . . has made me feel more secure, and overall increases my capacity to love my partner more selflessly." After all, "compersion," or the vicarious joy one derives from seeing one's partner achieve sexual satisfaction in the arms of another, involves a "level of selflessness that only comes from loving someone unconditionally." Yet it is *for that reason* that polyamory and unconditional love tend to be mutually unsustainable. A love so selfless that it might tolerate polyamory takes up enough emotional bandwidth to preclude multiple similar sentimental (and physical) obligations. Eventually, either love or polyamory gives way.

It's hard to avoid the suspicion that the author is fishing for congratulations over her self-professed "selflessness," but she does, in fact, deserve some credit. In progressive circles, admitting to finding fulfillment in something as bourgeois as monogamy takes real courage.

The rediscovery of the old ways is not limited to expressions of sexuality alone. In mid February, an essay published by the *Cut*, a *New York* magazine offshoot covering "women's lives and interests," captured the attention of the national intelligentsia. In the essay, inaptly titled "The Lure of Divorce," the author Emily Gould spun a winding tale involving her own deep, often manic, dissatisfaction with her husband and their respective professional successes, the fruits of which she thought were inequitably distributed.

The essay exploded onto the literary scene at a time when the upsides to divorce had become a fixation of the popcultural press. It may be no coincidence that the media's obsessive effort to make divorce into a fashionable trend had an inverse relationship with American divorce rates. According to census data compiled in 2021, the rate of divorce in America declined from 9.7 per 1,000 women aged 15 and older in 2011 to just 6.9. But media accounts of the declining divorce rate present it as an undesirable development.

**Media accounts of the declining divorce rate present it as an undesirable development.**

"Families are sticking together!" *Time* editor Belinda Luscombe remarked. "But in practice, this does not mean more people are living happily ever after." As Lyz Lenz, author of a book on divorce and her experience with it, wrote in an excerpt published by the *Washington Post*, marriage is an especially raw deal for women—whose happiness never seems to rate with either their partners or society more broadly. "You do not have to waste years of your life hoping that maybe, one day, you'll finally get there," she concluded in an essay that evolved into a pep talk. "You can be happy now."

Lenz's contentment in divorce notwithstanding, the available data don't suggest that her experience is representative. As American Enterprise Institute scholar Brad Wilcox documented, the 2022 General Social Survey found that "a combination of marriage and parenthood is linked to the biggest happiness dividends for women." Just 22 percent of unmarried, childless women between the ages of 18 and 55 describe themselves as "very happy" compared with 40 percent of married women with children. The same can be said for men, who experience more happiness and prosperity within matrimonial bonds than outside them. "Specifically, the odds that men and women say they are 'very happy' with their lives are a staggering 545 percent higher for those who are very happily married, compared to their peers who are not married or who are less than very happy in their marriages," Wilcox wrote in his new book, *Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization*.

Wilcox's conclusions are a source of resentment among those who promote divorce as a fashion. Given this fad and its accompanying social pressures, it's reasonable to expect that Gould's celebrated essay on divorce would culminate in a, you know, divorce. But it did not. "We still see the therapist twice a month," she wrote. "We talk about how to make things more equal in our marriage, how not to revert to old patterns." Staying together may be "work," but it's the satisfying sort and vastly preferable to its alternatives. "The difference is that we now understand what can happen when we don't do it."

It's a touching conclusion—one that reflects shifting values on the progressive left. That shift is as apparent in Gould's essay as it is in the decline of *Times* op-eds that fête divorce as "an act of radical self-love" or ask whether a "good-enough marriage" can "make for a great divorce." It's evident in the fact that the *Times* replaced those items with essays extolling "the case for staying married to a spouse you cannot stand" and tales about how "I married the wrong person, and I'm so glad I did." When outlets such as *Vox* can produce compositions about how the alleged "'decline' of marriage isn't a problem" in one decade only to lament in the ▶

next the degree to which "America has made it harder for Black people to marry," we can deduce that a metamorphosis on the cultural left is under way, despite the efforts to disguise it.

* * *

All of this is to say that the Left is insecure in its own intellectual and moral evolution. We see that insecurity especially in tentative efforts by progressives to question what has become the foremost value proposition in modern left-wing orthodoxy: the attribution of social and cultural currency to victimization.

The author Kathryn Jezer-Morton, in her column for the *Cut*, expressed her deep fear that her sons, ages ten and 13, may grow up to become—gasp—right-wingers. In an admission against interest, she confided in her readers that the only cure for the ills of her children's miseducation is more miseducation. By immersing them in the academy's ideological finishing schools, Jezer-Morton hopes to forestall late-onset conservatism in her offspring. In a moment of clarity, however, the author acknowledged a conundrum: The forces busily transforming academia into progressive reeducation camps are the same forces turning young men toward what she regards as the toxic masculinity–industrial complex.

"Overcoming obstacles is the most hallowed narrative in our culture," Jezer-Morton asserted. "It's a place where capitalism's growth imperative dovetails with the progressive appetite for stories about emancipation." In simpler terms, the culture and its progressive arbiters privilege persecution narratives above all others. "So, for young men, and straight white men in particular, to feel like valid participants in the storytelling of selfhood, they feel the need to start from a place of grievance, because otherwise there's no way to bounce back and beat the odds."

What a stroke of insight—one Jezer-Morton was brave enough to publish but not stalwart enough to attribute to her fellow progressives. Although she astutely condemned the "appeal of a grievance-based identity" as the source of so much modern psychological maladjustment, she blamed the incentives for victimization on anything and everything but the Left. It must be "logic from the free-market economy," the modern feminist supposition that "women started from a position of inferiority," or the "paranoid hands of masculinist discourses of male disempowerment."

These are the tributes vice pays to virtue—an offering in exchange for a worthwhile indulgence. And Jezer-Morton made the most of the dispensation she had purchased. "The appeal of a grievance-based identity makes it hard to convince straight white boys that they in fact have plenty going for them, and that they have no reason to feel aggrieved," the author concluded. Conservatives know her to be correct and have been saying precisely that for decades.

If the revolutionaries are slowly letting go of the radicalism that was so fashionable just a few years ago, they have not abandoned the language of rebellion. They frame as their own innovations their rediscovery of and satisfaction with ancient insights into the human condition. They tell anyone willing to listen that their breakthroughs are available only to those with levels of enlightenment rivaling their own. Well, whatever gets them through the night.

If these authors need to convince themselves that finding happiness in monogamous fidelity is insurrectionary, that gender-specific courtship rituals are an outgrowth of an education in gender inequities, and that a culture of victimization is psychologically debilitating only because of the evils of capitalism, so be it. As go the revolution's myths, so goes the revolution itself.

Conservatives who never needed to rediscover these eternal truths in the first place will have to be satisfied in victory without a triumph. And that shouldn't be too difficult. After all, conservatives know too well that lasting achievements are of the incremental sort. Here's hoping that progressives never convince themselves of the shrewdness in that bit of wisdom, too. ●

ARTICLES

# Triage for Medicare



## Priorities for reform

BY ROBERT E. MOFFIT

**Medicare spent $1 trillion** last year, and it is growing rapidly. It will spend nearly $2 trillion ten years from now. It is a major driver of the rising federal debt that, as the Congressional Budget Office has warned, threatens us with economic catastrophe.

This is a long-standing problem. Former CBO director Douglas Holtz-Eakin points out that the program has experienced funding shortfalls for all but two years of its existence and that by 2019 it accounted for more than a third of all federal debt.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, 73 percent of Americans are aware that sustaining the popular program will require changes. And despite reluctance from both parties to face the issue, House Speaker Mike Johnson is proposing a bipartisan debt commission, which inevitably will have to reckon with Medicare and other federal entitlements.

Fortunately, there are good ideas on how to preserve Medicare—that is, to provide the highest-quality care while addressing these fiscal challenges. Many of them appear in *Modernizing Medicare: Harnessing the Power of Consumer Choice and Market Competition*, a recently published book from Johns Hopkins University Press, which I co-edited.



It brings together top experts in the field, including Holtz-Eakin, and this article draws from it throughout.

While differing on technical solutions, these experts are united on the need to strengthen the program's consumer protections. They propose to preserve Medicare through market-based reforms. Patients would have a broad choice of plans and providers, and price competition among both would be intense.

University of Pennsylvania economist Mark Pauly observes that to be politically viable, reform must build on what Medicare beneficiaries know and like. That is why the Medicare Advantage (MA) program—a system of competing private health plans with rapidly rising enrollment covering more than half of all Medicare beneficiaries—is the strongest platform for positive change.

Medicare Advantage offers affordable comprehensive coverage—including, crucially, protection against catastrophically large medical expenses—and has a record of superior-quality care. At the same time, yearly health-plan bids to deliver traditional Medicare benefits routinely come in at a cost *less* than that of traditional Medicare itself. Former Medicare trustee Charles Blahous counsels making more use of the features of MA that have made this success possible: financial incentives, which could be made "more robust and transparent," for participants and insurance providers; and flexibility, which could be expanded, for competing health insurers to deliver high-quality medical care at the lowest feasible cost.

The experts acknowledge, however, that Medicare Advantage has certain weaknesses. Flawed payment and insurance-risk-adjustment systems are driving MA costs higher than they should be. They need to be fixed so that the program can provide a stronger foundation for long-term improvements to Medicare.

Economist John Goodman, the father of the tax-free health savings accounts enjoyed by millions of people, argues that we should also let seniors have accounts from which they could bypass the Medicare bureaucracy and its regulations to pay directly for medical services. Recognizing that the health needs of seniors, especially those with chronic illnesses, are complex and varied, Goodman stresses the importance of their personal empowerment through such accounts. This would not only enable these seniors to see direct-primary-care physicians regardless of insurance networks but also facilitate their easy access to a broader range of medical professionals and specialists.

A big political hurdle has already been overcome. Thanks to MA and the Medicare prescription-drug program, most Medicare patients receive much of their care in a defined-contribution system of financing. The government, that is, makes an annual per capita contribution to a patient's chosen health plan. The idea that people can shop for care with the help of that contribution can no longer be so easily characterized as a "risky scheme."

Several steps should be taken to improve the payment system for MA plans. The government contribution to MA plans is based in part on the results of a county-by-county bidding process—a relic of the traditional Medicare program. The bidding should instead be based on regions, which would both allow for greater competition and better reflect how more Americans get health care through regional health systems. MA plans should also make bids that provide the benefits not only of traditional Medicare but of prescription-drug coverage, too. As with today's MA plans, seniors could choose a plan with a premium higher than the government contribution if they were willing to make up the difference themselves. Unlike today's plans, they would keep all the savings in the form of cash if they chose a plan that cost less than the government contribution.

Government payments to Medicare Advantage plans aren't based on just the cost of traditional Medicare's benefits and market bids. They also have to be adjusted for enrollees' demographic characteristics and health risks to maintain insurance-market stability. But the way Medicare does this should change. Today, MA plans make a prospective assessment of the health risks of their enrollees, which inevitably involves guesswork and invites gaming. The risk-adjustment portion of the payments should instead be made retrospectively, based on actual costs incurred.

While MA has been gaining enrollees, many seniors are more than satisfied with traditional fee-for-service (FFS) Medicare, and they should not be compelled to leave. But traditional Medicare badly needs reform, too, argues Joseph R. Antos, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and a former assistant CBO director. It should be streamlined by combining Parts A (hospitalization), B (physicians' services), and D (prescription drugs) into a single, comprehensive, and integrated FFS health plan, with a single deductible, simplified cost-sharing, and an annual cap on out-of-pocket costs.

Transforming traditional Medicare into a comprehensive and updated health plan would have several advantages. It would not only reduce seniors' reliance on additional premium payments for supplemental private insurance, but it would also guarantee them protection from the financial ▶

devastation of catastrophic illness. This transformation, combined with an improved system of defined-contribution financing, would also enable traditional FFS Medicare to compete directly with Medicare Advantage plans on a level playing field in every region of the country.

Expanding and improving defined-contribution financing beyond MA and Medicare Part D, and allowing all seniors to enroll in a competitive market of comprehensive coverage with catastrophic protection, would facilitate seniors' access to a higher quality of medical care. Intensified health-plan and provider competition, in a fully transparent environment of price and provider performance in delivering quality care, would drive innovation in benefit design and improve health-care delivery.

Obviously, with the rapid growth of the 65-and-older population, America will spend ever larger sums on seniors' health care. Facing the nation's debt crisis, however, the president and the next Congress will be compelled to address Medicare's multiple challenges. They will need to make crucial policy choices to slow Medicare spending and secure the best value for taxpayers' dollars. "Saving" money by tightening Medicare's existing administrative payments and price controls is not the answer. Central planning and price caps, enacted as part of the Affordable Care Act of 2010, already threaten seniors' access to good care. More bureaucracy is no prescription for better care.

The superior route is to build on the best features of Medicare's competitive programs, Medicare Advantage and Medicare Part D, and transform the entire program into a dynamic, competitive system. That option holds promise. Basing his calculations on the CBO's baseline, Holtz-Eakin estimates that a fully competitive Medicare program would save $2.2 trillion over ten years, including $333 billion in savings for beneficiaries.

Real Medicare reform will benefit seniors as well as the taxpayers financing the bulk of their care. ●



# Deficits Forever



## Welcome to mandatory-spending dominance

BY DOMINIC PINO

**In any introductory** macroeconomics class, you will be taught something about public finance that goes like this: The government's budget deficit is related to the business cycle. Near the peak of the business cycle, the government should run a surplus because revenues are higher and the need for government spending is lower. Near the trough of the business cycle, the government should run a deficit because revenues are lower and the need for government spending is higher. In addition, the government will run a deficit in times of war or domestic emergency. There are also times when the government creates a new program and funds it with borrowing.

Now take a step back and look at the federal budget. Does the theory match the facts?

Not at all. The government has run a budget deficit every year since 2002, no matter where the country has been in the business cycle. The deficits have been growing quickly. In 2004, with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in full swing, the deficit was $400 billion. In 2009, the worst year of the largest U.S. recession since the Great Depression, the federal deficit was $1.4 trillion. In 2023, a year of low unemployment and high economic growth and revenue, the deficit was $2 trillion.

Despite his bragging about how strong the economy is, President Biden requests a $1.8 trillion deficit in his budget for fiscal year 2025. While portraying himself as a fiscally responsible deficit-cutter, his budget projects deficits between $1.4 trillion and $1.9 trillion for each year through 2034.

Under realistic budget projections based on data from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), and including the likely extensions after 2025 of Obamacare subsidies and the individual provisions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, the budget deficit is expected to surpass $2 trillion again in 2027 and $3 trillion in 2033. Those projections assume that interest rates and inflation stay relatively low and stable, no new major domestic spending programs are created, and the U.S. doesn't go to war or into recession.

On the conventional theory of public finance, this long-term increase in deficits, no matter the circumstances, makes no sense. But there's an unspoken assumption in the conventional theory: that the government actually controls its budget every year and has the capability to respond to economic circumstances.

The U.S. is entering—and, to some extent, has already entered—a period when that assumption no longer holds. Here's why.

The federal budget can be divided into two broad categories: discretionary spending and mandatory spending.

Discretionary spending includes most of the stuff most people think of the government as doing: the military, the courts, law enforcement, prisons, customs and border patrol, most anti-poverty programs, education, transportation, veterans' benefits, foreign aid, diplomats, agriculture programs, housing subsidies, safety regulations, national parks, research grants, collecting taxes, keeping the lights on in all the government buildings, and paying all the government employees who manage all of those things. Congress is supposed to vote on twelve appropriations bills each year to fund the discretionary budget, but it usually passes some type of omnibus bill to fund the entire thing for some period of time.

Mandatory spending includes basically three things: Social Security, major

**Only a few years from now, nearly all federal revenue will effectively be out the door before Congress even gets around to debating appropriations bills.**

health-care programs, and interest payments on the debt. In official documents, the government usually separates interest payments into their own category. For the purposes of this article, they will be included in mandatory spending because, as with payments for Social Security and major health-care programs, interest payments are made without annual votes from Congress.

Mandatory spending doesn't require an annual vote from Congress because payments are made in accordance with existing obligations. For Social Security and major health-care programs, benefits are defined by current law. For interest payments, the Treasury must pay back bondholders according to the terms of the bonds it issued.

The determinants of mandatory spending are not related to the business cycle. They are, by and large, related to the actuarial tables. The mandatory portion of the budget does not resemble the conventional theory of public finance at all. It looks more like a very poorly run insurance company.

Beneficiaries are taking out more money than they paid in, and more money than people are currently paying in. Under current law, this will be true until approximately the end of time. The government compensates for the difference by borrowing, which increases interest payments. All of that happens without Congress ever voting on anything.

Mandatory spending already consumes 73 percent of the federal budget. That proportion is projected to grow every year. The conventional public-finance theory of budgeting always overlooked that deficits will be more likely than surpluses because governments spend OPM (other people's money). But now lawmakers won't have the chance to make a budget responsive to the business cycle even if they want to.

Interest payments are the really spooky part of the equation. According to estimates from Brian Riedl of the Manhattan Institute, if interest rates stay around 4 percent—the rosy scenario that the CBO uses for its baseline forecasts—48 percent of federal revenue will go just to cover interest payments in 30 years. If rates gradually increase to 5 percent, that shoots up to 73 percent. If they increase to 6 percent, that's all of federal revenue, just for interest payments.

Most past instances of increasing deficits were due to wars or recessions. Wars and recessions end at some point, after which spending that was related to them can be cut. This is no longer true in a period of mandatory-spending dominance. The deficits are large because they are required to be large, and they will be required to be larger in the future. There is no peace dividend or economic boom that will change that.

Under mandatory-spending dominance, Congress's budget-making power is effectively null and void. Only a few years from now, nearly all federal revenue will effectively be out the door before Congress even gets around to debating appropriations bills.

In one sense, this is undemocratic, since the people's elected representatives will have little ability to make changes to how the people's money is being spent. But in another sense, mandatory-spending dominance is highly democratic. Polls show that most Americans support entitlement spending and wish to see it increase, and that is exactly what they will get. Both of the presumptive major-party presidential nominees oppose reforming entitlements, in perfect alignment with the will of a majority of the people.

The CBO projects that the national debt will increase by $119 trillion in the next 30 years. Nearly all of that increase, $116 trillion, will be from mandatory spending. That means an additional $116 trillion of federal borrowing—not to pay for national defense or law enforcement or better government in any way, but mostly to subsidize the consumption of retirees.

As Americans, we have a document that says why "governments are instituted among men." It's not to subsidize the consumption of retirees. And if we are to restore a limited government that secures our rights, we'll need to declare our independence from mandatory-spending dominance sooner rather than later. ●

ARTICLES

# A Drama in Russia



Moviegoers see *The Master and Margarita*, onscreen and in life

BY JAY NORDLINGER

**'It's a miracle,"** everyone says. It's a miracle that Michael Lockshin's adaptation of *The Master and Margarita* made it to Russian screens. It's a further miracle that it has stayed there (so far). Among those who use the word "miracle" is Lockshin himself.

He is a film director, and *The Master and Margarita*? That's the classic ▶

novel by Mikhail Bulgakov, the Russian writer who lived from 1891 to 1940. He worked on the novel from 1928 until his death. In 1930, he burned his manuscript. Then he started again. The novel could not be published during his lifetime. Stalin would not have liked it. It was published decades after Bulgakov's death, with the first complete version appearing in 1973.

What's it about, *The Master and Margarita*? (By the way, Lockshin's film bears the same title as the novel.) That's a simple question but a hard one to answer. As Lockshin tells me, in conversation, ten Bulgakov scholars will give you ten different answers. They can't even agree on who the protagonist is. *The Master and Margarita* is about many things, with contrapuntal story lines.

But everyone can agree on this: The novel depicts the condition of the artist under dictatorship—the life that Bulgakov was living. The life that many were living. Lockshin's adaptation depicts the same.

Some artists choose to be independent—defiant—sacrificing a great deal. Some are reliable toadies of the regime. Some live in a moral gray area, doing what it takes to survive, day by day. And if you have to cooperate with the regime—so be it. If you have to do a little snitching, a little informing—so be it. You may get the apartment of the guy you have informed on.

The movie that Lockshin made could never be made today, Lockshin tells me. Could not be made in Russia, that is. It was made in 2021, before Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. After the invasion, the Kremlin clamped down severely on Russian society. What freedom of action existed, closed.

We will return to these matters shortly.

Michael Lockshin was born in 1981, in the United States. In 1986, his father, Arnold Lockshin, moved the family to the Soviet Union. Arnold Lockshin was a scientist—a biochemist—and a believer in things Soviet. The Lockshins' arrival in Moscow made a splash around the world. This merits an article unto its own.

So, Michael grew up in the Soviet Union and then Russia. He did not dream of being a film director. But he allows this: "If I had a 'superpower' as a kid, it was observation." He first read *The Master and Margarita* when he was 15. It was assigned in school. He loved the book. He has pored over it since, getting fresh understandings.

He went to Moscow State University, earning bachelor's and master's degrees in psychology. He then moved to London. He later bounced between London and Berlin. And Moscow. He traveled all over Europe, directing commercials, primarily.

In 2019, he made a movie, a feature film: *The Silver Skates*, adapting the story of Hans Brinker. It is a Russian movie. Highly acclaimed, it won a slew of awards and became the first Netflix Originals movie in the Russian language.

These days, everyone wants to know about identity: Who are you, what are you, how do you feel? I put this question to Michael Lockshin: Does he feel American, Russian, some blend? "It's a complex question," he says. Life has blown him hither and yon. He is aware that people don't like the term, in our fervently nationalist age, "but I do kind of think the best term for me is 'cosmopolite.'" He knows Russian culture, he knows American culture. He has significant experience elsewhere. He views himself as a one-man melting pot.

Bulgakov, he notes, was a worldly man, who spoke five languages. And the movie has an international cast. Woland, for instance, is played by August Diehl, the German actor. *The Master and Margarita* is a beloved book in Russia, but it is also part of world culture. From this broader culture, Russia now seems to have withdrawn, says Lockshin. Putin has "isolated" the country.

Not lightly did Lockshin take on the assignment of *The Master and Margarita*. For many years, producers had had the rights to the novel. It was in 2019 that they asked Lockshin to direct. His thinking went something like this: *Everyone in Russia knows this novel—loves this novel. What if I screw it up? They'll burn me at the stake*. Also: *How do you do justice to this novel, with its multiple story lines? How do you put it all onscreen?*

On top of that: *Much of Bulgakov's novel depends on his prose—his extraordinary prose, down to the punctuation. The novel is not necessarily plot-driven. How does a filmmaker proceed?*

Lockshin found a way. He did not try to put the whole novel on the screen. He put elements of it into a "three-act structure," as he says. *Et voilà*.

He and his team shot the movie from July to October in 2021. Then he returned to the U.S., to edit the movie. I say "returned" because Lockshin had been making the U.S. his home base in recent years. His plan was to travel to Russia in a few months—sometime in early 2022. There was post-production to do. In February, Putin launched his full-scale invasion.

Lockshin spoke out on social media. He criticized the invasion and expressed support for the invaded. Like anyone else, he could have self-censored—kept mum. But conscience compelled him to do otherwise.

Needless to say, he did not travel to Russia. He could not have (without dire consequences).

The movie was supposed to come out on the last day of 2022. That day came and went. The release date kept being put off. From what Lockshin knows, there was a debate about whether to censor the movie or block it altogether. In the end, the movie was released, essentially as made. Why? Lockshin can speculate.

While the movie was being shot, in 2021, there was considerable publicity about it. The movie was widely anticipated. *The Master and Margarita* is a touchstone in Russia. And if the movie got buried, wouldn't that embarrass the government, given the themes of the movie?

An article in the *New York Times*, by Paul Sonne, put it this way: "Banning a production of Russia's most famous literary paean to artistic freedom was perhaps too big an irony for even the Kremlin to bear."

The movie came out on January 25, 2024. There had been very little of the usual promotion. Lockshin's name was omitted from posters. His name was absent from all marketing materials, such as they were. In any event, the movie was a sensation. The public went to see it, quickly making it the top-grossing




ROMAN GENN

Russian movie of all time in the over-18 category.

Furious, the state and its propagandists got to work. As Lockshin says, "a whole campaign" was launched against him and the movie. Propagandists called him a "criminal" and a "terrorist," and demanded that the movie be pulled from cinemas. The issue even reached the Duma (which passes for a Russian parliament). *How could this movie have been made? Who is responsible?*

Vladimir Solovyov denounced the movie for its "sharp, anti-Soviet, anti–modern Russia theme." Solovyov is maybe the most grotesque of the Kremlin propagandists, a fixture on television. He called for a "serious investigation" into the film's release.

Obviously, Kremlin officials and assorted mouthpieces see themselves in the movie. How could they not?

Lockshin says he knows, to a certainty, that there were "real conversations, real discussions," about pulling the movie from theaters—just three or four days after the movie came out. Yet it has stayed. Why? Again, Lockshin can speculate.

More than a million people saw the movie in just the first few days. (That number is up to five and a half million, as of this writing.) The movie was a trending topic on the internet (censored though the internet is). Maybe pulling the movie was more trouble than it was worth?

By all accounts, people have been moved on seeing *The Master and Margarita*. Some say that the mere act of going to see the movie is a "silent dissent." There are lots of anecdotes from and about moviegoers. I have one to share myself. I talked to a young Russian woman in New York whose mother, back home, had seen the movie. Her mother had been "overwhelmed," she said. "I had never known her to react that way to anything cultural."

The story onscreen parallels life in Russia today. On March 12, a headline from Meduza, the Russian news organization in exile, read, "Police search the homes of artists and activists across Russia." Lockshin says, "There are playwrights and theater directors in jail right now. There are artists in jail right now for making anti-war statements"—even general statements about war, as opposed to specific criticisms or condemnations. "It's a very scary time."

Many have fled the country. Many more would, if it were feasible. As Lockshin points out, people may have elderly parents. They may have several school-age kids. They may not speak another language. Not everyone can just pick up and leave.

As in Soviet times—as in all "fear societies," to borrow Natan Sharansky's phrase—some are accommodating themselves to the state. Some who have been critical of the government have recanted, abjectly. Lockshin's producers distanced themselves from him—but that was not enough to keep them in the good graces of the Russian Cinema Fund. They have been denied the right to apply for funding, indefinitely.

And here is something that people have noted—including a Soviet-born American, who pointed it out to me: Two of the actors who portray Kremlin lackeys in *The Master and Margarita* are themselves Kremlin lackeys—or at least mouth the official line. (What is in their hearts, who knows? Maybe even they don't know.)

I ask Michael Lockshin whether people—his colleagues, his friends—have been afraid to contact him. He is, after all, an official pariah, an official villain. "I would say there are people in Russia who are cautious about it," he answers.

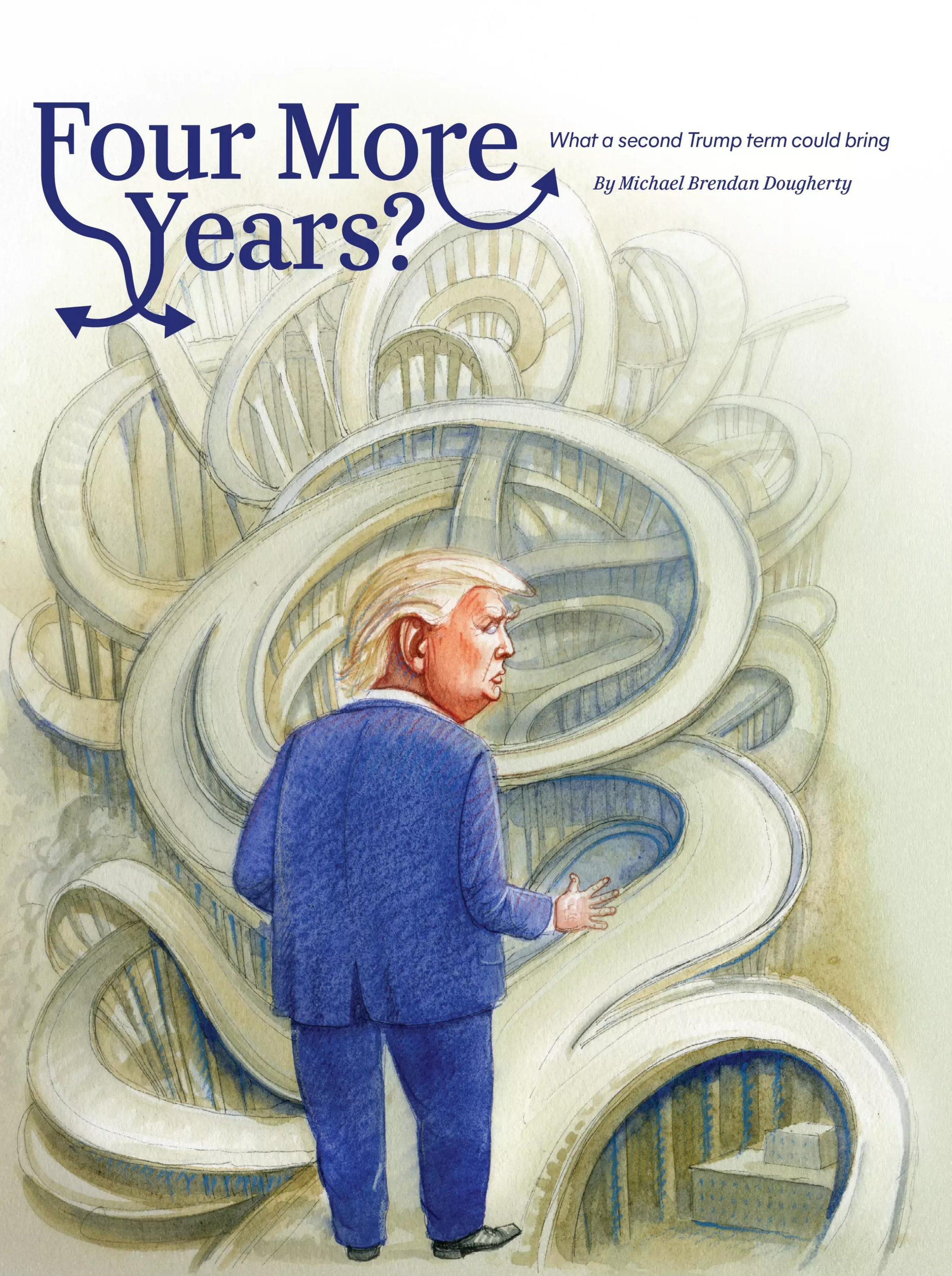
Another question—blunt: Does he fear for his personal safety? No, not in the United States. But returning to Russia is out of the question. There are other countries he must avoid as well. (Presumably, countries whose governments are friendly to Putin.)

Right now, Lockshin is working on a couple of English-language scripts. "I don't see myself making anything in Russian until the regime changes," he says. Before we say goodbye, I ask him what Mikhail Bulgakov would think of the movie and the reaction to it—by Kremlin and public alike. Bulgakov would not be surprised, the answer is. He would find it awfully familiar. ●

# Four More Years?

*What a second Trump term could bring*

*By Michael Brendan Dougherty*



**Despite polls that consistently showed** Donald Trump running a competitive race in 2016, his winning the presidency came as a shock to most of official Washington, the media, and other "sense-making" institutions in this country. The sight of such a norm-breaking figure taking the highest office in the land seemed to unscrew the loosest screws. Trump's behavior—whether throwing a Starburst candy at Angela Merkel ("Don't say I never give you anything") or tweeting about how his nuclear "button" was "much bigger" than Kim Jong-un's—drove some people genuinely insane and inspired outlandish conspiratorial thinking and behavior in opposition to him. It also degraded public discourse and the image of republican governance. The Trump presidency had high points—the roaring economy and rising wages of 2019—and low points: the summer of riots and lockdowns. But the worst fears—the end of our democracy—turned out to be unfounded. Trump was an unpopular president with limited ability to command criminal fealty or organize a conspiracy that extended beyond a rabble. American institutions proved stronger than his egotism joined with QAnon's muscle.

This limited ability for troublemaking may be why voters are thinking of taking a chance on him again. Trump is now the presumptive Republican nominee, and in most polls, he is soundly beating incumbent Joe Biden. Therefore, it's time to ask what we could expect from a second Trump presidency. There are four possible outcomes.

### *A Replay of the Limited Trump*

The likeliest scenario is a replay of the first term, a kind of controlled chaos that fascinates, repulses, thrills, exhausts, and polarizes. After all, men don't change, and Trump, after age 78, is the least likely of all men to change. So it's worth remembering the cut of his first term and what it would portend for a second.

The fact is, there were strong limits on Trump's presidency from the start. These included the Congress and the courts. In many ways, Trump had run against both parties. Even with a Republican majority, he found limited willingness to work for his priorities on the Hill. He ended up passing parts of an already existing Republican agenda of tax cuts and never got full funding for his border wall. The courts energetically—and sometimes dubiously—imposed limits on his executive orders, limits that his administration then respected.

Recognizing that there was not a deep bench of administrators entirely on board with his MAGA agenda, Trump built a cabinet that was simply dysfunctional. For example, he had campaigned as a severe critic of the bipartisan consensus around foreign policy, particularly of America's direct involvement in the Middle East. And yet, when his first secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, gave his first big speech, it was a direct reading from the establishment hymnal on the Syrian civil war, according to which America could continue to pursue five or six difficult goals with a minimum commitment of resources. And many conservatives probably blanched when orthodox economic thinkers such as Larry Kudlow joined a Trump team committed to mercantilism. But in the end, their influence was decisive: Trump did not strongly deviate from standard Republican views on economics. His trade war with China amounted to a phony war. He called it off at the start of an election year and praised our great relations with Beijing, even though his concluding talks with the government there amounted to little more than begging Chairman Xi to buy more soybeans in swing states.

Trump was also limited by a lack of follow-through and backbone. He developed a reputation for listening only to the last person who had spoken to him before his retreats for hours of cable-news watching. This led to embarrassing competition and even skulduggery among senior officials. Trump's former national-security adviser H. R. McMaster confirmed that Gary Cohn, Trump's economic adviser had stolen documents from the president's desk to prevent Trump from seeing them. An outgoing envoy to Syria, Jim Jeffrey, bragged in interviews that he simply hid from the president the number of U.S. troops in that country. This ended up scotching Trump's announced plans to withdraw our troops from Syria, since the scale of such an operation would have been larger than anticipated. In the meantime, those in the administration hoping to reverse Trump's intended withdrawal took advantage of the confusion and won the policy fight. In its worst forms, Trump's lack of command seemed to manifest itself in the intelligence agencies' open subversion of his presidency. In order to embarrass or bridle Trump when he wanted to withdraw from Afghanistan, members of the intelligence community leaked bogus stories to the *New York Times* about Russian bounties on our troops. Ex–CIA director John Brennan told MSNBC earlier this spring that, during the 2024 race, the intelligence community would withhold information from Trump that was normally provided to other candidates.

Over and over again, Trump could easily accomplish things for which there was preexisting Republican and institutional support—tax cuts, a revolution on the judiciary—but that, where his agenda cut strongest against the consensus of official Washington, his accomplishments were shallow. This is not to say that his election had no effect. For the foreseeable future, the Republican Party will remain the party of a strong border. His success shifted from a weak Washington consensus in favor of cooperating with China to a stronger consensus in favor of competing with and containing it. And he occasionally managed to make political gains out of disasters. The Taliban found themselves in a position to exclude the Afghan national government from talks under Trump's administration, but Trump's deal with them had effectively set in motion a withdrawal that was popular with the public. But the predictable political blast from its ugly execution exploded in Joe Biden's face.

Finally, the fact that he was the most unpopular presidential nominee in American history—and remained historically unpopular throughout his term—put limits on what Trump could do. While his respect for institutional limits is low, he is unlikely ever to achieve the popularity or command of the legislature that would allow him to stage a Viktor Orbán–like campaign of constitutional reforms.

So, in matters of policy, we should expect that a still-limited Trump would be able to reinstitute the ▶

ROMAN GENN

suite of executive orders that brought some control to the border. There are fewer off-the-shelf policy agendas floating around Congress than in days past, but it's possible that if he were gifted with a Republican majority in the House and Senate, Trump could pass a version of Senator Rubio and Senator Lee's child tax credit or even Mitt Romney's child-benefit proposal. If faced with a mixed Congress, Trump might take the only tax cuts available to him, which would be a partial or full reintroduction of the SALT deductions for affluent blue-state taxpayers. If thwarted by a firmly Democratic Congress, he might try to build a legacy with offbeat policy items such as reviving Ivanka Trump's ideas on paid maternity leave. Trump might run into serious fiscal limits on policy as well. Would America's debt continue to be bought up at rates that allowed Washington to postpone restructuring Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid?

The way that debates about aid to Ukraine have proceeded—and how Russia's war on Ukraine has updated battlefield assumptions about the amount of artillery modern armies use—means there will likely be a majority for investing more in America's defense industry, replenishing depleted stockpiles, or expanding capabilities in the Pacific. A second Trump administration would face challenges from a China that seeks to improve its geostrategic position while staring down demographic implosion, a quickly aging society, and a shrinking workforce. China could threaten war in Taiwan, a continuing increase in our cost of living, or both.

It is far-fetched that the progressive citadels of power in American political life would allow Trump to mollify and charm the public for long.

*The Full Trump*

A less likely scenario, but one that we shouldn't discount entirely, is that Trump has learned a few things from his first term and will find staff members who execute his decisions. Trump's probable difficulty in hiring like-minded staff to fill a second administration is a problem that many groups on the right are working on. The Heritage Foundation, American Moment, and the America First Policy Institute are all elbowing their way forward with a suite of policy ideas and young political actors who want to populate a Trump administration's second- and third-tier positions. If Trump were to be a success, these minds would be seen as having provided the generational and ideological turnover that is necessary for healthy republics.

The cabinet positions would still present challenges. But by now, some capable senators, such as Tom Cotton, have moved in Trump's direction on foreign-policy issues. Others, such as J. D. Vance, would positively relish the chance to push a full-throated MAGA agenda. Foreign-policy experts, such as *Strategy of Denial* author Elbridge Colby, who share Trump's belief that Europe needs to pull its own weight on defense while America focuses all its spare attention on the Pacific theater, would be capable in office and easily approved.

A successful Trump administration would be, like the successful Trump campaign itself, partly a matter of global trends working together in its favor. Populist and nationalist themes re-emerged across Western politics and beyond in the last decade for completely legible reasons—as reactions by those who felt they had lost out on the previous Clintonian/Blairite consensus politics and the institutions through which it exercised power.

If Trump built a border wall, it would fit a global trend of hardening borders with physical infrastructure. If Trump turned the economy in a more mercantilist direction, he would be following other actors, including Chairman Xi, who has doubled down on exports after the failure of China's real-estate booms. If America's economy succeeded more than others in this era of nearshoring, reshoring, and industrial policy, it would be a continuation of another trend already under way, in which global capital is looking back to the United States as a safe haven with reliable institutions and a brighter demographic future.

Trump might also be buoyed by the continuing backlash against the "woke" ideology that is evident everywhere in the culture now. His proposals for spending 2026 in a twelve-month-long, 50-state-wide 250th-birthday celebration for our nation, complete with new museums and monuments, would, by itself, be evidence of a profound majoritarian rebuke to the "America was never great" style of scholarship and literature that flourished among progressives during the first Trump presidency. The proposal, as it stands, would require working with all 50 state governments and so would have the potential to achieve some level of political depolarization if blue-state governors decided to play along.

There is also the possibility that Trump would continue to strengthen conservatives' new hold on the judiciary. A second presidency would almost surely find Trump replacing Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito. But he might also replace Chief Justice John Roberts and potentially a Democratic appointee (Justice Sonia Sotomayor has health challenges and may have miscalculated her future ability to serve on the Court). In such a scenario, Trump's historic stamp on the courts would be comparable only to FDR's.

I would rate this possibility fairly unlikely, in part because Trump has shown little ability to increase his popularity. Further, it is far-fetched that the progressive citadels of power in American political life would allow him to mollify and charm the public for long. Progressives now

exercise an outsized influence on Democratic politics, but if Trump were to have broad success, it would necessarily mean that most Democrats had begun distancing themselves from the progressive line, leaving this highly credentialed class as a defunct elite.

*A Four-Year Siege*

While the first two broad scenarios—controlled chaos and propitious success—depend largely on Trump's behavior and favorable political weather, the final two depend on his opponents, who would, of course, have their say. The second-most-likely outcome of a second Trump administration would be a feeling of American life under siege. Much as during the Trump campaign now and the Trump administration in the doldrums of summer 2020, we might see a "Resistance" whose legal, moral, and political brinkmanship presents as many threats to American institutions as, or even more than, Trump himself.

While Republicans view the first term's "Russiagate" as a hoax that exploded in Democrats' faces, many Democrats may remember it as a thrilling time in which lurid attacks on Trump helped drive his popularity down further with swing voters. A Democratic House will find every chance to investigate Trump a worthwhile one. They could try to pick up where other criminal investigations have failed—returning to the events of January 6 or to Trump's mishandling of classified documents in the first term.

Symbolic point-scoring would count for a great deal. At a minimum, we might see a Democratic House refuse to invite Trump to deliver a State of the Union address. Even as a minority, Democratic lawmakers might try stunts like those pioneered in the Tennessee legislature in recent years, tasking a handful of lawmakers with making it impossible to do the business of the House and daring the Republican leadership to arrest them.

Just as wokeness flourished under the first Trump administration, radicalizing people in institutions where offices of diversity, equity, and inclusion had only recently come into being, we would see an instant antibody-like reaction to Trump's second presidency. Most unfortunately, it would take as a given that Trump authentically represents America, and that the entire American tradition is a tree that produces bad fruit.

In the worst moments of 2020, Trump found himself totally overwhelmed, even a bit player in a larger drama. The anti-Trump revolution was taking the center of political life away from him. He was blamed for riots across America that blue-state governors and mayors either failed to stop or openly encouraged. Uncertain about his own governing instincts on Covid, he allowed people who plainly despised him and wanted him to lose reelection to set the terms on which Americans lived throughout that year. Having shown these weaknesses before, he has already given his opponents a playbook to undermine him again.

*Trump Aborted*

There is another, hopefully very remote, possibility. I hesitate to bring it up the same way I hesitate to talk to everyone about the weird buzzy feeling in my hand after I put my cellphone down. But it's possible that Trump will be elected and never take office. Ahead of the 2020 election, liberal columnists at the *Atlantic* gave lots of ominous warnings. Ronald Brownstein: "If Trump wins a second term—especially if that victory relies on another rural surge to overcome massive opposition across the big metros—the chaos in Portland might look like only the preliminary skirmish for an even more incendiary collision to come." In other words, the Left would foment widespread violence in the cities to punish nonviolent voters. Also in 2020, Franklin Foer analogized liberals' likely resistance to a Trump reelection victory to the Euromaidan revolution that toppled Ukraine's pro-Kremlin government. The model for such a revolution is to simply gather a destabilizing mob in the capital city, mobilize global opinion, and then use any resulting instance of violence as an occasion on which to declare the elected government illegitimate and lawless, with the goal of sending its members fleeing for their lives. Recently in the *Atlantic*, Russell Berman boldly reviewed Democrats' options for holding that Trump is ineligible to run for president and refusing to certify a Trump victory on January 6, 2025. Insurrection for me, not for thee.

In the worst moments of 2020, Trump found himself totally overwhelmed, even a bit player in a larger drama. The anti-Trump revolution was taking the center of political life away from him.

Chillingly, the argument closed this way:

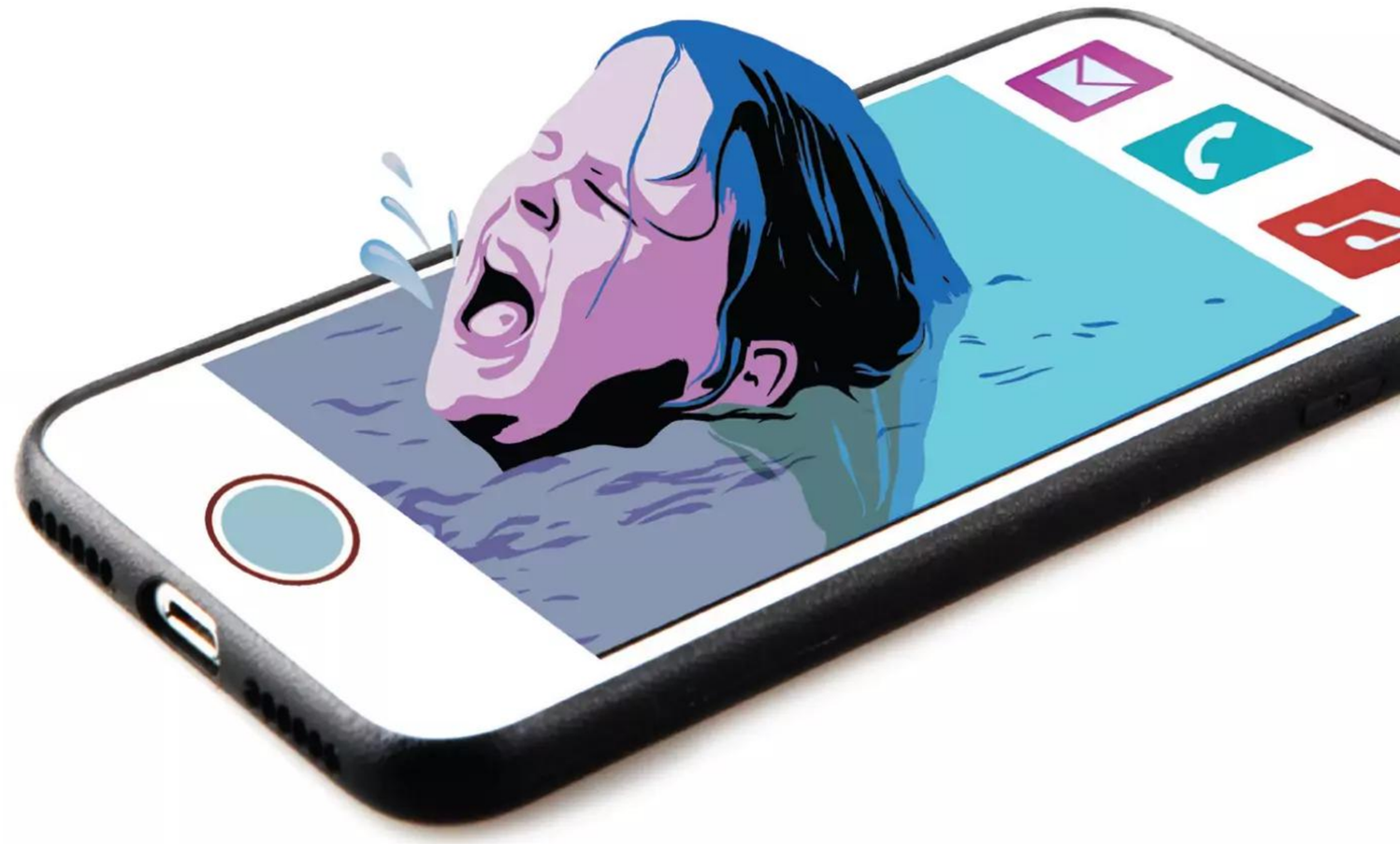
> The scholars [who described the Democrats' options] also warned that serious political instability and violence could ensue. That possibility was on [Representative Jamie] Raskin's mind, too. He conceded that the threat of violence could influence what Democrats do if Trump wins. But, Raskin added, it wouldn't necessarily stop them from trying to disqualify him. "We might just decide that's something we need to prepare for."

Again, I suspect public opinion and the desire for continuing constitutional government would restrain Democrats tempted by such a gamble. But the one thing we can count on in the Trump era of American politics is that surprises are around every corner. It can always get worse. ●

# ENDING THE TYRANNY OF SMARTPHONES

*We need government to help protect kids from the harms of social media*

By Jean M. Twenge



**Imagine that a company began** mass-producing a new toy. This was not a toy for little kids; instead, it appealed most to adolescents. The toy became wildly popular, first with teens and eventually with younger children as well. The toy was so engaging that some teens stayed up until 2 A.M. just to play with it. Before long, teens spent so much time using the toy that they cut back on socializing in person.

This is not a fictional story. The toy is the smartphone, and this is the story of teens' lives beginning around 2012.

Smartphones offer many things, but among the most attractive to teens are social-media apps such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube. By 2023, U.S. teens were spending an average of nearly five hours a day using social media, according to Gallup.

That is an extraordinary amount of time. But does this matter? Some have argued that social media are just a newer way for teens to communicate with their friends, the same as always, and therefore nothing to worry about.

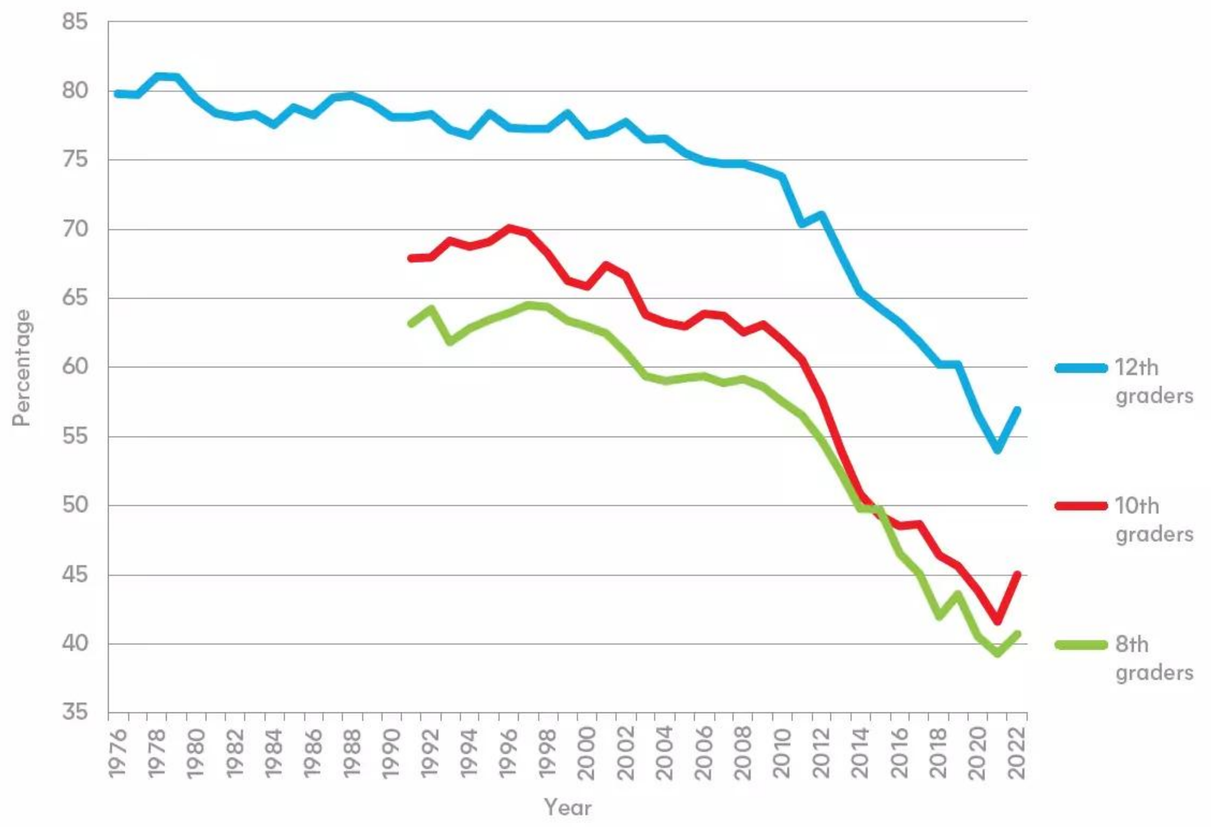
One way to answer the "Does it matter?" question is to ask whether social-media use is linked to mental health. If it is, what can we do to protect kids? And should keeping kids safe online be primarily up to parents, or is it time for lawmakers to step in?

**The growing popularity of smartphones** and social media over the past decade and a half has fundamentally changed teens' lives. With communication moving online, Gen Z teens became much less likely to hang out with their friends in person (see Figure 1). American teens and young adults spent about an hour a day socializing in person in 2012, but that figure sank to a half hour a day by 2022. They also went out with their friends much less frequently.

Technology use can also interfere with sleep, and it has: Half of U.S. teens were significantly sleep-deprived in 2022, up from a third in 2012 (see Figure 2). It's not a coincidence that 2012 was the first year the majority of Americans owned a smartphone and around the time that daily social-media use became nearly universal among teens.

This generational shift in how teens spent their leisure time (more time online and less time with friends in person, along with less time sleeping) coincided with a striking increase in loneliness, depression, and unhappiness. More than twice as many American teens suffered from major depression in 2022 than did in 2011, with nearly all of the increase occurring before the Covid-19 pandemic struck in 2020 (see Figure 3). These statistics are from a screening of thousands of randomly chosen teens across the country, not just those who have sought help

**Figure 1: In-Person Socializing**

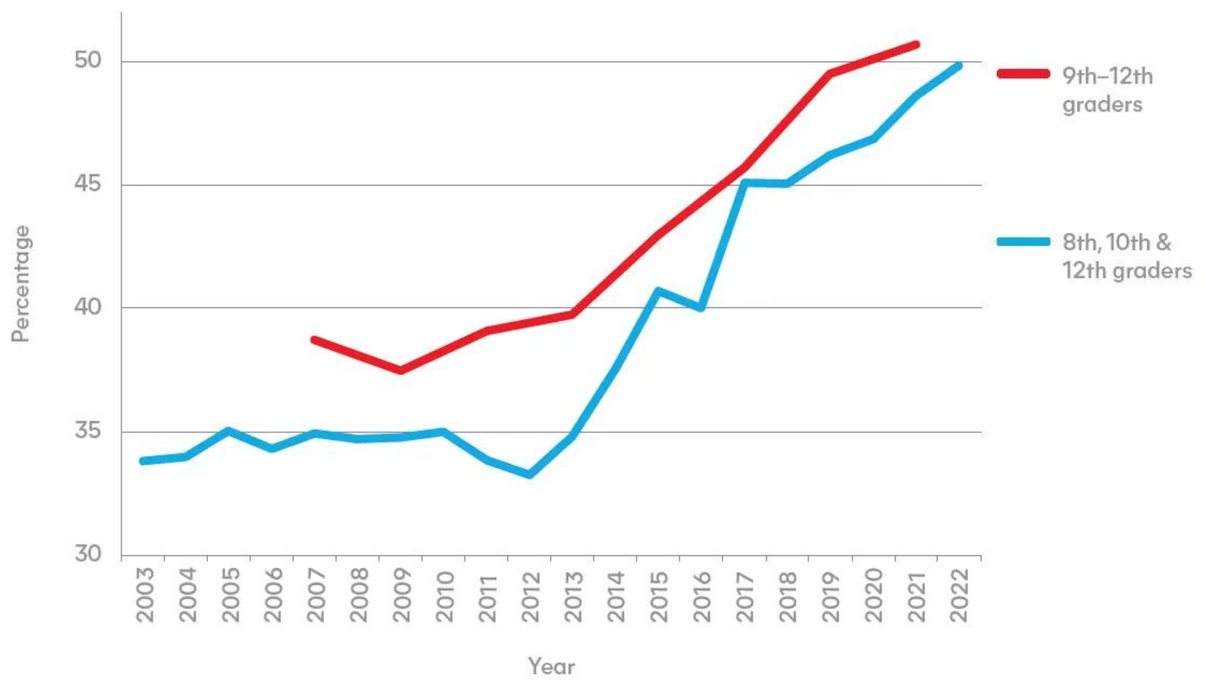



Percentage of U.S. teens going out with friends twice a week or more, by grade level, 1976–2022

**Source:** Data from Monitoring the Future survey, analysis by Jean M. Twenge in *Generations* (Atria Books, 2023)

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**Figure 2: Sleep**




Percentage of U.S. teens sleeping less than seven hours a night most nights, 2003–22

**Note:** Recommended amount of sleep for adolescents is eight to ten hours a night

**Sources:** Data from the CDC Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (9th–12th graders) and Monitoring the Future (8th, 10th, 12th graders), analysis by Jean M. Twenge in *Generations* (Atria Books, 2023)

from a professional. Thus the increases cannot be explained away by overdiagnosis or greater help-seeking.

After staying stable for two decades, the number of American teens reporting that they felt lonely, left out, useless, or joyless suddenly increased after 2012. Teen happiness, which had increased between the early 1990s and the early 2010s, suddenly declined after 2012. Within a few years, it had fallen to all-time lows.

Could these trends be caused by greater willingness among teens to admit to mental-health issues or unhappiness? If so, we would not expect to see any changes in objectively measured behaviors related to mental-health issues. But those changes have occurred: Emergency-room admissions for self-harm, a behavior linked to depression, doubled among older teen girls and more than quadrupled among ten- to 14-year-old girls in the U.S. between 2010 and 2021. These data are collected directly from hospitals by the CDC and so are not influenced by changes in self-reports. Even more troubling, suicide rates among American children and teens have doubled since 2010, another trend that can't be explained by self-report biases.

In short, more kids and teens are suffering from mental-health issues, and this trend began long before the Covid-19 pandemic. Adolescent mental health, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy has declared, is "the crisis of our time."

But how do we know that smartphones and social media are the cause of the crisis? Isn't it possible that something else caused the startling increase in teen depression?

The changes in the way teens spend their time don't just coincide with the increases in depression and loneliness; these increases are large, widespread, and of significant impact. An alternative explanation would need to have the same qualities.

For example, perhaps the increase in depression is due to factors such as school shootings, the opioid crisis, or the increase in students' college debt. These explanations, however, are all specific to the U.S. If any of them were the reason for the increase in teen depression and loneliness, we would not see similar upticks in other countries where they are less prevalent. But, in fact, similar trends appear among teens in the U.K., Europe, and Latin America, with anxiety and loneliness beginning to increase in 2012—just as in the U.S. In a 2021 paper, my co-authors and I found that loneliness increased in lockstep with internet use across countries but was unconnected to economic cycles, trends in income inequality, or changes in family size (see Figure 4).

Perhaps depression has increased because teens are anxious about climate change. Concerns about climate change have been prevalent since the 1990s, however, and depression did not begin its recent rise until 2012. Also, as Jonathan Haidt points out in his most recent book, *The Anxious Generation*, the usual response to global challenges is not depression but its opposite, action and activism. Moreover, why would worries around climate change increase loneliness? That's not at all clear. But millions of teens alone in their rooms scrolling through social media instead of getting together in person is an obvious recipe for greater loneliness.

Another possibility is that depression increased because teens are now less independent. It's true that today's teens are less likely to have a driver's license, work at a paid job, or go out on dates. But declines in those activities began in the late 1990s, long before the increases in depression beginning in 2012. Plus, the waning in teen independence also means declines in alcohol use, sex, and pregnancy, trends that should be positive for teen well-being (see Figure 5). It's certainly possible that the decline in independence and the rise in digital media have worked together—for example, both lead to teens' spending less time with friends in person. But the lack of teen independence alone cannot account for the rise in depression that began in the 2010s.

Beginning around 2012, teens unwittingly became part of a giant natural experiment that moved much of their social lives from in-person to online and shortened their sleep. Nothing else can so thoroughly explain why teen depression rates doubled even before the pandemic and why teen loneliness increased around the world.

The convergence of these trends is powerful evidence, because it captures the effects of technological change at the level of the group. Even teens who didn't use social media or who spent little time on their phones were affected as the norm for social interaction changed. The data also defy the alternative explanation that depression causes social-media use, instead of social-media use causing depression, at least at the group level. For that to be so, one would need to argue that an unexplained increase in teen depression caused more of them to buy smartphones and spend more time on social media—an explanation that defies logic. It is much more likely that smartphones and social media became increasingly popular, leading to the increase in teen depression.

Of course, we should also consider the link between social-media use and depression among individual ▶

teens. In studies of tens of thousands of teens, the more hours a day a teen spent on social media, the more likely that teen was to be depressed or unhappy. Even so, many researchers contend that the link is "small." But what does "small" mean, exactly? The correlation between social-media use and depression among girls is often around .15 to .20. For context, the correlation between childhood lead exposure and adult IQ is .11. The correlation between obesity and feeling dissatisfied with life among teens is .10. Far from being small, then, the link between social-media use and depression is similar to or even larger than other associations usually considered important.

It's also crucial to put these numbers in practical terms. In one large study of teens, those who used social media heavily were twice as likely as nonusers to be depressed. Most parents would not consider a doubling of depression risk to be small. These links are more than large enough to have caused the increases in depression since 2012.

In addition, emerging research shows that the brains of teens who frequently use social media exhibit more activation in the reward-sensitive dopamine pathway. In other words, social media might be changing the way teens' brains work.

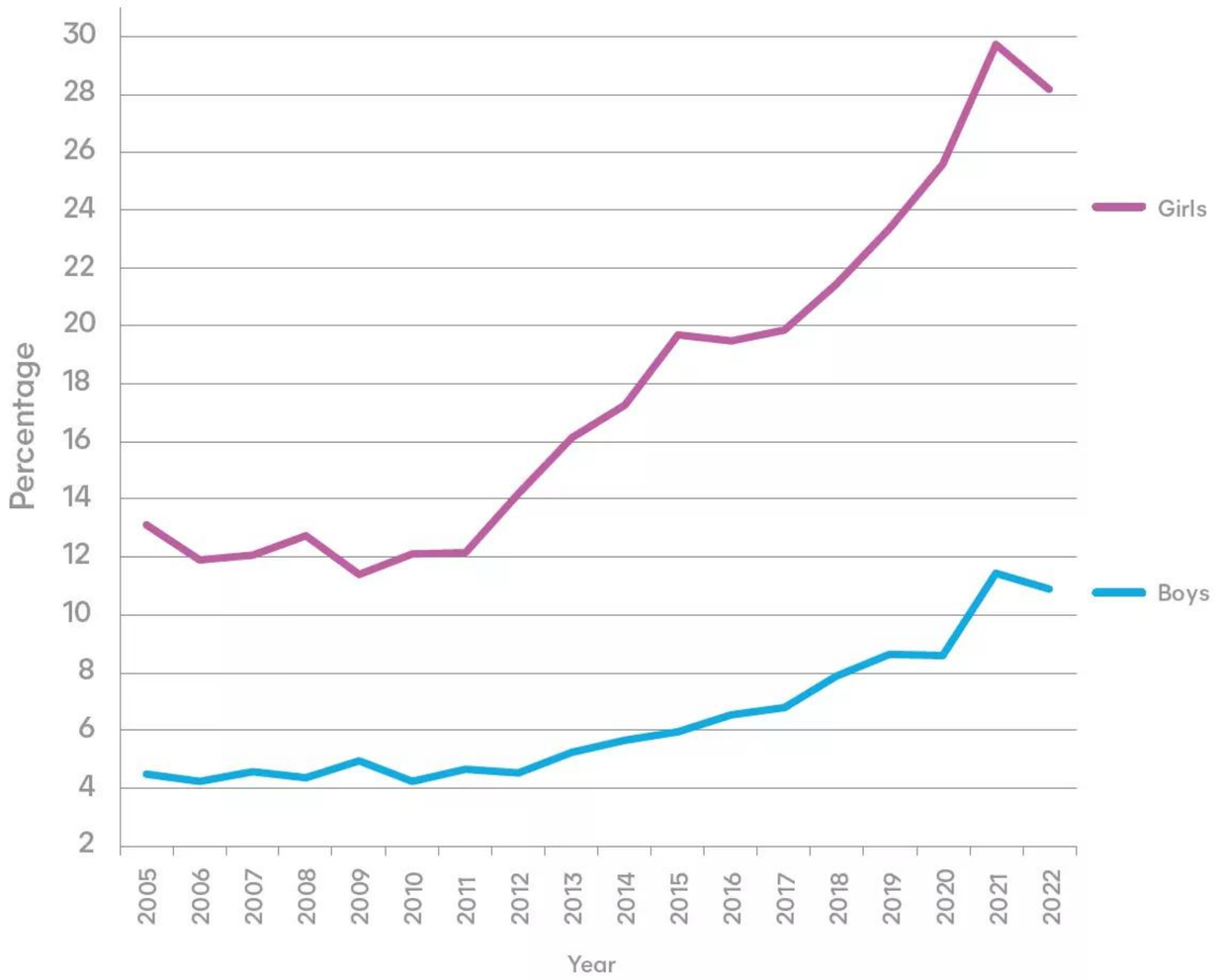
But are we seeing more than correlation—is there a causal link between social-media use and depression? Earlier this year, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg told Congress, "The existing body of scientific work has not shown a causal link between using social media and young people having worse mental health." Zuckerberg is, in a word, wrong.

The gold standard for establishing causation is the random-assignment experiment. For example, a drug trial might give some people the drug (the experimental group) and others the placebo (the control group). Several studies have randomly assigned people to give up or reduce use of social media (the experimental group) or continue their usual use (the control group). After two or three weeks, those who gave up or reduced their social-media use were less depressed than the control group. In addition, in a finding very similar to Meta's own internal research, viewing photoshopped images of people on Instagram, compared with viewing non-manipulated images, caused teen girls to feel worse about their bodies.

Then there are the natural experiments. For example, Facebook became available at different times on different college campuses. Researchers found that college students' depression increased after Facebook was introduced. Similarly, the rollout of high-speed internet across Spain coincided with more teen girls being hospitalized for mental-health issues.

Given all of this evidence, it seems likely that the rise of social media was at least one key cause of the sudden

**Figure 3: Major Depression**




Major depression in the past 12 months among U.S. 12- to 17-year-olds, 2005–22

**Source:** Data from National Survey on Drug Use and Health, analysis by Jean M. Twenge in *Generations* (Atria Books, 2023)

increase in teen depression. If so, helping kids and teens find a better balance between their technology use and the rest of their activities might finally reverse the seemingly inexorable rise of depression among our children. But how do we do that? And who should take the primary responsibility, parents or the government?

**For many people,** the answer to the question of who should take primary responsibility for children's social-media use is simple: the parents. It's parents' sole responsibility, this argument goes, to make sure their children do not use social media when they are too young to handle it. It's also the parents' responsibility to make sure that kids and teens don't spend too much time using social media and that when they do, they do so safely.

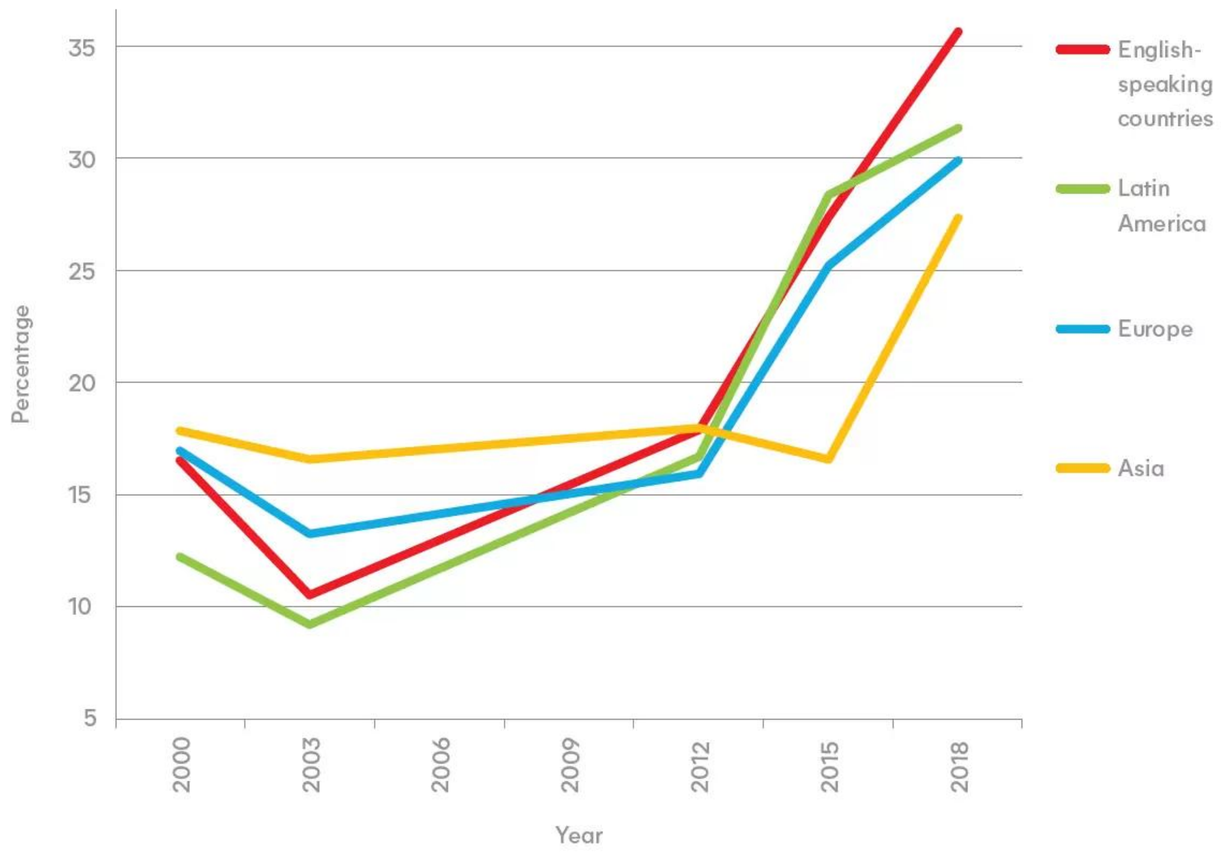
But there are at least two significant problems with this argument. First, access to social media is almost completely unregulated. Minors do not need their parents' permission to download social-media apps. Children can simply agree to the disclaimers and start using the app.

In addition, social-media apps do not verify children's ages. A 1998 law, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), specifies that children need to be 13 for websites to collect their data, but children can simply check a box saying they are 13 or older or choose a different birth year. As a result, many children and teens have social-media accounts without their parents' knowledge.

In a 2022 survey, seven out of ten fifth- and sixth-graders—all of whom were younger than 13—said they spent at least some time on social media. Among fifth- and sixth-graders whose parents explicitly forbade them to have social media, four out of ten did so anyway.

Some parents take significant steps to keep their children off social media, only to find them completely immersed in the apps.

**Figure 4: Loneliness**




Percentage of 15-year-olds high in loneliness, by world region, 2000–2018

**Source:** Data from Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), analysis by Jean M. Twenge in *Generations* (Atria Books, 2023)

One eleven-year-old girl opened her first Instagram account without her parents' knowledge, hiding it behind a calculator app on her iPad. Within two years, she had developed a severe eating disorder. Her parents have since sued Meta, the parent company of Instagram, alleging that the app caused their daughter's mental-health issues.

It's not surprising that kids can't stay away. Social-media companies have poured billions into making their products as engaging as possible; the more time users spend on an app, the more money a company makes. Even with the app closed, notifications entice users back. Algorithms powered by artificial intelligence learn what keeps a user watching and serve up similar content. Teens who intend to watch TikTok videos for a few minutes often report that they look up and an hour has passed.

Parents today are in an almost impossible position, asked to regulate their children's use of apps that are freely accessible on nearly every device. Parents may install parental controls on their children's smartphones—or even hold back from giving their children phones—only to find them using Instagram on their laptops.

Even if parents lock down their kids' personal laptops, many students have school laptops, which do not allow parental controls. You might think school laptops would be restricted to educational websites only, but that's not the case. My own children's school laptops have unrestricted access to YouTube, so the same device they use for their homework offers the temptation of endless video-watching. How can I, or any parent, know that "I'm doing my homework" is the truth unless I am looking over my children's shoulders all the time?

The second problem with placing responsibility primarily on parents is the group nature of the problem. The parent who does not give her teen a phone or keeps him off social media risks seeing him become socially isolated. When Snapchat or Instagram becomes the default communication tool in the friend group, your offline kid can quickly become the odd one out. In the delicate tapestry of middle-school friendships, pulling on a single thread may cause the relationship to unravel. At these ages, fitting in is all-important.

Imagine a fairy godmother gives you one wish. You choose eliminating social media for all elementary- and middle-school-age kids. That way, "all of my friends have it" would no longer be true. No kid could lie about her age and get on TikTok at the age of seven, which is laughably easy to do now. When your kids were using their school laptop, you would know they were actually doing something school-related instead of mindlessly watching video after video.

We don't need a fairy godmother to do this for us. We just need better laws. At the dawn of the internet in 1998, COPPA set the age for "internet adulthood" at 13, not for any developmental reason but as a compromise with the tech companies. But how many people truly believe that middle school—that time of nascent puberty, heightened bullying, and awkward self-consciousness—is the perfect time to introduce social media? This law is long overdue for change.

The research backs this up: The link between social-media time and depression is larger among children and younger teens. If the minimum age for social media were raised to 16, adolescents would have more time to develop socially, emotionally, and cognitively before setting up accounts. By 16, the association between social-media time and depression is lower; this is also the age at which we trust teens to drive, and so we assume they are more capable of mature judgment. With the age minimum at 16, middle-school students would no longer feel left out if they were the only ones without social media—none of their peers would have it, either.

Mental health is only one reason to gate by age. Social media allow adult strangers to easily contact children and teens, leading to many cases of sexual exploitation. It is also frequently used by drug dealers to sell their wares, which has led to teen deaths from overdoses. Even simply enforcing the existing age limit of 13 would be progress.

Enforcement of any limit will require users to verify their age to download a social-media app. Some apps already achieve this by requiring an ID or a pending charge to a credit card. Age verification does not need to be done by the apps themselves; it can be performed by a third party. There are now so many companies that verify age online that they have their own trade association. The Age Verification Providers Association lists twelve ways in which age may be verified online.

Several states, including Utah and Arkansas, have already passed bills raising the age for social-media access to 16 and requiring age verification. The laws were immediately challenged in court, however, and have not yet gone into effect.

Some, such as Charles C. W. Cooke in these pages, have argued against online age restrictions, partially because of practical challenges. It's true that it would be very difficult to keep kids and young teens off every website not suitable for them. But if age minimums ▶

were enacted for opening social-media accounts, that would at least keep kids off algorithmic sites, with minimum friction for everyone else (as verification would happen just once, not every time a user logged in). Cooke also protests that age verification involves sending "one's private information across the Web," but that objection seems odd in an era when people routinely splash their family pictures and political opinions across social media and shop online using their credit cards. Social-media companies already have access to vast amounts of our personal information; is it all that noteworthy that they might also know we are 16 or older, particularly if that verification were administered through a third party?

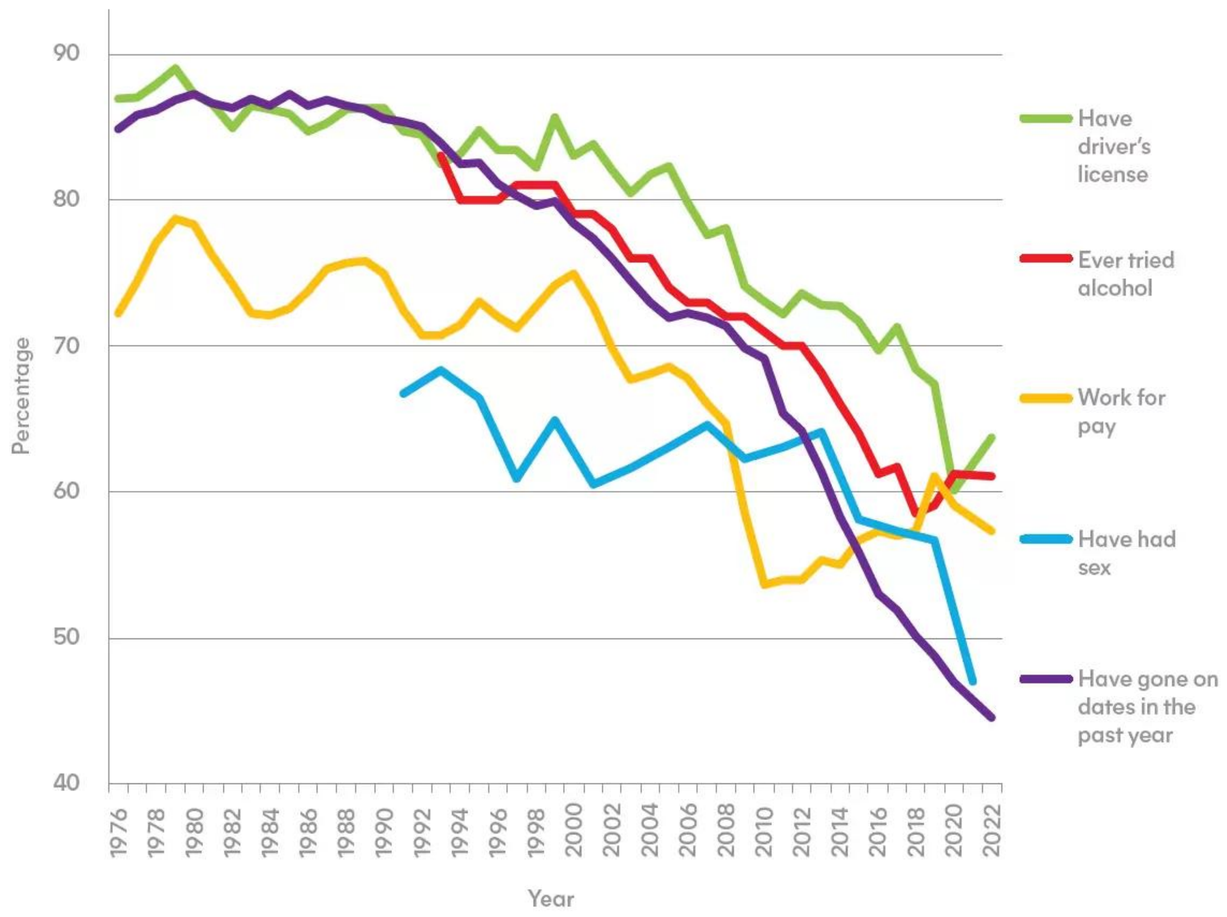
Another solution is for schools to ban student smartphone use during the school day. Not only would this benefit students' learning, but it would give them a break from social media for six hours a day. It would also give them more opportunity for in-person socializing during lunch and breaks. Schools that have implemented bans report that students are less distracted in class and talk to one another more. Consensus is growing: Late last year, the *Washington Post* editorial board called for schools to ban phones, and several states have passed or are considering laws requiring schools to ban the use of smartphones during school hours.

Even without such policies in place, there are still some things parents can do. First, make it a family rule that phones are not in bedrooms overnight. Device use can be difficult to manage during the day, but having no devices in the bedroom during sleep time is unambiguous. The benefit of such a rule is supported by a raft of data showing that smartphones and tablets interfere with sleep. If your teen responds with "But I have to have my phone in my bedroom overnight because it's my alarm clock," then buy her an alarm clock.

Second, delay giving your children internet-enabled phones for as long as possible. Most elementary-school-age children don't need a phone at all. If they need a phone for calling you when they're away from home, give them a flip phone. If they are middle-school-age and want to text their friends, give them a phone designed for kids and younger teens that has no internet access and no social media (some examples: Troomi, Gabb, Pinwheel). As the default, these phones allow only calling, texting, and taking pictures; some allow other apps with parental permission, but not social-media apps.

In my family, our rule is that you get your first smartphone when you get your driver's license. Even after that milestone—which our 17-year-old has reached—we've installed parental controls that disable app downloads. That way, installing a social-media app or a game is a discussion, not something done without our knowledge. Plus, there are many ways teens can communicate electronically without social media, including text and videochat.

**Figure 5: Adult Activities**




Percentage of U.S. 12th graders engaging in adult activities, 1976–2022

**Sources:** Data from the CDC Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (sex) and Monitoring the Future (all other variables), analysis by Jean M. Twenge in *Generations* (Atria Books, 2023)

**There is broad agreement** that adolescents are in the midst of a mental-health crisis. If children's and teens' unfettered access to social media is even partially responsible for this crisis, as seems hard to deny, that might be good news, because it means we can do something about it. It's unlikely that we will be able to influence genetics, the largest single cause of depression, anytime soon. Other causes, such as poverty, abuse, and loss, are also difficult to resolve. But putting more regulation on children's and teens' use of social media is straightforward and would cost very little.

One way to consider the issue is with a cost–benefit analysis. The benefits of keeping children and young teens off social media would include not only more time for sleep and in-person socializing, which in turn would contribute to improved mental health, but also a reduction in the sexual exploitation of minors. The costs would be minimal, amounting to removal of one option among many for kids and teens to communicate and gather information electronically. They would still have the rest of the internet, along with texting and videochat. And in any case, they would gain access to social media at 16.

The calculus is different for keeping things as they are, with elementary- and middle-school students routinely using social media and teens spending five hours a day on the apps. Here, the primary benefit is more profit for the tech companies. The cost is that staggering numbers of teens feel lonely and useless, more teens suffer from major depression, more girls between the ages of ten and 14 are admitted to hospitals for self-harm, and more children and teens take their own lives. Put this way, the choice is clear: Keep children and young teens off social media.

Last year, leaked internal documents revealed that Meta valued each teen user at $270 of "lifetime value." Is it really necessary to argue that our children's mental health is worth more than that? ●

*This essay is sponsored by National Review Institute.*

# The Green Road To Serfdom

*Voters will rebel against 'net zero' when the costs hit*

By Andrew Stuttaford

**Deciding who has been** the worst British prime minister of the 21st century (so far) is tough, but Theresa May (2016–19) strengthened her strong claim to this title shortly ahead of her ignominious departure from office. Desperate to secure a "legacy," she saw to it that Britain became the first major country to legally bind itself to reaching net-zero greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions by 2050. That is, the nation committed itself to releasing no more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere than it removes. Quite how this ambition could be fulfilled or what fulfilling it would cost was unclear, but no matter: This potentially enormous commitment passed into law with support across the political spectrum, astonishingly little scrutiny, and a great deal of self-congratulation. The 2050 target date reflected a widely held view that this is what it would take to contain the increase in the average global temperature since pre-industrial times to a more or less bearable 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Lemmings, so the myth goes, don't leap alone. Other countries from Japan to Switzerland to Canada have followed the U.K.'s example, including its neglect of critical thinking. Cost–benefit analysis is for "deniers." All EU member states are obliged to hit net zero by 2050. Germany, undaunted by its disastrous *Energiewende* (an appallingly expensive switch to renewables, combined with a phaseout of nuclear power, and—what could go wrong—reliance on Russian natural gas), has opted for 2045 instead. The U.S. has (following the procedures set out in the Paris climate accords) committed to achieving net zero by 2050. Although this commitment has not been incorporated into domestic law, the Biden administration is behaving as though it had, whether through its promotion of legislation such as the Inflation Reduction Act or through regulatory changes that have the advantage of avoiding too much democratic supervision. A growing number of U.S. states and cities have joined in, looking for dramatic reductions in their GHG emissions by mid century or before. And the U.S. is not the only country where such efforts are occurring below the national level. Thus the U.N.'s Race to Net Zero is targeted at non-state "stakeholders." Participants include businesses, cities, regions, and investors, all expected to take "rigorous and immediate action" to get to net zero by 2050, "at the latest."

The list of today's net-zero nations—Bhutan, Suriname, Panama, Guyana, Comoros, Gabon, Madagascar, and Niue—is a deterrent, not an inspiration. Before agreeing to any binding obligation to arrive at net zero, many less-prosperous countries, including four of the six largest GHG emitters (Brazil, India, Russia, and China, the GHG champ) are saying to the West, "After you," if that. Indeed, the Russian, Indian, and Chinese commitments, whatever they are worth, are to get to net zero one or two decades *after* 2050. All three countries are capable of assessing climate risk and have come to the reasonable conclusion that an increase of a touch under 3 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels by the end of this century (the current best estimate) is not an existential threat. This means that the climate weighs less heavily in their broader policy mix. That said, Beijing realizes that the Western world's climate fixation offers excellent geopolitical and commercial opportunities. It will try to exploit both to the fullest, and the West's other rivals will do their best to follow suit. The key position—discussed below, that China has established in the market for solar panels, and may achieve in wind turbines and, to no small degree, electric vehicles (EVs)—is, with the West set on retreating from oil and gas, of strategic as well as commercial value.

The campaign to reach net zero by 2050 is best seen as a giant exercise in central planning, bolstered by apocalypticism, puritanism, and, lurking there somewhere, distaste for the achievements of the West. Speed (it's a "race," remember) is essential, deadlines are pulled out of thin air, orders are barked from above, dissent is heresy, targets bear little connection to economic, technological, or political reality, and logic is displaced by frenzy: "C" no longer follows "B," "B" no longer follows "A." Those struggling to understand how policy-makers could insist on the urgent electrification of everything (or so it often feels) at the same time as they weaken the resilience of already-strained electricity grids need look no further.

**Working toward net zero** has attracted strong public support in Europe and more-cautious approval in the U.S. Spooked by endlessly repeated prophecies of climate doom, people like the idea of a grand project to help the planet but have been mostly unaware of its less appealing implications and unduly reassured by the thought that 2050 was decades away. ▶

But there have been warning signs that, when net zero begins to bite hard, voters will bite back. Polls show public backing for net zero but limited enthusiasm for paying for it. According to an Ipsos poll taken in 20 countries worldwide and published in April 2023, only about 30 percent of people (25 percent in the U.S.) would be prepared to pay "more" of their income in taxes "to help prevent climate change." "More" is not the same as "a lot," and the bill for net zero would be paid not only in steeper taxes but in a higher cost of living. However, 55 percent of respondents to a YouGov poll conducted last year in the U.K. would support policies to reduce carbon emissions only "if they do not result in additional costs for ordinary people," an impossibility. At around the same time, fewer than half of Americans polled by the AP-NORC Center and the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago said they would support a monthly carbon fee on their energy use, and, of those in favor, nearly a fifth said that the charge should not be more than a dollar.

And serious pushback has begun. The protests in 2018–19 by France's *gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) were initially triggered by the prospect of a fuel tax inspired by climate policy. Dutch farmers followed their example, alarmed by the threat to their livelihoods from rules designed, in part, to combat climate change. The BBB (BoerBurgerBeweging), an agrarian party of the Right formed in 2019 in response to the protests, has benefited from more-generalized discontent and, drawing votes from across the Netherlands, it became the largest party in the Dutch senate last year. An impressive showing in November's elections for the legislature's more powerful lower house may yet—it's complicated—lead to the formation of a government by a (more or less) populist coalition less supportive of today's green agenda.

Since December, there has been a wave of protests by farmers elsewhere in the EU. The causes vary, but in the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Lithuania, Romania, and Spain, they include opposition to climate-related policies.

The drive to hit net zero by 2050 is unlikely to stabilize the climate in time (the target date may even now be beyond reach), but there's a clear risk that it may destabilize the West, not least because of the harm it will do to its economies. For instance, it will push up a wide range of prices, whether because of the cost of the mandates that come with it or from the impact of an energy squeeze as the use of fossil fuels is curtailed. As it is, high energy costs (some of which are attributable to climate policy) are already sparking fears about "deindustrialization," above all in Germany, where energy-intensive industrial companies have been relocating production abroad. To take one dismal statistic among many: German chemical production hit a 28-year low in 2023. The country's increasingly far-right party AfD (Alternative für Deutschland)—which has been polling in second place—has suffered no harm for favoring both fracking and nuclear energy and opposing "green madness."

And then there is the destructive effect of regulations imposed with scant regard for current economic conditions, such as those requiring the retrofitting of office buildings to make them more climate-friendly, the last thing that embattled landlords need at the moment. In March 2023, economist Kenneth Rogoff warned of upward pressure on long-term real interest rates due (in part) to "the massive costs of the green transition." How much those costs might add up to is the subject of endless contention and is, in many respects, unknowable, but there cannot be any doubt that "massive" is the right adjective. In a 2023 report, the management consultants McKinsey & Company argued that getting the G-20 economies "on track" for net zero by 2050 would take investments that could exceed "an additional $35 trillion this decade," with about a third supposedly coming from "business-led innovation" and "baseline growth."

**'Green growth' will do far less than we have been told to offset the hit to GDP growth that striving for net zero by 2050 will entail.**

Even without the extra pressure referred to by Rogoff, higher inflation and the ending of the era of ultralow interest rates have dented the optimistic assumptions that previously encouraged the flow of private capital into projects that would bring net zero closer. The less that the private sector puts up, the more that governments determined to hit the 2050 target will have to chip in. That would mean adding to their mountains of debt, hiking taxation, cutting expenditures in other areas, or some blend of the three, with, in all probability, tricky political and economic results.

Much of the money to be invested would be spent replacing assets that are performing well but, from a climate-policy perspective, are now viewed as flawed. Such "investments" are little more than spending on glorified repair work, some of it of rather shoddy quality: For example, wind is a less efficient source of energy than the fossil fuels it is meant to supersede. Repeated on a sufficient scale, this diversion of capital from more productive use will lead to lower economic growth than might otherwise have been the case. This forgone gain could (maybe) be justified as an insurance premium, but it's a reminder that "green growth" will do far less than we have been told to offset the hit to GDP growth that striving for net zero by 2050 will entail.

The economic damage caused by the rush to net zero could obviously stir up popular discontent, but so could the increasingly burdensome and

intrusive changes introduced by climate-policy-makers into everyday life—there are or there will be plenty to choose from, and they go far beyond brutal utility bills: There has already been a bitter debate in some countries, including Germany (where it played well for the AfD), over plans to compel people to buy expensive electric heat pumps for their homes. Depending on where you live, there are bans or threatened bans on gas ovens, short-haul flights, cheap airfares, many types of conventional cars . . . well, the list already is lengthy, and it will only get longer. It is also worth considering the impact of substituting fossil fuels with (less reliable) renewables when America's overstretched electricity grid already is beginning to look dangerously unstable. Recurring blackouts are not a natural vote-winner. And then there's the small matter of significantly higher prices for meat and dairy products as (direct or indirect) climate levies kick in. Given the merciless math of net zero, they are coming.

**Some measures,** such as the coerced switch to EVs, will anger voters *and* damage the economy. Its compressed timetable may mean that many drivers end up paying more for cars that deliver less, especially if the current gaps in charging infrastructure are not filled quickly enough: Tesla cannot do it all. However good the network, the logistics of charging are never likely to be straightforward for city-dwellers without a parking garage or driveway of their own.

And quite a few automakers may find themselves in a fix, caught between slower-than-expected EV sales and, at a time when they are investing huge amounts into EV production, mounting regulatory constraints on their cash-generative conventional-car business. Chinese competition (particularly in Europe, where tariff barriers are much lower than in the U.S.) will add to their misery. But American automakers should not feel too relaxed: BYD, China's leading EV manufacturer, is planning to set up production in Mexico, which, of course, has a free-trade agreement with the U.S. That said, rules relating to the sourcing of components as well as restrictions on eligibility for the Inflation Reduction Act's $7,500 tax credit mean that this is less of a threat (for now) than it may seem.

Much of the advantage that incumbency has given Europe's automakers won't survive the transition to EVs. Benefiting from the expertise gained at home and their ability to price their cars very attractively (both are linked to extensive state support), Chinese companies are well placed to grab a sizeable portion of the European EV market, hurting the economies of "carmaking" countries across the continent. In August, Wang Chuanfu, the CEO of BYD, called on the Chinese auto industry to "demolish the old legends and achieve new world-class brands." It was a prudently patriotic note to strike in the age of Xi, but Wang meant it.

More cars are made in Germany than anywhere else in Europe. Its automakers are key to the country's vital industrial sector, already battered by high energy costs, of which more are attributable to climate policies than in many other European countries. A Chinese savaging of Germany's automakers would wreak havoc within the EU's industrial powerhouse, with knock-on effects throughout the bloc. Should Brussels establish that EVs imported from China are unfairly subsidized, it could take action. But if Beijing retaliated, Germany's automakers, which are heavily exposed to the Chinese market, could be in deep trouble.

And there won't be enough of those new, much-vaunted "green jobs" to save the day (something that should bother labor unions more and may now be beginning to do so), not least because too many of them will be in China. Germany was once a leading manufacturer of solar panels, thanks to subsidies that underpinned demand. After these subsidies had been greatly scaled back, Chinese firms, helped by a lower cost base (made possible in part by Uyghur forced labor), jumped in, and they now dominate the market. Something similar may be happening with wind turbines and, yes, if less so (for now), EVs.

Making matters worse, neither the EU nor its member states have access to the enormous amounts of (borrowed) money that the Biden administration is able to throw, however unwisely, at green-job creation in the U.S. The bill for that will come later.

Put all the above together and it seems reasonable to expect a broader revolt against the current direction of climate policy, in time. That's more likely in the U.S., where it could be easily accommodated within the existing party alignment as an item on a Republican program. There have been signs lately that some congressional Democrats, particularly those in vulnerable seats, are aware of this threat. A number have called on the administration to slow down the rush toward both a "forced" switch to EVs and away from natural-gas power plants. So far as the former is concerned, the White House, reportedly after prompting by Detroit and the United Auto Workers, has paid some attention. The new emission rules announced in late March were somewhat more relaxed than had originally been proposed and, in theory anyway, offer a greater role for hybrids. But in Europe, where the political establishment and (in principle) a large majority of voters still support the 2050 net-zero target, its opponents face a longer haul and may prefer to try their luck instead with "outsider" parties of the Right such as the PVV (Partij voor de Vrijheid, or Party for Freedom), the AfD, and Marine Le Pen's RN (Rassemblement National). That all these parties have a certain rapport with the Kremlin is just one reminder of the geopolitical risks that the West is running as it drives on toward net zero.

A more generalized crisis—as opposed to, say, the farmers' protests—could alter things, but, despite signs of unease, notably on the center-right, and pushback on some issues, most mainstream European politicians have yet to voice much concern about the general direction in which net zero is taking the continent. However, that may be starting to change, a process that could well accelerate if (as is currently forecast) the populist Right makes major gains in the EU's parliamentary elections in June. Should that occur, it may prod the center-right European People's Party, the largest grouping in the parliament, into taking a markedly more adversarial approach to the course that climate policy-makers have been taking.

Meanwhile, there is growing recognition that some imminent benchmarks on the path to net zero by 2050 will be missed. The extent to which the world still ▶

relies on fossil fuels allows for no other interpretation. To oversimplify, the slippage in timing is due not only to less-wealthy countries' prioritizing growth and energy security (among other matters) over climate worries but also to the practical difficulties involved in decarbonizing so much of the global economy so quickly (in one estimate 18 million kilometers of cable will be needed by 2030 alone). The ongoing revival of interest in nuclear power on both sides of the Atlantic may be a sign, like the EU's earlier acceptance that nuclear power is green, of greater common sense about the way to net zero, but it doesn't imply any broad change of direction. And building nuclear-power stations takes time.

The prevalence of a genteel climate fundamentalism, or something close to it, in the media, much of Europe's political establishment, and an influential segment of the Democratic Party in the United States will be hard to reverse. Its appeal has many explanations. These range from the psychological to the financial (it has proved to be a rent-seeker's dream) to the pragmatic (single-issue fights apart, such as over heat pumps in Germany, it has been politically perilous to oppose net zero in Europe, as it now is, to an extent, within the Left in the U.S.). And then there is the way that "the climate" offers policy-makers an unusual opportunity to wield quasi-authoritarian power within a democratic framework, an opportunity that can also be used to pursue agendas—such as the broader war against (any sort of) cars—only very loosely connected to the direction in which our planet's temperature is going.

**And so (as alluded to above),** in the absence of a major crisis, any course correction will be fairly limited. It may amount to nothing more than stretching out the timetable. But for now—if new recommendations out of Brussels are anything to go by—despite the occasional, generally temporary or cosmetic concession (farmers may fare better than most), climate policy-makers remain focused, however unrealistically, on 2050. Given the need to make up lost ground, that will mean cramming in more emission cuts over a shorter period, intensifying the pain they will bring and increasing still further the chance of voter revolt.

To continue along the old path to net zero by 2050 would damage the economy, individual liberty, and the security of the West. It also would represent a colossal waste of resources (including those that could be used to pay for a more intelligent response to climate change, with spending redirected toward nuclear energy, improving resilience, and research into technological solutions that might actually work). In Europe much more than the U.S., it may take, to borrow an old phrase from Brussels, a "beneficial crisis" to force a change of course. But while a crisis seems inevitable, that it will be beneficial is not.

And that's another reason to get off this path now. ●

# TED TALK TROUBLE

## A speech advocating color-blindness? Cue the pitchforks

By Brian Stewart

**TED—the popular "ideas organization"** devoted to the pursuit of knowledge "without an agenda"—has never been known for its modesty. It is hosting its annual conference in Vancouver in April under the banner "The Brave and the Brilliant." This is a large claim, but there can be little doubt about the brilliance showcased on the TED stage. The bravery at TED, however, is another question.

This year's TED conference comes at a time of crisis in the realm of ideas. Institutions and organizations that were supposed to be bastions of free thought have become strongholds of ideological conformity and monoculture. Nowhere has this been truer than in academia. The condition of free thought and free speech on America's college campuses has gone from bad to worse with unnerving velocity. Illiberalism and identity politics were incubated in American higher education for decades before culminating—especially in the most elite and expensive schools—in a mushy culture of "safetyism." This has nothing to do with the physical safety of students and everything to do with suppressing dissenting opinions.

Worse still, the surly and stultifying culture on campus has migrated beyond the university walls to the wider world of business, entertainment, media, and politics. "We all live on campus now," to borrow Andrew Sullivan's wry description of our predicament. Behind this new discipline is a reactionary body of thought in which the whole idea of Western civilization and American history is assumed to be racist and oppressive. Over time, these pseudo-intellectual tropes congealed into a species of open and pervasive antisemitism that has been on perpetual display since Hamas's savage attack on Israel on October 7. In every major American city, protests outside Jewish-owned businesses and calls for the elimination of the Jewish state have proliferated—not in response to any Israeli policy, but rather in support of a jihadist death cult that launched a vicious pogrom against Israeli Jews.




A TED TALK IN VANCOUVER, 2019

LAWRENCE SUMULONG / GETTY IMAGES

In the world before this latest explosion of Jew-hatred, ivory-tower administrators spared no effort in prosecuting every offense, real or perceived, against other minorities. Bans of the Confederate flag, to cite one example, have been the coin of the realm. In pointed contrast, expressions of antisemitism have now been met with insipid disavowals of "violence" and "hatred in all its forms." Three elite university presidents, testifying before a congressional committee, couldn't explain why their institutions suddenly jettisoned their refined sensitivities and permitted virulent antisemitism on free-speech grounds. Apologists for antisemitic mobs wish to benefit from free speech but not to the point where it allows the expression of views contrary to their own.

This double standard—one for a protected class of the politically and culturally ascendant, another for those at the mercy of the protected class's favored opinions—produced a backlash.

And this is where we return to the pusillanimity of TED. In January, TED caused an uproar by announcing that it would host Bill Ackman as one of the main speakers at its April conference. Ackman is the controversial hedge-fund manager who was instrumental in pushing out Harvard's president, who was forced to resign from her office (though she still teaches at Harvard) over her record of plagiarism and also allegations that she was insufficiently concerned about antisemitism. Another person invited to be a keynote speaker at the conference was the journalist Bari Weiss, editor of the *Free Press* and a prominent defender of the Jewish state. A handful of TED fellows promptly resigned, accusing the organization of taking an anti-Palestinian position and aligning itself "with enablers and supporters of genocide" in Gaza.

It is not clear how TED will navigate the situation if it becomes more dire, but there is little reason for confidence that it will stand for principle. Anyone familiar with the breakdown in the culture of free speech, and the way that "anti-racism" has merged into latent or blatant antisemitism, will not be surprised by the controversy over the demonization of Israel. And anyone familiar with TED's travails of late will not be surprised that hostility to free speech has arisen from within its ranks. A precedent had recently been set by high-ranking TED officials proving that certain ideas, no matter how respectable, could be justifiably curtailed in the face of a mob.

At the TED conference in April 2023, Coleman Hughes, an independent podcaster and author, was invited to lay out the case for color-blindness—the quaint notion that people should be treated equally regardless of race, both in their personal lives and in public policy. Hughes had a forthcoming book on the subject, so TED had summoned him to British Columbia. But a curious thing happened once Hughes left the TED stage. His talk was suppressed after a small but vociferous band of the most intolerant TED employees objected to the idea that human beings ought to be judged not by the color of their skin but only by the content of their character.

This episode was further proof that many elite institutions have been captured by an illiberal successor ideology known to its critics as "wokeism." It's no exaggeration to say that the commanding heights of American life—prestige media, social media, entertainment, academia, and the current majority party in Washington—have enforced a stifling conformity that borders on political religion. Formerly venerated repositories of liberal thought have been converted en masse to a theological vision that permits little if any dissent. The creed of individual freedom and equality of opportunity that defined American liberalism in its heyday has been swept away, not only on campus but across the cultural and political landscape. Erstwhile liberal institutions and foundations have been transformed into hotbeds of reactionary progressivism where racial progress is held to be a myth and the ideal of racial equality is given rude, short shrift.

The Hughes controversy warrants more attention than it has received. The day after the writer's ▶

lecture, the head of TED, Chris Anderson, informed him that an "employee resource" group called "Black@TED" had taken issue with his remarks. After the conference, Anderson told Hughes that the internal "blowback" had developed into a firestorm. The faction at TED that took umbrage with Hughes's talk was aghast that there would be any contemporary support for a color-blind society—the animating philosophy of the American civil-rights movement. The objective success of that movement in smashing white supremacy and achieving official racial equality is largely forgotten. In its place has grown up an ideology that casts the United States as fundamentally evil. Rigid racial categories are invoked and said to reflect an irreducible conflict between oppressor and oppressed groups. From this perspective, color-blindness is an insidious principle inhibiting racial progress. As Hughes has summarized his critics' view, color-blindness is little more than "a Trojan horse for white supremacy."

The upheaval at TED would have been an excellent opportunity for Anderson to stand up for Hughes and insist on letting him air his views. But instead Anderson yielded to the mob. At first he wavered. Then he proposed publishing Hughes's speech, but only after insisting on a moderated conversation between Hughes and a prominent critic of color-blindness that would be distributed around the same time. Even after this highly unusual condition was met, TED chose not to promote Hughes's talk.

This capitulation received a rebuke from Hughes, who meticulously exposed TED's betrayal of its professed mission to be a neutral arbiter in the battle of ideas. (Full disclosure: I have a slight social acquaintance with Hughes and favor airing his argument, as a matter of both principle and public interest.) In response, Anderson twice took to X, formerly Twitter, in a vain attempt to defend TED's craven conduct. In these mawkish posts, Anderson acknowledges that Hughes's talk set off an "intense debate" at TED. By the looks of it, however, the debate was not nearly intense enough. The TED employees angered by a remarkably mild argument sought to prevent its circulation on the grounds that, as Anderson put it, the principle of color-blindness is "not just wrong, but truly dangerous."

If any TED employees found it preposterous to call the philosophy of color-blindness "dangerous," Anderson made no attempt to speak on *their* behalf. Nor did he show his team or the wider world that Hughes is not, in point of fact, propagating dangerous ideas. He might have noted that anyone who claims otherwise is likely to be in the grip of an odd and extreme ideology and free to resign, but he didn't do that, either. A major purpose of the Enlightenment was to substitute the criticism of ideas for assaults on people. In this instance, TED employees, with the help of Anderson, obliterated that essential distinction. In the process, a brilliant young writer has been vilified as an intellectual maniac who brings harm on society.

This is nonsense on stilts. For starters, no one is made unsafe by the thoughts in your head. Moreover, Hughes appealed to the color-blindness principle that originated in the struggle against slavery and was refined during the struggle against segregation. Providing a lucid explanation of the philosophy undergirding the abolition of slavery and Jim Crow, Hughes urged people to think and act without regard to the color line and to do everything in their power to transcend it. He castigated race-based affirmative action, which he seeks to replace with government support for those who, regardless of skin pigment, used to be called the "deserving poor."

Those in the business of promoting ideas should be expected, at a minimum, not to go berserk in the presence of such an argument, even if they disagree with it. But Anderson chose to discard the essence of TED's mission and placate those who elevate emotion above reason.

Instead of pushing back against the mob and upholding the cause of free thought and free speech, Anderson bowed to those who don't tolerate views contrary to their own. Instead of jealously guarding the moral space for true argument, he endorsed the notion that liberal ideas pose a danger to individuals. Instead of firing those who conspired to squelch a TED talk and defame its author (whom Anderson had personally invited), Anderson caved to the heckler's veto.

It would have been less astonishing if Anderson had come clean and confessed that TED is no longer a values-neutral platform for ideas. He might have argued that TED was set to become a different sort of organization, explicitly aligned with the needs of the "social justice" movement. But instead he pretended that those who hounded Hughes "believe in the importance of ideas and in TED."

To justify this risible claim, Anderson cited the "rich debate" that has erupted in recent years on the subject of race. This is sheer fantasy. If the conversation about race had indeed been so rich, Hughes's TED talk would have struck his audience as moderate and even banal rather than shocking and dangerous. The strident and condescending response it generated is proof that the debate is impoverished. It has been pitifully deficient of imagination, nuance, and intelligence—the very hallmarks of Hughes's style and argument.

Anderson appears to understand that the cultural Left has veered into extremism. He noted that Hughes's views on color-blindness, once typical among leftists, are today "generally regarded as right of center." Exactly so. But this is where Anderson, who concedes that his ostensibly nonpartisan organization has fallen into the Left's orbit, loses the plot. TED's mission, he insists, is "to offer powerful ideas to everyone in the world, not just those from within one political group," and he regrets the "storm that has blown up" over Hughes's talk. Nonetheless, he assures us, "we want a growing diversity of ideas at TED."

Alas, this does not withstand scrutiny. Hughes was prepared to risk calumny to dispel what he regards as pernicious myths about race in America. For his trouble, he was used and abused by an organization billing itself as a platform for thinkers to disseminate their ideas. Hughes's defenestration will have a chilling effect on all those who venture to share heterodox views.

Anderson's statements on l'affaire Hughes demonstrate a failure to understand his role and responsibilities as the custodian of an institution devoted to intellectual freedom and excellence. At the end of his meandering missive posted on X, he confesses, "I really long for a shift in our culture." But he doesn't spell out what is wrong with the culture,

what he'd like it to become, or how he—as the head of a supremely influential cultural organization—might help effect such a transformation.

Fortunately for the rest of us, the way to build a culture of tolerance and liberty is no mystery. An example from Victorian England reminds us that the madness of crowds, especially when combined with backing from the wider society, is inimical to freedom. When John Stuart Mill campaigned for the right to protest and speak in London's public parks—the famous Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park is a tribute to his triumph—his primary concern was not government censorship but the enfeebled culture of free expression. It was not "the tyranny of the magistrate" that chiefly suffocated the conscience but rather the fear of social obloquy and ostracism for heterodox thinking. "There needs protection against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling," he warned.

The failure to defend and maintain culture against such powerful forces, especially in the upper reaches of our society, has been evident for some time. As a result, old verities no longer claim many supporters, and vast swaths of society can no longer think straight about rightful authority. In 1975, Robert Nisbet argued in *Twilight of Authority* that there was a critical diminution in "the traditional institutional authorities that for nearly a millennium have been Western man's principal sources of order and liberty." Nisbet spoke darkly of "twilight ages" and "processes of decline and erosion."

> A vacuum obtains in the moral order. . . . Retreat from the major to the minor, from the noble to the trivial, the communal to the personal, and from the objective to the subjective is commonplace. There is a widely expressed sense of degradation of values and of corruption of culture. The sense of estrangement from community is strong.

This degradation has been painfully demonstrated, in microcosm, in the TED fiasco over Hughes's views on race. It may surface again in the dispute over antisemitism. On each of these questions, the progressive cognoscenti now extol preposterous and sinister ideas. TED used to extol what every genuinely free society requires: the art of conversation and disputation, of giving both sides their say and listening to each with an open mind. Until it commits once again to that mission, it will be an organization that tacitly encourages the worst trends of modernity that put the entire architecture of liberal culture at risk: the use of taboos and stigmas to enforce conformity; the unwillingness to examine contrary threads of evidence and entertain opposing points of view; the facile conflation of accusation with guilt; the interpretation of thoughts and words as weapons; the failure of nerve by leaders entrusted with preserving free institutions.

Until it returns to that mission, TED will be a useless organization and ought to be treated as such. ●



FLORILEGIUS / GETTY IMAGES

# Blessed Are the Merciful

## *The widening case for animal welfare*

*By Mary Eberstadt*

**At least since René Descartes declared** dogs to be no more feeling than machines, and doubled down on his thesis by nailing and burning some of the unlucky automatons alive, people objecting to the misuse of animals have mostly inhabited the losing side. Granted, epic figures have spoken eloquently on the subject: Pythagoras, Saint Francis of Assisi, Leo Tolstoy, William Wilberforce, Mahatma Gandhi. Much of the time, though, run-of-the-mill defenders of animal welfare have ended up with the short straw. Mocked for "sentimentality," faulted for illicit "anthropomorphizing," dismissed for engaging in "moral equivalence," the diverse animal-welfare band has grown accustomed to what Richard John Neuhaus once quipped to pro-lifers: "lose a few, lose a few."

Even so, the seeming triumph of the notion that "dominion" entitles human beings to do whatever we like to our fellow creatures may yet prove Pyrrhic. If it does, the reason will be science. The explosion of research just since the turn of this century about the fascinating inner workings of animals reveals them to be more like us than has ever been established before. As a result, the disjuncture between what we now know about animals and what we still do to them amounts to a signature and stark moral anomaly.

Consider just a fraction of what we now know. Elephants bury their dead (and sometimes the dead of others), cry when reunited with family after years apart, and stay within yards of their mothers for the first eight years of life; they have ▶

also been observed protecting human beings and holding grudges against malefactors. When elephants are traumatized by seeing their family members shot, or upon being taken into captivity, their brain waves show patterns like those of humans diagnosed with PTSD. Pigs—as anyone acquainted with a regular farm will know—are very much like dogs in their trainability, or what we call "intelligence." They can learn their names, perform tricks, recognize themselves in mirrors, play video games; and like other mammals, though even more dramatically than most, they resist their deaths in slaughterhouses with preternatural, loudly expressed terror—as anyone who's been to one will also know.

Dolphins, like elephants, have been found to avoid humans who act in ways that the animals find threatening and to warm up to those who don't; some have protected and rescued humans from sharks; like elephants and chimpanzees, they can recognize themselves in a mirror. Even the less cuddly species behave in ways more akin to our own than has been guessed. Tagging devices on various types of sharks suggest, to the surprise of researchers, a social organization more akin to mammals than to fish. Similarly, and contrary to legend, wolves—like other animals—do not lope around like social isolates; the wolf pack is centered on a mated pair and their offspring, i.e., it is an extended animal family whose members play together into old age, tend to the sick among them, and coordinate discriminating attacks on individual prey with complex communications until recently unknown to us.

These and other leaps in understanding the interior world of nonhuman animals were unthinkable before modern instruments revealed them—a panoply including MRIs, increasingly sensitive acoustic and other tags, sophisticated video surveillance, and more. To repeat: Contemporary animal science is radically transforming our understanding of nonhuman animals. And here is where things that ought to be connected come apart. The same extraordinary leap in human knowledge about fellow creatures has yet to be matched by a commensurate *moral* leap that would transform some of our practices toward them.

So, for example, elephants in Asia and Africa continue to be marched to the precipice of extinction—whether because criminal bands including the Somali wing of al-Qaeda finance themselves with ivory, or for the sheer frisson enjoyed by men who kill for fun. Wolves, polar bears, lions, elephants, and other "trophy animals" continue to be wiped from the earth in numbers and proportions not seen since the several-hundred-year Roman bloodbath in the Colosseum. And despite incremental progress on behalf of factory-farm animals, notably pigs, most pork continues to be carved from creatures who spend their lives "immobilized for all of their existence, lying and living in their own urine and excrement, . . . sick, sore, atrophied, usually lame, crazed or broken in spirit, and kept alive in these torments only by a massive and reckless use of steroids."

That description is one of many unflinchingly offered by Matthew Scully in his new book, *Fear Factories: Arguments about Innocent Creatures and Merciless People.* A pro-life vegan and former speechwriter for President George W. Bush and others, Scully is also author of the landmark 2003 volume *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy*—a book that, like Peter Singer's very different *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals* a generation before it (1975), has had a marked effect on readers, especially younger readers.

Two decades later, Scully enlarges his defense of the defenseless with a collection of pieces traversing the question of animal treatment around the globe—from an animal-safari convention in Las Vegas to the bloody waters of the Pacific, where industrial trawling kills creatures of sea and air indiscriminately to ice floes where seals are clubbed within days of birth, to factory farms and other untouristed sites. In all, the book offers a welcome opportunity to take a new look at the moral argument that Scully, followed and accompanied by others, continues to put forward.

**Like *Dominion* before it,** *Fear Factories* will make some readers think as they may never have thought before. And for those already anxious to turn the page, rest assured that the book also offers relief. Scully is an exquisite writer, which is to say, thinker. Readers who fear a pitiless hectoring will be relieved to find instead an extended literary discussion, including invocations of Christian teaching and appeals to plenty of in-house favorites such as C. S. Lewis, Malcolm Muggeridge, and E. B. White; assorted celebrities; the last three popes; and NATIONAL REVIEW editors, including Kathryn Jean Lopez, Rich Lowry, and Ramesh Ponnuru. (As Scully notes, half of the chapters in the book appeared first as pieces in NR or on NRO.) In other good news, at least for those who take their humor dark, there are flashes of wicked wit as the author exposes what the laissez-faire approach to animal welfare has wrought.

Begin with the book's immolation of cant. In industry talk, mink (like other species) are not clubbed or gassed to death, but "harvested." They spend their lives not in boxes so small that a hamster might object, but rather on "ranches." Their carcasses are not ground to bits and fed to other animals in concentrations never found in nature, but instead "rendered into feed for other animals, . . . completing nature's natural scheme of recycling." And when they die, it is through the "introduction of unconsciousness," far easier to imagine than "anal electrocution."

According to the author, 355,000 pigs "are trucked off per day in the life of America." The typical factory-raised sow never sees the sun. She lies penned on concrete, unable even to turn around, biting her cages and often herself, jacked up freakishly with hormones and antibiotics, and otherwise treated in ways that would, and do, send the dog-abusers among us straight to cages of their own. The earlier euphemism for this disordered treatment, "gestation crates," having taken on something of a negative connotation, has lately been replaced with the softer "maternity pens." Notes Scully of the rhetorical upgrade, "It can't be too long before the toxic lagoons of manure outside these places are said to offer 'lake views,' and slaughterhouses are called 'the activity center.'"

A quick look around the globe proves that Descartes is not alone. "Bycatch," invoked as cover for the dolphins, whales, seals, birds, and other animals that make up the collateral damage of sea-"farming," is another

obfuscation. *Fear Factories* also relays the plight of captured animals across Asia, where dogs, dolphins, whales, sharks are sliced and diced alive with a zest that might have appalled the Marquis de Sade. In the United States, some 60,000 dogs are killed in animal experiments annually, in labs showered with government money. If there are sound utilitarian reasons for this sacrifice—especially in a nation where dogs now replace children as the companions of choice—they have not been forthcoming. Typically, those lab canines are also "de-barked," meaning their vocal cords are cut—supposedly to "reduce their anxiety," though the practice seems more designed to reduce the anxiety of their handlers.

Witness, including conservative witness, to the importance of animal welfare puts living creatures ahead of abstractions or things. It's an exercise in moral realism, not impotent virtue-signaling.

Euphemism being contagious, it is not only the immediate financial beneficiaries of animal exploitation who habituate themselves to it. One critic of Scully's speaks of animals' enduring "mere pain"—a phrase that "carries the distinctive whiff of the behaviorist laboratory," as he notes. Another defends the practice of elephants' being "taken in the parks," four words rather than the single one "killed." "Culling" is another evasion. Some 90 percent of the African elephants have been vanquished in the past century; does imperious nature really mandate killing more?

Yet *Fear Factories*, for all its castigation, ventures a merciful conjecture that rings true: Surely many people who do this kind of work have been taken in by euphemism, too, hoodwinked by the same untruths and half-truths.

**Is the systematic resort** to deceptive language beginning to sound familiar? It should, especially to readers of NATIONAL REVIEW. Euphemism is also the stock-in-trade of the abortionist—and the pornographer, and the trafficker, and others whose work is best done, and least susceptible to interruption, in the dark.

The question of animal welfare can't be reduced to politics. It isn't, or shouldn't be, "owned" by any faction. People who think we can do better by animals can be found across spectrums, cultures, and continents.

Consider the American Catholic theologian Charles Camosy, who in his 2013 book, *For Love of Animals: Christian Ethics, Consistent Action*, summarizes centuries of religious thinking on the relationship between critters and the rest of us. (Its introduction, which I contributed, was published on NRO.) A moral traditionalist who is often cast as a man of the Left for his other writings, Camosy defies easy categorization. Or consider some of the souls mentioned in *Fear Factories*—the chef in Chicago who took foie gras off his menu after seeing geese force-fed; the people in Africa, and elsewhere, moved by the plight of wounded and otherwise traumatized animals, doing their best to help; the documentarians who capture the magnificence of animal life on land and sea.

Mercy may sometimes require politics, but it isn't intrinsically political. At the same time, animal welfare remains an issue to which conservatives, above all, should give heightened scrutiny, for several reasons.

One is that attending to real questions about real, living creatures is an act of real stewardship; it is what, from a Judeo-Christian perspective, human beings are called to do. Such consideration could not be further removed from the performative "activism" that now passes elsewhere for concern about planet Earth. "Somewhere along the way," Scully notes, "our modern environmental movement took on an impersonal, abstract mindset, more about 'habitat' than animals." It amounts to "cheap nature worship." Witness, including conservative witness, to the importance of animal welfare puts living creatures ahead of abstractions or things. It's an exercise in moral realism, not impotent virtue-signaling.

Second, for pro-lifers especially, the family resemblance between defenseless human animals and defenseless other animals has become unavoidable. As I have argued both in these pages and elsewhere, pro-lifers and pro-animal-lifers are more aligned than either movement seems to understand. They are bound by their implicit—sometimes explicit—appeal to natural law. Nor does this similarity imply moral equivalence between human beings and nonhuman animals, as critics sometimes charge. "Though the moral stakes are not the same as with abortion," Scully explains, "the moral habits are, relying in both cases on the averted gaze and a smothering of empathy." What does it tell us that Big Abortion and Big Farm share the same terror of cameras in their midst, and visit the same prosecutorial vengeance on anyone who documents what happens in windowless rooms?

Movements on behalf of animals and the movement on behalf of unborn humans share another critical trait: altruism. As P. J. O'Rourke once commented, the annual March for Life is the only demonstration in ▶

Washington that doesn't stand to benefit those who take part. The late, great humorist's moral insight applies to those who look to animal protection, too.

Third, it's time to bury for good another objection lobbed at people who raise a hand about animal mistreatment. That's the retort that choice is the highest good. "Don't want a hamburger? Don't eat one," goes the thinking—as if, contrary to law and nature, food and food alone were immune to ethical inspection. Religions across the board wrap rules around what's on the table. So do doctors, nutritionists, chefs, and moms. Another variation on this theme, also heard often, is that human beings are designed, or primed by evolution, to eat animal flesh and therefore should. The first observation is true; the second makes the slogan a non sequitur. After all, we're also splendidly suited to enacting every one of the deadly sins, but no one seems to derive "oughts" from that "is."

Finally, to dispose of another misconception of which some readers are understandably wary: Protecting animals does not require buying into the academic quagmire of "animal rights." Yes, Peter Singer's utilitarian, rights-based approach in *Animal Liberation* almost 50 years ago first teed up the subject as no other single book did. True, academia abounds with similar talk of "animal rights," including in journals in which feminist theorists compare women to meat, rape to slaughter, and otherwise engage in decadent curiosities.

But these are not the arguments for animal welfare that have momentum these days in individual legislatures and courts, including the court of opinion. "Do the calves [used for veal] have a right to be spared their miseries?" Scully asks in an interview with Kathryn Jean Lopez on NRO. "It is enough to know that we have a duty to be lenient, granting even these creatures the little mercies that only human beings can bring into the world."

The strongest argument for erring on the side of mercy toward other creatures is that our unique power *in and of itself* makes the case for it. This is especially true today, as other species are more vulnerable to our own than ever before.

A new and potent fact has been introduced into Creation: There's no such thing as a fair fight anymore. Thanks to vaulting technology, even every lion is now a potential lamb, helpless before our kind. The beasts with natural power to tear apart or trample us have been neutralized. They are victims of a fearful asymmetry, slaughtered more easily than ever before thanks to AK-47s, night-vision goggles, helicopter rampages, sophisticated baiting sounds that mimic their young in distress, and other contrivances that *Homo faber* alone could have fashioned. Shouldn't that force imbalance *alone* render those who wield it more hesitant?

In sum, one does not need to give animals "rights" to see that human beings can do wrong by them. It is rather that we owe them mercy because of the kind of creatures *we* are—creatures capable of enacting it. The fact that we are the only animals with the power of clemency puts the choice before us constantly, especially since we no longer live in caves or subsist on mammoth meat: demurral, brutality, or mercy?

**Any reader who has made it this far** in an essay on a subject guaranteed to make most of us uncomfortable will be wondering: What does it all mean for me? There is no one-size-fits-all answer, not in *Fear Factories* and not here. But there *is* an analogy that might help: the mind-set that Catholics and other Christians are called to bring to Lent.

In the run-up to each Ash Wednesday, the hunt is on for acts that will make every Christian a better Christian, and the blueprints depend on too many particulars to count. Should you go to Mass more often? Quit drinking, complaining, online shopping, video games—or scrolling? Add extra prayer time? Sign up for the soup kitchen around the corner or enlist in other good works? How best to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and otherwise do what Christians are supposed to do anyway but are trying harder to do during these 40 days? As the list suggests, Lent doesn't mean throwing in the towel because it's impossible to be perfectly good. The spirit of the season is exactly the opposite: It's about spying moral opportunities where others might see nothing but dreary do-nots—including and especially in small things.

Consider that chef in Chicago mentioned earlier. Or the consumers who take time to learn the conditions in which their meat or fish was raised, even if it means paying more for creatures that got to live regular animal lives. Or the fact that ordinary citizens can make opinions known to legislatures, including opinions about animal protection.

There's also the story of fashion giant Oleg Cassini, told in *Fear Factories*. A leopard coat he designed for Jacqueline Kennedy became all the rage—so much so that an estimated 250,000 leopards were killed as fashionistas emulated her. A chastened Cassini relays that he was at first unaware of the destruction caused by the fur industry. "Then I began to read some articles. I began to look at the pictures, to see the frightening cruelty." Finally, in a move that would be followed by other big industry names, he swore off fur and began designing substitutes. "Fur is the most ancient part of the culture, when humans had to protect themselves against the cold and they had to kill to eat. But we are not at that stage anymore. We can choose a different way."

So we can. That's the beauty of rising attention to the matter of animal welfare. It's not about closing people's mouths. It's about opening our hearts.

That paradox hanging over the animals, and us, remains. The same force—science—that delivers new and improved weapons to use against the rest of Creation also keeps lifting the veil on what's inside it: sentient, familial, complicated creatures whose mysterious teleology is more recognizable to us than ever before. For religious believers, a coda all its own suggests itself. Our fellow travelers bear the silent message that even a chronically disordered world is underpinned by natural order—including more order amid the earth's species than was understood before. The animals, in their infinite complexity and ineradicable need for their own, signal our common origin. They point us toward home. ●

BY JAMES LILEKS

# Athwart




## Borderline Rude

I'm considering a lawsuit against Canada. I think I have a good case. Canada's changed. They're weak. Easy pickings.

When I was growing up in North Dakota, Canada was like a house on the other side of the block—terra incognita, but familiar. The archetype, of course, was a Mountie. A square-jawed figure in a red uniform and a khaki hat, seated on his trusty steed Maple, eyes scanning the horizon for fire or crime. *What's that I spy? Someone has not returned the shopping cart to the corral? Hi-yah, Maple, away!*

He would arrest the miscreant, because society realized that someone who violated the standards of niceness, decency, and community with such brazen contempt might go on to greater crimes, like selling substandard hockey sticks that splintered after one period. At the conclusion of his sentence the criminal would go north to log or fish and live out his shame in private.

Occasionally, there would be a war, and Canadians would perform with heroism and bravery. Also, everything printed was in French alongside the English, just to be nice to the people who spoke both languages but liked French more. The money had an old lady instead of a president.

Americans loved this version of Canada. It was like a twin brother who inherited the parents' vacation home when they passed, while we got the mansion. He was fine with that! The scenery was nice, and if there weren't a lot of people he could make friends with the beavers.

The current archetype of Canadians down here in the States:

"Oh no—the government's frozen my bank account because someone overheard me say I don't think we should let in too many trans Haitian cannibals, eh. Well, guess I'll climb in a suicide pod and be done with it. Have to love our free health care—no charge for parking at the suicide center! Course, they only validate for an hour, but that should be enough. I'd like a church service but the churches all got burned down in my province. Well, whoever did that probably had a good reason."

Exaggeration? Of course. But as a recent notorious news story revealed, Toronto police are encouraging homeowners to hang their car keys near the door, so burglars can find them with ease. Otherwise they have to wake you up. They probably just want the car anyway, so meet them halfway.

It's pathetic. Now, I've met lots of Canadians over the last few years, mostly in Mexican resort bars. Smart, industrious, entrepreneurial, eminently decent businesspeople. I would sing the virtues of the hardy stock who broke the cold stiff skein of the prairies, erected great structures of stone and steel, unfurled a tapestry of Anglophone civilization across the continent, *and* dealt with a population that insisted on Frog-talk. I'd ask: How do you feel about your current culture of prissy progressivism? The cowering and cringing to crooks, the abandonment of national narratives, the spikes of the authoritarian snowshoe grinding on your face?

Slight winces. After another tequila I'd ask again and get heavy sighs and shrugs. C'mon, guys, you can tell me. We're in Mexico. Trudeau doesn't have Stasi at the next table over. I'm on your side! The overreaching statist octopus should have its tentacles severed with the—*hic*—Axe of Liberty! Go ahead! Speak your mind!

After three tequilas, they might admit they have some concerns. Four, and they confess, quietly, with a hard look at the shot glass in their hand, to voting against Trudeau. At least in their heads. Five, and they ask me to explain the Second Amendment. This is the most Canadian thing ever: not "Defend the Second Amendment" but "I don't quite get what you fellows are up to with that; can you help me out?" Why yes. Yes I can.

I love those guys. I'm still thinking of suing Canada for reparations. In North Dakota in the 1960s we were annually terrorized by Canadian air masses that swept down from the Arctic, dumped snow, froze fingers. Canada did nothing to stop them. Didn't plant tall trees, didn't erect massive fans to blow the air back north, nothing. Treated the border like a joke. I have the feeling they'd pay up, because this was a historical injustice.

The past is all an injustice to some people. It's a wonder they don't burn the pictures of old Mounties. The horse was never asked if it consented to be ridden. ●



# HEMINGWAY COMES HOME

*Michigan, in the writer's work and memory*

*By John J. Miller*

*Petoskey, Mich.*

**When Ernest Hemingway drove** to northern Michigan in 1947, he had not seen his boyhood haunts for more than a generation—not since leaving them behind in 1921 and moving on to Paris and fame. He also never saw them again. His visit lasted about a day, an out-of-the-way stop on a road trip between Florida and Idaho. Its purpose is unclear even among Hemingway buffs—and the larger question of why the author of *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* avoided the place he had grown up loving is a small mystery.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

"I'm trying to figure it out," says Christopher Struble. We're meeting for dinner on a snowy night in Petoskey, where Struble owns a jewelry store and serves as president of the Michigan Hemingway Society. "I love Michigan, and I love that Hemingway loved Michigan," he says. "We have more authentic locales associated with Hemingway than anywhere in the world. I can put you within five feet of where he fished." He makes the claim as we drink pints of Two Hearted IPA, a beer whose name refers to the fishing story that may be Hemingway's first masterpiece: "Big Two-Hearted River," a 1925 tale about a character's recovery from trauma. It takes place in the wilderness of Michigan's Upper Peninsula; the beer is brewed downstate, in Kalamazoo.

Our dinner is at City Park Grill, an old restaurant that displays a photo of Hemingway above its bar, close to where he supposedly sat when he returned from World War I as a wounded ambulance driver. The claim that he imbibed at the bar may be more legend than fact, as Prohibition was in effect, but Hemingway almost certainly knew the building. It probably inspired the saloon he described in one of his later stories, "A Man of the World," written in 1957. That's according to a shield-shaped plaque on the restaurant's exterior, one of 17 in the region posted by the Michigan Hemingway Society. "We're trying to make it easy for tourists," says Struble, who has promised to show me around the next day. I've already seen many of the area's Hemingway sites, but in a do-it-yourself fashion, clutching a map printed from the internet. I'm eager to explore them with Struble, who may know more than anybody about Hemingway's time in Michigan.

Elsewhere in the United States, Hemingway is associated with his birthplace museum in Oak Park, Ill., a compound in Key West, Fla., and a grave near Sun Valley, Idaho, where he killed himself in 1961. There are also the international spots: the bookshops and cafés of Paris, Harry's Bar in Venice, and Finca Vigía, his pre-Castro home near Havana. Then there's Michigan, often overlooked, where he spent every summer of his youth. His father built a cottage on Walloon Lake and his mother named it "Windemere," in tribute to her ancestors from England's Lake District. Hemingway's relatives continue to live in it.

In the popular imagination, Hemingway is more than a writer who scribbled at a desk: He's a celebrated outdoorsman who fished for marlin in the Gulf Stream and hunted cape buffalo on safaris in Africa. His passion for such pastimes was born much earlier, as he plucked trout from Michigan's streams and shot birds and squirrels in its forests. Yet in the final 40 years of his life, his only return to the place that had formed him was that jaunt in 1947.

I also spent large chunks of my boyhood "Up North," as Michiganders call it, at a lakeside house my grandparents built before I was born. It's in the less affluent northeastern part of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, but it's close enough to Petoskey and Walloon Lake for me to have felt a distant kinship with the man who, except for the Motown musicians of the 1960s, may represent my native state's greatest contribution to art and culture. Unlike Hemingway, though, I couldn't give up northern Michigan. Year after year, I have kept going back to the family place.

My personal interest in Hemingway started with high-school homework. Reading *The Old Man and the Sea* turned me on to him, and my attraction grew as I discovered our mutual connection to Michigan. At Hillsdale College, I once taught a course about his Michigan stories. As a journalist, I've written about his ties to Michigan for the *New Criterion* and the *Wall Street Journal*. I've also gotten to know the sites. One attraction is Petoskey's Carnegie Library, where Hemingway as a young veteran talked to the Ladies' Aid Society about his war service. Another is the Little Traverse History Museum, whose artifacts include an oil lamp and two chairs from Windemere, a helmet and a canteen that Hemingway brought back from the Italian front, and a copy of *A Farewell to Arms* with a handwritten inscription to his friend Dutch Pailthorp, "to whom I told this story in the winter of 1919–20 in Petoskey, Michigan."

Among my usual stops in Petoskey is McLean & Eakin Booksellers, a two-story shop in the Gaslight District. Almost the first thing customers see when they enter the front door is a bookcase packed with Hemingway titles. "Every single day someone comes in for a book by or about Hemingway," says Zach Matelski, the general manager. At my request, Matelski consults the store's records. The most popular book by Hemingway is *The Nick Adams Stories*, a volume of tales set mostly in Michigan about a character who is often regarded as Hemingway's alter ego. Over the past 20 years, McLean & Eakin has sold more than 2,400 copies.

I once had a chance to visit Windemere—a rare opportunity because it's a private home. Most of the locals refuse to give directions. They don't want sightseers overrunning the residential areas of Walloon Lake, and, perhaps more important, they try to protect their neighbors from gawkers. My excursion was in 2012, during a conference of Hemingway scholars in Petoskey. For a $50 donation to the local historical society, we could spend an hour or so at the cottage. On the frame of a door that led to the lake, I saw century-old pencil scratches that marked the growth of "Ernie" and his siblings. And although Windemere at some point acquired indoor plumbing, an outhouse still stood, with a sign on its door: "Ernest Hemingway sat here."

On this trip, I'm staying where Hemingway once slept, at Petoskey's Perry Hotel, which was built in 1899, the year of his birth. The author spent a night at the hotel in 1916, on his way to Windemere from Chicago. The clerk at the registration desk smiles when I ask which room Hemingway occupied: "I get that all the time." He adds that the records are long gone and that even if they existed it wouldn't matter. "The hotel has gone through so many renovations that it's impossible to know anything," he says. "His head was probably in what's now room 206 and his feet in room 207." As it happens, I'm in room 324.

Struble lives a few blocks away, above a store that used to be Braun's Restaurant, which Hemingway changed to "Brown's Beanery" in *The Torrents of Spring*, a short 1926 novel set in Petoskey. Hemingway wrote it quickly to escape from a book contract. Although McLean & Eakin has sold nearly 500 copies over the past two decades, few readers recommend it, including Struble. "I have another theory about Braun's," he says. He thinks Hemingway used it for the main setting ▶



A PORTRAIT OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY OVERLOOKS THE CITY PARK GRILL IN PETOSKEY, MICH.

in "The Killers," one of the writer's best-known stories. The plot involves a couple of mob hit men and their target, a washed-up boxer who is resigned to his fate. (In a 1964 movie adaptation, Ronald Reagan played one of the gangsters in what was to be his final role before he ran for governor of California.) The tale, published in 1927, takes place in Summit, Ill., but an early typescript, now archived with the Hemingway papers at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston, names the setting of "The Killers" as Petoskey.

In Hemingway's time, Petoskey was a resort town. It's still one today, with boutiques and art galleries on its main drag. McCarthy's Barbershop, where Hemingway once went for shaves and cuts, is now Ruff Life Pet Outfitters. Across the street was Jesperson's Restaurant, supposedly a hangout spot for Hemingway and his friends. I once had lunch there, but it closed in 2017 and today is High Five Spirits, an upscale distillery. "He'd be okay with that," jokes Struble.

Our tour goes by the train station that Hemingway's family often used and a nearby bronze statue of the young author. Based on a photograph, it shows him holding a suitcase as he gets ready to board an outbound passenger car. A highlight of our circuit is the former Potter's Rooming House, where Hemingway lived in the fall of 1919. In a letter to his father that October, Hemingway described acquiring a typewriter and working on his fiction. His efforts from this period were mostly failures, but they were also the start of something that within a few years would lead to the likes of "The End of Something," a breakup story set in nearby Horton Bay, which is where Struble soon drives us in his black Jeep Wrangler.

Horton Bay is a speck of a town on Lake Charlevoix. Hemingway often walked to it from Windemere and met friends. "If Hemingway were to come back today, he'd recognize it," says Struble. "It's lost in time—and that's not true of the other places." As we approach the lake, Struble parks his Jeep beside a marshy area. He points to a small spring, pulls out his copy of *The Nick Adams Stories*, and reads from "Summer People," written in 1924 but not published until after Hemingway's death. It still describes the scene in 2024: "The water came up in a tile sunk beside the road, lipping over the cracked edge of the tile and flowing away through the close-growing mint into the swamp." When we get to the beach, we are at the setting of "Up in Michigan," a story of seduction and rape whose title is a double entendre. Across the water—now frozen because this is January—we see "the point" from "The End of Something."

One of Hemingway's friends in Horton Bay was Katy Smith. She later married John Dos Passos, the novelist who in his later years wrote for NATIONAL REVIEW. Through her, Hemingway met Hadley Richardson, his first wife. They were married at a Methodist church in Horton Bay in 1921. After honeymooning at Windemere, they left—and Hemingway never came back to northern Michigan, except for that one time.

Struble speculates that Hemingway returned in 1947 to settle some unfinished business involving the ownership of Windemere. The idea sounds plausible but lacks evidence. Struble spent several weeks in February and March working with a researcher to look for documents in Emmet County's courthouse and elsewhere. They turned up nothing. "We're still on the case," he tells me by phone when I check back in. Perhaps they'll yet make a discovery.

If they do, it might reveal why Hemingway came back to northern Michigan, but it won't explain why he stayed away. Hemingway possibly buried a clue in a 1923 letter, written less than two years after his departure. He was living in Paris, and his stories about Michigan were starting to click. "We can't ever go back to the old things or try to get 'the old kick' out of something or find things the way we remember them," wrote Hemingway. "We have them as we remember them and they are fine and wonderful and we have to go on and have other things because the old things are nowhere except in our minds now."

Hemingway was more specific with Irene Gordon, an old flame who was working at a department store in Petoskey. In 1994, when she was in her 90s, she told a newspaper reporter what Hemingway had said in 1947 when she quizzed him about his long absence: "Every time I came back to somewhere, I was disappointed, and I loved Michigan so much I didn't want to be disappointed."

It was embedded in his memory, where he could return to it again and again, in the way readers might open an old book and enjoy a familiar story. ●

CHICAGO TRIBUNE / GETTY IMAGES

# BOOKS, ARTS & MANNERS



BOOK REVIEW

## We Before Me

MADELEINE KEARNS

*Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization*, by Brad Wilcox (Broadside Books, 320 pp., $32)

*Family Unfriendly: How Our Culture Made Raising Kids Much Harder Than It Needs to Be*, by Timothy P. Carney (Harper, 368 pp., $29.99)

LUBA MYTS

**The good news** is that divorce is declining. The bad news is that so is marriage—and with it, the fertility rate. This is hardly surprising given that our ruling elites have done everything in their power over the past 60 years to undermine marriage and weaken our obligations to one another (even while, in some cases, ignoring their own advice). Yet, despite this, there are still Americans bucking the new conventional wisdom and living by ancient wisdom instead. Happier and more fulfilled, they're worth paying attention to.

So argue Brad Wilcox, sociologist and author of *Get Married*, and Tim Carney, journalist and author of *Family Unfriendly*. In their respective books, these two husbands and fathers to large families give a brilliant rebuttal to some of the worst ideas behind our marriage-and-family-unfriendly culture.

Today, marriage is perceived as a status symbol more than a cornerstone on which to build a fulfilling life. Since the 1960s, the U.S. has seen a widening class divide in its marriage rate.

The state hasn't helped. Government disincentives to family formation range from marriage penalties in federal aid programs to family-unfriendly housing policies. Wilcox seeks to move the conversation "beyond Nikki Haley-ism," what he sees as Republicans' failure to recognize that "the financial ▶



challenges families face today are different from the ones of the last century," as well as "beyond Bidenism," which "caters to the comparatively small number" of upscale, career-driven parents "who value full-time work more than the family-centered care of their own young children." Carney considers the balance between "alleviating stresses" on parents via child allowances and not inadvertently "discouraging marriage or discouraging work," a "devilish problem" with "no perfect or simple answer." He thinks something like the Romney-Burr-Daines 2022 child-tax-credit bill strikes the right balance, though policy alone cannot fix the baby bust or eradicate child poverty.

Even among the affluent, marriage is often considered something to pursue only after other, "more important" things are in place: career, for one, or an established sense of self (whatever that means).

A recent Pew poll found, for instance, that while 88 percent of parents believed that it is important for their kids to be financially independent and have "careers they enjoy" when they are adults, only 21 percent said it is important that their kids get married, and only 20 percent believed it to be important that their kids have children of their own.

Wilcox attributes attitudes such as these to "three pervasive cultural forces: individualism, hedonism, and workism." Carney similarly diagnoses the problem as "a workist, materialist culture," the trappings of "overparenting," the flawed mentality that one should aim for "quality over quantity" when having children—which typically results in shortfalls in both—and the damaging message that "the value we see in our children is in their worldly accomplishments."

*Don't get too serious, too young*, the standard advice goes. *Put marriage on the back burner—try living together first*. Those who ignore this—cultivating virtues in themselves that are essential for marriage, dating intentionally to find suitable spouses, and then acting decisively after a relationship's potential for marriage has been determined—are much happier for it.

In a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed in 2022, Wilcox and Lyman Stone wrote that women who married between 22 and 30 without cohabitating first "had some of the lowest rates of divorce in the National Survey of Family Growth," whereas couples "who live together before marriage are less likely to be happily married and more likely to land in divorce court."

Couples who have an all-in, "we before me" attitude in marriage are also likelier to be happier than those trying to hold on to their independence. Wilcox gives the example of family finances, citing a study from the University of Colorado that found that couples who "kept their money separate were more than 20 percent more likely to divorce or separate, compared to couples who pooled at least some of their money." As Carney puts it, in a committed marriage "you come to think of everything you have—including your savings and future income—as the components of a massive sacrifice to be immolated on the altar of family."

Young people are increasingly buying into what Wilcox calls "the flying solo myth," the idea that marriage threatens a person's "identity, individuality, and autonomy." On the left, women are told that marriage and children may impede their fulfillment. On the right, figures such as Andrew Tate promote a similar message to men, that marriage is a ball and chain that gets in the way of male prowess and success. Really, rather than "losing yourself," in a happy marriage spouses find true purpose and the best possible version of themselves.

Wilcox notes that, sadly, "a large and growing minority of men and women will not marry or have children, leaving them without any immediate kin as they head into midlife and later life." But even the unmarried stand to benefit from a culture that encourages strong marriages and families. Large extended families offer support networks and promote a strong sense of community, which are antidotes to loneliness and alienation.

Porn use and masturbation are on the rise, while sex is on the decline. Carney observes that the mysterious "sex recession" is really a "relationship recession." Happily married people consistently report the highest rates of sexual satisfaction. Wilcox writes that, "specifically, the odds that men and women say they are 'very happy' with their lives are a staggering 545 percent higher for those who are very happily married, compared to their peers who are not married or who are less than very happy in their marriages."

* * *

Same-sex marriage did not so much redefine marriage as formalize a redefinition that was already culturally dominant. So it's worth quoting from Justice Anthony Kennedy's majority opinion in the 2015 *Obergefell* decision that "the nature of marriage is that, through its enduring bond, two persons together can find other freedoms, such as expression, intimacy, and spirituality." (Notably, children don't make his list.)

This is an articulation of what the theologian Carl Trueman calls "expressive individualism," the idea "that human beings are defined by their individual psychological core, and that the purpose of life is allowing that core to find social expression in relationships." Anything that challenges the self's desires "is deemed oppressive."

Such an approach inevitably requires children to be sacrificed at the altar of adult desires. The consequences of divorce on children are obscured by what Wilcox calls "the family diversity myth," the notion that family structure isn't important, so long as children are loved. In fact, children from "non-intact families" are more likely to experience social and emotional setbacks, from child abuse to prison time.

The traditional Judeo-Christian understanding of marriage from the Book of Genesis is that "the two shall become one flesh." In Christianity, marriage involves laying down one's life for one's spouse as Christ did for his bride, the church. Children, meanwhile, are gifts to be "received lovingly from God," as the marriage rite

says. This translates as "family first, me second," which, as Wilcox explains, is the "paradoxical route to happiness in marriage" (though the religious observer might tweak that to "God first, family second, me third").

Wilcox identifies four distinct groups that he calls "masters of marriage": "strivers," or ambitious liberals with "bourgeois" values who "talk left but walk right" on marriage; Asian Americans, who are family-centric and instill this loyalty in their children; conservatives, those with more-traditional respect for marriage and family life; and, finally, "the faithful," religious Americans who "are the group most likely to enjoy wedded bliss."

Wilcox explains: "Insofar as religions enjoin vices like idleness, infidelity, and drug abuse, stigmatize them socially, and attach those injunctions to ultimate consequences of the greatest significance, they boost the odds that their adherents avoid living for the moment in ways that deny them a good long-term family future."

Wilcox and Carney, who are both Catholic, belong to the faithful category. The Catholic Church teaches that marriage is dissolvable only by death (except for a declaration that it was never valid, i.e., annulment). It teaches that an openness to children is a necessary precondition of a valid marriage, and that extramarital sex (including sex with a civil spouse after divorce and remarriage outside the church) and contraception are gravely serious sins that, unrepented, can separate a person from God for all eternity.

The church also teaches that God's love and mercy are constant and unwavering. That Christians likewise are obliged to "bear wrongs patiently." That suffering—even something as excruciating as the death of a child—is redeemed. That those who die in a state of grace will be reunited with loved ones in heaven. That God will never abandon those who love him. That human life is a gift.

It's easy to see how these teachings, when followed, promote a robust family culture. Among the Catholic population who attend traditional Latin Mass, the overwhelming majority of whom are obedient to the church's teachings, the fertility rate is 3.6 children per woman, twice the nation's average. Even among Catholics attending the form of Mass instituted after Vatican II, a group more likely to disregard church teachings and hold "workist," "materialist" values indistinguishable from those of the secular population, the fertility rate is above replacement level, at 2.3 children per woman.

**Contrary to popular opinion, marriage is not a game of Russian roulette. It is not a matter of luck which marriages breed contentment and which do not.**

Carney sees in Israel a story of how "infrastructure, expectations, and ultimately culture can avert low birthrates in the modern, wealthy, highly educated Western world." Israeli women average around three babies, well above replacement level. And "even secular Jewish women are having 1.96 children, higher than any European country." Carney writes:

> The best way to understand Israel's fruitfulness is to imagine a garden. The largest and oldest tree in the center is the tree of religion. Those who eat from this grand tree imbibe the teaching that children are a blessing, made in the image of God. They believe that a large family is beautiful in the eyes of God. They take to heart the first mitzvah, "be fruitful and multiply."

But there are other large trees in this garden. Jewish tribalism is another one. Zionism or Israeli nationalism is another large tree.

These three trees provide their own fruit, but they do much more than that. They create shade. They feed and provide homes for animals, who in turn fertilize the soil. They spawn an entire ecosystem, and that ecosystem is pro-child and pro-family.

On this point, Wilcox finds the work of Yale sociologist Nicholas Christakis helpful. What best predicts your risk of getting divorced is whether your *friends* are divorced. Indeed, you are 75 percent more likely to become divorced if you have a friend who is divorced and still 33 percent more likely to see your marriage end if only a friend of a friend is divorced. The lesson, Wilcox writes, is that "the quality and character of your community matter a great deal for the quality and character of your marriage."

In families (whom we don't choose), patterns of divorce can be broken, of course. But this is done intentionally. Wilcox notes, "Many of my friends are themselves children of divorce. But they are determined to reject that dark road they were forced to walk as kids. And they are *not* socially liberal." He adds: "The divorce revolution seems to have done something no one expected. It spawned a counterrevolution."

Contrary to popular opinion, marriage is not a game of Russian roulette. It is not a matter of luck which marriages breed contentment and which do not. Part of achieving contentment is managing expectations. In the old-rite Catholic Mass, the exhortation before marriage reads: "If true love and the unselfish spirit of perfect sacrifice guide your every action, you can expect the greatest measure of earthly happiness that may be allotted to man in this vale of tears. The rest is in the hands of God."

What both Carney and Wilcox convey is that the best marriage advice is to strive for that "unselfish spirit of perfect sacrifice" in yourself, prioritize it in your search for a spouse, instill it in your children, and surround yourself with a community of families doing the same. ●

BOOK REVIEW

# Growing Pain

NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY

*Bad Therapy: Why the Kids Aren't Growing Up*, by Abigail Shrier (Sentinel, 320 pp., $30)

*The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*, by Jonathan Haidt (Penguin Press, 400 pp., $30)

**For a number of years**, I have joked with my friends that I plan to write a book called "WASP Therapy," in which I will advise readers that they and their loved ones might be better off if they stopped talking about their feelings so much. It brings me no small amount of joy to find out that I'm not the only Jewish mother who thinks, as Abigail Shrier says, that "a healthy emotional life involves a certain amount of daily *repression*."

In her new book, Shrier presents all sorts of provocative but useful observations on child-rearing, in an effort to show that we (parents, schools, government, and American culture) have created the oft-decried mental-health crisis among children and teens. *Bad Therapy: Why the Kids Aren't Growing Up* argues that, by focusing adult attention so much on children's feelings, we have made things worse.

"Therapists, teachers, and parents in America all seem to proceed under the belief that checking in is a little like sticking a thermometer outside your front door: harmless and occasionally helpful." But as one psychiatry professor tells her: "Asking somebody 'how are you feeling' is inducing negative feelings. You shouldn't do that. . . . Nobody feels great. Never, never ever. Sit in the bus and look at the people opposite from you. They don't look happy. Happiness is not the emotion of the day."

It's not just that asking about kids' emotions induces negative ones. It's that it prevents them from doing the things that actually could make them happier and better. "How is a child supposed to get through a day of school if she's never learned to put aside her hurt feelings and concentrate on the lessons in front of her? How will she ever be a good friend if her own feelings are always, at every instant, front and center? How will she ever hope to function at work?"

As Shrier notes, it is helpful to remember that it was not always thus. She recalls two pieces of advice that the parents of Gen Xers and of earlier generations would proffer to their children: "Knock it off" and "Shake it off." The first "didn't overexplain," she writes. "It credited kids with common sense or nudged them to develop it. Rules had exceptions and workarounds, but 'knock it off' signaled a parent's disinclination to become entangled in them." And "shake it off" didn't solve the worst injuries but "did a helluva job playing triage nurse to kids' minor heartaches and injuries, proving to kids that the hurt or fear or possibility of failure need not overwhelm them."

We mean well. As Shrier emphasizes, the parents she is criticizing want what is best for their children. They want them to be happy and healthy and to lead productive lives. But they have taken an approach of "gentle parenting" that prevents kids from experiencing any kind of challenge—physical, intellectual, emotional. We have made our playgrounds too safe. We are doing our kids' homework or at least intervening with teachers when we think it's too hard. We are not just monitoring their feelings but bringing them to psychiatric professionals and offering kids medication.

This last part—the professionals, the therapy, the drugs—is the focus of much of Shrier's ire. Her previous book—*Irreversible Damage*, a blockbuster look at the transgender movement and how the so-called experts (schools, therapists, doctors) are weaponizing a dangerous ideology to do untold harm to children—seems to have alerted her to larger problems in the ways we treat children.

First, she notes that most therapeutic interventions being used on children have little to no evidence behind them. Whether it's play therapy for young children or talk therapy for older ones, Shrier maintains that there is little upside to these methods and plenty of downside. Perhaps one of the biggest downsides is that they suggest to our children that there is something really wrong with them when actually they are going through the normal difficulties of childhood. Maybe telling them they have ADHD when really they just have a little more trouble paying attention or sitting still than some of their peers is not helpful. Maybe diagnosing them with anxiety and ensuring that they have more time to take tests or don't have to wear clothes with tags on them or deal with children who bother them, instead of forcing them to just confront these problems a little bit at a time, is making things worse.

At the beginning of her book, Shrier explains that there are two "distinct groups of young people" who are conflated in discussions of the "youth mental health crisis." One suffers "profound mental illness" that prevents them from doing productive work or having stable relationships. They require psychiatrists and medication. The other group is "the worriers; the fearful; the lonely, lost, and sad." These kids require something else.

One problem, though, is how to tell the difference. I worry that the line is not as clear as Shrier thinks it is. Many of those in the latter group have gotten to a point where they cannot function normally. Indeed, Shrier notes that the behavior of some of these worriers, fearful, etc., is a cause of deep concern to their parents—the children's anxiety or depression, however mildly it began, is now causing them to engage in self-harm and preventing them from participating in family life or handling the basic requirements of schooling.

A traditionalist mother (not a gentle-parenting one) I spoke to recently about this said that 18 years ago, when her oldest was born, she probably would have agreed wholeheartedly with Shrier's assessment, but four children later she's not so sure. Maybe there are too many factors outside a parent's control that make it

hard to keep a child in the second group from migrating into the first.

Those factors include the school environment and electronics. And those are the focus of Jonathan Haidt's new book, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. Ensuring that kids have more of a play-based childhood and less of a screen-based one, which is Haidt's central concern, is not a new prescription for fixing what ails kids. (A humbler reviewer might not mention that she published a book six years ago whose subtitle was *Stop Banning Seesaws and Start Banning Snapchat*.)

But Haidt brings decades of research in psychology to the task. Building on the work of Jean Twenge, who convincingly showed in her book *iGen* that the steep decline in youth mental health coincided exactly with the rise of the smartphone (Twenge writes on the topic elsewhere in this issue of NR), Haidt explains to readers exactly how the process occurred.

**From sleeping, to spending time in nature, to reading books, to socializing with friends, there is hardly an activity that has gone undisturbed by the phone's march through childhood.**

The first and most obvious problem with the explosion of smartphone usage is the opportunity cost of its replacing so many of the other important activities of childhood. From sleeping, to spending time in nature, to reading books, to socializing with friends, there is hardly an activity that has gone undisturbed by the phone's march through childhood. Haidt takes care to explain why all of those activities are necessary to mental health and a successful transition to adulthood.

Take sleep. "A review of 36 correlational studies found significant associations between high social media use and poor sleep, and also with poor mental health outcomes." A study cited by Haidt of 11,000 nine- and ten-year-olds who were followed through adolescence found that "greater sleep disturbance and shorter total sleep time were associated with greater internalizing scores (which include depression) and externalizing scores (which include aggression and other antisocial actions associated with a lack of impulse control)."

When it comes to the loss of social interaction, Haidt's work is chock-full of studies showing that children need "face-to-face, synchronous, embodied physical play" and that "the healthiest play is outdoors and includes occasional physical risk taking and thrilling adventure." This does not describe the experience of most of the adolescents we see around us.

Defenders of the screens and of social media in particular have always claimed that they allow for children who are isolated to find others like them. But Haidt is skeptical. "The same demographic groups that are widely said to benefit most from social media are also the *most* likely to have had bad experiences on these platforms. The 2023 Common Sense Media Survey found that LGBTQ adolescents were *more* likely than their non-LGBTQ peers to believe their lives would be better without each platform they used." Black teens had worse experiences online than white teens, and poor teens had worse experiences than higher-income ones.

Haidt's book is a careful one; he is scrupulous about discussing the harms of screens for kids of different ages and the specific dangers for boys and for girls. Generally, he finds girls are more severely affected—certainly by social media—because their "core developmental needs are more easily exploited and subverted by social media." Girls, Haidt notes, are more subject to predation and harassment, more likely to be perfectionists, and more likely to share their emotions.

Which is not to deny that boys are severely affected by the pull of video games and pornography. Haidt has all the studies to show the harmful effects of these factors as well. His arguments will be familiar to anyone who has followed this topic over the past few years. But Haidt is clearly hoping to create systemic change. He wants parents to read this book, but he is also trying to get schools to ban phones altogether. He is trying to get communities to change playgrounds to make them more interesting and to change laws to allow more kids to be independent without their parents' getting investigated by Child Protective Services. He is trying to get tech companies to make it harder for kids to access social media and Congress to create laws that would force that outcome.

Shrier is less sanguine, perhaps because she has seen the ways in which schools and government and mental-health experts have actively harmed children. Indeed, with all the evidence that has been amassed in recent years, she can't understand why therapists haven't told parents they must immediately remove devices from the hands of their children. Such therapists are like doctors who treat lung-cancer patients without telling them to stop smoking. Where, Shrier wonders, were the school leaders and the psychologists when Covid lockdowns were profoundly damaging our kids' psyches? And she is particularly galled by the oft-repeated idea that parents are schools' partners in raising children. She says it is time parents stop putting up with this "demotion."

I am more sympathetic to Shrier's call for parents to storm the barricades than to Haidt's push for legal changes, but Haidt is right that, for most families, this change in childhood is a "collective action" problem. Not all parents are going to homeschool their children, and many cannot find a school nearby that will adopt the screen rules they want. They are not going to send five-year-olds to the supermarket (as parents do in Japan) knowing the police could be called. ▶

And even if they send their nine-year-olds to the park alone, if no one else is there the kids will come home five minutes later. So I am hoping that school leaders and policy-makers will also get involved.

The ground is already shifting. A critical mass of educated parents is very worried and sees screens as a big problem. A critical mass of teachers has had enough of poor behaviors and constant distractions. Still, for those of us who have had children grow up in the past decade, change may come too late. Even if you have managed to protect your own children from the worst ravages of screens, they are still surrounded by peers whose gentle parents have stifled any achievement of independence. They are going to school and then to work with a cohort scarred by diagnoses and medications that have permanently altered their development. It is not too late to reverse the youth mental-health crisis, but plenty of damage has already been done. ●

BOOK REVIEW

# Power Struggle

MICHAEL M. ROSEN

*The War Below: Lithium, Copper, and the Global Battle to Power Our Lives*, by Ernest Scheyder
(Atria/One Signal, 384 pp., $30)

**"There are no solutions,"** the celebrated economist Thomas Sowell once wrote, "only trade-offs."

Nowhere is this wise maxim truer these days than in the realm of green energy, where the headlong quest for a carbon-free economy has collided with other cultural, social, and environmental forces.

Want to extract lithium, a critical component of the batteries that run electric cars? Watch out for that sacred Native American burial site.

Looking for cobalt to power smartphones? Careful you're not exploiting child labor in the developing world.

Eager to dig up the rare earth metals necessary for modern weapons systems? Make sure you're not despoiling an otherwise pristine recreation area.

Oh, and are you trying to onshore all of these resource-generation activities to enhance national security and deprive the Chinese Communist Party of its global stranglehold on extraction of minerals? Better cut through the red tape of dozens of federal, state, and local agencies.

Such are the trade-offs and obstacles skillfully detailed by the journalist Ernest Scheyder in *The War Below*, his balanced and troubling chronicle of the difficulties we've encountered in hunting for the minerals required to transition to the much ballyhooed "clean economy."

"This is a story," Scheyder explains, about the choices facing "regions across the United States and the world replete with lithium or copper, nickel, rare earths, or cobalt—metals critical to the construction of solar panels, electric vehicles, batteries, wind turbines, and an array of other products heralded as key to electrifying the world's economy and easing carbon emissions."

Consider, for example, a typical Tesla Model 3 battery, which contains six kilograms of lithium, eight kilograms of cobalt, eight kilograms of aluminum, 17 kilograms of copper, 42 kilograms of nickel, and 55 kilograms of graphite. All of these materials come from somewhere, and that somewhere is underground—often, far beneath the surface.

As a rule, underground mines make for very uncongenial neighbors. Their sites are dirty and dusty, loud, crowded with vehicular traffic, liable to pollute aquifers and generate toxic waste, and demanding of enormous quantities of water. Underground extraction can also conflict with deeply rooted cultural, historical, and social norms and practices.

Scheyder cites the case of Rio Tinto, a multinational mining conglomerate. In a frantic search for lithium lodes across the globe, the outfit at one point in 2022 found itself quarreling with the San Carlos Apache over a mine in Oak Flat, Ariz.; with the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura aboriginal peoples in Australia over the Juukan Gorge caves; and with the Serbian government over extraction of a rare, lithium-rich mineral called jadarite. Scheyder documents how the Biden administration ultimately canceled the Oak Flat project, apparently as a reward to the Apache for throwing their support behind the 2020 Biden-Harris ticket in Arizona, where Biden's victory was extremely narrow.

Scheyder documents the extreme vacillation—bordering on schizophrenia—evinced by the Biden administration regarding domestic mining. On one hand, the White House has championed a transition to a green economy driven by manufacturing and sourcing material in the United States. "We need to end our long-term reliance on China and other countries for inputs that will power the future," Biden proclaimed in March 2022.

On the other hand, the administration has repeatedly thwarted domestic exploration of the very metals critical to the green-energy switchover. In 2022, the agriculture and interior departments canceled mining leases in Minnesota's Boundary Waters, which are rich both in natural beauty and in subterranean copper and nickel. "If Democrats were serious about developing renewable energy sources and breaking China's stranglehold on the global market," fumed Representative Pete Stauber, a Minnesota Republican, "they would be flinging open the doors to responsible mineral development here in the U.S."

(It's worth noting that it's not just Biden: After years of waffling, President Trump scrapped the Pebble Mine copper project in Alaska when his son Don Jr. and Tucker Carlson announced their opposition because they liked hunting and fishing in the Bristol Bay area, where the extraction would have taken place.)

Another area of concern: rare earth metals, which comprise 17 distinct and expensive elements that are unsubstitutable and employed in a wide range of technologies, including F-35 fighter ▶

# THE BOOKSHELF

## NEW AND UPCOMING RELEASES

*by Katherine Howell*

Samuel T. Wilkinson, a psychiatry professor at Yale, takes on what he calls "the existential dilemma of Darwinism" in ***Purpose: What Evolution and Human Nature Imply about the Meaning of Our Existence*** (Pegasus, 352 pp., $29.95). The dilemma is personal for him. As a student in medical school, he found that the theory of evolution challenged his religious faith, that he struggled to reconcile a "benevolent God who created us with the seemingly mindless process of evolution." To get at an answer, he crosses disciplines, synthesizing the findings and arguments of scientists, philosophers, sociologists, and anthropologists. Along the way he deals with the problems of evolution's seeming randomness and whether or not free will exists. The result is a clear and fascinating case for a broadly theistic conception of evolution that considers the "dual potential of human nature"—our propensity for both altruism and selfishness, or, put another way, good and evil—to be both a result of the way evolution shaped us and a key to what gives life meaning. "Life is a test," Wilkinson concludes. "A principal purpose of our existence is to choose between the good and evil inherent within us."

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"A very bad, very good man" was Annabella Milbanke's estimation of Lord Byron, in a letter to her mother, during their courtship. By the time she had left him, taking their infant daughter, a year after they married, her judgment of him may have aligned more closely with the famous summation of Lady Caroline Lamb: "Mad, bad, and dangerous to know." This year marks the 200th anniversary of Byron's death at age 36 in Greece, an event that "to his contemporaries ... felt something like the end of the world," according to Andrew Stauffer in his new book, ***Byron: A Life in Ten Letters*** (Cambridge, 300 pp., $29.95). Byron left behind memoirs, which his friends promptly burned. (It's not hard to imagine why. As Stauffer puts it: "Rumors of blasphemy, adultery, sodomy, incest, and madness surrounded him, many of them mostly true.") Fortunately, thousands of his letters remain, an epistolary trove that Stauffer draws from to provide pegs for his absorbing narrative. Stauffer's Byron is a man of contradictions—by turns witty, charming, warm, egotistical, self-mythologizing, deluded, an enemy of cant, coldly cruel (notably to women), pragmatically charitable, a privileged aristocrat, and a revolutionary. In Stauffer's telling, Byron's fatal championing of Greek independence was mostly admirable—if he was mainly playacting the soldier and used by rival Greek factions as a purse, he was at least sincerely invested in the cause and willing to act to advance it. In the end, his death from a fever brought on by a ride in the rain was more pitiable than romantic or heroic—an irony he might have appreciated.

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The First World War, notes Michael Korda in ***Muse of Fire: World War I as Seen Through the Lives of the Solider Poets*** (Liveright, 400 pp., $29.99), came at the end of the age of the celebrity poet. He gives a highly readable account of the lives of six English-speaking poets—Rupert Brooke, Alan Seeger (the lone American in the bunch), Isaac Rosenberg, Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen—whose verse shaped our image and memory of the Great War to an extent that has no contemporary parallel. The arc from Brooke ("If I should die, think only this of me: / That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England") to what Korda calls Sassoon's "snapshots of a brutal reality" traced the public's perception of the conflict: Optimism and enthusiasm gave way to horror and cynicism after years of hellish trench warfare. Of Korda's subjects, only Graves and Sassoon survived the war—the rest were among the "the best and the brightest of that generation" who were "scythed down in the mud of Flanders and northeastern France."

jets, iPhones, wind turbines, televisions, and night-vision goggles. While American firms have struggled to extract these resources domestically, China has nearly cornered the global market, deploying them as a lever to exert economic and geopolitical pressure, as when it suspended their export to Japan during a recent diplomatic spat. In 2017, a Chinese-backed venture even managed to buy out of bankruptcy a troubled California-based rare earths mine that was the only viable domestic source of these materials. Meanwhile, in 2020, Russia announced its plans to become the world's second-largest rare earths producer within five years.

When the federal government itself hasn't blocked projects, other groups have stepped in. A radical environmental outfit called Deep Green Resistance, which regards the clean-energy transition as "lies that allow us to maintain an unsustainable way of living while pretending that we are not killing the planet," staunchly opposed the extraction of lithium from the Thacker Pass mine in northern Nevada. Max Wilbert, the group's leader, told Scheyder that, far from adopting sensible measures that will reduce carbon emissions, "we need a planned contraction of the economy, planned negative economic growth," and must "deliberately abandon industrialism." Senator Catherine Cortez Masto (D., Nev.) straddled the issue, broadly approving of domestic lithium production but instructing an aide to ask Scheyder to delete a tweet that noted her support for the Thacker Pass mine. Ultimately, a federal judge allowed the project to move forward in early 2023.

Another group, called the Center for Biological Diversity, has worked for years to stymie a Nevada lithium-extraction project planned for Rhyolite Ridge. Patrick Donnelly, an activist with the organization, lodged FOIA request after whistleblower complaint after Bureau of Land Management protest in order to protect Tiehm's buckwheat, a unique flower discovered at the site and threatened by the project. "There are many other lithium sources that won't end up killing off a species," Donnelly insisted. "Electric vehicles don't need to come at the cost of extinction."

Similarly, Sonya and Warren Snowdon resisted Piedmont Lithium's efforts to develop a mine in Gaston County, N.C., near the homestead that had been in their family for centuries. Piedmont had signed a lucrative supply agreement with Tesla but had not obtained the necessary permits and planning approvals from state and local authorities, which the Snowdons and their neighbors, concerned about losing their bucolic lifestyle, successfully impeded. "We're so much greener than most other people," Warren Snowdon said. "And we're not opposed to lithium, we just want it someplace else."

**Ultimately, to secure an overall cleaner future, we will have to sacrifice something and not reflexively reject projects that may be discomfiting.**

And yet essentially *every* potential source of lithium and other important metals on earth entails some type of trade-off. Extraction in Africa and South America, whether under the aegis of American or foreign firms, has often entailed the use of child labor, environmentally devastating means of extraction, and unsavory alliances with autocratic regimes. When the company China Molybdenum purchased cobalt mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo from an American outfit, "its track record of safety and community relations started to pale in comparison to that of its predecessor," Scheyder writes.

Some disputes have been amicably resolved, providing reason for hope that compromise is possible. For instance, the San Carlos Apache in Arizona agreed to supply water to Freeport, which runs a major copper operation in nearby Morenci. Coexistence between resource recovery and conservation is possible. "You'll still be able to swim here, fish here, camp here when this mine opens," Dean DeBeltz of Twin Metals said of the Boundary Waters project.

Scheyder traveled to Bolivia to document how an Austin-based company, EnergyX, led by a brash American lithium entrepreneur named Teague Egan, has been working to persuade provincial authorities to authorize his mining project. Bolivia—the largest lithium holder in the world, possessing more than 20 million tons of it—has for centuries eyed with suspicion any foreigners seeking to exploit its abundant natural resources. EnergyX's strategy has been to promise to fund education and other local community programs, and it remains hopeful its blandishments will succeed.

Then, too, innovative recycling efforts can both prevent ecological degradation and furnish new supplies of old materials. At its facility in Rochester, N.Y., the lithium-battery-recycling firm Li-Cycle generates what by the end of 2024 will be 8,500 tons of lithium carbonate, according to Scheyder, making it the largest single lithium producer in North America. And technologies exist that mitigate environmental harms. Direct lithium extraction, for example, which Berkshire Hathaway has sought to apply in California's Salton Sea and which EnergyX aims to implement in Bolivia's Salar de Uyuni, filters lithium from salty brine reservoirs without resorting to the use of harmful evaporation pools.

In some cases, then, compromise and technology may help us avoid the most painful trade-offs. But ultimately, to secure an overall cleaner future, we will have to sacrifice something and not reflexively reject projects that may be discomfiting. As Idaho mining executive Mckinsey Lyon remarked to Scheyder, "if you want to change the climate, industry has to be part of the solution." ●

BOOK REVIEW

# Can Christians Engage in Politics?

DAVID L. BAHNSEN

*The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism*, by Tim Alberta (Harper, 512 pp., $35)

**There is a part of me** that wanted very badly to empathize with the thesis of Tim Alberta's new book. Alberta, a staff writer for the *Atlantic*, makes the case that Evangelical Christianity has been poisoned by its embrace of Donald J. Trump and by its pursuit of earthly power through partisan politics.

Like many practicing Evangelicals, I have been distraught by the apparent tendency of many who identify as part of that camp to offer unqualified support for what is often indefensible in the age of Trump. What began as a "lesser of two evils" and "save the Supreme Court" argument has clearly evolved, for many, into a defense of Trump as a nearly messianic figure. And while reasonable people can disagree about where to draw the lines when considering the candidate vs. his policies and weighing what significance presidential races have in the context of a broader cultural war, I, for one, share Alberta's concern that Evangelicals have, in many cases, been willing to associate with and explicitly endorse unacceptable behavior. Had that been the key takeaway of the book it would not have offered much that hasn't been said already in redundant editorials, and it also would have been much less objectionable to me. Unfortunately, Alberta went far further than merely scolding his fellow Christians about the current blurriness between MAGA and Evangelicalism.

It is worth starting with a caveat: The anecdote that has made the rounds in press accounts of this book and that serves as a sort of pretext for Alberta's emotional case against "Christian MAGA-ism" is a brutal story. A few years ago, Alberta attended his father's funeral only to be verbally assaulted by church members protesting his brand of political journalism. The story is gut-wrenching to read. If Alberta were Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Bernie Sanders, and Kamala Harris rolled into one, he'd still deserve a politics-free day at his father's funeral. This is something decent people know and honor, and, as one who has at times experienced the lack of social and moral decency that people too often display in such contexts, I could relate to his disappointment. Of course, his account is anecdotal, and I am sure someone with his maturity and experience knows that, but it still induced a sense of genuine empathy.

Beyond the personal experiences that form the broader disappointment behind his thesis, Alberta goes to great lengths to show examples of indefensible MAGA sycophantism within the Christian Church. Though I might insist that much of this is nut-picking, the fact remains that, first of all, the phenomenon is more prevalent than I want it to be, and, second, his point is not that everyone within the church is implicated but only that a high percentage of its members are. I have found it unhelpful to debate about exact percentages that are intrinsically unknowable. Do I believe that over 80 percent of Evangelicals, for example, defend extramarital affairs and payoffs to porn stars? I do not. Do I think that the number of Evangelical leaders who have publicly abandoned the ancient belief (c. 1998) in the importance of character in our public officials is unacceptably high? Indeed. So we can agree that such a problem as Alberta describes exists, even if we disagree about how systemic it is.

I doubt we will solve anytime soon the issue that I believe most needs to be addressed: how to engage in dialogue about the bad political choices on offer without abandoning our views and principles. (For what it is worth, for every Bill Bennett who has decided virtue doesn't matter after all, or every Marco Rubio who has abandoned free trade, there is a Never Trumper who has jettisoned support for the Second Amendment or the pro-life cause; the age of Trump has corrupted people in multiple directions.) Parsing our political decisions when there are no good options is hard when the well is poisoned by extremism, dishonesty, double standards, and cheap moral relativism. That many representing Evangelicalism appear to be rank nominalists doesn't help, either.

But the fundamental error of Alberta's book goes beyond the likely hasty generalizations that define it. Underneath his assessment of a current problem (the MAGA–Evangelical pairing) is an Anabaptist theological worldview holding that Christians ought to be disconnected from the civil realm. It turns out that his issue is not merely with the methods and excesses of the MAGA moment but rather with the very idea of Christians seeking a seat at the table in this current age. Christians, we are told, are to be on the outside looking in, accepting what comes, not overdoing our attempt at influence, and wearing such passivity as a badge of honor. As one of Alberta's interviewees sums it up:

> There's this false assumption of action we're called to take. The task of the Church is simply to be the Church. All of this high-blown rhetoric about changing the world—we don't need to change the world. We're not called to change the world. We're called to be the world already changed by Christ. That's how we're salt; that's how we're light.

If active political engagement means lying about elections, name-calling, and other forms of outrageous populist antics, I am on Alberta's side. But, of course, it does not. Diligent engagement can, and must, honor Christ, obey the law of God, and, at the same time, pray Christ's own words after Him: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Alberta's attempts to downplay the increasing cultural persecution of practicing Christians in our society are just as egregious as many Christians' attempts to exaggerate them. Fearmongering is an unacceptable tactic, and so is denial. But at its root, the disagreement of our day is about both *how* Christians are to ▶

engage the world in which we live and apparently *if* we are to engage.

I know the answers to both as revealed in the Bible. And I also know this: The more that Christians are told not to engage, the more they'll engage in ways unlikely to please those who urge them to sit on the sidelines. ●

BOOK REVIEW

# Child's Play

PETER TONGUETTE

*Cocktails with George and Martha: Movies, Marriages, and the Making of* Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, by Philip Gefter (Bloomsbury, 368 pp., $32)

**The 1962 play** *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee is a great work about a supremely sad subject: childlessness.

Anticipating our country's ever-falling birth rate, the American playwright understood that for a married man and woman to proceed through life without children is often, at best, a sadness and, at worst, an invitation to boredom, emptiness, and resentment. In the absence of children into whom they could channel their time, care, and hopes, husband and wife are left with no one but themselves—and, in the fullness of time, many will realize that that is not enough.

Such is the state of history professor George and his wife, Martha, the central couple in Albee's classic play. Having reached middle age without children, George and Martha have no outlet for their energy other than intermittent marital brawls. They take up arms over their perceived inadequacies: Martha pounces on George for his failures as an academic, George assails Martha for her licentiousness. Each has the other's number on their mutual drunkenness.

Theoretically, their cancerous anger might have its source in any manner of thing, but Albee, in the course of the play, makes plain its origins: For an unknown number of years, the couple, unable to have children, have been perpetuating between themselves the fiction that they are parents to a son—a phantom figure about whom they speak, for whom they celebrate birthdays, and in whom they find a measure of contentment. The "little bugger," as George calls him, functions as a stand-in for an alternative life, one that might have held less rancor and more hope, less self-centeredness and more giving. In the final act of the play, George brings the fantasy to a climax by announcing that the illusory boy has had an illusory death—an attempted exorcism that may bring them momentary peace but is likely to do little to help their fractured union. Is a fake dead son really better than a fake living one?

Today, most audiences are familiar with *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* through the 1966 film version directed by Mike Nichols, produced and adapted by Ernest Lehman, and starring Richard Burton as George and Elizabeth Taylor, his real-life wife (for two periods), as Martha. George Segal and Sandy Dennis co-starred as Nick and Honey, the younger, sprightlier, but similarly (and notably) childless couple who are induced to spend an evening with George and Martha and thereby bear witness to their fisticuffs, shenanigans, and revelations. A major box-office success, winner of several Oscars, and all-around boundary-breaker, the film deserves credit for its relative fidelity to the play and its undeniable comprehension of the meanings behind the text. Through the volcanically committed performances of Burton and Taylor, the film communicates the madness of George and Martha, and through the expressive, sometimes baroque direction of Nichols, it also gets across the wellspring of that madness.

The movie is the subject of a laudatory, engagingly written new book. Philip Gefter ably recounts the backstory of the play, the movie, and the assorted personalities involved in the creation of each, but he gets tripped up on the point of the movie: For Gefter, George and Martha's troubled marriage has no specific explanation but is instead merely an extreme example of the trials and stresses experienced in most marriages. "Albee is peering beneath the surface of one marriage to reveal a set of fundamental truths about marriage itself," he writes, and, to prove his point, he indulges in a tiresome recent trend, of nonfiction writers' inserting bits of autobiography into books in which they otherwise play no part: "My parents bickered, too, of course. And sometimes, bitter arguments would erupt between them, with *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* intensity. . . . I lived with the persistent fear of their divorce, but it never happened."

As long as Gefter limits himself to discussions of the creation of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, his book is a readable piece of pop-culture history. We are reminded of the famous story of Albee encountering the title phrase scribbled in soap on a mirror in the men's room in a Greenwich Village bar, and we learn of other, less known details. Gefter tells us that a bohemian couple named Willard Maas and Marie Menken were dead ringers for George and Martha (Albee "used to come here every time to eat and just sit and listen while Willard and I argued," Marie said, adding that the characters' childlessness reflected something in her own life: "That's supposed to be me and Willard arguing about my miscarriage"). Other interesting tidbits are that the tune "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" was too costly to use so the title phrase was sung to the public-domain tune "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush" and that Albee wrote to the husband of the late Virginia Woolf seeking permission for the title ("The play is not a frivolous work, and the use of your wife's name in the title will not, it seems to me, do dishonor to her name or position"). Upon its premiere on Broadway, the play received admiring, if occasionally skeptical, reviews and was undeniably a sensation: It sold out each of its 644 performances and prompted Warner Bros. to pay half a million dollars for the film rights.

The book is equally good when it shifts to Hollywood, where a seemingly ill-matched cast of characters conspired to make the movie: studio boss Jack Warner,



LEFT TO RIGHT: GEORGE SEGAL, ELIZABETH TAYLOR, AND RICHARD BURTON IN *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?* (1966)

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

whose chief preoccupation seems to have been to force the movie to be shot in color (it was ultimately filmed in black and white); producer-adapter Lehman, presented as a square with, as Taylor put it, a "Brooks Brothers mind and intelligence"; and director Nichols, whose time was spent managing his social life, working with (and sometimes against) Lehman to preserve Albee's vision, and supervising his tempestuous, much-talked-about stars, Taylor and Burton. Wonderful anecdotes abound, including Nichols's screening New Wave classics *The 400 Blows* and *Jules and Jim* and Fellini's *8 ½* as directorial inspiration, Lehman observing Nichols act out the script for his performers ("He is particularly great as Honey"), and Taylor and Burton, having been offended by a bit of direction, stalking off only to return, hours later, in the company of their pals, the duke and duchess of Windsor. A bold and brilliant film emerged.

Yet, for all his strengths in cultural reportage, Gefter does not persuade with his thematic analysis. He juxtaposes the happy marriages shown in fluff such as *Ozzie and Harriet* with the toxic marriage in the play, but he errs in assuming the former to be counterfeit and the latter authentic. As we all know, in real life there are both contented unions and discontented ones, and for a work of art about marriage to be great and true, it need not portray only unions that end in rancor or separation: In cinema, the great "comedies of remarriage" feature spouses who have drifted from each other but nonetheless find their way to reconciliation: *The Awful Truth*, *The Philadelphia Story*, *The Palm Beach Story*. Gefter makes much of changing cultural mores about marriage and divorce—he even quotes from Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*—but the fact remains that the play assigns specific blame for the bleakness and barrenness of George and Martha's particular marriage: the missing child.

Albee, who himself was an adopted child saddled with apparently cold, uncaring parents, was vague in explaining the dramatic purpose behind George and Martha's made-up youngster. At one point, the playwright said the child was "a 'beanbag' for them to throw at each other, a way of getting at each other indirectly." It is always better, however, to trust the tale, not the teller: Because the absence of a child is given such prominence in the play, we can conclude that had one existed, George and Martha's lives would have been different; because Martha is so deeply stung by George's "killing" of their son, we can surmise that she harbored dreams of actual motherhood. This is why Uta Hagen (who played Martha on Broadway) held back in her performances: She herself had had miscarriages and, as director Alan Schneider recalled, "could not suffer the pain of revealing herself that openly night after night."

Yet that conclusion eludes Gefter, who adopts the contemporary view that marriage is inevitably messy and always governed by emotions, not duty, honor, or obligation. In being so attuned to the mores of the age, he is unable to see what is right in front of him: If George and Martha had been blessed with offspring, their lives likely would have been a whole lot happier. The painful truth is acknowledged, indeed foregrounded, near the end: "You couldn't have any?" Nick asks, to which George and Martha each say in turn, quietly, "We couldn't." ●

FILM REVIEW

# The Nature of Greatness

ROSS DOUTHAT

*Dune: Part Two* is a little uneasy with its hero's journey.

**In a recent essay** for *Modern Age*, Noah Millman notes how many of 2023's movies were concerned with men of extreme talent and vaulting ambition, and yet how few of them—*Oppenheimer* was the exception, he argues—seemed comfortable with the idea of greatness as a reality unto itself. Instead, movies as diverse as Ridley Scott's *Napoleon*, Michael Mann's *Ferrari*, and Bradley Cooper's *Maestro* presented supposed masterful men without making their mastery manifest or their importance clear, leaving audiences "fundamentally perplexed about why the story was being told at all."

*Dune: Part Two*, which has loomed over the cultural landscape in the weeks after its release the way *Oppenheimer* did ▶



*DUNE: PART TWO*

last summer, doesn't have that problem: All of the energy in the movie is building up to the moment when that nice young man Timothée Chalamet, playing Paul Atreides, stops moping around and embraces his destiny as a prophet, messiah, general, and all-around chosen one. Everything that's absent from Scott's bizarre portrait of Napoleon—the sense of how a youthful charismatic leader binds an army to his cause and reaches out to claim a crown—is right there on the screen; it's just that you have to go to the fictional planet of Arrakis to get a clearer sense of what went down in 1790s France.

*Dune*'s second part picks up right where the first half left off, with Paul cast out into the Arrakis desert, the source of the "spice" on which the story's far-future imperium depends, with his mother, Lady Jessica (Rebecca Ferguson), after the near-destruction of his family at the hands of their great enemy, House Harkonnen. Taken in by the Fremen, the desert-dwelling warriors who have been primed by missionaries from Jessica's Bene Gesserit order to expect an off-world messiah, Paul soon passes a series of tests—most notably learning to ride the giantest of all the giant sandworms—that make him a prime candidate to be the long-awaited savior.

He puts up some resistance to this fate, fearing the galactic wars and genocide that his own spice-enhanced mind foresees. But events, his single-minded mother, the growing spice-awakened fetus of his sister Alia (yes, for real), the pious enthusiasm of the Fremen leader Stilgar (Javier Bardem), and his own prophetic visions conspire to make messiah-hood seem like the only way. Soon enough he's leading a jihad against the planet's Harkonnen overlords (Stellan Skarsgård and Dave Bautista returning, and Austin Butler showing up as Paul's peer and rival, the sociopathic Feyd-Rautha) that also puts him on a collision course with the emperor (Christopher Walken) who engineered the attempted purge of House Atreides in the first place.

As in the first part, the story is told in a style that matches the achievement of Peter Jackson with his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy: Like Jackson, Denis Villeneuve has taken a beloved work long thought unfilmable and brought it to life sumptuously, lavishly, on a scale that will colonize the imagination of future readers of the book. And he's done so, as Jackson did, by mastering the technologies of virtual creation, subordinating them to a project of realistic, tactile world-creation: not Marvel's glossy surfaces, but David Lean plus CGI.

For all this, Villeneuve is being rewarded with boffo box office and the thanks of both cinephiles and Dune-iacs, and I share both kinds of gratitude. But he has something else in common with Jackson: Although his version of *Dune* is more straightforward in depicting greatness than most contemporary efforts, he's still altered his source material to suit certain present-day preconceptions, to telegraph a kind of liberal skepticism more explicitly than the book does.

In Jackson's case, the key alterations were designed to introduce more conflict, doubt, and temptation within a few of Tolkien's more heroic characters. The effect was to modernize the story, to make its characters match a 20th-century idea of character and personality, and especially the modern assumption that you can only trust a king who comes to his crown reluctantly and with trepidation.

Villeneuve does some of that with Paul's character, amping up the desire to be something other than the man of destiny. But his bigger change is to transform Chani (Zendaya), Paul's Fremen lover, into a kind of surrogate for audience anxieties about rooting for an aristocratic savior figure and a religious crusade. The other Fremen may be religious fundamentalists ripe for manipulation, but she's a strong feminist secular nationalist who's always ready to cut Paul down to size, who thinks that a native movement should have a native leader, who gets angrier and angrier the more power he accrues.

The intent is to undermine the straightforward hero's journey—which is not a betrayal of the book, exactly, since *Dune* author Frank Herbert also clearly wanted to complicate a simplistically heroic reading of his messianic tale. But it's a cruder version of what the novel did more subtly, and it ends up rebounding and undermining its own intent. The Harkonnen bad guys are so bad, Paul's fulfillment of the messianic prophecies so striking, that Chani ends up seeming truculent and out of touch, as though she's wandered in from a different world and story, or from one of the 2023 movies that didn't get the nature of greatness and heroism at all.

*There is no alternative* is the message, finally, of the movie's story, no matter how much Villeneuve wants to row against it. Which of course is always the great man's justification, sometimes covering necessary transformations and sometimes a multitude of sins. ●

WARNER BROS. PICTURES

BY RICHARD BROOKHISER



# City Desk

## Notes from Underground

"The subways aren't safe." My trainer should know. Every workday he meets clients in one gym after another, across two islands and three boroughs. "People are jammed in, standing room. If you wait for the next train, they're jammed too. Something always happens." What happened today, I asked. "Guy coughed in another guy's face, they got into it."

My trainer remembers the bad old days of Day-Glo tags and dirt-dark grime. He even achieved a bit of fame when he pulled someone off the tracks and had to squeeze himself into the scoop of space below the lip of the platform so as not to be crushed by the inbound train. It took the transit police an uncomfortable while to move the train out and lift him up. But life belowground now is bad enough in its own way. Trouble first began during the pandemic with homeless lunatics. The city, he says, let them camp out in the subways, since there wasn't space enough in the shelters to house them safely. Disorder ensued. He recalled turning back from an exit stairway at one station because the homeless couple who slept there had defecated in it. On his way back down he met a family of tourists about to head up. He directed them instead to the stairway at the other end of the platform. "Imagine seeing that. Welcome to New York!"

But things have gotten worse, he says, far worse, thanks to migrants. (Like the president, he uses a sanitized synonym for "illegal aliens," but his attitudes are anything but inclusive.) "They ride the trains all day, looking for work. Or they got nothing else to do." It is the provision made for them aboveground, however, that most dismays him. Both state and city have programs in place to give migrants debit cards. "So we, who lived here for years, paying our taxes, are paying for that." Housing for migrants is another sore point. "We got our own homeless here. What about housing them?"

My trainer is an immigrant himself, from the islands, who came here on a work visa to help an uncle, then overstayed his time. During the decades that followed he made various attempts to get legalized, employing the services of a series of immigration lawyers, several of whom were outright shysters. He remembers waiting by appointment, with other clients, like gulls in a Sherlock Holmes story, outside one office that turned out to be a dummy. What stymied his honest helpers was the fact that he had lost his home-country passport. After it turned up one day, in the pages of a cookbook, the path to citizenship cleared. I celebrated by buying him a slice of cherry pie with an American flag stuck in it. Seeing migrants waved across the border now rankles.

One possible fresh cohort of migrants my trainer worries about are Haitians. His island is near enough theirs that the desperate and the dead frequently wash ashore; the defense forces intercept the former and send them back. He has followed recent events in Port-au-Prince when gangs overran the prisons and sprang 4,000 inmates. Coming to a city near you. The Venezuelans can show them the ropes.

My trainer is not a partisan. His views are black/left of center, but he is not vehement about them (or maybe he is just polite: probably some combination of the two). But he brings up migrants often, and unbidden by me. Hearing him recalls long-ago editorial dinners with Peter Brimelow.

He thinks the president is done for. Part of that is a former bodybuilder's judgment of his physical condition (terrible). But much of it is the immigration issue. Thanks to my trainer's years in the city, he is well acquainted with the presumptive opponent, whom he knows for a clown and a scoundrel. But, but . . .

I have read the predictions that 20, or 30, or, hell, 100 percent of blacks and Hispanics will vote MAGA and I'll believe them when it happens. Democrats could carry New York State with a corpse, and probably will. But if black turnout drops in Philadelphia, whither Pennsylvania?

This is not a political column. I take cabs. ●

BY BRYAN A. GARNER

# Garner the Grammarian



## Americans: Dwellers in a Polyglot Boardinghouse

*A dialogue continued*

**Socrates:** Did you see the March 12 essay in the *New York Times* about the glories of multilingualism in America?

**Aristophanes:** Of course I did. By Ross Perlin, the linguist. I cut it out and filed it away.

**Socrates:** Wasn't it excellent?

**Aristophanes:** Not particularly. It's more of the paltering that goes on about bilingual education.

**Socrates:** Paltering? I should have known you'd be hidebound in your English-only attitude.

**Aristophanes:** Once again you caricature my views. Would you like to discuss the subject seriously, without oversimplified accusations?

**Socrates:** You know I would. Perlin quotes Donald Trump as saying it's "a very horrible thing" that New York classrooms are full of people who speak "languages that nobody in this country has ever heard of." Surely you don't agree with that.

**Aristophanes:** Let's think about it. It wasn't the presence of the students that Trump deplored, but the insistence that they should be taught at school in the language spoken in their homes. That's the mad situation we have today.

**Socrates:** Mad? Perlin observes that we have an abysmal ability to teach, learn, and translate the world's 7,000 or so languages. He mentions the "growing body of research" that has found linguistic diversity to be "good not only for children's overall development but also for their health." He makes a good point when he says that "the presence of these languages and their speakers continually revitalizes the profound social experiment that is America."

**Aristophanes:** Yes, he seems to want teachers who will cater to children whose home languages are Mixtec, Kichwa, Tibetan, and Fulani. He cites those languages and alludes to "a trove of endangered languages invisible to the census" but present in various enclaves around the nation.

**Socrates:** Look, nothing says that they must be taught in English. You're sounding scarily xenophobic.

**Aristophanes:** The traditional melting-pot view was that immigrants should assimilate as quickly as possible—preferably within a generation. One way of helping that along, in children's schooling, is complete immersion in English.

**Socrates:** Well, your view has been rejected by educational experts. Bilingualism is now a fact of life in American schools.

**Aristophanes:** Yes, and in Richardson, Texas, for example, there are more than 70 languages spoken in the public schools, and they've hired teachers for each of those 70-plus languages. It's just another example of why the populist culture that's so powerful today rejects the expertise of left-leaning social scientists.

**Socrates:** You'd just have these students flail around in a sink-or-swim educational environment?

**Aristophanes:** Not at all. Almost all of them are at an age when they can pick up English almost effortlessly. Bilingual education just postpones their mastery of English, and as they grow up, it becomes more and more difficult for them.

**Socrates:** You want more Americans to be monoglots, without a second language?

**Aristophanes:** No, it's an excellent thing knowing more than one language. Whatever kids get at home they'll inevitably possess. But there's no reason to expend public funds to slow their progress in acquiring Standard American English—the language of our public life. The irony of bilingual education is that in trying to undo past pain and privation, it ensures future pain and privation.

**Socrates:** There's no empirical evidence for what you're saying!

**Aristophanes:** Gathering the empirical evidence requires generations of social tinkering and the creation of second-class citizens. It all just defies common sense.

**Socrates:** It seems as if you want to stifle the splendor of our multicultural society.

**Aristophanes:** People have their private individuality, but they need to be admitted into a public individuality as well. That means a shared culture, and language is at the heart of a shared culture. You seem to think of assimilation as a bad thing. I think of it as a necessity.

**Socrates:** Time has passed you by. We're creating a new America. The people who come here are renewing the American experiment.

**Aristophanes:** Increasingly, immigrants are living in enclaves where it's unnecessary to acquire English at all. They don't share our language, and they don't really share our culture. And if that's true, then they don't value freedom of speech, freedom of religion, separation of powers, and the other commitments of the Founding Fathers. These things don't come naturally to the cultures in which Mixtec, Kichwa, Tibetan, and Fulani are the predominant languages.

**Socrates:** Now you're confusing language with culture. There's no reason at all why the First Amendment can't be translated into other languages.

**Aristophanes:** Come off it. Many languages don't even have the vocabulary to express core American values. Anyway, what we're doing is gradually wiping out English as the de facto official language.

**Socrates:** Your revered Founding Fathers didn't value that thought enough to enshrine it! So you're on your own here, along with all the failures of the English-only movement of the 1970s and 1980s.

**Aristophanes:** The Founding Fathers never envisioned a future in which we'd be expected to teach Mixtec, Kichwa, Tibetan, and Fulani in American schools. The failure to put into the Constitution that we're an English-speaking nation was an oversight on their part.

**Socrates:** Since 1975, in many parts of the U.S., ballots have been printed in Spanish, Bengali, Chinese, Hmong, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. That's because of civil-rights legislation enacted under a Republican administration. I think you want to disenfranchise people!

**Aristophanes:** No, I don't. But I do want to promote linguistic assimilation into American culture. Without it, we suffer from cultural entropy. Right here on this continent, we're putting American culture into a centrifuge. We'll see our core values disintegrate in short order.

**Socrates:** New values will arise. New forms of language will evolve. These natural forces are inevitable. Stop worrying so much. In the fullness of time, things have a way of working themselves out. You're famously against a planned economy, but you seem to favor a "planned culture."

**Aristophanes:** That's what education entails, my friend. Teaching core values involves some degree of indoctrination. Regardless of what happens at home, I'd like American schoolchildren indoctrinated in values such as honesty, fair play, sportsmanship, patriotism, and even tolerance.

**Socrates:** Now *you're* the one who's paltering! How can you tout tolerance in the same breath as patriotism?

**Aristophanes:** Easily. That's what the First Amendment is all about. *E pluribus unum* accepts pluralism, but the *unum* part amounts to a restraint. Count me with Teddy Roosevelt, who famously said: "The one absolutely certain way of bringing this nation to ruin, of preventing all possibility of its continuing to be a nation at all, would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities."

**Socrates:** Pure fearmongering. You're a mass of contradictions, my friend. Once again I reject your fallacious scare tactics.

**Aristophanes:** And once again I reject your tendentious labeling. Despite your much-belauded logic, you haven't identified a single fallacy in what I've just said. ●

POEM

BY P. DAVID HORNIK

## Leaving Tel Aviv

1

Tel Aviv will forget me
as Jerusalem did.
As the whole world will
when I step off entirely.

Silent dawns, brooding—
but about what?
Not enough time
to sit by the dawn
and plumb what it is
that is not grasped.

2

Tally the days you wasted
in too many cafés
on Ibn Gavirol Street.
Such a darting hopped-up city
even my jaded cat
viewed it from the window
perplexed.

3

Out at sea
the red disc
drops below the rim.
Some faint sails
distill into dusk.
In deep night
they'll float soundless
into the marina.

BY CHRISTIAN SCHNEIDER

# Happy Warrior



## That's the (Non-Digital) Ticket

In a small shoe box under my basement stairs sits a map of my life. It's not an impossible-to-fold highway map, or one of those giant scrolls you'd see a pirate unfurl to point to treasure. It is instead a box full of ticket stubs.

Through these tiny, half-torn slips of paper, we can re-create certain elements of our lives; where we lived, who our friends were, whether we had unfortunate musical taste, and the like. Holding a wrinkled old ticket stub in your hand can transport you to your past self, conjuring memories you had forgotten and reminding you of the person you used to be.

For instance, I can dig through my box and pull out a tiny strip of paper that tells me that on September 15, 1995, I paid $10 to get into a tiny club in Salt Lake City to see a new band whose first album had only recently been released. The band's lead singer had previously been the drummer in a famous group, but its lead singer had committed suicide. Now the drummer was striking out on his own with a new band. They were called the Foo Fighters, and I figured they were worth checking out. (Thirty years later, a ticket to see them will set you back anywhere between $100 and $1,000, depending on how close up you want to see head Foo Dave Grohl.)

And now I can hold the ticket stub in my hand—the same one that was in my pocket nearly three decades ago. There are some tactile clues to how the night went; the stub is wrinkled, so I assume I got pretty sweaty. There is a brown stain at the top—did I pour beer on it in the midst of slamming into other people? (Another stub in my box indicates I saw the band again around six months later, this time paying an exorbitant $13 for a ticket—so I must have enjoyed myself the first time.)

Of course, in the modern age, digital companies act as if these visual and tactile reminders of your whereabouts are a nuisance. The idea of a "ticket stub" is hopelessly in the past—fans now gain entry to sporting events, concerts, and movies by waving their phones in front of a sensor. The "ticket" is either a QR code or a digital pulse meant to identify the ticket-holder.

It is true that the new system is convenient; digital tickets are easier to obtain, sell, and transfer to others. There is no waiting in long lines at a record store on Saturday morning hoping you can get your hands on a paper ticket to see your favorite band. No checking the mail every day to see whether a postal worker has delivered your Willy Wonka–style golden tickets to the NCAA basketball tournament.

But the new "e-tickets" are ephemeral. When the show is over, they vanish unless you take pains to log them in some sort of database or take screenshots of them. But even then, they are sent to the graveyard of digital photos, hidden among dramatic shots of the chicken wings you wanted to brag to your friends that you made. If you switch devices, you may never see them again—and even if you do, you are looking at an electronic facsimile of your receipt, not a material item with which you have any connection.

In the digital era, there is nothing like having a physical thing to hold in your hands and admire. Physical artifacts provide longevity and permanence, as young people are coming to recognize. This is why sales of vinyl albums have increased for 17 years running; young people understand that the music they accrue on their phones through Spotify and other services will simply vanish if those companies go belly-up. Physical media will last through the market churn that sees digital formats come and go.

Technological advances have always promised to help sanitize our lives; no longer will we need to carry bags full of books, keep checkbooks balanced, learn to parallel park, or even shop for our own groceries. But somewhere in that messiness lies what it means to be a person interacting with the material world. And the memories of the person you used to be are found on tiny slips of paper, hidden away in a box somewhere, begging to tell your story to anyone who finds them. ●

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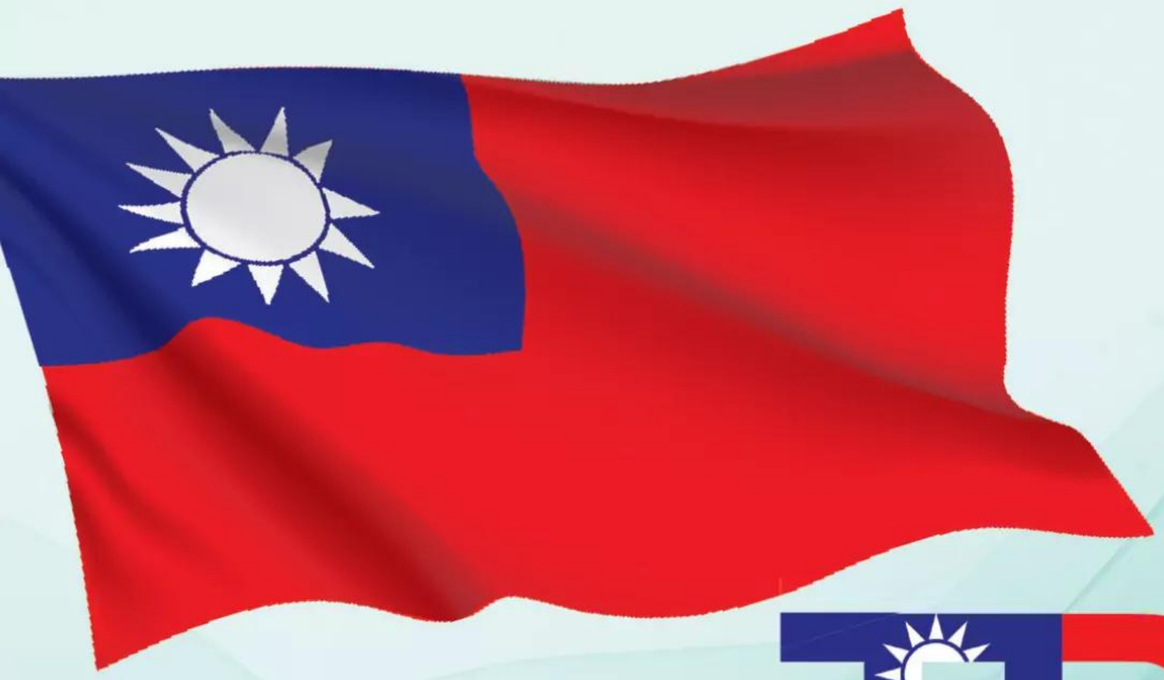
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