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AUGUST 2024

**THE ROLLING STONES' BACKBEAT**

ETHAN IVERSON

**RISE OF THE INFLUENCER CHEFS**

AARON TIMMS



**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**

# HARRIS STEPS UP

The future of the Democratic Party, and American democracy, now rests on her shoulders. Can Kamala Harris meet the moment?

JOAN WALSH

**SHE'S READY**

JOHN NICHOLS

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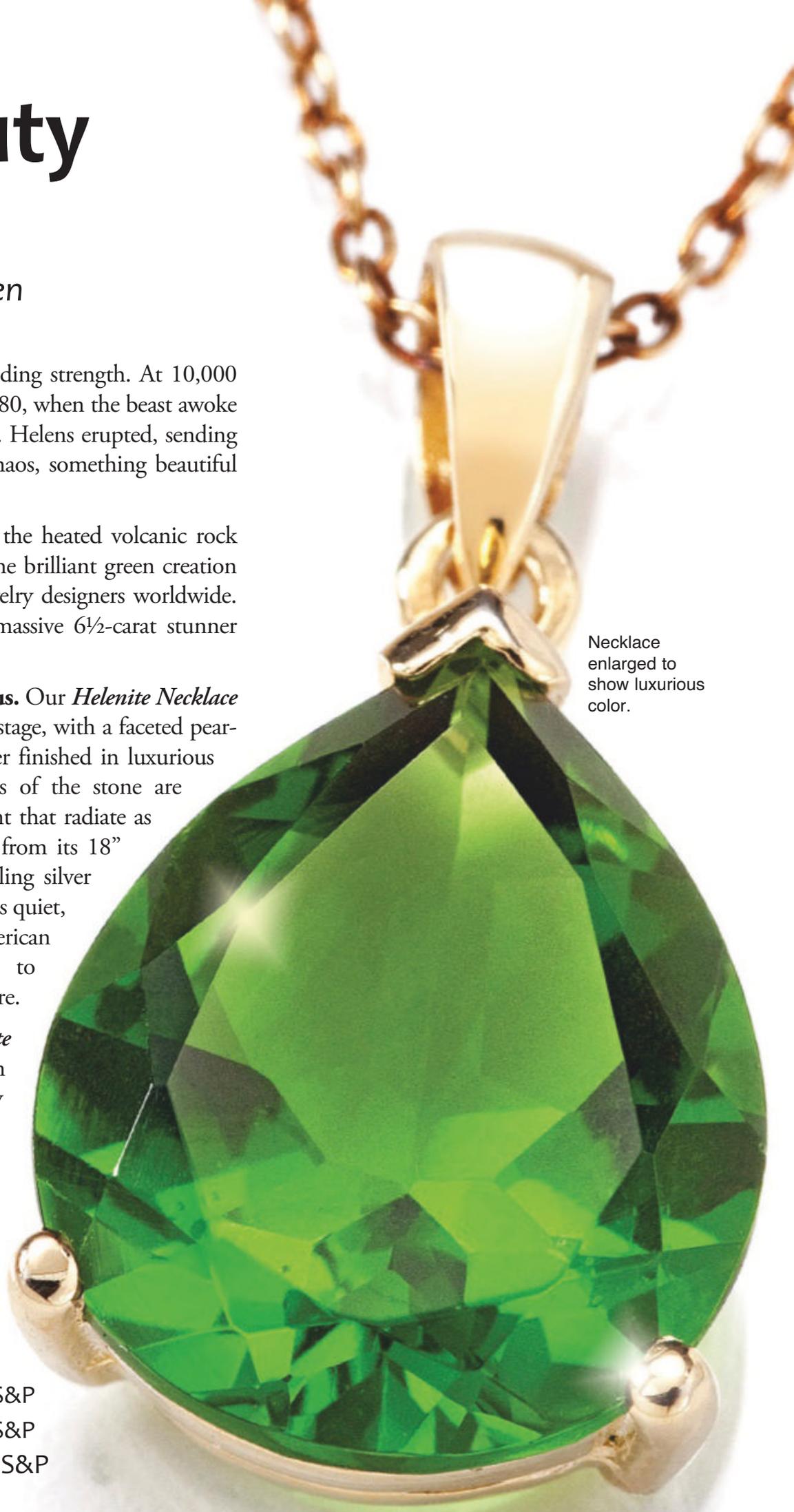
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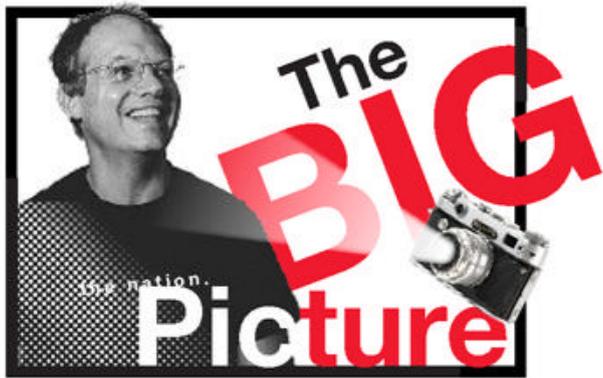
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# Passing the Torch

**L**IKE MOST AMERICANS MY AGE, I STILL REMEMBER exactly what I was doing when I heard the news that John F. Kennedy had been shot. My mother and I were in an elevator at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, where I was being treated for cancer. Although I had no idea at the time (my parents spoke simply of a cyst that had been removed from my neck),

I was not expected to survive. The elevator operator, a middle-aged Black woman who always asked after me, was crying, and when my mother asked what was the matter, she replied, “They killed the president.”

As a 6-year-old, I had a less than perfect grasp of the machinery of our democracy. All I knew about Kennedy was that, like my father, he had two small children. I thought being president was something fathers did, like mowing the lawn or taking out the garbage. So I asked, “Will they shoot Daddy when he is president?”

Five years later, when Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered, my teachers were still crying when we returned to school four days later. And I can remember my parents crying when Robert Kennedy was shot.

I was in Maine visiting relatives the day someone tried to assassinate Donald Trump at a rally in Pennsylvania, and my first response was not grief—*The Nation* is not a Trumpist organ—but fear. Not for the candidate, but for our country, and our politics. The phrase that came irresistibly to mind, at the time and afterward, was Malcolm X’s comment that JFK’s assassination represented “the chickens coming home to roost.”

Mao’s adage that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun” is of little use in democratic politics, though it may explain part of our country’s fetishistic devotion to the Second Amendment. Because in America, what grows out of the barrel of a gun is chaos, and fear, and desperation.

In the days before Trump was shot, the Democratic Party had been consumed by the question of whether President Biden should step aside. That question has now been settled. On July 21, in an act of patriotism and devotion to duty that should secure his legacy as the most successful single-term president in US history, Joe Biden announced that he would stand down, and speedily endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris. As we went to press, all of Harris’s most daunting

competitors had followed suit, joining a potential popular front that stretches from the Clintons to Cori Bush and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Yet the shooting—which spared Trump but took the life of Corey Comperatore—has already roiled our politics, burnishing the Republican candidate’s sense of impunity and driving some Democrats to despair and defeatism. Like Representative Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Bernie Sanders, we draw a different lesson, namely that the best way to counter the call to Make America Great Again is with a summons to Make America Democratic Again. This means not just the formal democracy of elections—fragile and necessary though that is—but the genuine democracy of a country in which power comes from the mouths of the people; women control their own bodies; workers enjoy security and the fruits of their labor; healthcare, childcare, and higher education are regarded as basic rights; and the food we eat, the air we breathe, and the water we drink are protected by the public, for the public.

Thanks in part to her role as the Biden administration’s point person on abortion, Harris is a formidable messenger for that summons. But for the millions who have been led—like the mainstream media—to discount the vice president’s abilities, Joan Walsh’s exclusive profile of Kamala Harris offers a must-read corrective. Equally compelling—

and just as essential—are Elie Mystal’s anatomy of Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson’s emerging jurisprudence, Gabriel Furshong’s dispatch from Jon Tester’s Senate campaign, Rania Abouzeid’s profile of the Palestinian actor and director Mohammad Bakri, and Daniel Judt’s radical reenvisioning of

workers’ education. Oh, and we sent Ethan Iverson to see the Rolling Stones...

As for our critics, Nawal Arjini reviews Hari Kunzru’s new novel, Sarah Chihaya considers Helen Oyeyemi’s uncanny fictions, Karrie Jacobs appraises Brooklyn’s Dubai, David Klion interrogates John Ganz’s argument that it all started in the 1990s, and Aaron Timms samples food TV. Plus dispatches from France and Texas, our brilliant columnists, and more!

See you in September.

**N**

D.D. GUTTENPLAN  
Editor

EDITORIAL / JOHN NICHOLS FOR THE NATION

# Harris Is Ready



WHEN PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN ENDED HIS EMBATTLED BID FOR A SECOND TERM on July 21, he placed Vice President Kamala Harris on a trajectory that could well make her the first woman to win the Oval Office. Harris moved to the top of the ticket in a matter of minutes; key Democrats rushed to endorse her; and she raised a record \$81 million within the first 24 hours of her campaign launch. The circumstance is unprecedented, the challenge daunting, but Kamala Harris is up to it.

Despite what Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump and his MAGA cabal may suggest in public, they know this—and they fear her. That’s why, amid a rising chorus of calls for Biden to stand down after a miserable debate performance in June, Trumpworld went oddly quiet. Republicans recognized that Harris—who was quickly identified by *The Nation*’s own Jeet Heer as the logical successor—would hit the campaign trail with the energy and focus that Biden had struggled to muster. They also recognized that, after four years of claiming that Biden was too old to serve a second term, Trump is now the old man in the race for the presidency.

The twist is that Harris also runs as an exceptionally experienced candidate. The child of civil rights activists who participated during college in demonstrations against South African apartheid, Harris defeated an incumbent Democrat to become San Francisco’s district attorney in 2003, beat a popular Republican prosecutor to become California’s attorney general in 2010, and was elected to the US Senate in 2016.

Harris lost her first presidential bid in 2020, but like Biden in 2008, she emerged as the Democratic Party’s vice presidential candidate. She proved her ability to prosecute Republican lies by trouncing Mike Pence, a governor and former talk-radio host, in their debate—just as Harris will trounce Trump in any fall debates. In office, Harris was mocked by the right—and neglected by pundits—as she took on some of the administration’s toughest jobs. Yet she gained the respect of the people who sustain Democratic presidential campaigns: state and local elected officials and activists, whom she campaigned with in 2022 and 2023. And she did so as “Biden’s top ambassador on issues of reproductive justice,” as Joan Walsh writes in her compelling profile of Harris in this issue, where she explains how, “without anyone totally noticing it, Harris has been put in charge of outreach to all of the groups of voters—women, Black voters and voters of color, young voters, and voters who care about gun reform”—whom Democrats must mobilize for November.

Harris hasn’t always been a favorite of progressives, as *The Nation*’s editor, D.D. Guttenplan, acknowledged in a July 4

editorial calling for Biden’s withdrawal. Backing her a day before Biden finally left the race, Guttenplan concluded that Harris was “the only person who can justifiably run on the administration’s record of successes” and who might bring “a fresh approach to the stalemate in Ukraine and the slaughter in Gaza.”

It’s a safe bet that Republicans will run a racist, sexist, and xenophobic campaign against Harris, who would be the first Black woman and the first South Asian American to take the party’s nomi-

nation, even if she chooses a white guy as her running mate. Some Democrats fret about the certain attacks, but they need to get over it, just as they needed to get over their uncertainty about whether voters would support “a skinny kid with a funny name” in

2008. Harris is ready for this fight, and Democrats who know how to win see this.

Within hours of launching her campaign, Harris received endorsements from the Service Employees International Union and the American Federation of Teachers. That’s no surprise. Two years ago, after the first of many interviews I’ve done with Harris on labor issues, I wrote that she “displays as much passion [for labor rights] as President Joe Biden.” Harris is ready to put that passion on display as the Democratic nominee. If she couples it with an embrace of Biden’s call to tax the rich in order to expand Social Security, end medical debt, and otherwise tip the balance in favor of working Americans, alongside her commitment to defend abortion rights and democracy, she will be Trump’s worst nightmare.

**Despite what Trump and his MAGA cabal may say in public, they know Harris’s abilities—and they fear her.**

COMMENT / HARRISON STETLER

# French Lessons

*The far right did not prevail in France's snap elections; the United States should watch and learn.*

**C**ALLED “THE YEAR OF THE ELECTIONS,” 2024 HAS seen a withering of political objectives to their lowest common denominator: blocking the far right from power. From the United States and Europe to Narendra Modi's India, it's hard to deny which camp has the momentum in the 2020s. In many of the world's democracies, a commanding plurality—what Henrik Ibsen called the “compact majority” in his 1882 drama *An Enemy of the People*—is turning toward authoritarian ethno-nationalism. The ideas and leaders that offered some hope only a few years ago are in retreat. In the United Kingdom, a de-Corbynized Labour Party may have won a majority in early July, but the best that can be said of new Prime Minister Keir Starmer is that he's not 14 years of Tory rule. Having strained relations with the social movements to its left, the Democratic Party's main case for a new term is that it's still not Donald Trump.

France is a stubborn exception. The New Popular Front (NFP)—a broad left-wing coalition—was indeed critical in denying Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally a victory in this summer's snap elections. Formed just days after President Emmanuel Macron dissolved the National Assembly on June 9, the NFP emerged as the largest bloc in France's hung Parliament and is demanding the right to govern. But the alliance did it on a comprehensive program to turn the page on Macronism and avert the slide to the hard right, calling for the repeal of recent immigration laws and the legislation passed during the Macron era to constrain civil society. The alliance is promising to invest in public services, freeze prices on daily necessities, and reindustrialize through “ecological planning”—the French equivalent of the Green New Deal. And the NFP doesn't beat around the bush about how to pay for it: Corporations and the wealthy would have to pony up more in taxes.

This is a coherent road map for what the alliance's legislative contract calls “rupture.” But it's well within the bounds of France's political tradition, which explains the appeal of the NFP and the popular dismissal of claims that it's too extreme. The New Popular Front harks back to the original: the 1936 alliance of liberal, socialist, and communist forces that briefly governed France amid the first pan-European rise of fascism. The NFP's demands—an increase in the national minimum wage, dignified retirement at 62 and maybe even 60—recall key victories of 1936 like the 40-hour workweek and paid vacation. This is what France's tradition is really about: common political and social rights. No, Léon Blum is not rolling over in his grave.

Americans often claim that politics stops at the water's edge. The saying aptly describes US foreign policy's imperviousness to criticism, but it doesn't mean that what happens internationally won't reverberate domestically. Biden's blank check for Netanyahu's war on Gaza

has shredded the president's credibility in the eyes of many progressive voters. Abroad, the claim by Western powers that they are defending international law in the face of Putin's invasion of Ukraine rings hollow next to their refusal to pressure Israel to end its wanton aggression against Palestinian lives and rights.

What will it take to break the West's isolation? The NFP combines the defense of Ukrainian sovereignty with the promise to use leverage to get Netanyahu to end his war. An NFP government would immediately recognize Palestinian statehood and impose an embargo on arms exports to Israel. In the French context, this too could be considered something of a restoration: Many rightfully look back with pride at the country's threat to veto the 2003 UN Security Council resolution on the invasion of Iraq. The alliance's program falls short of the diplomatic revolution implied by the rise of the so-called Global South, but it points to the type of thinking that is needed.

The NFP is one beneficiary of the breakdown of the French party system since the mid-2010s—something that has also enabled the rise of the far right and Macron's centrist rule since 2017. When the left-wing veteran Jean-Luc Mélenchon abandoned the Socialist Party in 2008, he set off on a long march to rebuild French progressivism on a new footing. Mélenchon has largely succeeded: The democratic demands of his party, La France Insoumise, are the lead inspiration for the NFP

program. There are legitimate critiques to be made of Mélenchon, whether it's his occasional dogmatism or the lack of internal democracy within his party. These flaws have destabilized past attempts to build a progressive front, and other left-wing forces often point to them to make the case for going it alone.

Something like the New Popular Front goes against the entire institutional DNA of the modern Democratic Party. But for those who are serious about wanting to prevent the

return of Trumpism, France's left has one simple lesson: The best defense is a good offense. There's no substitute for unity around a detailed plan for wealth redistribution and public investments, or for the social movements that have emerged in the past decade. With the Supreme Court in conservative hands for a generation, the American right is going for its version of rupture. When will liberals? **N**

**Something like the New Popular Front goes against the institutional DNA of the Democratic Party.**

*Harrison Stetler is a freelance journalist based in Paris.*

COMMENT / BRUCE ROBBINS

# After Atrocity

*Can a cause still be just, even if atrocities have been committed on its behalf?*

**T**HERE IS A SET OF IMAGES TO WHICH AMERICANS DO not have much access. It consists of photos of German cities after the American bombing raids of World War II: photos of Germans pulling the bodies of children out of their bombed-out homes, stacking corpses on carts, sifting through the rubble for what might remain of their possessions. Why are these images missing from the collective memory? Is it because the United States had no photojournalists in enemy territory? Or are they unremembered because, unlike so many of the bombing campaigns that followed, this one belonged to what we think of as a good war? Most US readers probably have little desire to contemplate the collateral damage, measured in German civilian lives, of a victory over fascism that everyone agrees was noble and necessary.

These images do exist, of course, and I have often thought of them over the past months thanks to the images from Gaza, which they resemble. But they first came to my mind long before October 2023. One afternoon a few years ago, I was sitting on the sofa reading *The Air Raid on Halberstadt on 8 April 1945*, a book of text and images in which the German philosopher Alexander Kluge documents the arrival of the US Eighth Air Force over his hometown. As I was reading, something about the title struck me as mysteriously familiar. I went into my study. Framed on the wall was a scrap of paper listing the missions my father flew as a bomber pilot during the waning months of the war. And there it was, in his own handwriting: “Halberstadt. 8 April 1945.” While the 13-year-old Alexander Kluge waited to see whether he would die, as two or three thousand of his neighbors did in the explosions and fires around him, my father, Capt. Eugene Rabinowitz, age 21, was steadying his B-17 over Halberstadt, the bomb bay doors open.

Some months after I looked at my dad’s flight record, I managed to meet Alexander Kluge. He was very kind. Kluge did not say anything about how it felt as a child to be bombed. He told me that the men in those planes had no more control over where they dropped their bombs than workers in a factory have over what their factory produces. Then he mentioned some seemingly random episodes of violence, among them the eradication of the Neanderthals and a 18th-century pogrom against Jews in Prague. This was confusing. I decided afterward that the far-flung examples of atrocity he mentioned helped relativize, for him, the awfulness he had lived through as well as American accountability for it.

Face to face with an atrocity, historical relativizing doesn’t seem like the obvious move. Mass violence against noncombatants—my rough definition of “atrocity”—can hardly appear, looked at up close, as

anything but unbearable, incomprehensible, inhuman. The only thing to feel about it is indignation. The only way to judge it is to say that the perpetrators must be monsters. Whatever side I am on, it can’t be theirs. Whatever is done to their side by way of retaliation, they are the ones responsible for it.

That is what many people decided after the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023. But that line of reasoning is a mistake—as I think Kluge was trying to tell me. What was done in Halberstadt was monstrous, but my father was not a monster. Human history is full of violence, and you can’t understand that history, or play any role, even the slightest, in preventing future atrocities, if innocent victims and guilty perpetrators are all you see in it.

A cause can still be just even if atrocities are committed on its behalf. That was the case with the Allied bombing of German cities. It is not the case in Gaza, even if the Israeli pilots who have been doing the bombing deserve some share of the complicated mixture of sympathy and abhorrence that cohabits in me with my love for my father. (Who knows what their officers have told them?) Palestinians, on the other hand, have every right to struggle for self-determination and an end to occupation and blockade—even if the violence committed by Hamas on their behalf is unforgivable. The Native Americans who murdered women and children

while defending themselves against encroaching settlers during King Philip’s War in 1676 were not wrong to defend their homes, even if we do not approve of the atrocities that accompanied that defense. The situation was not symmetrical. The Native Americans had not paddled their canoes up to England’s shores, burned English homes, taken over English woodlands.

But if atrocity does not make a cause unjust, it does not follow that the existence of atrocities can be ignored. To commit an atrocity is still the single worst thing anyone can do. It stops you in your tracks—and so it should. Yet that doesn’t rule out attention to differences in quantity, proportion, and circumstances. Like the supporters of Israel who harp on October 7, the German historians who draw a moral equivalence between the Allied bombing of German cities and the Holocaust—as if the sufferings brought by the former canceled out German guilt for the latter—are neglecting important distinctions. My father told me his targets were only military and industrial. This statement turned out to sometimes

**Most US readers have little desire to contemplate the collateral damage of the victory over fascism.**

be true, though it was not true of the raid on Halberstadt. At Auschwitz, there was no intention to avoid civilian casualties.

Listening to the implausible verbiage with which Israel defends its daily carnage in Gaza, it will seem naïve or worse to demand acknowledgment for the history of good intentions that has produced the modern concept of atrocity—intentions so often ignored in practice. But that history helps distinguish between Gaza now and Halberstadt then.

Because the killing of noncombatants was not always considered shameful. Once upon a time, when plunder was a principle of economic survival, conquest was a matter of pride. Before the rise of modern international law, conquest was understood to confer rights of sovereignty. If you conquered a territory, it was yours to rule. Not only did conquest not violate any legal or moral norm; it was celebrated. What do you do with conquering heroes if not hail them? And the same was true of the atrocities that conquest necessarily brought in its wake. Armies lived off the land, which meant taking what they needed from those who lived on the land. Soldiers were routinely promised, and rewarded with, booty. Under these circumstances, it was inconceivable that any moral norm should arise condemning the mass killing of noncombatants. The word *atrocious* signified excessive cruelty; it did not refer to the identity of the victims. The modern concept of atrocity as a victim-based moral scandal could not exist then. Yet now it does.

Our leaders no longer brag about the number of people

killed, as Julius Caesar did when he conquered Gaul. The passage of time has done more than add to the chronicle of excruciating acts of violence; it has also changed how those acts are and should be judged. Since the raid on Halberstadt, human rights and humanitarian law have sharpened the world's moral consciousness. Our leaders may cynically prefer the word *atrocious* to *genocide*, since the latter comes with the imperative to do something. Still, they have reason to know better now than they did, even in World War II, that history will not applaud their success in wreaking mass violence on defenseless noncombatants. The IDF and its American enablers are guiltier than the Eighth Air Force because the nearly 80 years that have gone by have not been morally meaningless. For the same reason, the rest of us have more responsibility to hold the IDF and its American enablers accountable.

The phrase “the right side of history” sounds lame these days; few would admit to sharing Martin Luther King Jr.'s conviction that the arc of the moral universe, though long, bends toward justice. The great pain that comes with attending to atrocities past and present tests such little faith as may persist. Still, there is obviously a wrong side of history. Anyone seeking its right side can begin by calling for an immediate end to the bombing. **N**

*Bruce Robbins is the Old Dominion Foundation Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University. His most recent book is The Beneficiary.*

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# RETHINKING RURAL

ANTHONY FLACCAVENTO

## Rural America Looms Large in the 2024 Elections

*So why is it such a small piece of the Progressive Caucus agenda?*

**T**HE PROGRESSIVE PROPOSITION AGENDA ISSUED BY the Congressional Progressive Caucus is a commendable effort to push the Democratic Party to put people and the planet ahead of corporate control and profits. The proposal includes a call to “end hunger and support farmers and local producers” and to “invest in rural infrastructure, small farms, and break up Big Ag.” This should be welcomed, as should the recommendation to increase funding for rural hospitals. Nevertheless, giving rural Americans just 24 words in the CPC document—out of a total of 1,656—is far from adequate. Indeed, what’s missing could fill a barnyard.

For those of us who believe that fixing our economy and politics requires addressing the root causes of the rural/urban divide, there are many good elements in the CPC agenda. One of the most important is the strong emphasis on fighting corporate power—through stronger antitrust enforcement, as well as specific tactics to roll back the increasingly dominant but largely unregulated dark money from private equity firms flowing through elections. Its call to limit the “fox guarding the henhouse” influence of corporations over federal regulations is critically important as well.

The Progressive Proposition Agenda is also very strongly pro-worker, from its recommendation to enact comprehensive labor law reforms and a national living wage to its calls to cap childcare costs and protect workers during strikes. Such policies are good for workers and communities around the country—including in rural places. In fact, the Rural New Deal has many similar recommendations.

But here is what’s missing: a proactive agenda for building a more just and resilient economy from the bottom up, one that enables people to take control of their lives and meet their own needs. The CPC plan, appropriately, calls for strengthening the safety net, taxing the rich, and using those revenues to make life better for the millions who are struggling. It’s the redistribution agenda with which we progressives are most familiar and comfortable.

There’s much less attention, however, to “pre-distribution” policies—those that help people to help themselves, that enable communities to solve most problems close to home, that build real and enduring wealth for ordinary people. A focus on policies that cultivate self-reliance would help people everywhere but

is particularly critical in rural communities. Economically, such policies would help to reverse decades of extraction—not just of dwindling natural resources, but of wealth and people from rural communities. Politically, these policies garner broad support because rural people strongly prefer a hand up to a handout. As a January 2024 survey by government scholars demonstrates, rural people overwhelmingly want the government to “make it possible for us to improve our communities ourselves” rather than impose top-down solutions.

What kinds of federal policies contribute to an economy that builds local wealth, enables community solutions, and promotes self-reliance? Policies that put local people in the driver’s seat, allowing them to adapt programs and use funds based upon their local realities. In my 40 years of rural development experience, I’ve observed that state and federal programs that prioritize local control and local



capacity-building garner much broader community support and have more impact over the long term. Equally important are policies that invest in and incentivize the restoration and sustainable use of land and ecological capital. The town of St. Paul, Virginia, for instance, utilized federal resources to rebuild its economy around the restoration of the Clinch River, putting a critical local asset at the center of efforts to move beyond the coal industry.

During a “Rural Communities in Action” gathering at the White House on May 14, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack admitted that the strategy that has dominated US agricultural policy for 50 years, which Nixon Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz dubbed “get big or get out,” was a huge mistake.

**What kinds of federal policies contribute to an economy that builds local wealth, enables community solutions, and promotes self-reliance?**

**Small Ag:** Franklin Farm in Guilford, Vermont, is family-owned-and-operated.

Moving from an all-of-the-above approach that enabled the corporate dominance of American agriculture, USDA is now emphasizing family farms, investments in regional food systems, and helping farmers and forest landowners adopt soil-building, carbon-sequestering management practices. This long-overdue course correction is very popular among producers: 180,000 farmers managing 250 million acres are projected to sign up in the next five years. And it is exactly what we need to sustain our food system—and help curb climate change.

Finally, a progressive agenda must prioritize policies that promote greater economic diversity and a higher degree of local ownership. This includes simplifying access to grants and loans for smaller, newer businesses; targeting federal procurement dollars to small and minority-owned businesses (in 2023, the federal government purchased \$178 billion of goods and services from small businesses—a record amount), and redirecting tax and financial incentives from corporate chains to local independent businesses.

Democracy is indeed on the ballot this November. But for the millions of Americans who believe that the economy and the political system are rigged against them, calls to “save our democracy” fall flat. This includes the persuadable rural voters who will play a critical role in the election, particularly in the battleground states. For progressives working to prevent a MAGA victory, promoting federal policies that help rebuild rural communities while creating a more resilient economy must be a part of that strategy. **N**

## Subject to Debate Katha Pollitt



### What's Left After Wokeness?

*An interview with political philosopher Susan Neiman, the author of Left Is Not “Woke.”*



**S**USAN NEIMAN IS A PROMINENT AMERICAN POLITICAL philosopher living in Berlin, where she directs the Einstein Forum. She is the author of many books, including *Evil in Modern Thought* and *Learning From the Germans*. Her most recent book, *Left Is Not “Woke,”* from Polity Press, has sparked an international conversation, with translations, she told me, coming out in languages from Thai to Farsi. This interview has been lightly edited and condensed.

**KATHA POLLITT:** What do you mean by “woke”? When Lead Belly urged Black people to “stay woke” in a 1938 song about the Scottsboro Boys, he meant “Watch out for racism.” To be woke was good. Now it’s somewhere between a joke and a pejorative: Ron DeSantis named his law against teaching about racism the Stop Woke Act.

**SUSAN NEIMAN:** Many people urged me not to use this title, for fear that it would be seen as supporting the right. But I decided to use it because it’s a phenomenon people recognize all over the world. The term is confusing because it is based on traditional left-wing emotions, like wanting to stand up for the oppressed, while relying on assumptions that are drawn from the right—like a commitment to tribalism rather than universalism and a focus on power rather than justice. Because many leftists are increasingly uneasy with those assumptions, they are uncertain about what it means to be left today. I wrote the book to set out simple philosophical principles that define what “left” is—because people recognize what “woke” is, even if they have trouble defining it.

**KP:** What is “left”? You criticize “progressives” for what you see as an excessive focus on victimhood and identity politics, in which people are lumped together according to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and so on, with massive assumptions made about what they want and need. You want universalist values. But isn’t a major feature of today’s left that people are demanding the right to speak up for themselves about their own issues and problems?

**SN:** Traditionally, the left was concerned with universal justice, which included the right to speak up about each group’s own problems but was never confined to it. Thanks to a combination of ideologies that took hold at the end of the 20th century, including neoliberalism and evolutionary psychology, we have come to normalize the idea that



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self-interest is the only thing that motivates us to action. That's actually a right-wing philosophical assumption.

**KP:** You support universalism over what you call tribalism, but where does that leave women and minorities? Universal programs, such as national health insurance, are important and help everybody, but it takes a lot more to give disadvantaged people equal access to good care. Countries that have universal programs, like the United Kingdom, still have big problems with racism and sexism in medical care. Doesn't universalism use white men as the (unconscious) norm?

**SN:** Like other good ideas, universalism can be abused, and politicians have indeed often preached universalism while—more or less unconsciously—practicing tribalism that serves the interests of white men. But the only real basis for arguing against racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination is the universalist question “Is she not

**“We have come to normalize the idea that self-interest is the only thing that motivates us to action.”**

also a human being?” Here I'm quoting the Ghanaian philosopher Ato Sekyi-Otu, whose book *Left Universalism* convincingly argues that universalism is not a European invention but an ideal found in his native Akan as much as anywhere else. The point is that we can only fight oppression by appeals to universal values. Otherwise the struggles have nothing to do with justice but are just a matter of tribes fighting for power.

**KP:** How is tribalism different from people with common problems uniting as an interest group?

**SN:** It isn't different. The question is whether the best thing we can do is to unite as interest groups or allies, as the US and the USSR did as long as they were fighting the Nazis—or can we return to the idea of international solidarity, which once defined the left? That distinguished it from the right, which recognized no deep connections and few obligations to those outside a particular tribe.

We've become used to the idea that people only act upon their own self-interest, but it often is not the case. One of my heroes, Paul Robeson, was the son of an enslaved man. He was subject to racist abuse much of his life. Yet what sparked his own turn to political activism was an encounter with striking Welsh miners.

**KP:** All over the world, reactionary forces are gaining strength in places as disparate as India, Texas, and France. In Germany, where you've lived for many years, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) is moving ahead despite scandals over its Nazi sympathies. Why is this happening?

**SN:** Reactionary forces are indeed gaining strength, because tribalism is the easiest way of reacting to global neoliberalism. To focus on Germany for brevity: The AfD and a left-wing party with some similarities have argued that the current center-left government has substituted symbolism for policies that would increase genuine equality. Gender-sensitive language does not change the fact that women earn 18 percent less than men, on average, or cannot pay their rent where housing is no longer considered a social right, as it was in East Germany. But it's always easier to blame immigration than to imagine creating systemic change. **N**



**SNAPSHOT**  
Bertrand Guay

**Olympic torch relay:** Dancers from the Moulin Rouge welcome the Olympic flame to Paris ahead of the 2024 Summer Games.



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# Back Talk Alexis Grenell



staffer whom Cuomo harassed in ways both pathetic (“I need a hug!”) and creepy (“Got any other piercings?”)—is suing him for gross (in more ways than one) violations of the New York State Human Rights Law, which Cuomo himself signed into law. In April, her lawyers moved for summary judgment, largely based on the attorney general’s report, in effect saying that the defendant’s illegal behavior was already so well documented that everyone should just settle this thing and move on.

But not so fast! In a counterbrief, Hochul’s lawyers argued a few slightly insane things, chief among them that since the executive chamber did not participate in the attorney general’s investigation (of which it was the subject) or have a hand in reviewing its findings, the report is therefore not a sufficiently valid basis for Bennett’s motion. Programming note: Cuomo made a legal referral to the AG’s office for this investigation, and although he does not accept its findings, he legitimized the investigation by authorizing it. The brief further tries to undermine the report by suggesting that the AG and the governor’s

office were “adverse,” which of course they were, by definition. This is like taking a test, getting a bad result, and then denying that you willingly sat for it in the first place. See also: “Election, refusing to accept the results of.”

The brief also dismisses the report as the work of “Independent Investigators” that the AG merely “published,”

as if the state’s highest-ranking law enforcement officer has her own imprint at Random House. The whole reason that James deputized outside counsel to investigate Cuomo’s misconduct was to avoid perceived conflicts, since Cuomo had endorsed her and they’d essentially campaigned as a ticket. It was also an attempt to ensure that a sensitive investigation into the most powerful officer in the state would be conducted by attorneys with the proper expertise and high professional integrity—that it would be the unimpeachable work not of a politician but of

experienced practitioners with no ties to the political establishment, which might hope to influence the outcome.

More broadly, though, the brief introduces the notion that the executive chamber exists as an entity apart from the state, and so the AG’s report is not necessarily representative

## Hochul’s Choice

*New York’s governor has made the baffling decision to use public money to defend the disgraced Andrew Cuomo.*

**R**EADERS OF THIS MAGAZINE WHO LIVE IN NEW YORK are likely so incensed at Kathy Hochul for blowing up congestion pricing earlier this summer—somehow managing to unite the Democratic Socialists of America and the business community in their ire—that it’s hard to imagine what could possibly match such a fantastic display of self-inflicted damage.

Hold on to your shorts.

New York’s taxpayers are already \$8.2 million in the hole for disgraced former governor Andrew Cuomo’s legal bills, which doesn’t even include the cost of defending his associates, who are also being sued for covering up his abuse of public employees. But that’s not even the most offensive part. The latest twist comes to us courtesy of his successor, the woman who would not be governor but for the 168-page report on Cuomo’s extensive misconduct that was released by the office of New York Attorney General Letitia James. That report is now being called into question by lawyers at the firm Morgan Lewis, which has been retained by Hochul’s executive chamber for an initial \$2.5 million to defend the state against the spate of lawsuits that have been filed by Cuomo’s victims. Yes, the governor is using public money to pay a private law firm to potentially challenge her own attorney general’s report, all on behalf of Andrew Cuomo and against his victims, whom the report confirms he harassed.

What is even happening here?

First, the why: James declined to defend the state against Cuomo’s victims. This makes sense for various legal and ethical reasons, but it’s also not that hard to imagine James throwing up into a bucket at the very thought. However, Cuomo is indemnified by the state, since the harassment happened in his official capacity as governor, and therefore he’s entitled to a taxpayer-funded defense.

Charlotte Bennett—the twentysomething



Self-sabotage: Kathy Hochul is frittering away taxpayer money.

**The argument of Hochul’s lawyers is like taking a test, getting a bad result, and then denying that you ever sat for it in the first place.**

of its position. How does that square with the fact that the executive chamber requests opinions from the Department of Law all the time because it's an official agency of the state, even though the attorney general is independently elected? It would seem to suggest that unless the governor herself investigates, no investigation is valid. By this warped logic, if Morgan Lewis says Cuomo didn't do any of the things he clearly did, this should count more than the AG's findings. The reason James conducted an investigation in the first place is that Cuomo's staff failed to follow the

law and their own policy for reporting sexual harassment, facts that Hochul's office accepted as part of a settlement with the US Department of Justice, which did its own investigation.

Hochul has no legal obligation to defend the former governor; she could easily have settled the various lawsuits against him, likely for less than the millions of dollars taxpayers have already forked over. Compounding Cuomo's attacks on the AG's credibility and subjecting his victims to seemingly endless nonsense is a choice. **N**



SNAPSHOT

Munir Uz Zaman



## Battling Inequality in Bangladesh

Police fire tear gas and rubber bullets at students in Dhaka on July 11, during a protest against the government's preferential quota system for civil service jobs. After violent crackdowns on students and citizens, the country's top court ruled to scale back the quotas.

### By the Numbers



**15.7M**

Number of jobs created under President Biden's administration

**6.5M**

Number of unemployed people in America right now

**8.5M**

Number of job openings

**3%**

The inflation rate as of June 2024

**3.3%**

The inflation rate in 2023

**37.9M**

Number of Americans living in poverty in 2021 and in 2022, the latest year for which census data is available

**73%**

Portion of Americans who said strengthening the economy should be a top priority for the Biden-Harris administration and Congress

CALVIN TRILLIN

## DeadlinePoet



### Manchin Is Leaving the Senate

Joe Manchin's giving up his seat.

Next January, he'll be gone.

Will that bring change? It's hard to tell.

Just which side was Joe Manchin on?

# Q&A

## Brandon Johnson

“The Chicago mayor is the most protested mayor in the entire country,” says Brandon Johnson, the chief executive of the nation’s third-largest city. As a veteran labor activist who has organized his share of demonstrations, Johnson’s good with that. *The Nation* spoke with the mayor as he prepared for his city to host the 2024 Democratic National Convention, which will see its share of protests and which will feature added intrigue now that President Joe Biden has dropped out of the race and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris to take his place on the ticket. But Johnson has not been fretting about the uncertainties: He remains confident that Chicago will host a great convention. He expects a blend of pomp and protest, and he is looking to spread his vision for progressive governance on everything from raising wages for tipped workers in Chicago to achieving a ceasefire in Gaza. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

—John Nichols

**JN: Are you prepared for everything that’s coming your way?**

**BJ:** Well, that’s the beauty of this moment, right? You have someone like me who’s deeply tethered to grassroots movements, political organizing, working with faith and labor. Many of the individuals who are applying for permits to protest, I’ve stood alongside. And we’ll have delegates and people coming from all over the world not just to celebrate the leadership of President Biden and Vice President Harris, but also to propel us into the next stretch with some energy, right? So we’re talking about safe and peaceful protests while also having an energetic, vibrant convention.

Chicago is designed for this type of complexity, for moments where these types of contradictions exist. This is the city that said “Yes, we can!” [recalling the 2008 presidential campaign of Chicagoan Barack Obama] and “Keep hope alive!” [recalling the 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns of Chicago’s Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr.]. But it was also the city where Dr. King said [something along the lines of] “Ain’t no place like it.” He had never seen the type of visceral, in-your-face resistance and racism [that he encountered at demonstrations in Chicago]. There were places in the Deep South where you had your sheriffs and you had your dogs, and you had people who were obviously opposed to equal rights for Black folks. For the city of Chicago, that hatred was right on the block. It wasn’t confined to some person who had a powerful political position, whether it was in law enforcement or government or

business. This was just everyday people who live on the block, who would be in your face making it very clear: “We don’t want you here.” So that was the city of Chicago, as Dr. King described it, though he also said [paraphrasing his 1966 speech to Chicago community organizations], “You figure it out in Chicago, you can do it anywhere in the world.”

**JN: The year 1968 is top of mind for the media, and many top Democrats, because things got wild for the city then. Are you worried there could be chaos again?**

**BJ:** No, because I’m different from the mayor who was around during that time. So there’s a much different approach that I’ll take—again, peaceful, safe, but energetic and vibrant, all at the same time. The First Amendment is not just fundamental to our democracy; Black liberation doesn’t become a possibility or even a reality without the ability to protest the government. And so, for me, we get to show up at the convention and lay out our vision for working people in this city, while hearing from the voices of protesters who want to reach the broad swath of leadership that makes up the Democratic Party.

**JN: That’s an important point. Many of the people protesting want the party to do better. It’s not necessarily that they want the party to lose. They want the party to be more of something.**

**BJ:** And if there’s anyone who understands that, it’s a Black man who’s the mayor of the city of Chicago. Wanting the government to do more for people who have been stuffed in the margins for decades—that is our reasonable service.

**JN: Let’s talk about one challenge you’ve faced on your City Council, and that was the Gaza vote. You had to break the tie. Tell me about that.**



QUINN HARRIS / GETTY IMAGES

**BJ:** I thought about how the generation that made it possible for me to become mayor understood Chicago's role in a global context. Black political leaders were taking a position against South African apartheid; they understood Black liberation from a global [perspective].

[Nearly 40 years ago,] when Mayor Harold Washington declared the city to be a sanctuary, it was in the context of Ronald Reagan's so-called war on communism and the destabilization of Central and South America. And so that's the perspective and the mindset that I bring to the fifth floor [of City Hall]: Chicago is a global city, [and] our decisions have ramifications around the world.

So, in October, [the City Council] condemned in the most fierce terms the terrorist attack against the Israeli people. And then, as death [totals in Gaza] became increasingly more horrific, [it was important for us to raise] our voices. Calling for the release of hostages and a ceasefire, for us, is in keeping with our birthright as Chicagoans.

This is part of a long history of progressive Black and brown and white voices who understand their assignment, and that assignment is not confined to building affordable homes in Chicago, providing behavioral health services in Chicago, providing opportunities for young people in Chicago. We also understand that we have to tell the world that it has a moral responsibility and obligation to make sure that we're protecting people on the West Side of Chicago and in Gaza—that we see liberation and freedom in the same context, whether it's people who are suffering from abject poverty or those who are suffering from a foreign policy that's causing death and trauma and terror. So we get to say "Ceasefire!" We get to be the voice of those voices that are not heard, and we get to walk into a very profound, unique tradition as Chicagoans to provide that type of moral clarity for the world.

**JN: Let's talk about how you got elected mayor. You started at 3.2 percent in the polls, yet you won. It's often said that the Democratic Party must maximize its ability to build coalitions. It's got to build multiracial, multi-ethnic coalitions around a working-class message—and you did that.**

**BJ:** We did do that. It's very humbling. But what was so potent was that, although we had a small base when we started, the base already reflected the coalition that we would need to win. So labor was already there, faith was already there, community-based organizations were already there. We already had elected officials on the ground [and a] multicultural, intergenerational base—all of the ingredients for a campaign deeply tethered to our values. When I announced, I did not announce alone. I didn't initiate until we actually got buy-in and support from the coalition, and then we were able to magnify our values—positions that people were already in agreement with. They just wanted to know that there were people and a person willing to elevate and lift those values, unapologetic, with moral clarity and with the pathway to be able to deliver.

**JN: It was a tough race from start to finish, but you seemed to enjoy it.**

**BJ:** The beauty of organizing prior to becoming a candidate is that there's nothing that someone can say that I have not heard.

One sort of "negative" hit against me was that I was a union member—you know, "Because he worked for the Chicago Teachers Union, there's no way that he can be independent." What's so hypocritical, so asinine, about that particular framing [is that] no one said that when a business leader ran—that this person could not be an objective arbiter and a fiduciary, responsible mayor because they're too attached to business, corporate interests, policing, right?

The other attack was when they "exposed" the fact that my wife

and I were on a payment plan for a water bill. It highlighted the fact that, between my wife and I, we did everything right, working hard, and the ends still don't always meet at the end of each month—like a lot of working people in Chicago. If it's not your water bill, it could be a different utility. It could be a car bill, [or] a number of things where you're just moving things around just to exist in Chicago. And that actually is where my motivation is centered around: the person or the persons who are getting up every single day to make life work for them and their family. All they want is to know that someone is committed to making key investments in their lives, prioritizing them so that their lives can be far more sustainable.

**JN: It hasn't always been that way with mayors of Chicago.**

**BJ:** The people of Chicago have witnessed some of the most horrific forms of governance. You're talking about anti-business and anti-Black. Think about this for a moment: Imagine a politician saying that the way we're going to move our city forward is, we're going to sell off all of our public assets. We're going to shut down our public accommodations, we're going to tear people's pensions apart, and we're going to give it over to billionaires—and that's how we're going to build a better, safer Chicago. Who's winning on that freaking platform? But that's what's been done by previous administrations: closing mental health clinics, shutting down public schools, shutting down public housing, raiding pensions of working people, [and] totally destabilizing our economy in a way where the wealth gap [has] continued to grow.

**JN: You've made closing that gap a priority.**

**BJ:** I'm fighting to abolish the subminimum wage so tipped workers get a raise [as they did on July 1]. They're going to continue to get a raise until they are actually matched with the minimum wage in the city of Chicago, plus their tips. We [also] doubled paid time off for workers, so now we have one of the most substantive, comprehensive paid leave—sick leave—[policies] for 1.1 million workers. We did that within the first six months of my administration.

On hiring our young people, we saw a 20 percent increase last year from the previous administration, and we added an additional \$80 million on top of what we did the previous year to hire up to 28,000 young people. And we're going to continue to work to do that. On policing, I made a commitment to hiring 200 detectives within my first term. We're going to complete that by the end of this year, and we're way ahead of the end of the first term. And [my administration has budgeted] a quarter of a billion dollars for the unhoused crisis, \$100 million for violence prevention, and a \$1.25 billion bond for economic development and housing—the largest such bond in the

history of Chicago—to build homes and create economic development on the west and south sides of the city, places that have been marginalized for decades.

**JN: And yet you'll get no credit from Republicans. Republicans have a standard line on cities, and it revolves around claims that they are overwhelmed by crime. That doesn't fit with the data, though, does it?**

**BJ:** Not even close.... The safest cities in America do one thing: They invest in people. That's what we're doing. And to your larger point, the city of Chicago is not even in the top 20 in terms of the most violent cities. In fact, since I've been in office, we've had two consecutive years of reduction in homicides and shootings, while also making critical investments in the neighborhoods.

There's [still] a lot of work to be done. We have just this ungodly amount of access to illegal weapons.... The ridiculousness around the Republican Party in particular, of not being willing to have real comprehensive gun control in this country, is just mind-blowing, because these are the same [people] that would want to critique a city like mine when violence does happen. It just shows you how disingenuous they are.

**JN: They're also disingenuous on immigration, particularly people**

**“We have to make sure that we're protecting people on the West Side of Chicago and in Gaza.”**

**like Texas Governor Greg Abbott who are flying migrants to Chicago.**

**BJ:** What Governor Abbott is doing to our country is one of the most iniquitous acts that I've seen in modern political history.

**JN: You chose that word very carefully.**

**BJ:** I'm trying to remain, you know, tethered to my faith here and try not to use vulgarity. However, it is shameful what he's doing. The fact that Abbott was sending the majority of migrants to me and New York Mayor Eric Adams, it tells you where his heart really is. That is wicked, because

these families are dealing with very severe and harsh economic circumstances. And then you have Abbott, who doesn't want to cooperate with the rest of the country. It's one of the most petulant acts that I've seen as a politician.

**JN: You recognize a moral component in these debates?**

**BJ:** I'm governed not just by my ideology but my responsibility to something bigger than myself. The Bible says that your treasure and your heart must be aligned: Wherever your treasure is, your heart's going to be also. And what I have worked to do is to show that progressive leadership, through the lens of Black liberation theology, shows up not just boldly; it shows up with one of the most powerful forces, and that's love. **N**

OUR BACK PAGES/RICHARD KREITNER

## The Selfish Free

The Nation *raged when the nation closed its border.*

**T**he 100th anniversary of the Immigration Act of 1924 came and went this spring with little fanfare. Perhaps that's because it would have been difficult to tell a simple, linear story about the law, which severely limited immigration to the United States from Southern and Eastern Europe and much of Asia. The most egregious provisions were modified in 1965, but the quota system introduced by the bill remains in place today—while the nativism that fueled its passage has come surging back into American life.

*The Nation* immediately grasped the implications of the law. When eugenics advocate and Washington Representative Albert Johnson introduced it in Congress, the magazine warned that it was “expressly designed to restrict future immigrants virtually to the so-called ‘superior races’ of Teutonic, Scandinavian, and Anglo-Saxon countries.... The Johnson scheme is not only bad science and poor justice; it is definite discrimination against Roman Catholics and Jews. The measure should not be called the Johnson bill, but the Ku Klux Klan bill.”

A subsequent editorial, “Land of the Noble Free,” began by noting that “Americans are all immigrants,” with the notable exception of Indigenous peoples. “There is no American race; there is not even the established claim of centuries to plead the primary right of any one stock.... Whence comes this myth that our country is the private property of some one racial stock? Whence come the arrogant assumptions of those who, like [Johnson], want to preserve a



‘racial homogeneity’ which has never existed?”

The editorial continued, “It is a tragic thing that this country, built on the sweat and aspirations of immigrants, should so soon be fencing itself about with a wall. We are becoming the great example of national selfishness in all the world. While we bar human beings from our shores we bully weaker countries into granting American capital privileges alien to their national interests. We force Mexico to revise its oil laws, tell China how to use its customs, ask Russia to reconsider

its view of private property, and everywhere proclaim the ‘open door’—for American capital—as an American policy. ‘Equal rights and opportunities, *for capital*, all over the world’—what a bitter slogan for America when a hungry peasant from South Italy, a persecuted Jew from Rumania, an Armenian whose home is a heap of ashes finds the door to America slammed in his face!”

After the bill passed overwhelmingly in Congress and was signed into law by President Calvin Coolidge, *The Nation* published a letter from a reader suggesting that “a congressional committee be appointed and instructed to proceed to Bedloe’s Island, New York... and wrench from the base of the statue of the Goddess of Liberty the bronze tablet to Emma Lazarus”—the one bearing her words welcoming the “huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”

“Either that,” the writer said, “or reverse the position of the goddess and turn her back to Europe.” **N**

# 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 Q** — that combines both CoQ10 and PQQ to support maximum cellular energy and the normal growth of new mitochondria. **Ultra Accel Q** is the first of its kind to address both problems and is already creating huge demand.

In fact, demand has been so overwhelming that inventories repeatedly sell out. But a closer look at **Ultra Accel Q** reveals there are good reasons why sales are booming.

## Science Confirms the Many Benefits of PQQ

The medical journal *Biochemical Phar-*

*macology* 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 Q** 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 Q** 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 Q Multiply Your Energy?

**Ultra Accel Q** 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 Q** 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 Q** 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."

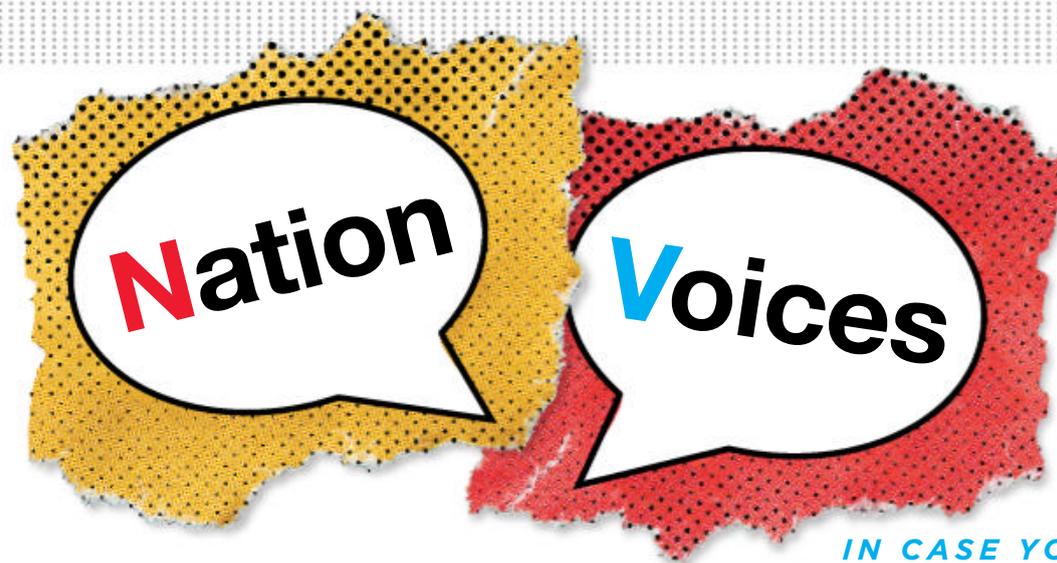
## How To Get Ultra Accel Q

This is the official nationwide release of **Ultra Accel Q** 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 Q**. 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 **1-800-998-3468** right now and use promo code **NATUAQ824** to secure your own supply.

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



IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

VOICES / ELLA FANGER

## A Win for Workers

*This union victory is part of a broader movement to bring high-paying, good-quality manufacturing jobs to the South.*

**O**RGANIZED LABOR IS IN THE MIDST OF A fierce campaign to make inroads into the auto industry in the South, most recently at the Mercedes plant in Vance, Alabama, where on May 17, 56 percent of workers voted against joining the United Auto Workers. But a few months earlier, workers 100 miles away in Anniston, Alabama, unionized and won a historic contract at an EV bus manufacturing plant run by New Flyer, the largest manufacturer of transit buses in North America. In January, a majority of the approximately 600 workers at the plant signed cards to join the International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried, Machine and Furniture Workers (IUE-CWA). Over the past couple of years, workers at the New Flyer plants in Kentucky and New York have also unionized, adding these plants to the IUE-CWA's two longtime shops in Minnesota, making it the largest union in the public transit bus manufacturing sector in the country, with over 2,350 members.

While Southern states have been chipping away at workers' protections for decades, New Flyer workers like Shannon Franks know that unions have long been the way to ensure well-paying, good-quality jobs in the region. Her dad left the mountain town of Ider, Alabama (population 732), to find work and landed in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he got a union job with the Tennessee Valley Authority that paid for him to attend electrical training school. "They gave him a chance," she says. Now Franks works at the Anniston plant installing motors in electric buses. When she and her coworkers won their union at New Flyer, "it was like history repeating itself," she says.

Just six months after the organizing drive officially began last November, New Flyer workers ratified a contract with significant pay raises, restrictions on forced overtime, and expanded vacation time. "The wage package alone is life-changing for me," says Ryan Masters, an employee at the Anniston plant. "Now I'll be able to save up some [vacation] time and spend more time with family for those pivotal moments."

Masters didn't want to sign a union card at first. Growing up in the South, he had always heard that unions were "greedy." But after a couple of weeks of talking to organizers and his pro-union coworkers, "I figured out that a union is not an outside organization," he says. "It's just a coalition of the workers sticking together."

The rapid road to contract ratification was made possible by a years-long campaign by the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and a coalition of community groups, including Jobs to Move America (JMA), a nonprofit policy center founded in 2013 to ensure that the jobs created by government-funded transit projects are high-quality and serve marginalized communities. In 2022, New Flyer signed an agreement with the coalition to provide training opportunities and hiring pathways for workers from historically disadvantaged groups. The company also agreed to voluntarily recognize unions that formed at its plants—meaning that New Flyer workers weren't subjected to union-busting tactics like captive-audience meetings during their recent organizing drive, unlike the workers at the Mercedes plant to the west.

The workers at Mercedes in Vance and New Flyer in Anniston are part of an industry whose presence is growing in the South, where roughly 40 percent of the country's electric vehicle manufacturing jobs and investment dollars are concentrated. Much of the Biden administration's historic investments in green energy tech have flowed to the South, where companies like New Flyer build zero-emissions buses for New York, Boston, Los Angeles, and other cities that are electrifying their public transit systems.

New Flyer workers hope their victory will boost organizing in the South by the very workers who are building the cars and buses that will power the green transition in our economy. "This is for all of us," Franks says. "It's huge for the state of Alabama."

Erica Iheme, a co-executive

**"The wage package alone is life-changing for me. Now I'll be able to save up some [vacation] time and spend more time with family."**

director of JMA, says the agreement with New Flyer sets a new precedent for jobs in the public transit and green manufacturing sectors. “We want to meet this moment to make sure that labor standards and good jobs are attached to this new type of work.”

In 2013, New Flyer won a \$508 million contract from the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority to provide up to 900 buses and signed on to JMA’s US Employment Plan, a policy tool created by the nonprofit to encourage companies to commit to upholding certain standards for working conditions and community engagement, pledging to provide more than 50 jobs above a specified pay rate at its facility in Ontario, California. In the following years, after talking with workers at New Flyer’s facility and reviewing their pay stubs, JMA grew concerned that the company wasn’t upholding its commitments to the agreement. New Flyer had pledged to pay workers at least \$18.35 an hour, but the documents reviewed by JMA indicated that workers were making \$17 or less when they started at the Ontario facility. In 2019, the organization filed a fraud complaint against New Flyer alleging that it was misrepresenting the value of the wages and benefits it had promised to provide to its workers as a condition of receiving municipal funds.

At the same time, a coalition of community groups in Alabama, including JMA, local shops of CWA and other unions, and faith and environmental organizations, launched a public campaign to highlight the effects of low pay and discriminatory working conditions on New Flyer workers. The coalition publicized an Alabama A&M University study that found there was a pay gap between Black and white workers at New Flyer’s Anniston plant and determined that Black workers were more likely to be denied promotions and get injured at work. Coalition members attended the American Public Transportation Association conference that year to raise awareness about the study and distributed an open letter from current and former Black workers describing racist treatment at New Flyer. Employees appeared before local transit boards that were considering granting contracts to New Flyer and testified about the impact that the company’s low wages and benefits had on them and their communities.

At the time, New Flyer spokesperson Lindy Norris told *In These Times* that the company disputed a number of the claims in the open letter and that JMA had been waging “a very public, aggressive and antagonistic attack on [New Flyer].” She added, “We take any and all allegations of racism, sexism, toxic workforce culture, and pay inequity seriously,

and have investigated singular and atypical incidents following multiple allegations made by JMA.”

In 2022, New Flyer settled the LA Metro lawsuit for \$7 million while denying any wrongdoing and signed a community benefits agreement with JMA covering its plants in Alabama and California. (New Flyer’s operations in California are now mostly dormant.) A year later, Will Tucker, JMA’s Southern director, wrote that the agreement was “having a noticeable impact” at the company, including its new system for discrimination complaints, enhanced safety training, and hiring pipelines for workers from historically disadvantaged communities. Erica Itheme of JMA said, “The partnership with New Flyer gave us, as Southern workers, hope that we can create not only quality products and build out this infrastructure but also [that] we can do it in a space of good jobs and collaboration.” The company also signed a neutrality agreement with CWA to voluntarily recognize unions that were created at all of its plants. IUE-CWA’s president, Carl Kennebrew, says the union’s partnership with JMA was “crucial” and that JMA’s policy tools and campaign strategy had helped ensure that New Flyer maintained neutrality.

Organizers at the Anniston plant see the recent win as part of a broader movement to bring good green-economy jobs to the South, even as Alabama is now trying to discourage other neutrality agreements. On May 13, Governor Kay Ivey signed a law preventing companies that voluntarily recognize unions from receiving economic incentives from the state.

Ryan Masters, the New Flyer employee, hopes that the fight at the company will help end the “Southern discount” on labor costs. “I’m tired of being paid less than somebody who lives six hours from me,” he says.

Because of the training programs that New Flyer agreed to create in the new contract, Shannon Franks, the assembly worker, will be able to become an electrician, just like her dad. “When I told him that they’re going to have an electrical apprenticeship program and I’m top of the list to go, it just made it full circle,” she says. “If it wasn’t for the union, I wouldn’t have that opportunity.” **N**

*Ella Fanger is a writer, researcher, and labor organizer based in Brooklyn.*

VOICES / MARY TUMA

## Deadly Bans

*A new study found that Texas’s 2021 abortion ban “is responsible” for a rise in infant mortality rates.*

**B**EFORE THOUSANDS OF ANTI-ABORTION PROTESTERS at the Texas Capitol in 2023, Republican Governor Greg Abbott brazenly touted his party’s passage of draconian abortion laws as “life-saving.” “We promised we would protect the life of every child with a heartbeat, and we did. I signed a law doing exactly that,” Abbott told the crowd at the annual Texas Rally for Life event. “All of you are lifesavers, and thousands of newborn babies are the result of your heroic efforts.”



Abbott's words now ring particularly hollow in light of a new study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* revealing that infant deaths in Texas starkly increased following the passage of SB 8, which bars abortion care at the first sign of embryonic cardiac activity, typically around six weeks of pregnancy, and encourages private citizens to sue anyone suspected of providing an abortion, deterring the vast majority of care in the state. The 2021 law was the most restrictive abortion ban in the country prior to the Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.

Researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found that infant deaths in Texas rose by nearly 13 percent in 2022. By comparison, such deaths—defined in the study as occurring under 12 months of age—increased less than 2 percent in the rest of the United States.

“We found that infant mortality increased pretty substantially in Texas but not in the rest of the country,” says Alison Gemmill, an assistant professor in the Bloomberg School's Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health and one of the study's lead authors. “It speaks to how these restrictive laws can have horrific and devastating effects on infant health, pregnant people, and on families overall—unintended or not.”

While many reproductive health studies (including ones that show a link between infant mortality and abortion bans) show correlations between factors, this one notably finds a direct causation, providing important evidence of the law's dire impacts. “This study shows that the state policy is responsible for these deaths—there is a very, very strong causal link here,” Gemmill says.

The research is said to be one of the first large-scale studies to highlight the spillover effects of anti-abortion laws in the United States on maternal and infant health. By analyzing monthly death-certificate data, researchers were able to isolate and examine outcomes of what would happen with and without the law.

Congenital anomalies—birth defects that can include fatal conditions of the heart, spine, and brain—are the leading cause of death among infants, the researchers found. Such deaths spiked nearly 23 percent in Texas in 2022, compared with a decrease of 3.1 percent in the rest of the country during the same period. Glaringly, Texas's abortion law provides no exception for fatal fetal anomalies, which are typically diagnosed later than six weeks.

Those who are unable to access abortion care were forced to “experience the physical risks of continuing the pregnancy and the emotional and psychological hardships of losing a pregnancy in this way,” says Gracia Sierra, a data scientist who focuses on infant mortality and reproductive health at Resound Research for Reproductive Health in Texas. “The process can be difficult and painful, and it ultimately takes away their freedom to make their own decisions about their reproductive life.”

Responding to the study, Abbott's office doubled down on its anti-abortion agenda. It applauded a different Johns Hopkins study that found that SB 8 may have resulted in an additional 10,000 births. “Texas is a pro-life state, and Governor Abbott will always fight for the most vulnerable among us,” Andrew Mahaleris, a spokesperson for his office, told *The Nation*. “Texas passed a critical law to save the innocent unborn, and now thousands of children have been given a chance at life.”

While Abbott and anti-abortion advocates continue to laud the measure as lifesaving, in reality this means perpetuating forced

births—no matter the outcome of that birth.

“It's never been clearer that the term ‘pro-life’ is a farce,” says Nicolas Kabat, a staff attorney at the Center for Reproductive Rights. “Politicians are forcing women to carry doomed pregnancies and give birth to babies who will live only a few painful minutes or hours. This suffering is man-made: It's being inflicted by Texas lawmakers.”

Women who recently fought the state in court after being denied abortion care despite severe pregnancy complications are all too familiar with Texas's forced-birth policy. *Zurawski v. Texas* sought to provide much-needed clarity to the abortion law's vague medical exceptions.

Samantha Casiano, one of 22 women in the lawsuit, was forced to watch her baby slowly die. Diagnosed with anencephaly, a lethal condition, her child would be born missing parts of its brain and skull. The mother of four lacked the resources to travel for abortion care and had no choice but to carry her doomed pregnancy to term. In court, Casiano tearfully recounted how she watched her baby gasp for air for four hours before dying. “I told her, ‘I am so sorry I couldn't release you to heaven sooner.’ There was no mercy for her,”

Casiano said. The trauma will haunt her and her family forever, Kabat explained.

In May, the all-Republican Texas Supreme Court failed to provide clarity on the anti-abortion law or grant any relief for those who might suffer the same fate as Casiano, ruling in the case that pregnant people cannot have abortions for fetal diagnoses of any kind, even lethal ones. The Center for Reproductive Rights' Kabat, who represented the plaintiffs in *Zurawski*, says the lawsuit is a stark reminder that the state is uninterested in taking responsibility for the deaths that Casiano and others were forced to endure.

Gemmill says that the study is the first of many to come. Researchers are now looking at infant mortality rates in the dozen-plus other states in the US that have banned abortion care. They predict that the results of those studies will be similar to what they've found in Texas. “Unless we get a flood of resources for patients to seek care across state lines,” Gemmill says, “I really don't see this increase in infant deaths changing. I don't have any reason to think this wouldn't persist into the future.” **N**

*Mary Tuma is a Texas-based freelance journalist who covers reproductive rights.*

# Will This Strange Antarctic Squid Solve America's Memory Crisis?

*New Deep Sea Discovery Proven to Be The #1 Natural Enhancer of Memory and Focus*

Half a mile beneath the icy waters off the coast of Argentina lives one of the most remarkable creatures in the world.

Fully grown, they're less than 2 feet long and weigh under 10 pounds...

But despite their small size, this strange little squid can have a bigger positive impact on your brain health than any other species on the planet.

They are the single richest source of a vital "brain food" that 250 million Americans are starving for, according to a study published in the British Medical Journal.

It's a safe, natural compound called DHA – one of the building blocks of your brain. It helps children grow their brains significantly bigger during development. And in adults, it protects brain cells from dying as they get older.

Because DHA is so important, lacking enough of it is not only dangerous to your overall health but could be directly related to your brain shrinking with age.

With more than 16 million Americans suffering from age-associated cognitive impairment, it's clear to a top US doctor that's where the problem lies.

Regenerative medicine specialist Dr. Al Sears, says thankfully, "there's still hope for seniors. Getting more of this vital brain food can make a life changing difference for your mental clarity, focus, and memory."

Dr. Sears, a highly-acclaimed, board-certified doctor— who has published more than 500 studies and written 4 bestselling books — says we should be able to get enough DHA in our diets... but we don't anymore.

"For thousands of years, fish were a great natural source of DHA. But due to industrial fish farming practices, the fish we eat and the fish oils you see at the store are no longer as nutrient-dense as they once were," he explains.

DHA is backed by hundreds of studies for supporting razor sharp focus, extraordinary mental clarity, and a lightning quick memory... especially in seniors.

So, if you're struggling with focus, mental clarity, or memory as

you get older...

Dr. Sears recommends a different approach.

## THE SECRET TO A LASTING MEMORY

Research has shown that our paleo ancestors were able to grow bigger and smarter brains by eating foods rich in one ingredient — DHA.

"Our hippocampus thrives off DHA and grows because of it," explains Dr. Sears. "Without DHA, our brains would shrink, and our memories would quickly fade."

A groundbreaking study from the University of Alberta confirmed this. Animals given a diet rich in DHA saw a 29% boost in their hippocampus — the part of the brain responsible for learning and memory. As a result, these animals became smarter.

Another study on more than 1,500 seniors found that those whose brains were deficient in DHA had significantly smaller brains — a characteristic of accelerated aging and weakened memory.

## PEOPLE'S BRAINS ARE SHRINKING AND THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW IT

Dr. Sears uncovered that sometime during the 1990s, fish farmers stopped giving their animals a natural, DHA-rich diet and began feeding them a diet that was 70% vegetarian.

"It became expensive for farmers to feed fish what they'd eat in the wild," explains Dr. Sears. "But in order to produce DHA, fish need to eat a natural, marine diet, like the one they'd eat in the wild."

"Since fish farmers are depriving these animals of their natural diet, DHA is almost nonexistent in the oils they produce."

"And since more than 80% of fish oil comes from farms, it's no wonder the country is experiencing a memory crisis. Most people's brains are shrinking and they don't even know it."

So, what can people do to improve their memory and brain function in the most effective way possible?

Dr. Sears says, "Find a quality



**MEMORY-RESTORING SENSATION:** The memory-saving oil in this Antarctic squid restores decades of lost brain power starting in just 24 hours.

DHA supplement that doesn't come from a farmed source. That will protect your brain cells and the functions they serve well into old age."

Dr. Sears and his team worked tirelessly for over 2 years developing a unique brain-boosting formula called **Omega Rejuvenol**.

It's made from the most powerful source of DHA in the ocean, squid and krill — two species that cannot be farmed.

According to Dr. Sears, these are the purest and most potent sources of DHA in the world, because they haven't been tampered with. "**Omega Rejuvenol** is sourced from the most sustainable fishery in Antarctica. You won't find this oil in any stores."

## MORE IMPRESSIVE RESULTS

Already, the formula has sold more than 850,000 bottles. And for a good reason, too. Satisfied customers can't stop raving about the memory-boosting benefits of quality-sourced DHA oil.

"The first time I took it, I was amazed. The brain fog I struggled with for years was gone within 24 hours. The next day, I woke up with the energy and mental clarity of a new man," says Owen R.

"I remember what it was like before I started taking **Omega Rejuvenol**... the lack of focus... the dull moods... the slippery memory... but now my mind is as clear as it's ever been," says Estelle H.

"My mood and focus are at an all-

time high. I've always had trouble concentrating, and now I think I know why," raves Bernice J. "The difference that **Omega Rejuvenol** makes couldn't be more noticeable."

And 70-year-old Mark K. says, "My focus and memory are back to age-30 levels."

These are just a handful of the thousands of reviews Dr. Sears regularly receives thanks to his breakthrough memory formula, **Omega Rejuvenol**.

## WHERE TO FIND OMEGA REJUVENOL

To secure bottles of this brain-booster, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-443-0714**. "It takes time to manufacture these bottles," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship the product directly to customers who need it most."

Dr. Sears feels so strongly about this product, he is offering a 100%, money-back guarantee on every order. "Send back any used or unused bottles within 90 days and I'll rush you a refund," says Dr. Sears.

The Hotline is taking orders for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number may be shut down to allow for inventory restocking.

Call **1-800-443-0714** to secure your limited supply of **Omega Rejuvenol**. Readers of this publication immediately qualify for a steep discount, but supplies are limited. To take advantage of this great offer use Promo Code **NATOM824** when you call.



The Republican National Convention opened and closed in Pennsylvania today, lasting approximately seven minutes.

OPPART/STEVE BRODNER  
**Party of One**

The RNC called for “unity”—for Trump.



**Charlie Kirk**

Extreme MAGA youth organizer

“We are going to work harder than ever before to chase ballots.”



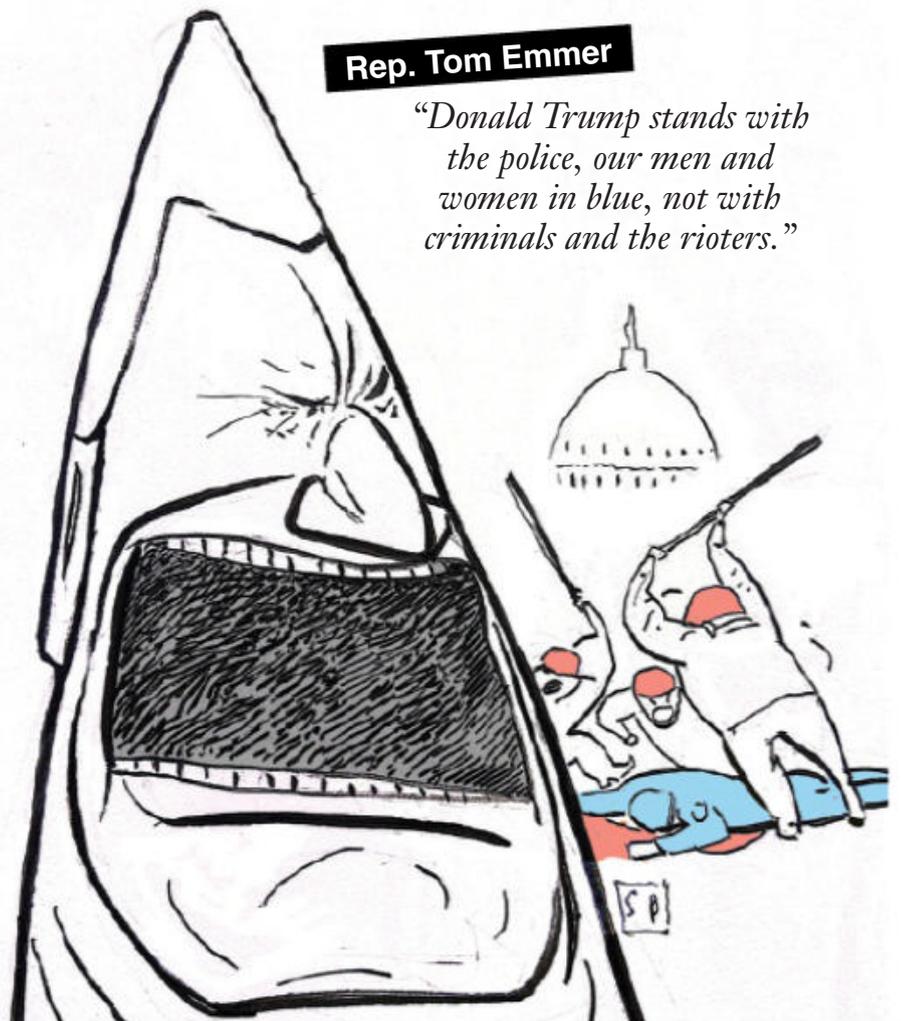
**J.D. Vance**

“I’m a ‘Never Trump’ guy.”  
“I never liked him.”  
“You’re an idiot if you voted for him.”

“Might be America’s Hitler.”  
“Might be a cynical asshole.”  
“Cultural heroin.”  
“Noxious.” “Reprehensible.”

**Rep. Tom Emmer**

“Donald Trump stands with the police, our men and women in blue, not with criminals and the rioters.”



**Nikki Haley**

“I want to make one thing perfectly clear: Donald Trump has my full endorsement, period.”





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**EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW**

# HARRIS STEPS UP

The future of American democracy could rest on the vice president's shoulders. That's why it's more important than ever to understand who Kamala Harris is.

JOAN WALSH

**I**SAT DOWN WITH KAMALA HARRIS ON A SCORCHING JUNE AFTERNOON, ONE OF A nearly week-long string of 90-degree-plus days. Staffers escorted me to a well-cooled hotel room that had been made over into an interview chamber. I sat at a spare table where a bed would normally be. It was draped in one of those forlorn table skirts and set with two empty glasses, and the window's thick curtains were closed to the midday sun. It was a little bleak.

I heard the rapid staccato click of high heels. Harris walked in, greeted me warmly, and immediately yanked open the curtains. She was not afraid of the heat. She wanted sunshine in here.

She is about to get much more sunshine—and heat—than she asked for. A

few days after our conversation, President Joe Biden had the worst debate performance of his career and sent the Democratic Party into a crisis over his ability to win the 2024 election against Donald Trump. Pundits and more than a few Democratic leaders clamored for Biden to step aside, as polling showed his path to a second term drying up. On July 21, Biden announced that he was suspending his campaign for president and endorsed Harris as nominee soon after. Prominent Democrats quickly lined up behind her as her work wooing Biden's delegates began.

Harris and I spoke when she was still trying to win a second term for Biden, dispatched to reach voters who were among the most critical to his reelection. In the days before I met with her, I was repeatedly told: Do not suggest that she's "found her voice" in the two years since the ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, when the Supreme Court robbed American women of rights we've enjoyed

for half a century—although she kicked off her *Dobbs* anniversary tour the day we spoke. Do not say that she's "having a moment" on the 2024 campaign trail. Or ask if there's any "daylight" between her and the president over Israel's brutal retaliation against Hamas in the wake of the October 7 massacre. (On policy, there isn't, though Harris has been more critical in public about the mercilessness of Israel's response and the toll on Palestinian civilians than Biden has.) Do not ask whether anything "surprises" her after a long career as a district attorney, an attorney general, a senator, and now as the nation's first Black, first Asian, and first woman vice president. This struck me as a defensive tic, a reaction to the feeling that she has repeatedly been underestimated. (That feeling simmers under the surface of our conversation as well.)

I was warned against going down these paths not just by her staff but by some of the friends who've known her for decades. They were not protecting her; they were protecting me—from her impatience with what she thinks are stupid questions she's heard time and again.

So I struggled with how to phrase a question about whether *Dobbs* has given her a new mission. I think I maybe even used the dreaded word "moment."



**“I see a Black woman who got tired of trying to please everybody and just said, ‘Fuck it.’”**

—Senator Laphonza Butler

**Unburdened by what has been:**

Harris overcame harsh early coverage of her vice presidency and found a role as Biden’s emissary to a host of crucial voting blocs.

things I’m utterly in awe of is the number of people who have decided, ‘I’m gonna tell my story, because I don’t want other people to go through this,’” Harris told me. “I said to Hadley, ‘I’ve seen, in moments of crisis, the universe has a way of revealing the heroes.’”

After Biden’s catastrophic debate performance and declining poll numbers, the Democratic Party needs a hero. Can Harris pull it off? Senior Democrats as well as some progressives who had been pushing Biden to stay in the race have lined up behind her, including former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senator Elizabeth Warren, Bill and Hillary Clinton, and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. At press time, former President Barack Obama had not endorsed Harris, yet several of Harris’s strongest presumed rivals for the nomination, including California Governor Gavin Newsom and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, had. ActBlue reported raising nearly \$50 million in small donations in the seven hours after Biden’s announcement. Now the way in which she navigates this unprecedented situation could mean the difference not only between getting herself or Trump into the White House—but between democracy and autocracy.

Back in New York, Harris resisted the idea that her past two years represent any sort of evolution into a stronger leadership role. So I flipped to what her longtime friend, California Senator Laphonza Butler, told me. Butler didn’t see some post-*Dobbs* awakening in Harris either, but she mentioned one thing she thought might be new, and I shared it with Harris: “I see a Black woman who got sick and tired of trying to please everybody and just said, ‘Fuck it. I’m not gonna make everybody happy. I just have to be me.’”

Harris responded with the trademark laugh that’s launched a thousand

“I appreciate that perhaps for some who weren’t paying attention, this seems like a ‘moment,’” Harris allowed. “But there have been many moments in my career which have been about my commitment to these kinds of fights, whether they’re on the front pages of newspapers or not.”

The problem, though, is that Harris could use this redemption story. Her 2020 presidential primary bid went poorly. (Full disclosure: My daughter, Nora, was her Iowa political director in that race. I also worked with her sister, Maya Harris, at an Oakland nonprofit 25 years ago.) The first year or so of her vice presidency didn’t shine. The past two years have been different: Since *Dobbs*, she has been Biden’s top ambassador on issues of reproductive justice—yes, unlike Biden, she’ll say “abortion,” but she also frames the issue around broader themes of maternal health and family support. When we met, Harris had just come from a taping at MSNBC where she sat alongside Hadley Duvall, the brave Kentucky woman who spoke about being raped by her stepfather and becoming pregnant at 12 and railed against Republicans who would force girls to have their rapist’s baby.

Duvall had a miscarriage but remembers she took comfort in knowing she had “options”—options she wouldn’t have now in Kentucky or in many other states. “One of the



hateful Fox News segments and told me: “I love Laphonza Butler.”

**W**ITHOUT ANYONE FULLY NOTICING it, Harris was already leading the outreach to all groups of voters—women voters, Black and other voters of color, young voters, and voters who care about gun reform—who are less than fully in the tank for the Democrats this election cycle.

Her ability to reach these constituencies has been an asset over the course of her career. “All of her strengths were always clear to me,” says Patrick Gaspard, the leader of the Center for American Progress, the ambassador to South Africa under President Barack Obama, and Obama’s political director in 2008, when Harris was a crucial surrogate. “I could send her anywhere,” he adds.

“The universe of likely voters Joe Biden would need: Women. Women in the suburbs. It was clear there would be a challenge with younger voters, which is a natural place for her. And clearly voters of color. Given all that, it was obvious she’d be a really important flag-bearer.

“All of that was absent from her early coverage. There was no sense of history.”

Harris and her team would prefer that I ignore that past coverage and look to the future, but even Gaspard admits that “the arc to a [political] story always has an up and a down.” The early coverage was harsh: For instance, a June 2021 *Politico* headline blared “Kamala Harris’ office rife with dissent” and claimed that the dysfunction came “from the top.”

Harris’s admirers—not staff—have given me names that I can’t share of who some of the leakers were. A few came from the White House, not the vice president’s office, my sources say. But every person I spoke with said that her detractors did not include Biden, whose appreciation and admiration for her, they say, has continued to grow since assuming office. That was more evident this spring.

At a reception in the Rose Garden in May, he quipped, “I work for Kamala Harris. I asked her to be my vice president because I knew I needed someone smarter than me.”

During his commencement speech at Morehouse College later that month, Biden told the graduates: “I have no doubt that a Morehouse man will be president one day—just after an AKA from Howard.” (AKA is, of course, Alpha

Kappa Alpha, the first intercollegiate African American sorority; Harris pledged AKA as an undergraduate at Howard University, one of the nation's largest historically Black colleges and universities.) Harris has solidified a role as an emissary to crucial voting blocs: to women of every race and age—including some Republican women—because of the reproductive health crisis; to Black voters, who polls show were less enthusiastic about Biden than he could afford; and to younger voters, angered by the war in Gaza but also disappointed by what they see as inaction on the climate crisis and gun violence, as well as insufficient student loan relief. (It would be remiss of me not to point out that the latter is partially the fault of the Supreme Court, which ruled Biden's first sweeping relief plan unconstitutional.)

It's undeniable that Harris gained a new role—and a renewed sense of direction—when the draft of Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito's anti-*Roe* decision was leaked. I was at an EMILYs List gala where Harris gave the keynote the night after the leak, and as I reported at the time, she channeled the rage in the room.

"How dare they?" Harris asked the crowd, with genuine anger. "How dare they tell a woman what she can and cannot do with her own body?"

The reproductive health crisis has also allowed Harris to reframe her career as a prosecutor (which alienated many progressives during her presidential run) in terms of her work defending sexually exploited women and girls. "I created the first child sexual assault unit in the [San Francisco] DA's office," she reminded me. "Remember, they used to call [underage sex workers] 'teenage prostitutes'; I changed the name to 'sexually exploited youth,' and I said, 'Instead of police picking up these kids and arresting them for teenage prostitution, we should treat it as: They've been exploited.' They used to be taken to juvenile hall. Remember, I created a safe house for them."

Harris also has a personal connection to the issue: Wanda Kagan, her best friend in high school, was physically and sexually abused by her father. Now a hospital administrator, Kagan has been telling her story since 2020, but she's been more prominent of late. "I think she knew I was being abused at home, physically," Kagan told me in May. "But when I decided to tell her I was being abused sexually, too, she was like, 'You have to get out of there. You have to come stay with us.'" Harris called her mother, who immediately insisted that Kagan live with their family.

Harris has traced her desire to be a prosecutor to her early experience with her best friend's nightmare. "I didn't think it was my right to tell Wanda's story," she said, "and then



she started telling it, and encouraged me. It had a profound impact on me. We were young teenagers. Maybe it's because from the earliest stages of my life, my mother said, "Take care of your sister," referring to Maya, her only sibling, who is two years younger.

"The passion that you hear from me is: There are so many people suffering because of [sexual assault]. Many are silently suffering. I know enough from prosecuting child sexual assault cases. When we were selecting a jury, when we'd ask prospective jurors, 'If there's something that's too personal that you want to bring up, we can go back to chambers,' the number of people that raised their hand to say, 'Can we talk about this in chambers?'" she recalled. "And we'd go back and we'd talk, and they'd never told anybody, but they'd say they cannot sit on this jury because of that issue.... They'd experienced it."

Michele Goodwin, a professor of reproductive law at Georgetown University, was among a group of scholars Harris consulted after the *Dobbs* decision. "She listened, even though she clearly knows the issue and has her own ideas," Goodwin says. Harris "anticipated all of what was at risk: interfering with interstate travel, criminal punishment for women and doctors. She wanted to dig deeper."

Celinda Lake, a Biden pollster, agrees. "She has been very comfortable talking about the fact that reproductive justice is economics, it's healthcare, it's contraception, it's maternal health, maternal mortality," Lake says, noting that the maternal mortality rate for Black women was three times higher than for white women.

And Harris's appeal is starting to show up in the polls. "She does better with young people, she does better with African Americans—even better than the president—and she does better with younger women," Lake says. A *Politico* poll in late May showed this strength with Black voters—and reported that she was "way out ahead in a hypothetical 2028 matchup between several other figures in the party," including Newsom, Whitmer, and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, as well as Arizona Senator Mark Kelly and Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro.

**An uncertain future:** In the wake of Biden's catastrophic debate performance, Harris found herself in the spotlight in a way she did not want.

**The reproductive health crisis has allowed Harris to reframe her career as a prosecutor, which had alienated many progressives.**





**Marching ahead:** Harris, seen here at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, has led the Biden campaign's outreach to Black voters.

**H**ARRIS'S OUTREACH TO AFRICAN AMERICANS IS ARGUABLY AS IMPORTANT as her role in connecting to women. Part of her strategy is touring American cities with large Black populations—including Milwaukee, Atlanta, Detroit, and Philadelphia—to promote the administration's "Economic Opportunity Agenda." When I traveled with her to Milwaukee on May 16, a *New York Times*/Siena poll had just come out showing Trump getting more than 20 percent of the Black vote nationally, more than any Republican since the 1960s.

Harris brought Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo and Acting Housing and Urban Development Secretary Adrienne Todman to Milwaukee to help her spread the word about the administration's record on advancing economic opportunities among Black Americans.

Harris shared the stage with the comedian and radio host D.L. Hughley and addressed a crowd of roughly 350 small-business owners, healthcare workers, realtors, and communi-

ty leaders and activists. There was a lot to discuss. While much of her pitch was aimed at businesspeople and aspiring homeowners, she and Hughley also delved into what the administration had done for those who are still trying to make ends meet. Under Biden, small-business loans can now go to formerly incarcerated people. Student loan debt can be forgiven even for students who didn't get degrees. The administration has also mandated that medical debt be excluded from

credit score calculations.

The most meaningful interaction came when Hughley apologized to Harris for believing the "media narrative" about her as a tough-on-crime prosecutor who locked up too many Black men as the San Francisco district attorney and later the California attorney general (the shorthand: "Kamala is a cop"), which helped doom her presidential bid. A January 2019 *New York Times* op-ed by the legal advocate Lara Bazelon had blared "Kamala Harris Was Not a 'Progressive'

Prosecutor," arguing that as attorney general she had failed to sufficiently support progressive criminal justice reforms and fought the release of several prisoners whose appeals made a convincing case for their innocence. But as Biden prepared to pick Harris as his running mate 18 months later, Bazelon told *Politico*, "She's positioned herself in the last couple of years as someone who really is on the right side of these issues, and that carries weight."

Hughley said onstage that he'd heard only the criticism, not the corrective: "I had let a media narrative co-opt my perspective, and I think that tends to happen with women and people of color. I had to apologize to you."

"I didn't want to like the prosecutor," Hughley tells me later by phone. "It's not cool to like a prosecutor! California had become such a mean place. I wanted to blame somebody. But then we had dinner. It was a very heated conversation, and I remember how calm she was listening to me. I was very impressed."

In the audience, Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley was moved by the interaction. "I thought that was so powerful! You don't get a lot of Black men apologizing publicly to Black women," he says. ("You don't see men apologizing publicly to women, period," Celinda Lake adds later when I recount the story to her.)

"She got in the weeds, and we needed her in the weeds," says Crowley, who at 38 is the youngest person, as well as the first Black person, elected as county executive. Crowley gave me a list of local initiatives that had been made possible by programs passed under Biden and Harris. "We're making the largest push to build affordable housing in years. We're creating opportunities for Black and brown families to become

**"We had dinner. It was a very heated conversation, and I remember how calm she was. I was impressed."**

—D.L. Hughley



first-time homebuyers. The dollars are coming to Milwaukee: for development, housing, health equity. Black unemployment is down. We've broken ground on more Black businesses. More programs for seniors. We've also been able to save programs that were jeopardized." These are not just talking points: Unemployment and poverty among Black Americans are at all-time lows across the country.

The influential Milwaukee radio host Earl Ingram Jr. was equally impressed. "I had never had a chance to hear directly from the vice president," he says. "The media made her a caricature, just focusing on her giggling. It was clear to me that the first thing I have to do is reassure people who haven't met her that she's a bright, accomplished woman, she's astute, she's not what you've been told. I've gotta make sure people who didn't see her know that.

"I'm proud to see her as my sister."

**A**SKED HARRIS WHAT SHE IS HEARING FROM Black men, adding that while I didn't believe the recent polling that said Trump could get 25 percent of their votes, I was wondering what she thinks is going on.

She asked me frostily, "What's going on with what?"

I stumbled a bit, noting that men across almost all racial groups are more likely to vote Republican than women, but that there had been a lot of reporting lately about the ways that Trump's message was seemingly resonating with Black men.

"Well, you're asking a lot of questions," Harris replied. "But let me start with this: There is a trope in this election which I take issue with, because the underlying premise suggests that Black men should be in the back pocket of Democrats. And that is absolutely unacceptable. Here's why: Why would any one demographic of people be different from any other demographic? They all expect you to earn their vote! You've gotta make your case."

"And you're out there making the case—" I started, but she interrupted.

"You're assuming they're a monolith, Joan, and they're not."

Ouch. "I don't think I assume that," I told her.

"Black men are no different than white women, than Asian teenagers—go across all the demographics you can imagine. They want to talk about the economy, they want to talk about healthcare, they want to talk about small business and access to capital. Gun violence, climate. They're no different from anyone else.

Why not be shocked that white women are voting for Trump?"

I assured her that I am shocked by that.

"You know what I'm saying," she replied. "But the narrative is for some reason focused on one demographic—honestly, in a way I find a bit insulting."

Here's the thing: I know Harris sees the same polls that I do. She sees the uptick in Trump's support among Black men; that's partly why I was invited to travel along to the Milwaukee event. She can be defensive with reporters she feels are somehow disrespecting her, but I'm a little surprised to be on the receiving end, since she knows I respect her. On the other hand, when we spoke, I understood her irritation when the most bewildering question was: How could this swindler/grifter/racist/felon arguably be leading Biden both nationally and in swing states?

Even more offensive, she said, is "the assumption from Trump that Black men liked his mug shot and his being found guilty of 34 felonies. That helps him? So you have now decided to package up in your own head the sum total of a whole population of people around some sense of connection to the fact that you've been found guilty of 34 felonies? It's insulting, and he's wrong."

**T**HAT TENSE EXCHANGE WITH HARRIS BROUGHT BACK memories of some of our spiky interactions while I was reporting a 2003 profile of her for *San Francisco* magazine. During her campaign for district attorney, the city's justice system had been rocked by a series of racial conflicts. She thought I pushed her harder for decisive words on these controversies than I'd push a white candidate—and she probably was right. Nevertheless, we remain on good terms. Part of that is because of the personal connections I mentioned earlier. But most important to Harris, I think, is the fact that I'm one of the few national reporters who had a chance to interview her late mother.



Harris grew up the child of two immigrant scholars, Shyamala Gopalan, from India, and Donald Harris, from Jamaica, who met at the University of California, Berkeley. Both were political radicals (they divorced when she was 7 years old). As a *New York Times* article recounted, the Afro-American Association where they met was an influential center of Black nationalism; some of its members helped found the Black Panther Party. Harris recalls growing up at civil rights marches, in a home where "Free Huey" and "Free Bobby" were written on the sidewalk outside their house to protest the imprisonment of Panther leaders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. So how did she wind up as a prosecutor?

When I spoke with her mother in 2003, she admitted that the family was surprised: "People from our background tend to be public defenders." Even at the time, I sensed that Gopalan Harris, who became an endocrinologist and a renowned breast cancer researcher, was the most important person to talk to about Harris other than Harris herself. But I didn't entirely get how important.

One of the criticisms Harris faced was that she was the candidate of San Francisco's moneyed elite, many of whom she counted as friends, and they

**"Why would one demographic of people be any different from any other? They all expect you to earn their vote!"**

—Kamala Harris

**The context of all in which she lives:**

Harris, seen here with her sister Maya, was deeply influenced by her family—especially her mother.

## Harris's eloquent, anguished words on Gaza have sat uneasily alongside the Biden administration's actions.

**Didn't just fall out of a coconut tree:** Harris has been in politics for decades. That's why it's a mistake to ask if anything "surprises" her.

elite, Kamala Harris was a boldface name," it declared breathlessly. It also called her, repeating an insulting joke, one of the "Pretty Thangs" of the political scene. It should also be noted that some of these very same social connections "launched" Gavin Newsom. Those ties dominated the coverage of Newsom's early career but rarely came up once he became a statewide figure.

The tale all but obliterated her scientist mother, her radical economist father, and her circle of left-leaning Bay Area friends who in fact "launched" the future political leader.

Back in 2003, her mother recounted that Harris was so pigeon-toed that she wore leg braces for a while and ugly orthopedic shoes for years after. The family, she added, were academic nomads, moving from college town to college town before she and Harris's father divorced. "I assume the divorce was very hard. I'm sure Kamala suffered. We did not have an

orderly television-family life. I was always working."

Gopalan Harris, I realized later, was trying to complicate the caricature of her beloved daughter—to refute the charge that Harris was a socialite to whom everything had come easily.

Watching Harris over two months, I noticed how constantly she mentioned her mother's influence on her life and career. In our interview, she described how her current campaign on reproductive justice originates with that. "It's grounded in having a mother who was one of the very few women of color as a research scientist on one of the biggest health issues that women face, which is breast cancer. And how she fought so passionately and brought that fight home, in terms of the importance of fighting for women in the healthcare system and fighting for their dignity."

And that laugh her critics like to mock? That comes from her mother too. "I have my mother's laugh," she told Drew Barrymore during an April appearance on her talk show. "I grew up around a group of women who laughed from their bellies! They'd sit around the kitchen drinking coffee, telling big stories with big laughs. I'm never gonna be one of those people who—" She tittered softly into her hand. "I'm not that person."

**U**NDENIABLY, THE TOUGHEST ISSUE that Harris faces on the campaign trail is the war in Gaza, which took a huge political toll on Biden's standing with younger voters. She has gotten credit for being a step ahead of the president, most notably in early March, when she addressed a crowd commem-

had handpicked her to challenge the progressive Terence Hallinan, whose office was in disarray. This narrative persisted at least through her presidential campaign. "How San Francisco's Wealthiest Families Launched Kamala Harris," announced a 2019 *Politico* article. "In Pacific Heights parlors and bastions of status and wealth, in trendy hot spots, and in the juicy, dishy missives of the variety of gossip columns that chronicled the city's

orating "Bloody Sunday" in Selma, Alabama. "What we are seeing every day in Gaza is devastating," Harris said. "We have seen reports of families eating leaves or animal feed. Women giving birth to malnourished babies with little or no medical care, and children dying from malnutrition and dehydration."

Citing a recent incident when dozens of Palestinians rushing to get food aid were killed by Israeli forces, Harris continued: "People in Gaza are starving. The conditions are inhumane. The Israeli government must do more to significantly increase the flow of aid. No excuses.... There must be an immediate ceasefire for at least the next six weeks, which is what is currently on the table."

But the eloquent anguish in Harris's words sits uneasily alongside the administration's actions. Biden has been essentially unyielding in his military support for Israel, even as the death toll in Gaza climbs ever higher and the global condemnation of the war deepens.

Harris doesn't set the administration's foreign policy agenda, and it's unclear how much she has pushed internally for Biden to shift course on Gaza. In public, though, her team has been eager to play down any notion of daylight between her and the president. "The difference is not in substance but probably in tone," one of her advisers on the conflict told me.

I asked Harris about that question of tone.

"Listen, I strongly believe that our ability to evaluate a situation is connected to understanding the details of that situation," she said. "Not speaking of myself versus the president, not at all. From the beginning, I asked questions. OK, the trucks are taking flour into Gaza. But here's the thing, Joan: I like to cook. So I said to my team, 'You can't make shit with flour if you don't have clean water. So what's going on with that?' I ask questions like, 'What are people actually eating right now? I'm hearing stories about their eating animal feed, grass....' So that's how I think about it.

"Similarly, I was asking early on, 'What are women in Gaza doing about sanitary hygiene? Do they have pads?' And these are the issues that made people feel uncomfortable—especially sanitary pads."

The young people who have mobilized against the death and destruction in Gaza are unlikely to be mollified by these answers. What does she say to them, I asked?

"They are showing exactly 8



what the human emotion should be as a response to Gaza,” Harris replied. “There are things some of the protesters are saying that I absolutely reject, so I don’t mean to wholesale endorse their points. But we have to navigate it. I understand the emotion behind it. We want and have called for a ceasefire; the ball is now in Hamas’s court. For all those who want to see a ceasefire: Join us in calling for Hamas to take the deal so we can have a ceasefire, get the hostages out, get aid in, and start working for a two-state solution, which I’ve been advocating for practically since October 8.”

But the day after our conversation, there was reliable reporting that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, not just Hamas leaders, opposed the terms of the ceasefire deal. The story would flip many times before I finished this piece.

Harris said that her approach to young people is consistent. “There are so many issues impacting Gen Z,” she said. “They’ve only known the climate crisis. I ask in every venue, ‘Raise your hand if at any point between [grades K-12] you had to endure an active shooter drill.’ Almost every hand goes up. We grew up with fire drills. These kids are afraid that somebody’s gonna bust through the classroom door with an assault weapon. They witnessed the killing of George Floyd. During the height of their reproductive years, the highest court of the land took away their right to make decisions about their own bodies. They have endured so much.”

Harris is less afraid that young voters will go for Trump than that they’ll stay home in November. “You’ve got, on the one side, an administration in Joe Biden and me fighting for a woman’s right to make decisions about her own body, your right to love who you love openly with pride; on the other side, someone who took away a fundamental right, his allies who promote ‘Don’t say gay,’ want to take away contraception, IVF,” she said. Trump will also roll back the administration’s moves on climate protection, student loan relief, and gun safety reform, she has pointed out. “Don’t let a situation or circumstance silence your voice,” she tells young voters.

**H**ARRIS HAS WORN A LOT OF HATS IN the administration, most importantly that of president of the Senate, where she has set an all-time record casting tiebreaking votes for Biden’s priorities and appointees. She chairs the White House Office of Gun Violence Preven-



tion, and its executive director, Greg Jackson, talks about the work she’s put in behind 40 executive orders and two new laws on gun safety reform.

At a recent campaign event, Jackson recalls, Harris “took an hour out in advance to talk to elementary and middle school youth impacted by gun violence,” meeting with them privately. “She’s met with hundreds of survivors,” he adds—including, in June, some high school seniors whose graduating class was decimated by the massacre of 20 first-grade classmates in Sandy Hook, Connecticut, in 2012.

Harris also chairs the White House Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment, as well as the National Space Council. “Please don’t forget about that, because I’m really excited about it,” she said to me, proud of her work with global leaders on the Artemis Accords, committing a global coalition to common principles to guide space exploration, including sharing scientific data. The initiative seeks to place a woman, a person of color, and the first international astronaut on the moon this decade.

She has also stepped up her international profile in the past two years. Since her inauguration, Harris has visited 21 countries and met with 150 world leaders, according to her office. She is proud of her historic visit to Africa in 2022, where she was greeted by thousands of ecstatic people in Ghana. But not only the visit, she told me.

“It’s about reframing our relationship with the continent of Africa and beginning the next era in a way that is about a partnership, not about aid,” Harris said. “Recognizing that by 2050, one in four people on Mother Earth will be on that continent. The median age is 19. My goal is to change the narrative about what should be the relationship between the US and Africa.” She’s proud of a public-private partnership she’s led that’s already raised over \$8 billion for investment there.

Lake, the pollster, argues that even before the *Dobbs* decision, Harris’s Africa visit reset some of her media coverage. “She registered as a major leader,” Lake says. “Women have to have validators for our leadership [to be taken seriously]. When all of those foreign leaders were so respectful of her, people were like, ‘Oh, she’s not just cutting ribbons.’”

**“How dare they?”**  
In 2022, Harris took on a new role: channeling the rage that so many felt after the Supreme Court gutted abortion rights.

**“The protesters are showing exactly what the human emotion should be as a response to Gaza.”**

—Kamala Harris



Still, Harris faces media headwinds here in the United States. She has represented the country three times at the Munich Security Conference, but I watched this past February

## Harris's admirers have been outraged by the media's continued promotion of alternatives for the nomination in 2024.

as major cable networks cut away from her remarks there, which included new details about US policy on Gaza, in order to announce the death in custody of the Russian dissident Aleksei Navalny. That may have been defensible news judgment, but the networks returned to Harris's remarks only briefly, then shifted away.

Where did they go instead? To covering the ludicrous hearing in Fulton County, Georgia, where Republicans were trying to disqualify the district attorney, Fani

Willis, from prosecuting Trump because of her romantic relationship with another lawyer working on her team. It was hard to ignore the message: The American media is far more interested in covering Black women when it involves alleged scandal or lurid claims about their romantic lives. The Black woman leading on a global stage at a moment of crisis, from Russia to Gaza to our own threatened democracy? Not so interesting.

**A**S THE RELENTLESS SPECULATION ABOUT WHETHER Biden would head for the exit picked up after his first debate performance, so did the chatter about an alternative.

The vice president's admirers have been outraged by the media's continuing to promote alternatives to Harris for 2024. Polls show even the familiar governors Newsom and Whitmer with single- or low-double-digit support among Democratic voters as the 2028 nominees, while Harris continues to strengthen, with 42 percent in recent polls. Even after Biden's withdrawal, some Democrats have continued to point to alternatives, saying that Harris's polling is weak. "If [42 percent] is weak, give me weak," Lake says.

It's also worth noting that Harris, as part of the Biden ticket, is the only candidate who would have easy access to the Biden-Harris campaign committee's funds, which in late May totaled about \$91 million of the approximately \$240 million all Democratic groups together have raised for the campaign. Also, as the longtime Democratic strategist Donna Brazile asked CNN, "How the fuck are you going to put all these white people ahead of Kamala?"

Oh, and the notion that the Democrats should have an "open convention" to replace Biden? First, the president would have to release his delegates, which would trigger chaos. "Have you met us? We're Democrats!" retorts Leah Daughtry, a party leader and the CEO of past Democratic national conventions. "We would have the food fight of the century!"

"Food fight" is probably an understatement.

Though my interview with Harris preceded the debate, concerns about Biden's age and fitness had been swirling for years. But I didn't bother to ask her about the speculation over whether Biden should remain at the top of the ticket—I didn't want to face her prosecutor's glare. Instead, I took a different risk and asked her about the perceptions that she's become more comfortable in her job, maybe even having some fun, which I acknowledged was a tough concept in a time of war and the threat of Trump. Harris did not entirely shut me down.

"Remember, we came in during Covid," she said. "[Only] Joe Biden and I and a couple of staff could be together in person. We were spending day and night trying to convince people to get vaccinated, spending day and night trying to get checks out to people. Remember the number of women who left the workforce? It was about

a full year and a half of trying to get our country back on track.

"And also, we just couldn't travel! Now I'm on the road, and I love getting out of DC—I'm telling you, get me out of DC every day of the week! I wanna be with people. I wanna be listening to them. I'm doing a lot more of that—I do enjoy that. But the work that we did in the beginning was necessary work."

That increasing comfort in the role was evident throughout the time I spent reporting on her. Maybe my favorite moment trailing Harris this spring and summer came when she appeared on *Sherri*, the daytime talk show featuring Sherri Shepherd, a veteran of *The View*. Many in the audience of mainly Black women were Harris's AKA sisters, dressed in the sorority's trademark pink and green. That's where I met her friend Wanda Kagan, who spoke on the show not only about her high school trauma but about the school dance troupe, Midnight Magic, at Montreal's Westmount High (Leonard Cohen was also a graduate), where Harris moved with her sister when their mother got a job at the city's Jewish General Hospital.

Kagan and I could see Harris dancing in her seat and singing along with the music boomed by a DJ during commercial breaks—she knew all the words to George Clinton's '80s funk anthem "Atomic Dog"—but she reined herself in when the cameras returned. "She wouldn't really dance, but she really wanted to," Kagan chuckled. About a month later, though, Kagan saw her friend dance at a White House Juneteenth reception after Harris was beckoned to the stage by the gospel superstar Kirk Franklin.

Daughtry, who was there, recalls watching Franklin lead Harris onto the stage: "You could almost see her thinking: 'Do I go up or not go up?' She didn't have a choice. For her to refuse would say something. People there loved it. The crowd was roaring!"

Kagan loved it too. She sees Harris finally embracing all of who she is. "She has always been a compassionate, empathetic person—with power—who fights for the rights of people. Then there's the professional side. Then she's quirky and she's fun and she loves to dance. I just love seeing it all come together: the power, the passion, and the funny."

Gaspard, of the Center for American Progress, sees a lot of the same things: "Authenticity is so important to voters. People have to know they're seeing who you really are." He adds, "Sometimes history comes running at you and you have to be ready. She has demonstrated that she's ready."

Can Harris hold on to her authenticity, cement her nomination, win back the voters who had gone cold on Biden, and keep Trump out of the White House? Strap in. We're about to find out.



# US CIVIL RIGHTS: ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

*Jackson, Little Rock, Memphis, Selma,  
Birmingham, and Montgomery*

**FEBRUARY 9–16, 2025**

The civil rights movement is one of the most significant chapters in our country's history. Over 55 years after the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., this is a time for our nation to reflect upon how far we've come—and how much remains to be accomplished. While we confront increasingly racialized violence and emboldened white nationalists, we can look back to the victories of the past and to the hundreds of thousands of brave Americans who fueled this history-altering movement, fighting—and too often dying—for the cause of equality.

For those working toward social justice today, there are great lessons to be learned from the civil rights movement, in which a profound demonstration of commitment and courage succeeded against all odds. In the words of Dr. King: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

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# In Search of the BACKBEAT

Sixty years after their first American tour, the Rolling Stones are on the road again. This time around, they've got a new drummer.

ETHAN IVERSON

**M**ICK JAGGER AND KEITH RICHARDS BOTH turned 80 last year. Their first performance together was in the summer of 1962, or well over a year before the Kennedy assassination. On the microphone at Lincoln Financial Field in South Philadelphia, where I joined 60,000 other people still eager to see the Rolling Stones in 2024, Jagger told us he could remember an early Stones gig in Philly in 1965.

Some people grumble that these old men shouldn't still be getting up there and peacocking like vain and troubled teenagers. It's a fair point. Jagger and Richards are the only original members of the band, and over the years they've become more or less synonymous with the whole outfit. Any ensemble still in operation for six decades is bound to have some casualties, the first in this case being founding guitarist Brian Jones, a hard partyer who drowned in his swimming pool in 1969, and the latest being drummer Charlie Watts, who died at the age of 80 in 2021. A lot happened in between.

From my corner of the bleachers at Lincoln Field, some 180 yards away from the stage, the band seemed to be made up of tiny figures, and were more discernible on the massive high-definition screen. Aside from a few songs from their latest album, *Hackney Diamonds*, the band mostly delivered the hits, nine of them collected on the definitive anthology *Hot Rocks 1964–1971*. Jagger and

Richards cowrote most of this classic material, though bandmates like Jones and bass player Bill Wyman contributed melodies and harmonies. These hits are familiar to multiple generations, and may well be part of the very texture of human existence.

I'd traveled to the concert with two of my best friends from high school, Wilson and Tim. We're all in our early 50s, and it seemed like a good time for a bonding ritual that guys our age have been undertaking for decades. Much of the audience shared our demographic, and all of us seemed to be transported. Certain moments of the show exhibited sheer pageantry, as in the evening's rendition of "Sympathy for the Devil." The idea that rock and roll is aligned with sin, Satan, and bad-boy behavior is banal. Yet it is also the truth. When Jagger thundered out, "Please allow me to introduce myself," the lights turned a burning red

*Ethan Iverson is a pianist, composer, and Blue Note recording artist.*





MIRL Palmer

Glyde

Stubblefield

FRED Below

BENNY

John "Jabo" Starks

BENNY

AL JACKSON Jr.

Goofield

## The first requisite of a great band is a great drummer, and the Stones were lucky to land Steve Jordan.



**All down the line:** Waiting for the show to begin at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia on June 11.

ing band in the documentary and concert film *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*. There could be no higher credentials for the seat he now holds.

Rock and roll has a basic orientation, a North Star, its first breath, the om. It is the backbeat, the “crack” played on the snare drum on beats two and four. At Lincoln Field, the great unifier was not Mick Jagger’s menacing vaudeville or Keith Richards’s ragged strum. It was Steve Jordan’s backbeat, a driving pulsation roaring out from the back of the stage.

“THE DEFINITION OF ROCK AND ROLL IS PUSH AND PULL,” JORDAN TOLD me when I called him a few days after the concert. For Jordan, that feeling is conveyed in rhythm, namely the ambiguity of “straight eighths against a dotted eighth,” the latter being an asymmetrical division of the quarter-note beat. In rock and roll, he said, “there’s always back-and-forth; it doesn’t stay one or the other.”

The word for what Jordan is talking about is “feel,” an elusive topic that rarely gets discussed in technical terms, partly because it can’t be written down with traditional European music notation. Most musicians would agree that swinging jazz and grooving funk need an element of “laying back,” meaning a slight lag behind the tempo. Of course, the details

and the whole stadium sang along.

Like most other significant recording artists, the Stones invested a lot of time and energy in studio magic when crafting their hits. But the live gig has always been the live gig. They set up and they play: No synthesizers glamping up their sound, no click track in earpieces keeping their beat in line. The front line is the grizzled veterans: Jagger in the spotlight, Richards with his idiosyncratic tunings, and second guitarist Ronnie

Wood as bluesy foil. However, much of the heavy lifting is done by pianist and longtime music director Chuck Leavell; bassist Darryl Jones, a Miles Davis alumnus who joined the band’s first tour after Wyman’s retirement in 1993; and the newest member, Steve Jordan, who replaced Charlie Watts.

The first requisite of a great band is a great drummer, and the Stones were lucky to land Jordan, whose numerous past credits include not only rock icons Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, and Neil Young but major figures in jazz (Herbie Hancock, Sonny Rollins, Don Pullen) and R&B (Stevie Wonder, Alicia Keys, Beyoncé). His association with the Stones dates back to the 1980s, when, after a couple of one-off collaborations, he became the drummer and principal cowriter on Keith Richards’s solo albums. As Richards recounts in his memoir, *Life*, Watts himself noticed Jordan as far back as 1978, when the young drummer was part of the *Saturday Night Live* band and the Stones appeared as musical guests. Years later, Jordan was jointly chosen by Richards and Chuck Berry for the back-

vary, and the moment someone on the bandstand decides to turn a feeling into a law, that law needs to be broken. As Jordan says, “push and pull.”

Most rhythmic feel in American music comes from Africa and the Afro-Cuban diaspora. Traditional European music didn’t have much of this kind of rhythmic sophistication, but it did have a concept of “syncopation,” which Merriam-Webster defines as “a temporary displacement of the regular metrical accents in music caused typically by stressing the weak beat.” In the late 19th century, ragtime, as composed by Black musicians like Scott Joplin, brought that off-kilter syncopation to a new prominence with sparkling melodies.

The accompaniment of ragtime had a European origin. Any march or polka features an “oom-pah” in the bass clef supporting the melody—the “oom” on the strong beat, the “pah” on the weak beat; the left hand of a ragtime pianist does the same. As ragtime gave way to jazz, gospel, and early R&B, African American musicians began stressing the weak “pah” much more, almost inverting what was “weak” and what was “strong.” This accent got stronger over time, and in the 1950s it started taking over the world.

To a layperson, a backbeat might seem easy, and in some ways it is easy, at least compared to more complex Afro-Latin diasporic rhythms connected to traditional bell pattern or clave, where staggered syncopations flex like pulsating Morse code. One of the key creators of modern rock drumming was the New Orleans virtuoso Earl Palmer, who was first widely heard with legends like Fats Domino and Little Richard before going on to appear with many of the world’s most famous acts. “The backbeat came about because the public wasn’t buying jazz,” Palmer said, in a memoir written with Tony Scherman titled simply *Backbeat*, “so we put something in that was simpler and that’s what made the difference.”

Heavily syncopated African music always implied dance, and there’s little American popular music without some sort of African-based syncopation appropriate for a dance floor. A backbeat is a dance-worthy syncopation reduced to the essential.

AS WITH ANYTHING essential, getting a backbeat right becomes an advanced topic. In the 20th century, African Americans created the template. Along with giving due credit to Earl Palmer, Jordan named more of the beat’s



greatest proponents: Al Jackson Jr. of the Stax Records house band and Al Green's band at Hi Records; Benny Benjamin, of Motown's house band, informally known as the Funk Brothers; Fred Below, who accompanied Chess Records artists like Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, and Bo Diddley; and James Brown drummers Clyde Stubblefield and John "Jabo" Starks, whose beats reverberate through hip-hop in the form of samples.

During the British Invasion, a group of drummers took up this topic like a consortium of mad English scientists: Ringo Starr for the Beatles, Ginger Baker for Cream, Mitch Mitchell for the Jimi Hendrix Experience, John Bonham for Led Zeppelin, and Charlie Watts for the Rolling Stones. Watts was never a flashy drummer, and he never used one of the outsize drum kits favored by many of the bands who headlined stadiums in the 1970s. As his tenure in the Stones matured into mastery, Watts worked out some of the sparest versions of the backbeat heard on record.

For right-handed drummers, the backbeat is played on the snare drum on two and four with the left hand, while the right steadily pulses eighth notes on the ride cymbal or the closed high hat. Watts's trademark eventually became the omission of the right-hand stroke on the high hat at the point that it would normally line up with the backbeat. The jaunty flourish that resulted—a quick upswing of the right hand as the left dealt out a resounding "PAH"—seemed to epitomize the Stones' aesthetic, with a bit of Englishness underlying the New World groove.

It was only when I spoke to Jordan that I learned that Watts did not invent that approach. "Charlie never left out the high hat in the '60s," Jordan said. "He started doing that in the '70s. It was something in the air at that moment. Levon Helm and Jim Keltner did it, and now I do it too. It was especially relevant for recording. The backbeat snare explodes in the studio if the high hat is not also being played. The high hat gets into every microphone, so if you leave it out when hitting the snare, you can treat the snare however you want. Charlie does this on 'Shattered' and 'Start Me Up,' and it's very exciting."

Jordan has thought a lot about how to approach playing with the Rolling Stones. "Keith Richards and I are in the engine room, so to speak," he told me. "But Darryl Jones and I have also worked closely together on the right way to make the basic groove happen. I like the way the Stones sounded on live gigs from 1971 to 1974—to me, that was one of the strongest periods of the band in terms of live energy and how they were playing as a unit, and I try to bring the spirit



of that era to the gig. By now, we're in full swing. The band has found its stride."

For Jordan, much of contemporary music has lost the secret sauce for "push and pull," often as a result of preprogrammed software that digitally homogenizes rhythm. "When you go to see live acts these days, half of what you're hearing is sequenced in Pro Tools, which also means that the tempos don't breathe," he said. "The main thing is to bring an unbridled excitement to a live performance. Take 'Jumpin' Jack Flash': If we stayed at the opening tempo—if I held the tempo from start to finish—it wouldn't generate the type of excitement that's on the record. They speed up on the studio records of 'Brown Sugar' and 'Honky Tonk Women.' This accelerando is for a reason: It's part of the excitement of live performance. If you're preoccupied with holding the time steady, it's not as freewheeling. It's restrained, which is exactly what you don't want to do in rock and roll. There's nothing worse in rock and roll than being too far behind the beat or slowing down."

It's a subtle art. Only a fellow professional would notice anything speeding up, and only an artist of Steve Jordan's caliber could create such an effect without sounding artificial.

**J**ORDAN'S MASTERS OF THE BACKBEAT—PALMER, Jackson, Benjamin, Below, Stubblefield, and Starks—were six African American drummers. It was a reminder that the larger issue of race is not sorted in this arena. Who got paid and who got famous is a loaded subject. It's easy for casual rock music fans to name-check Ringo Starr, Ginger Baker, and John Bonham. The James Brown drummers Clyde Stubblefield and Jabo Starks are vastly more obscure to the world at large, in spite of their ubiquity in popular music ever since the first time DJ Kool Herc alternated between two copies of Brown's "Give It Up or Turnit a Loose," turning Stubblefield's drum break into an endless loop.

The Rolling Stones sit dead center in this controversy. Some cannot forgive the Stones for emulating Chicago blues records—many of them featuring Fred Below—at a talented-amateur level as they ascended to world domination. It's

(continued on page 61)

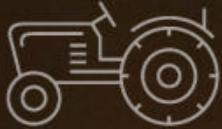
**In the engine room:** Ronnie Wood, Mick Jagger, Steve Jordan, and Keith Richards at Soldier Field in Chicago.



**"There's nothing worse in rock and roll than being too far behind the beat or slowing down."**

—Steve Jordan

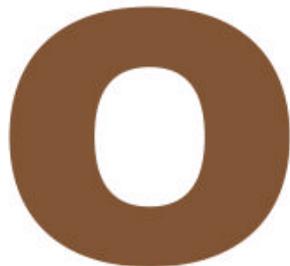


*The*  
 **Dirt**   
**Farmer**  
*of the*  *of the*   
**Senate**



## Jon Tester is the last Democrat holding statewide office in Montana. Can he save his seat and help keep the Senate blue?

GABRIEL FURSHONG



ON NOVEMBER 7, 2006, SENATOR JON TESTER GATHERED WITH HIS campaign team at the Heritage Inn in Great Falls, Montana, a former smelter town with a population of 60,000 clustered around five hydroelectric dams on the Missouri River. It was election night, and the mood was ebullient. The upstart

campaign was about to upend the balance of the US Senate.

“We had a stage with balloons, and everyone was ready for a big party,” remembered Bill Lombardi, Tester’s former state director, “but the AP wouldn’t call it because it was so close. So we told everyone to go home.”

At the time, Tester was just a third-generation farmer and butcher from Big Sandy, a town with 600 people, three bars, and one grocery store. He was also a former music teacher and school board member who had worked his way up in Montana politics to become president of the state Senate. Still, few Montanans knew his name when he entered the race.

By contrast, his opponent, Conrad Burns, was an 18-year incumbent in the US Senate who sat on the powerful Appropriations Committee. A Marine Corps veteran and former cattle auctioneer, he had a history of delivering money to a rural state that consistently ranks among the top 10 most federally dependent in the nation. Most Montanans knew his name.

But Burns had a major liability: He was one of the lawmakers whom the disgraced lobbyist and convicted felon Jack

Abramoff trusted to deliver federal dollars to his clients. This liability surfaced in 2004, when Burns earmarked \$3 million for the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, an Abramoff client, to build a new school. The Michigan-based tribe contributed thousands to Burns’s PAC both before and immediately after that appropriation, drawing criticism in the state and national press.

“Every appropriation we wanted [from Burns’s committee], we got,” Abramoff told *Vanity Fair* in April

2006. “Our staffs were as close as they could be.”

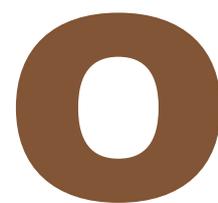
On election night, Lombardi stayed up to watch the returns, and when the sun came up, a wheat farmer was leading one of the most powerful senators in the West by just over 1,000 votes. Ultimately, Tester won by 3,562 votes, less than 1 percent of the total.

“We won because of his authenticity—that agrarian populism, a person who’s tied to the land,” Lombardi told me. “Montanans still have that libertarian-populist streak. They don’t want these fake cowboys.”

Today, the battle to control the US Senate will once again be fought in Montana and a few other swing states, with at least seven contested races for seats currently held by Democrats and one independent. The challenge for Republicans is that Tester hasn’t changed. He’s still the same guy who beat Burns: a scandal-free farmer from Big Sandy.

The challenge for Democrats, though, is that Tester’s role has been reversed. Now *he* is the 18-year incumbent vulnerable to the time-tested insult of “career politician.” More important, Montana isn’t the same place where Tester won 18, or even six, years ago. Like so much of rural America, it has been transformed by the polarization of major media outlets and the nationalization of politics. Local newspapers keep shutting down or laying off reporters, and now more Montanans learn about current events from Fox News than any other news outlet. Montana, in the 2016 and 2020 elections, was roughly 11 points more Republican than the nation overall.

Today, Tester is the only remaining statewide officeholder in the Democratic Party, and he’s running for a fourth term against Tim Sheehy, a pro-Trump Navy SEAL with no political history. The question this year is whether Tester, who has regularly defied pundits and outperformed the polls, can muster one more win.



ON MAY 19, I DROVE TO Bozeman to interview Tester, who was in town to shoot a campaign ad.

It was 40 degrees when

I arrived, and sleet was pelting the front windows of the ELM, a music venue near downtown. Inside, Tester mingled with 20 or 30 veterans who’d driven from all over the state to promote his work on the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee. Wearing a plaid Carhartt shirt and blue jeans, the working farmer with his famous flattop posed for photos in front of a huge American flag.

He’d been on his tractor planting alfalfa, peas, and hard red spring wheat early that morning before boarding a plane to Bozeman, and he was anxious to finish the job before returning to DC. So the campaign invited me to join him for the 20-minute drive to the regional airport in Belgrade. After he ordered

**“We won because of his authenticity—that agrarian populism, a person who’s tied to the land.”**

—Bill Lombardi, Tester’s former state director

Gabriel Furschong is a writer based in Helena, Montana.



three beef soft shells at a Taco John's drive-through, I asked him about our country's defining political trend: polarization.

"Obviously, I don't think it's healthy," Tester said, crushing a taco wrapper in his right hand. He had lost three fingers on his left hand in a meat grinder when he was 9 years old. "It keeps us from getting work done."

He brought up the border security bill that was introduced in the Senate and voted down by House Republicans in mid-April as an example of lawmakers voting against their own party's policies in order to deepen polarization on a politically advantageous issue. The \$118 billion legislation—which raised the ire of several members of the Democratic Caucus, who felt that the bill was

doubling down on punitive Trump-era policies—would have added 1,500 Border Patrol agents, increased ICE's detention capacity, and created an emergency authority to deport migrants before they could apply for asylum.

"It's interesting—what people don't remember at all is Trump said, 'Kill this bill and blame me for it.' He actually said that, [because] they wanted it as a campaign issue, and they're using it as a campaign issue, record be damned."

I asked whether it's possible to get a majority of Montana voters to appreciate the nuances of what he called a "missed opportunity" when Republican ads on illegal immigration occupy every commercial break.

"Well, you've got to say it over and over again, and hopefully they'll believe it," he replied, "but the truth is, they don't look at the fact that I have voted for a wall in certain areas. I have voted for additional manpower. I have voted for additional funding."

I could hear some frustration growing in Tester's voice as he detailed his own record on the issue. "The truth is, they try to pigeonhole people into all these positions when in fact they're not accurate."

As a Democrat in a Republican state, Tester is sensitive to being pigeonholed. In fact, he's been liberal on issues with cross-party appeal for Republicans—he's a champion of labor and a protector of public lands—and conservative on issues with cross-party appeal for Democrats, namely immigration and foreign policy. And this balancing act has frequently put him at odds with progressive members of his party.

During his first term, Tester voted against the DREAM Act, which would have granted conditional US residency to qualifying undocumented high school graduates. The bill fell just five votes short of the 60 needed for passage. He's also been a reliable vote for defense funding and has only occasionally opposed US military action abroad, voting against air strikes in Syria but supporting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Lately, Tester has dismissed calls for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, which has killed more than 38,000 Palestinians, including more than 15,000 children, and more than 1,100 Israeli civilians. In March, when ceasefire supporters interrupted his speech at a Democratic gala in Helena, the crowd started chanting, "Let's go, Jon!" After

sheriff's deputies removed the protesters, Tester quipped, "Isn't it great to be popular?"

During the ride to the airport, I asked him why he'd decided to run for a fourth term, and he returned to the topic of pro-Palestinian demonstrations. "What drives me crazy is, we get protested by 10 or 12 of these kids that are 'pro-Palestinian' or 'pro-Hamas' or 'antisemites'—I don't know what the fuck they are," he said. "But they come in in their mid-20s, maybe 30, and they actually think that if they defeat me in this election, I'm going to cry about it, when in fact the only reason I'm running is for them."

He explained, "I'm trying to set it up, truthfully, so that we have clean air and clean water, and we're moving into the 21st century in a way where our economy is going to give opportunity to our kids and our grandkids. And that shit doesn't happen by accident; it happens by people thinking forward."

Because the Democratic Party leadership has given him influential committee assignments, Tester has had the opportunity to put such thoughts into action, and he has written and passed several bipartisan bills during a period marked by legislative gridlock.

In 2009, just three years into his first term, Tester was given a seat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, and in 2014, he cosponsored and passed the Rocky Mountain Heritage Act, which protects 275,000 acres of wildlife habitat south of Glacier National Park, an area long threatened by oil and gas development.

As one of the 10 senators who wrote the 2021 infrastructure bill, Tester has channeled hundreds of millions of dollars into clean-water projects for rural communities in Montana and the state's Indian reservations. And last year, in a bid to address the rising cost of housing in Montana, he secured \$225 million for the PRICE grant program, which funds the construction of factory-built homes in eligible communities.

As the chair of the Senate's Veterans' Affairs Committee and the Appropriations subcommittee on defense, he's also expanded healthcare for a new generation of veterans. In 2022, he passed the PACT Act, the largest expansion of Veterans' Affairs health services in decades, which grants thousands of veterans exposed to toxic chemicals access to VA health benefits. Last year, he successfully introduced the Veterans' Compensation COLA Act to ensure that benefits for veterans with service-connected injuries keep pace with inflation.

Still, legislative achievements have a limited effect on voters'

**The opponent:** Tim Sheehy, the Bridger Aerospace CEO who is running against Tester, in his company's hangar in Bozeman.





**Shovel-ready:** Tester, then a Senate hopeful, loads wheat into his tractor trailer in 2006 in Big Sandy. Tester is a third-generation dirt farmer.

voters will] look and say, ‘All right, what’s the dude done, what’s he done that’s helped my life?’ And I think they’re going to—” He paused, searching for an end to the sentence. “I think it’s going to be fine.”

**I**F THINGS ONCE AGAIN WORK OUT FINE FOR TESTER AND HIS SUPPORTERS, it will be because Montanans’ favorable views of the farmer outweigh their partisan ties to Trump. In several polls taken over the fall and winter, that appeared to be the case, but the most recent poll, from late March, shows Sheehy with a narrow lead, raising the question of whether Tester’s track record and personal appeal can suppress voters’ partisan ardor.

During Tester’s last reelection campaign, authenticity was a decisive theme. His opponent in 2018 was State Auditor Matt Rosendale, a real estate developer from Baltimore who moved to Montana in 2002. Early in the race, the Tester operation dubbed him “Maryland Matt” and pounded his slow-moving campaign with television ads challenging his Montana bona fides. Tester won by nearly 18,000 votes, the largest margin of his career.

But he won’t have the pleasure of running against Rosendale this year. On February 9, Trump endorsed Sheehy hours after Rosendale announced another Senate bid, ending a rancorous debate within the Montana GOP over who should go toe-to-toe with Tester.

Sheehy, a millionaire from Minnesota, was hand-picked by Montana Senator Steve Daines, the current chair of the National Republican Senatorial Committee. Sheehy announced his bid last summer and has been running full-on for a year. By the end of March, he’d already spent nearly \$1.5 million of his own money



**“Tester has had weaker opponents in the past. I mean, this race might be over if Rosendale was running.”**

—Jessica Taylor, Senate editor at the *Cook Political Report*

partisan affiliations, which are becoming less flexible each year, particularly for Republicans, whose partisan preferences have calcified since Donald Trump effectively took control of the GOP. Without trusted local news sources to inform voters, actual policy outcomes, such as increased funding for veterans, may influence them less than inflammatory attack ads.

In April, the conservative One Nation PAC purchased \$15 million in television ads to paint Tester as soft on immigration, and that investment has paid dividends. Undocumented immigration is arguably the top issue for Montana Republicans, even though the state is more than 1,000 miles from the southern border.

Tester, though, is reluctant to accept polarization as a foregone conclusion, even on issues like immigration, perhaps because he’s defied the trend more than once. In 2012, when Mitt Romney defeated Barack Obama by a 14-point margin in Montana, Tester beat his challenger, Representative Denny Rehberg, by nearly four points. Then he won by nearly the same margin in 2018, two years after Trump vanquished Hillary Clinton by 20 points.

“I think the ticket-splitting stuff is still going to happen,” Tester said, “because I think Montana is still a small enough state where [the



in a race that will set a record for political spending in Montana. And he's using these resources to highlight his support for a range of issues, including tighter border security, ending access to abortion, and defending the Lord's Prayer in public schools.

"Tester has had weaker opponents in the past," Jessica Taylor, the Senate and governors editor at the *Cook Political Report*, told me. "I mean, this race might be over if Rosendale was running with his past baggage and anemic fundraising."

Anticipating this outcome, Tester's campaign launched television ads and began talking to voters earlier than in previous cycles. In March, it also announced a Native vote program to connect with Indigenous constituents who have been the target of voter-suppression efforts by Republicans in the state Legislature. At 6.6 percent of Montana's population, Indigenous people represent a powerful bloc in the Democratic base, and Tester's campaign plans to spend at least \$1.2 million to reach them—more than twice what it spent last cycle.



**"It's not just that Tim Sheehy moved here from out of state. It's that he is a self-interested multimillionaire."**

—Shelbi Dantic, Tester's campaign manager

**Rally round the flag:** Tester greets a military veteran in Bozeman.

ing in Afghanistan three years earlier.

Sheehy moved to Bozeman after receiving a medical discharge. In 2014, he founded Bridger Aerospace, an aerial firefighting company that relies on government contracts for 88 percent of its revenue and reported \$77 million in losses last year. In 2020, Sheehy bought three adjacent ranches in the Little Belt Mountains and started to raise cattle.

This latest business venture, named the Little Belt Cattle Company, has been an easy target for Tester. Last July, *Business Insider* reported that a campaign photo of Sheehy posing by a barbed-wire fence was actually taken in Kentucky. More recently, Sheehy came under fire for selling private hunting trips on the ranch for \$12,500 each.

This level of early spending confirms the expectation that Sheehy would be a more formidable opponent than Rosendale.

Sheehy, 38, grew up in a multimillion-dollar lake house in the Twin Cities suburb of Shoreview, Minnesota. He graduated from a private high school in 2004 before enrolling in the US Naval Academy. In 2015, he was awarded a Bronze Star for helping to evacuate a wounded member of his unit while serv-

"It's not just that Tim Sheehy moved here from out of state," said Shelbi Dantic, Tester's campaign manager. "It's that he is a self-interested multimillionaire who does not understand or care about the Montana way of life and is trying to change our state into a playground for rich transplants like him."

Historically, this line of attack has been the most effective in Tester's political playbook. But the level of damage incurred by opposing candidates also depends on the legitimacy of their claim to be someone most Montanans admire. When Sheehy advertises a rural upbringing and portrays himself as a rancher, he risks being seen as just another rhinestone cowboy. His military service, however, could place him on terra firma in a state with the fifth-highest number of veterans per capita in the country.

"The GOP has a history of getting behind a wealthy candidate who has recently moved to the state, and I do think there is a vein of that frustration in Montana," Taylor said. "But I guess I reserve judgment on whether that works, because Sheehy moved there after finishing his military service, which could negate some of that."

Ultimately, Sheehy's ability to convert his military service into political capital depends on how well his actual record matches his portrayal of it to voters, and there are already some inconsistencies. In December, Sheehy's campaign posted a video of him at an event telling supporters that he still had a bullet lodged in his right forearm "from Afghanistan." But in April, *The Washington Post* reported that Sheehy sustained the wound when he accidentally shot himself in Glacier National Park in October 2015. And in his 2023 memoir, *Mudslingers*, he provides two conflicting explanations for the injury.

Sheehy's campaign minimizes communication with reporters and strictly controls media queries. The campaign has no phone number or physical address. Katie Martin and Jack O'Brien, communications consultants for Sheehy's campaign, did not reply to multiple requests for comment. Calls to the Montana Republican Party and messages sent through its website were also not returned.

Aside from past donations to GOP candidates, Sheehy has no significant political history. This void has allowed him to reflect the hopes of the Trump wing of the party without offending moderates. Some moderates, though, are beginning to voice their dissent.

The state's former Republican governor, Marc Racicot, who served from 1993 to 2001, is a leading critic of Sheehy and other far-right Republicans. It's hard to question his conservative credentials: Racicot chaired the Republican National Committee from 2002 to 2003 and led George W. Bush's presidential reelection campaign. "I've known Jon since he first reported

for his job at the State Capitol,” he said. “I have a high opinion of his ability to act independently and do what he thinks is right.”

As for Sheehy, Racicot said, “The fact that he moved to Montana recently doesn’t bother me. What bothers me is that he moved here simply to be the vehicle for Donald Trump’s will, which is a will to remain in power. That’s all that Tim Sheehy has claimed as a merit badge: to be a loyal acolyte to Trump.”

Yet most rank-and-file Montana Republicans disagree. In a state that Biden lost by 16 points, Sheehy’s fealty to Trump is likely enough to earn their support.

**F**OR LIBERAL AND MODERATE MONTANANS, the extent of this rightward shift merits close attention. Not long ago, things were trending in the opposite direction.

Tester’s surprise victory over Burns was part of a surge of Democratic support among Montana voters, who have split their ballots for generations. In 2008, they narrowly favored John McCain over Obama by 11,000 votes, but Democrats held both of Montana’s US Senate seats and all six statewide offices, and they had a 50-50 tie in the state House of Representatives.

Four years later, voters reelected Tester and five more Democratic incumbents to statewide offices. But there were signs that a change was underway. In 2012, Montanans chose Romney over Obama by nearly 65,000 votes, an 11-percentage-point swing from 2008. Since 2012, Democrats have lost 21 out of 23 statewide and federal races, and Republicans have held the majority in both state legislative chambers for 14 years.

“Tester is the last man standing, and what used to be a purple state is now clearly a red state,” said Rob Saldin, a political science professor at the University of Montana and a senior fellow at the Niskanen Institute in Washington, DC.

And these partisan trends are likely to continue. Montana has the sixth-highest percentage of voters 65 years and older, a group that is increasingly likely to vote a straight ticket in the state. In 2016, there was an 18-point difference between the highest- and lowest-performing Democrats. Four years later, every Democratic candidate ran within six points of the rest, marking a dramatic decline in crossover voters.

These are foreboding figures for Tester, who held favor with older voters in the past but seems to be losing ground. Although his 61 percent approval

rating among Montanans remains one of the highest in the country, his approval rating among Republicans has plummeted from 42 to 22 percent.

“Obviously, you can’t find a better example of a candidate who is able to distinguish himself from the national party, but there are some really big structural forces at play here,” Saldin said. “National issues matter more than local issues now. The urban-rural divide has really been exacerbated in recent years. Then there are the forces of polarization of politics. All of these things are way more intense than in 2018, and they all work to the advantage of the GOP in Montana and, insofar as the Senate is concerned, the entire nation.”

On these points, Taylor, the *Cook Political Report* editor, agrees. “I think this is Tester’s toughest race because of the environment he’s running in,” she said. “On paper, he’s the most endangered incumbent in the Senate. But I think Tester is a talented politician, and you can’t count him out. If anyone can outrun Biden by 10-plus points, it’s probably Tester.”

**O**F COURSE, IT’S NOT JUST TESTER WHO’S IN danger. If Sheehy wins, every policy that depends on a Democratic majority in the Senate to become law would also be imperiled.

“Democrats cannot afford to lose a single senator,” Taylor said. “And even if they don’t lose a senator but Trump wins, then Trump’s VP will be the tiebreaking vote.”

This possibility is not lost on Tester, who voted for the Inflation Reduction Act, enabling Vice President Kamala Harris to cast the tiebreaking vote on a bill that the International Monetary Fund calls “the most significant piece of climate legislation in the history of the US.”

“I do this in every election,” Tester told me as we neared Belgrade. “You always think of what you’re going to do if you win, and you think about what you’re going to do if you lose.”

As we were driven by a campaign staffer, Tester gazed through the rain that was drumming the passenger window. “I don’t think I’m going to have a lot of crying for myself. I’ll have some crying for the country, and I’ll have some crying for my kids and my grandkids—but for me, life will get markedly better if I don’t get back to the Senate. Why? Because I’ll have some fucking time.”

As we pulled up to the hangar, I could see the tiny single-engine prop plane

that would soon be buzzing high above the wheat and barley fields toward Big Sandy. In a few hours, Tester would be back on his tractor.

“Ray Peck, ya know,” was the guy that got me hooked into politics,” he said, referring to a former school superintendent from Big Sandy who recruited him to run for office in 1998. “When I told Ray I was going to come home every weekend to farm, he said, ‘You’ll be dead before the end of your first session—no human being can make that trip every weekend.’”

“Well,” Tester said, “I’ve done it for 18 years, and if I get reelected, I’ll do it again.”



**“What bothers me is that Sheehy moved here simply to be the vehicle for Donald Trump’s will.”**

—Marc Racicot, former GOP governor of Montana

**Bumpy ride:** Tester takes a car en route to Big Sandy, where he still tends to his farm.



# DIRECTOR'S CUT

Palestinian filmmaker **Mohammad Bakri** was censored for daring to tell the story of occupation in Jenin, Jenin. Now he is trying again with a new film.

**RANIA ABOUZEID**

# T

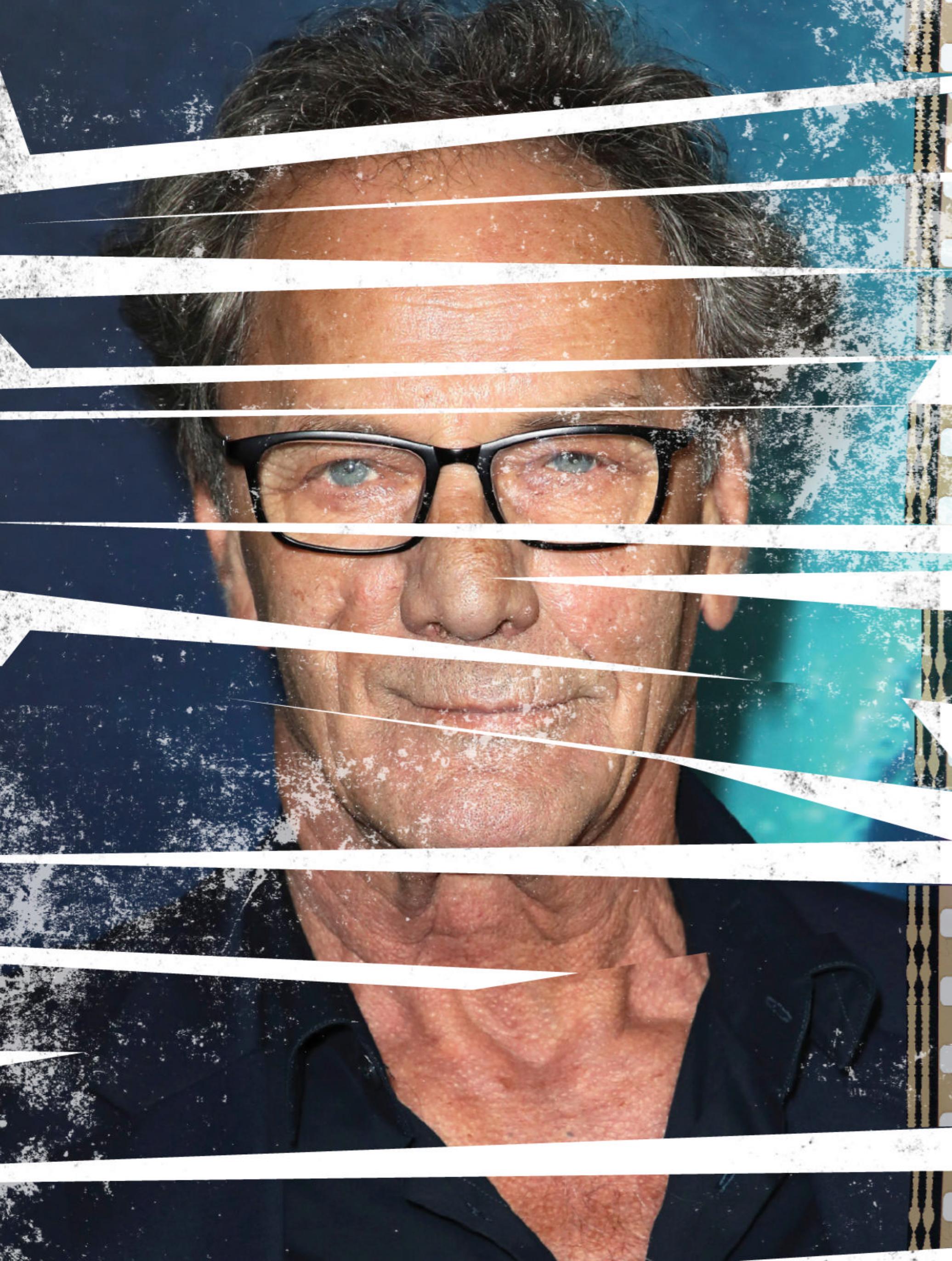
HE PALESTINIAN ACTOR AND DIRECTOR MOHAMMAD BAKRI IS singing the Israeli national anthem, his voice rising as he belts out a few lines in Hebrew. The 70-year-old is reminiscing about his primary-school days, which occasionally began with a rendition of the song. He remembered a speech that his principal made him deliver on Israel's Independence Day to the Israeli officer who was overseeing martial law in his hometown of Al-Baneh in the Galilee. Like every Palestinian town that survived the Nakba, avoiding the fate of at least 530 villages that were destroyed and emptied of their residents, Al-Baneh was incorporated into Israel in 1948 and then placed under martial law until 1966 (Bakri was 13 years old when it ended). The speech, he recalled, "was about 'We stand to remember what happened in the Second World War. We stand to remember what the Nazis did.'"

*Rania Abouzeid is an award-winning independent print and television journalist. Her book No Turning Back, about the Syrian uprising, was published in 2018.*

It wasn't until he was a teenager that he understood the impact of that history—and the Israeli narrative—on his family. His illiterate father would repeat, on every occasion that he could, the story of what happened when Zionist military forces marched into his village on a sweltering day in 1948—about the men summarily executed, the relatives who fled into exile, and the imprisonment of every Palestinian male between the ages of 16 and 40, including Bakri's father. That wasn't part of the history that Bakri was taught at school.

"We didn't commit the Holocaust, but we paid the price for it. We could have lived together if they left Palestinians in their homes and lived alongside us. They would have been welcomed. But to live in our places—why? That is my story," he told me. "They don't want to hear it, because they don't acknowledge me as a Palestinian. Israel wanted us to forget who we are."

Bakri is what Israelis call an "Arab Israeli," a term that many Palestinians (including Bakri) don't use, because it erases their Palestinian identity within a generic Arab one while also splintering that identity, based on Palestinians' fragmented geography, into Arab Israelis, Gazans, West Bankers, and East Jerusalemites. In the wider Middle East, Bakri is considered a "Palestinian of '48" or a "Palestinian of the interior," part of the quarter or so of the population of historical Palestine who were not expelled or forced to flee in 1948 and then forbidden from returning. There are now millions of Palestinian refugees in the diaspora. Although Bakri's identification papers and passport are Israeli, he is emphatically Palestinian.



**For 20 years, starting in 2002, Bakri was dragged through Israeli courts, censored and censured, because of his film *Jenin, Jenin*.**



**A painful sequel:** Bakri and a Palestinian woman visit a building that still bears the marks of a 2023 Israeli invasion in his new film *Jenin Jenin*.

“My Palestinian identity is in my heart, it is in my soul, it is not in my pocket,” he said. “It is not possible to be Palestinian and be folded into the Israeli story, because it means you have ceased to be Palestinian.”

We had decided to meet in Amman, the capital of Jordan, because it was neutral territory for both of us. Bakri, who still lives in his hometown, cannot travel to my base of Lebanon or most of the Arab world on his Israeli passport; Arab states

forbid it. It is, however, possible for him to do so using an additional travel document issued by the Palestinian Authority, but not without facing serious legal consequences in Israel. As an Australian Lebanese New Zealander, I cannot cross an Israeli border to visit him, given Lebanon’s anti-normalization laws with Israel that carry charges of treason. These restrictions are one way that Palestinian citizens of Israel are disconnected from most of the Arab world.

We met to discuss Bakri’s new documentary, *Jenin Jenin*; the first word of the title, *jenin*, means “embryo” in Arabic, reflecting the idea that the Jenin refugee camp in the Israeli-occupied West Bank has birthed generations of resistance to Israel. Like a previous documentary, *Jenin, Jenin*, released 22 years ago, Bakri’s newest offering will also likely get him into trouble with Israeli authorities.

There’s a chill in the late-afternoon air, and Bakri, a father of six and grandfather to many, is urging me to put on a jacket. He’s sipping strong Turkish coffee and smoking incessantly, one e-cigarette after another, despite a ferocious cough. Still movie-star handsome, with shaggy gray hair and bright blue eyes, he is a man who says what he thinks and doesn’t take time to weigh his words. He’s done trying to explain himself to an Israeli audience that he believes is uninterested in narratives that start from a different premise and veer from its own.

It wasn’t always this way. A theater and Arabic literature graduate of Tel Aviv University, Bakri was a fixture of the Israeli theater and cinema scenes, performing in Hebrew and Arabic and winning awards—until he wasn’t. He is famous (or infamous) in Israel and the Arab world and has performed internationally. Five of his children have followed him into what has become the family acting and film business, with two of his sons, Saleh and Adam, starring in Oscar-nominated movies about life under Israeli occupation. Saleh, his eldest son, was once voted Israel’s sexiest man. His youngest, Mahmood, edited *Jenin Jenin* and shared the filming with another of his sons, Ziad, who is also an actor and director.

Bakri pulls out another e-cigarette. We’re talking about the role of documentaries in the social media age, when atrocities are live-streamed and the deluge of debunked stories and confirmed facts can seem overwhelming to audiences. “If everything we are seeing on the Internet—on Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and other sites—showing the destruction, the deaths of women and children in Gaza, hasn’t moved people to act, what will a film like mine do? I don’t expect it to do anything more than what we are witnessing now,” he said. “Look, there is a Palestinian saying that ‘God can’t hear the silent,’ so my stories are for God to hear. Maybe He will help us.”



STORIES, AND THE CONTROVERSIES around them, have shaped Bakri’s life since childhood, but there is one story in particular that has defined him—and for which he paid a high price: his 54-minute documentary *Jenin, Jenin*. For 20 years, starting in 2002, Bakri was dragged through Israeli courts because of it, censored and censured, charged with defamation and fabrication, branded a traitor to the Israeli state and a terrorist sympathizer by members of the Knesset, and subjected to death threats and a grenade attack on his home.

The film presented the oral testimonies of Palestinian survivors of a 15-day Israeli military invasion of the Jenin refugee camp in 2002. Tensions and violence between Israelis and Palestinians had been rising since September 2000, when Ariel Sharon, then the leader of the Israeli opposition, accompanied by hundreds of heavily armed security forces, stormed Jerusalem’s Al Aqsa Mosque, triggering the Second Intifada. A Palestinian suicide bombing of an Israeli restaurant led to the assault on Jenin, part of what Israel called Operation Defensive Shield. At the time, it was the largest military offensive in the West Bank since the 1967 war.

The raid on Jenin left 52 Palestinians dead, of whom 22 were civilians, as well as 23 Israeli soldiers. Human Rights Watch documented Israeli war crimes committed during the operation, including the use of Palestinian civilians as human shields. Bakri made no claims in the documentary; there was no voice-of-God narration. He simply gave Jenin’s Palestinians the space to share their experiences, and in so doing challenged the Israeli narrative of a defensive surgical raid targeting “terrorists.”

“What is the fault of the child they killed? We are still pulling martyrs out from under the rubble,” an elderly man leaning on a walking stick says in the beginning of the film. “They say an investigating commission is on its way. Why do all the world’s regulations apply to us but not to the Israelis?” He gestures toward the sky: “Where are you, God?” In another scene, a hospital employee in a white lab coat recounts how the facility was struck at 3 AM by 11 Israeli tank shells, destroying major infrastructure, including the hospital’s west wing. He spoke of warplanes unleashing barrages of missiles every few minutes. “I contacted the Red Cross, who contacted the Israelis, but to no avail,” he says.

There were angry protests outside the film’s premiere at the Jerusalem Cinematheque and

at the few screenings of *Jenin, Jenin* that followed before it was banned by the Israel Film Council. The council called it a “propaganda film” capable of offending “the feelings of the public which may mistakenly think that IDF soldiers regularly and systematically commit war crimes, and this is completely at odds with the truth and the facts uncovered by investigations of the IDF and international bodies.”

In 2003, Israel’s Supreme Court reversed the ban, saying it infringed on Bakri’s freedom of expression. But in 2007, Bakri was once again brought to court after five Israeli soldiers filed a defamation lawsuit. That suit was dismissed, because the soldiers weren’t identifiable in the footage. Another soldier who appeared onscreen for a few seconds could be identified, however, and in 2016, with the support of the military’s top brass, he filed his own defamation suit. In 2021, a district court found Bakri guilty of defamation and ordered that every copy of *Jenin, Jenin* be confiscated. (It is still freely available on the Internet.)

After one final appeal, Bakri lost in Israel’s Supreme Court in 2022 and was ordered to pay about \$55,000 for defaming the Israeli soldier, as well as \$15,000 in legal fees. He is still paying the sum in installments. The court said that *Jenin, Jenin* portrayed “a fabricated narrative under the pretense of a documentary” and banned the film permanently.

Despite being censured for his work, Bakri returned to the Jenin refugee camp in 2023, days after the end of another major Israeli military incursion, to shoot *Jenin Jenin*, which presents the oral testimonies of survivors, including some featured two decades earlier in *Jenin, Jenin*. Bakri doesn’t care about the possible consequences. “I am not afraid of them,” he told me. “There is strength in telling the truth. I believe in our narratives, and I believe that the occupied also write history.”

**T**HE TELLING OF HISTORY HAS ALWAYS BEEN political, an enterprise shaped not only by whose stories get included and how they are framed but by whose stories are left out. There are voices heard, and voices silenced. History is about facts, but also, and more important, it is about power—as exercised through the erasure or the acknowledgment of those facts, as well as attempts to reclaim that power through alternative tellings.

Bakri’s experience with *Jenin, Jenin* is entangled in these tensions. His tribulations are rooted not only in questions of censorship and free



speech, or activism and objective documentation. They are part of a deeper historical discourse about Palestine—or the lack of one. The “question of Palestine,” as the late Palestinian American professor and public intellectual Edward Said wrote in his 1979 book by that title, is “the contest between an affirmation and a denial,” one premised on what Said called Israel’s “refusal to admit, and the consequent denial of, the existence of Palestinian Arabs who are there not simply as an inconvenient nuisance, but as a population with an indissoluble bond with the land.”

The battle over what has happened in Gaza since October 7, 2023—and why it has happened—is already fierce and will likely only grow more intense once the dust of thousands of pulverized buildings eventually settles across Gaza, the fate of the Israeli hostages is determined, and the extent of Palestinian deaths, displacement, and injuries is fully accounted for.

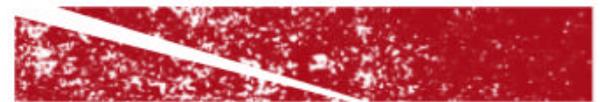
Bakri’s two-decade-long ordeal portends what may happen to other documentarians who step outside the mainstream and tell another story. If he was persecuted for a film about a raid that left some 50 Palestinians dead, what might happen to those who chronicle a war that has left more than 38,000 dead? Israel has already shut down *Al Jazeera’s* operations in the country, claiming its news broadcasts are a security threat. “Today, I am convinced that our conflict with Israel is not a religious conflict or even about land—it is a war of narratives,” Bakri told me, one that he says started with Israel’s foundational narrative: “The Zionist movement said that they were a people without a land arriving to a land without a people. But we were here.”

Since October 7, Israel has intensified its crackdown on both Palestinian citizens of Israel (who constitute about one-fifth of the population) and Jewish Israelis who engage in anti-Zionist speech or who oppose Israel’s offensive in Gaza. Although the policing predates Hamas’s surprise attack, the space for alternative views has been shrinking in Israel—and the penalties for tiptoeing outside that space have been growing.

Adalah, a nonprofit legal center for Palestinian rights in Israel, has documented hundreds of cases in recent months of students being expelled or suspended from academic institutions and of people being arrested or losing their jobs over social media posts. One incident, however, is considered unprecedented: the case of Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, a renowned Palestinian academic at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian is a feminist legal scholar whose

**Cinema verité:** Bakri stars as Salim, a Palestinian man facing prosecution by the Israeli state, in the 1983 Costa-Gavras film *Hanna K*.



**“There is a Palestinian saying that ‘God can’t hear the silent,’ so my stories are for God to hear. Maybe He will help us.”**

—Mohammad Bakri

## Bakri's two-decade-long ordeal portends what may happen to other documentarians in Israel who step outside the mainstream.

**Past as prologue:** A young girl tells her story in *Janin, Jenin*; 20 years later, she appears as an adult in Bakri's follow-up, *Janin Jenin*.

institutions, pushed for the adoption of a draft law to fire university lecturers who criticize Israel and its policies, a bill that is facing pushback from some universities.

Jabareen described Shalhoub-Kevorkian's arrest and her harsh treatment in detention, which included being strip-searched, shackled, denied her medication, and verbally abused, as "racism based on humiliation." Although Palestinian citizens of Israel can vote and there are several who sit in the Knesset, they are still second-class citizens, Jabareen said, because of the nearly 70 laws that discriminate against non-Jews. These include the 2018 "nation-state law," which affirms that "the right to exercise national self-determination" in Israel is "unique to the Jewish people," and which enshrines Hebrew as the country's official language (downgrading Arabic) and "Jewish settlement as a national value," without saying where those outposts might be. (Settlements on occupied land are illegal under international law.) Now a new proposed law would extend the practice of "administrative detention," under which Palestinians in the occupied territories can be held indefinitely without charge or trial, to Palestinian citizens of Israel—but not to Jewish Israelis.

The impact of the suppression of free speech and dissent has reverberated beyond Israel's borders. In mid-March, in a landmark decision in the United Kingdom, a 24-year-old Palestinian citizen of Israel identified by the pseudonym Hasan was granted asylum after claiming that "Israel maintains an apartheid system of domination of its Jewish citizens over its Palestinian citizens, whom it systematically oppresses." Hasan, his legal team said, had "provided evidence to the tribunal that he is at enhanced risk of persecution [in Israel] because of his

research focuses on trauma, genocide, state crimes, gender violence, and surveillance. On April 18, she was arrested for comments she made on a podcast earlier this year and for academic articles she has written in the past. She was suspected of "serious incitement against the State of Israel by making statements against Zionism and even claiming that Israel is committing genocide in the Gaza Strip," according to the court transcript. Among other

things, Adalah has said, she was questioned about the terms she used in her peer-reviewed work, including "ontology," "sacralization," and "settler colonialism"; why she describes East Jerusalem as "occupied"; her research into the withholding of the bodies of dead Palestinians; and the meaning of the title of one of her books, *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear*, which examines Palestinian experiences of life and death within the context of the Israeli security state.

"This is the first time that an academic was arrested and investigated about articles that he or she wrote and were published by academic journals," Hassan Jabareen, one of her lawyers and the director of Adalah, told me over the phone. "Legally, it is not allowed."

Shalhoub-Kevorkian, who is in her 60s, was released on bail, but her case is not closed. Since her arrest, the effort to police speech in universities has only increased. In early June, the National Union for Israeli Students, which represents more than 350,000 students in some 60 higher education



Palestinian solidarity activism in the UK and his anti-Zionist political opinions."

The young man, who has lived in the UK for most of his life but is not a citizen, applied for asylum in 2019. In October 2022, Britain's Home Office rejected his claim, denying that Israel persecutes its own citizens. This March, however, it abruptly reversed its position less than a day before Hasan's legal team was due to challenge it.

Franck Magennis, one of Hasan's lawyers, told me that he believes the war in Gaza influenced the Home Office's ruling. "I don't think that they would have withdrawn the decision in the way that they did if they hadn't been much more worried post-October 7 that a judge would have said, 'Yeah, I agree it's apartheid. I also agree that it's genocide, and I'm granting your client asylum on the basis that Israel persecutes its own citizens if they are Palestinian, anti-Zionist, or Muslim,'" Magennis told me over the phone from London. "I am not aware of any other Palestinian citizen of Israel successfully claiming asylum or even really attempting to."

The irony, as Magennis pointed out, is that millions of Palestinians want to move in the other direction—back to Israel/Palestine—under the terms of United Nations Resolution 194, which stipulates that Palestinians have a right of return but has not been implemented since it was instituted in 1948. "In that context, it is very painful to suggest that Palestinians might not be able to return because they will be persecuted," Magennis said. "But that's the reality."

Jabareen told me that the idea that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East "has become passé." Israel, he continued, "could be the only ethnic democratic state in the world—meaning Jewish democracy, as South Africa's democracy was white democracy and America's was for white Americans during segregation and slavery."

Jabareen fears that the crackdown on rights and free speech will only get worse. "I hope that after the end of the war," he said, "I won't have the feeling of a Jewish person walking in Berlin's streets in 1945 when I walk in Haifa, in Tel Aviv, and in Jerusalem."

**B**AKRI'S NEW HOUR-LONG DOCUMENTARY premiered in May to a packed house at Ramallah's cultural center in the West Bank. The Israeli raid at the center of *Janin Jenin* is merely "a drop in a sea of what is happening in Gaza," Bakri wrote on Facebook after the screening. "What will the Zionists say this time? Did I lie too? They



need to look at Gaza and check themselves in the mirror.”

The new film begins with footage from *Jenin, Jenin*, reacquainting viewers with some of the more memorable characters. There’s the deaf man who took Bakri on a tour of the camp, signing what happened and acting out where and how people were killed; his son became a militant. There’s the preteen girl with a bob cut and bangs seen walking over the rubble, her eyes and words belying her age: “This land is like our son, our mother, everything we have,” she said in 2002. “There are still women. We will bear children and men who are stronger than those who were lost.” Today, she is a mother of four.

There are new characters too, including a woman who knows that the Israeli helicopters traumatizing her 5-year-old grandson are American-made Apaches—“He’s not normal, he’s not normal at all” after the raid, she says—and a 38-year-old actor at the Freedom Theatre, a landmark cultural and community center founded by Jewish Israelis and Palestinians, who identifies the bulldozers tearing up his streets in 2023 as the IDF’s Caterpillar D9s, an armored model he said he hadn’t seen in Jenin since 2002. (The D9s have returned to Jenin numerous times since October 7, most recently in June.)

“I consider myself the result of 2002, and I am living another incursion,” the actor tells the camera. “OK, I understand we are occupied, there are raids and resistance, and then what? My question is, where are we headed? There are generations that are living the same experiences.”

That’s the inescapable message of Bakri’s new film: that the Palestinian children of today are reliving and repeating the same stories, experiences, and traumas as the children of yesterday.

One wonders what the children of Gaza will say, if they survive to tell their stories.

Although Bakri’s first Jenin documentary was primarily for an Israeli audience, he doesn’t intend to show his new film in Israel—“not out of fear of them, but because of a lack of hope in them,” he said. “I thought in my ignorance, such as it was 22 years ago, that because *Jenin, Jenin* was about the testimonies of real people, that it would change Israeli sentiment, and that was a big mistake.”

Israeli sentiment appears to have hardened since then. A Pew Research Center survey published in September 2023 showed that only 35 percent of Israelis believe that peaceful coexistence with Palestinians is possible, down 15 points since 2013. Polls conducted since October 7 have shown wide support for Israel’s war in Gaza. In January, 66 percent of Jewish Israelis polled by the Israel Democracy Institute said they did not want Israel to stop “the heavy bombing of densely populated areas.” While there have been protests calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and demanding that the government agree to a deal to free Israeli hostages and end the war, the latest Pew poll, published on May 30, indicated that a combined 73 percent of Israelis believe that their military’s response in Gaza was either about right or had not gone far enough.

“That’s why I make films,” Bakri said. “I want to explain for history’s sake the crimes that they committed and continue to commit against my people. They said *Jenin, Jenin* is full of lies. [With *Janin Jenin*,] I am showing them, ‘Look, history is repeating itself.’ How can it be a lie when the same stories, the same things, are happening again? The same people who were children then are adults now saying the same things, living through the same experiences. How is it lies?”

He continued: “I, the occupied, am obliged to tell my story in response to the stories of this occupation.”

Bakri made his new documentary, he told me, “for history’s sake, not for the [Israelis’], because throughout my life, I read history that they wrote. And we were not in it.” **N**

**Who will listen?**  
Rasmia Abudan, a resident of the Jenin refugee camp, stands amid the debris of her home, which was destroyed during Israel’s April 2002 invasion.



**“I want to explain for history’s sake the crimes that they committed and continue to commit against my people.”**  
—Mohammad Bakri



# SCHOOLS FOR STRUG FOR A WORKERS' EDUCATION MOV

A century ago, labor colleges transformed American unions. It's time to bring

DANIEL JUDT

**I**N DECEMBER OF 1936, A DAY INTO THEIR HISTORIC SIT-DOWN STRIKE AT a General Motors plant in Flint, Michigan, autoworkers set up a school. Surrounded by idle machines, freed from the foreman's gaze, they took classes in public speaking and labor journalism, in political economy, in the history of the labor movement.

This was not a spontaneous idea. Some of the key players in the strikes—the nascent United Auto Workers (UAW) union's education director and several rank-and-file organizers, as well as its future president, Walter Reuther, and his brother, Roy—had spent time at Brookwood Labor College, a small independent school for workers who wanted to radicalize the labor movement. Many of the classes at the factory in Flint were based on those at Brookwood. In a way, so was the strike itself. It was at Brookwood that the Reuther brothers first studied the sit-down—a tactic that would be deployed in the coming year by nearly 400,000 workers in one of the most radical upsurges in American labor history. The start of the modern labor movement in America owed a lot, as one historian puts it, to “Brookwood's Detroit vanguard.”

That moment should be front of mind today for a new generation of labor leftists. A rejuvenated UAW invoked the sit-down strikes as a precedent for its successful “stand-up” strike against the Big Three automakers last fall. Today's young activists are returning to 1930s organizing pamphlets for strategy and inspiration. There are even two new podcasts devoted exclusively to the history of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which was founded in 1935. These

retellings and invocations are happy signs of a renascent labor movement. Propelled by enthusiastic young workers and new leaders, unions are starting to organize—and to strike!

We shouldn't exaggerate. Union density remains cripplingly low (10 percent of the overall workforce and just 6 percent of private employees belong to unions), and some of the new wave of organizing has already crashed against capital's willingness to flout our impotent labor laws. But the excitement is real, and it is prompting labor leaders, activists, and scholars to return to the 1930s for lessons.

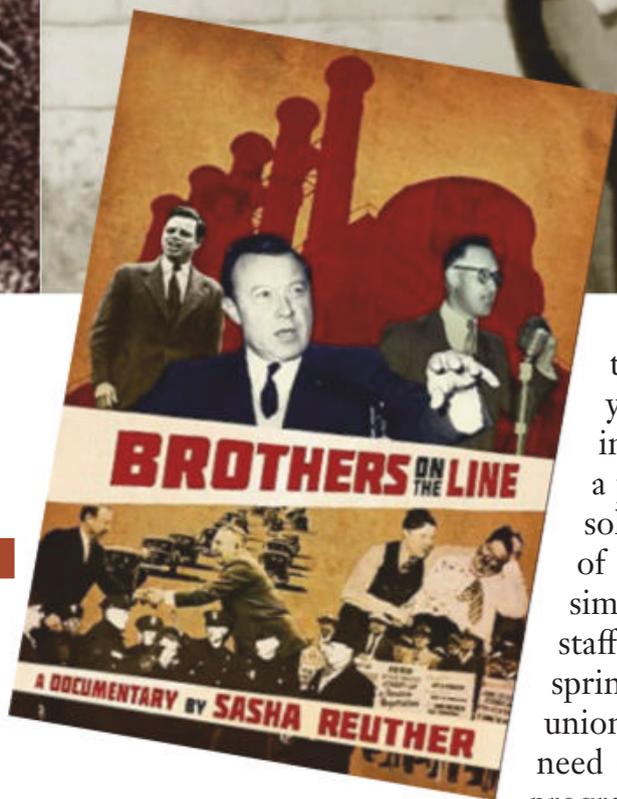
So it matters that Brookwood—and, more critically, the vast movement of workers' education of which the college was but one part—remains largely absent from our narration of labor history. This historical omission is indicative of a contemporary problem: The project of workers' education is absent from our understanding of labor's past because it has no role in labor's present. “There is little clarity about the significance or substance of workers' education within the labor movement,” wrote Bob Master, a former leader with the Communication Workers of America (CWA) who directed the

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# GLE: EMENT them back.



union's political education programs in New York, in an unpublished essay from 2017. In fact, he went on, many unions "have abandoned worker education entirely."

There are exceptions. CWA has for many decades run excellent, member-led workshops on finance capitalism, labor history, and current political issues. Labor centers at some universities—CUNY's School of Labor and Urban Studies, for instance, and the labor centers now being established across the UC system in California—run accredited courses for union members. A "New Brookwood," founded in 2019 in St. Paul, provides online night classes for union members. And in Arizona, I help coordinate the Worker Power Leadership School, a month-long in-residence program for union members inspired by the 1920s labor colleges.

But such initiatives are few and far between, for reasons both historical and structural. In union-led political campaigns and workplace organizing drives, it is very difficult to create the space for workers to think beyond the demands of the moment. The tendency in even the most militant unions is to focus instead on "organizing trainings": how to talk

to your coworkers, build a committee, tell your story, win the next contract. This is important work, and, done well, it can be a powerful exercise in self-actualization and solidarity. But the ultimate end—the vision of what we are organizing for—is usually simply assumed. Or handed down by union staffers. But political consciousness does not spring organically from being a member of a union, or even from going on strike. For that we need a vast, ambitious, forthrightly ideological program of education that remains grounded

in the labor movement without being constrained by its immediate battles.

**B**ROOKWOOD WAS FOUNDED in 1921 in Katonah, New York, by a small group of labor radicals—"socialists with a small 's,'" recalled A.J. Muste, the pastor turned labor activist who directed the school for the next 12 years. It was hardly an auspicious moment. The first Red Scare and government crack-downs on leftists during World War I had crippled radical unions and rolled back the gains achieved by mainstream labor during the war. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) remained wary of political action and unwilling to press beyond its base of skilled craft workers. National union density hovered at around 10 percent. And yet it was in this hostile context that left-wing labor activists set up dozens of "colleges" and "institutes." Their politics varied, but together they constituted an attempt to rejuvenate the labor movement from the ground up. Brookwood, its directors declared in a letter to *The New York Times*, "frankly aims not to educate workers out of their class."

Students were union members who wanted to be active in the labor movement. Educational background did not matter. Of Brookwood's 42 students in 1927, for example, only 15 had attended high school. The faculty was made up of academic

**From labor rights to civil rights:** Left, A.J. Muste (seated) leading a class at Brookwood Labor College in 1925. Right, Martin Luther King Jr., Pete Seeger, Charis Horton, Rosa Parks, and Ralph Abernathy at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee in 1957.

**Brookwood, declared its directors in a letter to *The New York Times*, "frankly aims not to educate workers out of their class."**



**Still in the fight:** A.J. Muste at an anti-Vietnam War rally in Central Park in New York in 1966.

## “Spiritually, Brookwood was a labor movement in microcosm—without bureaucrats or racketeers.”

—Len DeCaux

Political Action” asked students to figure out how the labor movement should engage in electoral politics. These classes were not lectures or trainings in disguise. “This morning I spoke on the ‘Relationship of Brookwooders to the Labor Movement,’” Ed Falkowski, a Pennsylvania mine worker who spent two years at Brookwood in the late 1920s, wrote in his journal. “[I said,] ‘We are not here so much to absorb theories as to take them apart and see what is in them.’... The talk went very well, provoking comment hot and cold.... The rest of the day I was being buttonholed by those [students] who disagreed with me.”

For Falkowski and thousands of others, the labor colleges were a place for good-faith discussions and debates about what kind of movement they wanted to build. As Arthur Gleason, a labor journalist, wrote in a pamphlet surveying the movement in its early stages:

This is the heart of workers’ education—the class financed on trade union money, the teacher a comrade, the method discussion, the subject the social sciences, the aim an understanding of life and the remoulding of the scheme of things.

That, after all, was the point. Workers’ education mattered to the extent that its students applied their learning, Muste

experts who were also engaged in labor politics; many later held leadership positions in unions or the Franklin Roosevelt administration. Everyone lived on “campus”—a cavernous old mansion donated by two rich progressives—and everyone was expected to help with manual labor (though in practice, it was often the wives of faculty members who cooked and cleaned). “Spiritually,” remembered Len DeCaux, a merchant seaman who attended Brookwood from 1922 to 1924 and later served as publicity director for the CIO, “Brookwood was a labor movement in microcosm—without bureaucrats or racketeers.”

Throughout his tenure as director, Muste was very clear that the college should not shy away from questioning the AFL’s politics and strategy. He took care to ensure the college’s political independence, thanks largely to financing from the Garland Fund, an essential source of left-wing philanthropy in the early 1900s. The aim was for students and faculty to criticize from a place of commitment—and from a place of frank uncertainty. “In order to be worthwhile,” Muste wrote in 1929, “workers’ education must address itself to the actual

needs and problems of the workers.” What those actual needs and problems were could be settled only by the workers themselves.

To that end, students at Brookwood enrolled in 15-week seminars on the fundamental political and social questions of the day. A seminar in “Advanced Economics” began with Marx and worked its way through comparisons of contemporary economic well-being in America and the Soviet Union. “Workers’

argued, “in the actual work they did in unions.” And so in the mid-1930s, when the combination of an unbearable depression and a (warily) labor-friendly Roosevelt administration opened up new channels for worker action, Brookwooders streamed into the field. Two graduates went to Toledo to lead a strike at the Electric Auto-Lite Company, organized in part by Muste himself, that would kick off the historic strike wave of 1934. Clinton Golden, a machinist who served as Brookwood’s faculty recruiter, helped found the Steel Workers Organizing Committee in 1936. A Brookwood economics professor, Katherine Ellickson, supported a radical wing of the United Mine Workers and eventually became a top official of the CIO. Brookwood alumni, the vast majority of them rank-and-file workers, helped lead crucial strikes at mines in New Mexico, steel mills in West Virginia, rubber plants in Ohio—and the sit-down strikes of 1936 and 1937.

More than that: The labor colleges of the 1920s and ’30s contained the seeds of many lefts, including some that bore fruit long after the end of the New Deal. The Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, for instance, is today better known as an incubator for the civil rights movement—Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., and dozens of other leaders studied there. But it was founded in 1932 as a labor college on the Brookwood model. (Elizabeth Hawes, who became the extension director for Highlander, was a Brookwood alum.) The civil rights lawyer Pauli Murray studied at Brookwood in 1936, during the heat of the sit-downs and with many of her classmates bound for Spain to fight fascists. “I was catapulted,” she later recalled, “into a radical stance.”

**T**HE TIDAL WAVE OF PROGRESSIVE unionism in the late 1930s was the culmination of Brookwood’s mission. It was also, ironically, part of its downfall. The founding of the CIO and the explosion of worker unrest in the late ’30s drew would-be students onto the shop floor. This attrition, combined with growing internal strife—attacks from AFL conservatives and, as the

Popular Front began to fracture, Communists—proved to be fatal, and Brookwood shut down in 1937. (Almost all of the other labor colleges folded around the same time, with the notable exception of Highlander.) “Having survived Labor’s poverty,” observed a *Time* magazine article, “Brookwood was killed by Labor’s prosperity.”



**Smearing Highlander:** Billboards tarred the civil rights movement as communist-inspired.

This was true in ways that *Time* could not have foreseen. As organized labor grew stronger after World War II, it also grew more conservative. Workers' education programs generated politics that were more radical than most union leaders, whether for fear of anti-communist crackdowns or because of their own convictions, could stand. In their place, they built programs focused on skills training, teaching members how to reinforce a regime of collective bargaining that became the limit of the labor movement's vision. (Meanwhile, universities established "labor studies" programs that, though sometimes well-intentioned, scrutinized unions as players in interest-group politics: better living through social science.) By the 1950s, when union density in America peaked, the workers' education movement had all but disappeared.

Workers' education programs were canaries in the coal mine. Their demise foretold the processes of deradicalization and counterrevolution that began to hollow out the core of the labor movement in the late 1940s even as it seemed, at first, to grow. Whether such growth could have been achieved without labor's acquiescence to a Cold War order is a question that historians continue to debate. But what is clear is that the turn away from workers' education came at an inopportune time. In the early 20th century, socialism and radical democratic movements were both live models and unrealized hopes for the labor movement to draw from. By the 1980s, neoliberalism and the Cold War had obscured those radical alternatives from view. (I wonder whether, in a strange way, the turn from radical education also chimed with the Alinskyite belief that people could be politicized through organizing alone—a belief that still persists today.) Organized labor neglected the project of building a competing worldview at the precise moment when workers' access to alternate political visions through other social channels disappeared.

**W**HAT COULD A WORKERS' EDUCATION movement look like today? What would it take to build one on a scale that matches—and then exceeds—the Brookwood moment? We are asking these questions as we gear up for Worker Power's summer education program in Phoenix, now in its second year. For an entire month, 24 members from unions and organizations all over the country will gather every morning for a seminar in the Brookwood style, each led by a different instructor-activist. (One promising opening for workers' education: Many young academics have now experienced a union in graduate school.) In the afternoon, they'll knock on doors as part of Worker Power and Unite Here Local 11's canvassing operation

**Counting the days:**

General Motors workers in Flint, Michigan, chart how long they've been on strike.



for the general election. The idea is to blend learning and action, even as the two push up against each other—in this case, to work alongside Democrats while teaching beyond, and sometimes against, the party platform. Our first session, in 2022, was hardly perfect. But when it worked—the flash of recognition as an opaque historical process came into relief, and the powerful confidence that followed—it was amazing to see.

This is one model. We will need many others. We will need programs that bridge the gaps in education, wealth, ethnicity, race, and ideology that exist between and even within unions. There must be strikes to go to and organizing campaigns to join (a reminder that the current surge in both absolutely matters). Unions and philanthropists will need to support these programs while granting them genuine independence. We will need classes on the climate crisis, on neoliberalism and financialization, on the politics of immigration and the history of colonialism, on the history of how unions have become so legally and politically constrained—and on what it might look like for that not to be the case. Most of all, we will need to figure out how to give new meaning to radical labor politics for rank-and-file workers when "socialism" remains, by and large, a meaningless or even a pejorative term.

All of which is to say that a workers' education movement today cannot simply mirror the Brookwoods of a century ago. An alternative to capitalism is harder to envisage now than it was four years after the Bolshevik Revolution. The legal regime around unions, so freeing in the 1930s, now restricts us to a set of narrow goals. And now, unlike then, we have to contend with what Mike Davis called the "barren marriage" between labor and the Democratic Party. Whether these differences put us in a better or worse situation than we were a century ago is almost beside the point; they put us in a different one. And so, even if the goal of a workers' education movement remains the same, the shape it takes will be new. It may even involve working to transcend those structures that earlier generations of labor leftists fought to secure. We will have to find out as we go.

**Long march:** Decades after Highlander planted the seeds, a strike at Spring Hill in Tennessee won the UAW a contract with General Motors.



**Workers' education programs generated politics that were more radical than most union leaders could stand.**

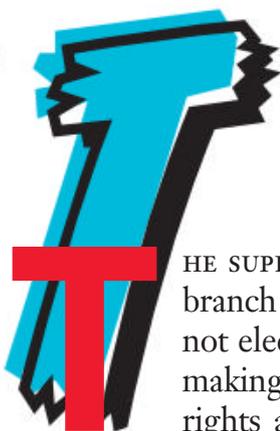
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# JUSTICE FOR THE PEOPLE

During her time on the Supreme Court, **Ketanji Brown Jackson** has articulated a skepticism toward judicial power that feels more urgent than ever.

By Elie Mystal



THE SUPREME COURT IS THE MOST ANTIDEMOCRATIC branch of government. Its justices are nominated, not elected, and they hold their positions for life, making them unaccountable to the people whose rights and liberties they curtail. For at least the past 24 years, ever since the court installed George W. Bush as president instead of permitting a recount of votes cast in Florida, the Republicans controlling the court have been increasingly hostile to democracy. They've gutted the Voting Rights Act, allowed states to gerrymander away the voting power of entire constituencies, overturned or vitiated popular legislation regarding gun safety and environmental protection, and expanded their own power at the expense of the other branches.

The president and Congress have done nothing to stop these attacks on democracy. Lawmakers won't pass an ethics bill to prevent justices from engaging in corruption. They

won't cut the court's budget. The president and Congress won't even consider passing court expansion, the surest constitutional method for bringing an extremist, antidemocratic court to heel. They're willing to write strongly worded letters appealing to Chief Justice John Roberts to *do something*, but the branches elected by the people won't use their actual powers to reform the court. The

result is that people nobody voted for routinely punk the people everybody voted for, and all that our elected representatives do is shrug and tell us to vote harder (and they do this even as the court itself tries to make those votes functionally meaningless).

So it's been all the more startling to see that one of the few public officials who seems interested in stopping the antidemocratic court from stomping all over the elected branches of government is a member of the Supreme Court itself. Ketanji Brown Jackson, the newest justice, has been on the court only two years. But in that time, she has shown herself to be not only willing but eager to call out her colleagues' frequent attempts to inflate the Supreme Court's power. She is certainly the justice who is most willing to let democratic processes resolve issues without court intervention. While time will be the true test, she appears thus far to be developing into that rarest of public servants: a powerful officeholder who doesn't think their office should hold as much power.

This has been particularly surprising to me because of the history she brings to the job. Jackson wasn't a blank slate when she was nominated to the Supreme Court in

**Ketanji Brown Jackson has shown herself not only willing but eager to call out the court's frequent attempts to inflate its own power.**



## What Jackson has done so far has been intellectually thrilling. We may be looking at a new kind of liberal jurisprudence.

**Living history:** Ketanji Brown Jackson at the 60th-anniversary commemoration of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama.

2022. She had already established a strong record in defense of civil rights, especially for people who are incarcerated, impoverished, or living with disabilities. Traditionally, judges who believe in robust protections for human rights tend to favor strong, aggressive courts. “Democracy,” for all of its charms, tends to leave a lot of people behind. A powerful court that protects the rights of people who will never win a popularity contest can often be the corrective that democracy needs.

Moreover, Jackson is Black, and unlike some Black judges, she’s proud of it. I think that’s relevant when you understand how Black liberals of my generation (and Jackson’s, I believe) were taught to view the court and its power, particularly during the critical period of the civil rights era. It was the court, not democracy, we were told—usually by white people through their media

and educational structures—that “ended” segregation and Jim Crow laws. A strong, respected, and, yes, antidemocratic court was needed to protect people of color and vulnerable groups from the tyranny of the white democratic majorities.

As it turns out, this story wasn’t entirely true. It was social justice movements and the laws they pushed by means of the democratic process that changed the country. *Brown v. Board of Education* was important, but it wouldn’t have defeated Jim Crow without the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. All we really needed the Supreme Court to do was prevent states from violating the 14th and 15th Amendments (a job the court refused to do for nearly 100 years), extend those constitutional protections to women and the LGBTQ community, and uphold popular laws, passed by Congress, over the objection of racists.

Still, I must confess that I find myself unwilling to fully reject the old view; I know what white people are capable of, and the specter of unchecked white majorities fills me with dread. Justice Jackson, in contrast, seems motivated by the old adage “The cure for the evils of democracy is more democracy.” She has shown a willingness to let the voters decide the critical issues—except the issue of who gets to vote. On that question, on the fundamental question of who gets to participate in our democracy, Jackson unequivocally says “everybody” and is in favor of using the full power of the court to make that a reality.

Jackson’s approach is already distinct from that of her immediate predecessor, Stephen Breyer. Breyer was a centrist pragmatist who thought the court could assert as much power over Congress, or be as deferential to it, as was needed to accomplish the goals of a free and fair society. Nor does Jackson appear to fully adopt “living constitutionalism,” the theory, often associated with liberal justices, that the Constitution is an evolving document whose precepts must match modern definitions and sensibilities. Instead, she’s carving out a unique jurisprudence that looks first at the text, then at the history, and then tries to figure out what the people’s elected representatives were trying to accomplish when they wrote the laws or constitutional amendments. The other liberal justices, Sonia Sotomayor

and Elena Kagan, do this too, but Jackson seems more concerned than any of her colleagues with fitting the court within the structures of democracy, instead of letting the court overpower the elected branches of government.

This doesn’t necessarily lead to the political conclusions I would like—and I can’t say that I agree with all of Jackson’s opinions. But her approach is clear and consistent. Her career is still evolving, but what she’s done so far has been intellectually thrilling. There’s a possibility that we’re looking at the early stages of a new kind of liberal jurisprudence.

**A**S OF THIS WRITING, JACKSON HAS authored 12 majority opinions for the Supreme Court. Those cases have, admittedly, been relatively unimportant. I’m sure I’m supposed to say, “Every Supreme Court case is important,” and they are... for somebody. But pretending that every case has equal relevance to the functioning of our democracy is how you get really bad “statistical” analyses that purport to show that the conservative supermajority is actually very moderate and cool. Conservatives have an iron grip on the Supreme Court: They get to choose which cases are heard, the legal questions argued in those cases, and how the cases are decided. They naturally get to write the controlling opinions in all of the most important cases, because they are winning. The liberals get few (if any) opportunities to shape the law. And as Jackson is the most junior liberal justice, she’s often not the one writing the main dissent to whatever the conservatives have cooked up, as the honor of shouting into the void is given out based on seniority.

Still, it’s possible to get a sense of what Jackson cares about and her jurisprudential worldview—her “vibe,” if you will—by reading her dissents and concurrences, of which she’s written quite a few. What she writes, in cases where she doesn’t have to weigh in, matters.

In May, Jackson wrote a dissent that went against her presumed partisan interests. In a case involving a simple temporary injunction, *Robinson v. Callais*, competing lower-court rulings had left Louisiana without a constitutionally acceptable map for the upcoming federal elections. One district court ruled that Louisiana’s old map was unconstitutional because it didn’t have enough majority-Black congressional districts, while a different district court ruled that Louisiana’s revised map





**Six injustices:** Protesters with cardboard cutouts of the Supreme Court's conservative majority in 2022 in New York.

was unconstitutional because it had too many. When the case got to the Supreme Court, the conservative majority issued a ruling that locked in a map that included two majority-Black congressional districts (which was a win for the NAACP and the other Black voting-rights advocates who brought the case), with the justices arguing was that there wasn't enough time before the next election for the state Legislature to draw yet another map.

Jackson disagreed. Not only did she think there was enough time for Louisiana to go back to the literal drawing board, she reasoned that the Supreme Court was the body that had caused the delay in the first place by deciding to take the case, which, she argued, could have been adequately resolved by the lower courts. "Were it not for this Court's intervention," she wrote, "[the lower court] may have selected a map that complies with both [the Voting Rights Act] and the Equal Protection Clause." Jackson was making an argument to let the political and legal redistricting process play out, in all of its messiness, even though that process risked producing a map that was less fair to Black voters in the state. It doesn't get much more "pro-democracy" than allowing the state Legislature in Louisiana to take another crack at drawing a congressional map.

Another way to get a feel for Jackson's intellectual process is to listen to what she says during oral arguments. One of the highest-stakes cases this term was *Looper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, which involved a direct challenge to what's known as "Chevron deference," the idea that courts should defer to the executive agencies when implementing laws passed by Congress. As far back as oral arguments, which took place in January, it was possible to glean a lot about

Jackson's position. During these arguments, she went toe-to-toe with alleged attempted rapist Brett Kavanaugh over the question of whether a president's political agenda should be reflected in the actions of their executive agencies. Essentially, the case was about who should have the power to interpret and effectuate the laws passed by Congress: the president, whom everybody elects, or the courts, whom nobody does. Kavanaugh said that the power should not belong to the executive and argued that *Chevron* was, in the words of one legal scholar, "a source of extreme instability" because the law (as interpreted by the executive agencies) can change wildly every four to eight years, depending on who wins the White House.

Jackson argued that the shifting nature of the law is a feature of democracy, not a bug. "Taking into account the policy goals of the new administration," she said, "reflects a democratic structure where we have the new administration being elected by the people on the basis of certain policy determinations." Jackson then elaborated on the role of the court itself, countering Kavanaugh's worry about legal instability: "I guess my concern is...judicial policymaking is very stable, but precisely because we are not accountable to the people and have lifetime appointments. So, if we have gaps and ambiguities in statutes and the judiciary is coming in to fill them, I suppose we would have a... separation-of-powers concern related to judicial policymaking."

If that sounds a little wonky, here's another way to think of it: Consider *Jurassic Park*. In that story, scientists use "frog DNA" to fill in the gaps in the dinosaur genetic code they are trying to re-create. But that has disastrous consequences for the scientists' ability to control dinosaur reproduction. During the *Chevron* argument, Jackson was making the case against using judicial DNA to fill in the gaps left by Congress, saying that it would create the disastrous problem of unaccountable lifetime-appointed judges usurping the will of the people as expressed through elections. (Jackson eventually joined Elena Kagan's dissent in the case, while the conservative justices overturned *Chevron* and gave courts, not the people, ultimate authority over the administrative state.)

Jackson has also been able to get her views on the record

**It doesn't get much more "pro-democracy" than letting a state legislature take another crack at drawing a congressional map.**



merely a coincidence that Thomas Jefferson and James Madison always wanted Mitch McConnell and Donald Trump to win.

In her concurrence, Jackson was arguing that Thomas and his fellow conservatives have it backwards. She argued that, absent an unambiguous limitation in the text of the Constitution, Congress—not the courts—gets to decide what Congress can or cannot do. If there are two reasonable interpretations of the text, the court should not superimpose its interpretation of the Constitution on Congress, even when the

conservatives claim to be in *séance* with the founding fathers. It's a much more limited role for the court than the one that the conservatives trumpeting "judicial restraint" have been selling for the past 40 years.

**F**OR WHAT IT'S WORTH, JACKSON'S view is the prevailing one in other democracies. In countries such as Canada, Germany, and South Africa, the high courts do not regularly overrule laws passed by the elected branches of government; their justices are not political stars whose deaths or retirements affect which rights people do and do not have. But in the United States, we consistently let the best guesses of five unelected justices veto entire pieces of national legislation, based on those justices' kooky theories of what the Constitution might mean. If the Constitution is clear, then of course the courts should step in. But if it's not, it makes no sense to have unelected rulers place their interpretations over and above those of the representatives that people actually voted for. At least, it makes no sense in a "democracy."

This approach comes at a cost, however, and the cost is that Jackson is a less reliable vote for standard liberal decisions than some of the other justices. I can't predict her vote as easily as I can those of, say, Sotomayor, because I never know when her pro-democracy preferences are going to bite my preferred political outcomes in the ass. Jackson has shown a willingness to come to the "wrong" outcome for the "right" reasons.

Jackson also flips the script on how people might expect a liberal justice to reason through a case because of her willingness to use originalism, the conservative interpretative philosophy that says all laws should be calcified in what old dead white men thought long ago. She is quick to use the history, traditions, and "original intent" of laws as they would be understood by the people who wrote them. But I wouldn't call Jackson an originalist. Instead, I agree with *Slate's* Mark

through her concurrences. She authored an important one in mid-May in a case where she agreed with a decision by Clarence Thomas but took a sharply different route to get there. The case was *Consumer Financial Protection Bureau v. Community Financial Services Association of America*, and it involved a conservative attempt to defund the bureau by attacking the way Congress had decided to fund it. Thomas relied on his view of 18th-century history to conclude that the CFPB can continue

to exist, but he did so by placing the courts in charge of telling Congress how it can fund its priorities.

Jackson took a different tack. "When the Constitution's text does not provide a limit to a coordinate branch's power," she wrote, "we should not lightly assume that Article III implicitly directs the Judiciary to find one.... An essential aspect of the Constitution's endurance is that it empowers the political branches to address new challenges by enacting new laws and policies—

without undue interference by courts."

If Jackson's idea here caught on, it would force a huge change in the Supreme Court's use of power. The current conservative majority is fond of saying that they're just "following the Constitution," but what they're really doing is exploiting it. They use constitutional vagueness as an excuse to allow the courts to step in and resolve questions the way they claim "the founders" would have wanted—and then they tell us it's

## Jackson's approach comes at a cost: She is a less reliable vote for standard liberal decisions than some of the other justices.

**A tale of two courts:** Above, the Warren court in 1962; below, Ketanji Brown Jackson and Chief Justice John Roberts in 2022.



Joseph Stern, who coined the phrase “originalism jujitsu” to describe what she is doing. Jackson is willing to use originalism to show that the conservatives are wrong on their own declared terms.

We can see this in Jackson’s dissent in *Students for Fair Admissions v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, which ended affirmative action last June. In that case, the conservative originalists, most notably Thomas, invented, whole cloth, a new interpretation of the 14th Amendment as “colorblind.” Jackson, in turn, obliterated Thomas’s ahistorical and counterfactual argument. “Our country has never been colorblind...,” she wrote. “Slavery should have been (and was to many) self-evidently dissonant with our avowed founding principles. When the time came to resolve that dissonance, eleven States chose slavery.” Jackson went on to explain that the Reconstruction amendments were written specifically to address the wrongs of slavery and referenced political support for the ratification of the 14th Amendment at the time. She used the kind of evidence that is usually dispositive to conservative originalists, at least when the rights of white people are on the line.

Jackson’s felicity with the terms and precepts of originalism serves a critical function on the court. It allows her to go up against Thomas, Samuel Alito, and Neil Gorsuch on their own terms and expose their brand of originalism as unmoored from intellectual consistency. The conservatives embrace originalism because it allows them to deliver anti-Black rulings, and we can see this because whenever Jackson points out that originalism should lead to an outcome that tears down white supremacy, the conservatives abandon originalism.

**BELIEVE THAT JACKSON’S** NASCENT ICONoclasm would be universally respected if she were white, and downright lauded if she were conservative and could bend her process to always arrive at the outcome that does the most harm to Black people, women, and the LGBTQ community—the way Clarence Thomas does. But since she is neither of those things, mainstream court watchers treat her like she’s just another lefty vote, while conservatives slander her as a “lesser Black woman” who doesn’t belong on the court.

The reality is that Jackson might be the new archetype for a liberal justice in the post-*Roe v. Wade* era. In a world where liberals have no power on the court (Democratic appointees haven’t been in the majority since Earl Warren retired in 1969), Jackson is the one who seems to have gotten the memo and is responding by articulating a vision that would give the court less power. Instead of propping up Warren-style jurisprudence and waiting for the Democratic Party to get its head out of the sand, Jackson is arguing for

a court that perhaps isn’t as powerful as the Warren court was... but also isn’t as destructive as the Rehnquist or Roberts courts.

Jackson summed up her pro-democracy view in *Moore v. United States*, a case decided near the end of this term that involved Donald Trump’s “repatriation tax.” Jackson joined a majority opinion upholding the tax but added in her concurrence: “I have no doubt that future Congresses will pass, and future Presidents will sign, taxes that outrage one group or another—taxes that strike some as demanding too much, others as asking too little. There may even be impositions that, as a matter of policy, all can agree are wrongheaded.” But, she goes on to argue, the solution does not lie with the court; instead, she wrote, quoting a dissent from a prior Supreme Court ruling, “the remedy for such abuses is to be found at the ballot-box.”

Imagine deciding tax cases based not on love letters between long-dead enslavers but on what people actually voted for Congress to do.

It’s a much more limited view of the court than liberals have traditionally supported. But after 50 years during which Republicans have controlled the Supreme Court, shoving their worldview down our throats over the objection of the popular majorities, I could be convinced to give it a try. What liberals have been doing hasn’t worked in a lifetime. Maybe we should listen to Jackson and place our faith in ourselves, instead of the courts. **N**

*(Iverson, continued from page 39)*

beyond question that the African American architects of blues and R&B deserved not just wider acclaim but a fairer share of the immense profits their work and influence generated.

There’s no way to fix history, but to their credit, the Stones have done much more than many rock stars to keep mentioning the names of their heroes to their vast public. When the band was booked to perform on the American TV show *Shindig!* in 1965, they insisted that Howlin’ Wolf appear on the show as well, introducing him as the original performer of their latest hit, Willie Dixon’s “Little Red Rooster.” For the rest of his life, Charlie Watts could hardly get through an interview without praising Black jazz geniuses like Charlie Parker and Kenny Clarke. It’s well-known that the band’s name comes from a Muddy Waters song, and indeed one of the best tracks on *Hackney Diamonds* is Jagger and Richards’s closing duet on Waters’s “Rolling Stone Blues.”

Jagger and Richards could do literally anything with their platform and their band, and it’s no accident that they have a Black rhythm team, Darryl Jones and Steve Jordan, serious working professionals who cut their teeth playing jazz and R&B with luminaries of those fields. Jones and Jordan don’t need to prove that they can hang with Jagger and Richards—it’s the other way around. Jagger and Richards need to prove that they can walk onstage and groove with Jones and Jordan.

With that lineup in place at Lincoln Field, the Rolling Stones still sounded like the world’s greatest rock and roll band, emphasis on the word *band*. Afterward, my friends talked about how the already thrilling concert had ascended to electrifying new heights during that night’s version of “Honky Tonk Women.” I hadn’t noticed at the time, but Steve Jordan’s subtle accelerando must have had something to do with it. “When we get to the second chorus of ‘Honky Tonk Women,’” he told me, “I’ve already planned to pick it up, shift gears, and drive it forward.” **N**



**Jackson is arguing for a court that perhaps isn’t as powerful as the Warren court was, but that isn’t as destructive as the Roberts court.**



## The Ghosts of Prague

*Helen Oyeyemi and the borderlands of realism*

BY SARAH CHIHAYA



HERE'S ONE WAY TO START TALKING about Helen Oyeyemi: For many years, I taught her 2011 novel *Mr. Fox* to undergrads in an intro-to-fiction class, lecturing with bravado about its narrative manipulations but disconcertingly uncertain that I'd fully got it. In this novel about writing novels, a fictional character is conjured into life, intervening in the very life of her creator, only to become a writer herself. For most readers, this leaves them wondering who or what is real in the world of the book, blurring the lines between writers, characters, and readers. This was the case for me as well. My students would ask question after question about the novel as though I could answer

ILLUSTRATION BY LILY QIAN

them in a definitive way, trusting that I understood the text with some comprehensive authority. Yet I, too, had a lot of questions. By the last time I taught the book, I had read myself into a knot, feeling sure that I'd gleaned something esoteric about its speculations on the violent nature of storytelling while doubting that I understood even the most literal aspects of the plot. The uncertainty created by the novel, however, was what drew me to it and why I liked teaching it.

Over the past two decades, Oyeyemi has written eight novels characterized by a similar seductive and often disquieting playfulness; sometimes they tease, and sometimes they bite. Her first, *The Icarus Girl*, written when she was 18, drew on Nigerian mythology and supernatural horror to tell the story of a mixed-race girl torn between cultures and histories. The novels that followed continued to incorporate folklore, horror, and fairy tale. Never dominated by the rules of any given genre, they tended to leave the reader with far more questions than they answered. In a moment when so much contemporary fiction is concerned with redefining new conventions of realism or reasserting old ones, Oyeyemi is more interested in pushing past its boundaries altogether. Her novels move with an utterly unique velocity that, as the American novelist Alexandra Kleeman observed, creates “the discombobulating quality of walking through a moving vehicle while carrying a full-to-the-brim cup of very hot tea.”

This delicate sense of ambiguity and unsteadiness is on display in *Parasol Against the Axe*, Oyeyemi's new novel about how we get to know people, places, and books. Just as the novel's protagonist, a heroine on the run named Hero Tojoso, finds herself carted around Prague in a wheelbarrow, readers are briskly shuttled through the city in a state of undignified but delighted disorientation, jostling over cobblestones at a pace just slow enough to catch glimpses of a multitude of things they want to investigate, but too fast to get out and take a steady look.

It's hard to choose just one way into *Parasol Against the Axe* because it is not just one book. If we approach it through its plot—never a trustworthy proposition with any of Oyeyemi's works—it is simply the tale of a destination bachelorette party gone wrong, in which the past unexpectedly turns up to threaten the present. Within that loosest of narrative nets, we meet three women, Hero, Thea, and Sofie, former friends, housemates, and business partners who in the past have run various schemes of entrapment, blackmail, and revenge. Hero and Sofie have tried to clean up their act and leave

*Sarah Chibaya is the author of the forthcoming Bibliophobia and a coauthor of The Ferrante Letters.*



### Parasol Against the Axe

A Novel

By Helen Oyeyemi  
Riverhead.

272 pp. \$28

their lives of crime behind; Thea hasn't. And when she unexpectedly shows up with very different intentions, the conventional hell of a bachelorette party turns into something less conventional and more hellish.

But the trio's reunion isn't the whole story or even really the main one. The book's cast of characters also includes various spirits of Prague: a quirky trinity of female figures who may or may not be the city itself; someone who only appears costumed as the beloved Czech cartoon character Krtek the mole; the famed Golem, the mythical defender of the city's Jewish community; and Robert Louis Stevenson's aristocratic sleuth, Prince Florizel of Bohemia.

In this way, the tangled relationships between Hero, Sofie, and Thea are a kind of MacGuffin, a pretext for the city's own account of these three visitors. Rather than offering a clear resolution to any of their plotlines, the novel is more about getting acquainted with a city that is sometimes unfamiliar, sometimes unwelcoming even to those who have always lived there, and yet also absorbs strangers and natives alike—sometimes whole—with its myth, its history, and its sheer force of personality. Instead of simply being a place where people live, Prague demonstrates how, as Oyeyemi writes, “a

place can live in you without letting you know about it for the longest time.”

At the center of *Parasol Against the Axe* is another book, a book within the book. If Oyeyemi's novel can be said to have an anchor, it is the “Prague book,” a slim novel called *Paradoxical Undressing* that appears again and again in *Parasol Against the Axe* and seems to offer something firm to cling to by the sheer fact of its recurrence.

*Paradoxical Undressing*, however, turns out to be as tricky and uncannily alive as the novel it is featured in and the city that produced it. Its contents are different for everyone who reads it; it even offers Hero two completely different tales when she reads the book and then rereads it a few hours later. The narratives it generates often move in opposite directions, reaching into different eras in Prague's long history. For one reader, it might be a Tarantinoesque post-Velvet Revolution thrill ride. For another, it tells the story of a secondhand bookshop that peels away to reveal a love triangle between a 16th-century nobleman and his two physicians.

At times, Oyeyemi lets us see what *Paradoxical Undressing* says itself, offering excerpts from the book and its paratexts. At other times, she has characters relate their readings of the novel, none of which line up with the rest. The book-within-the-book also has a habit of interrogating its readers just as they're getting comfortable with a given narrative. When it addresses Hero, it's gently inquisitive (“Humor me. Tell me. Where are you?”) or solicitous (“Before we continue—look up from this page. Have a stretch, have a look around”); when it speaks to Thea, it's politely standoffish (“It's time you were leaving”), then rudely direct (“That's all you're getting: now begone”).

*Paradoxical Undressing's* resemblance to Italo Calvino's playful *If on a winter's night a traveler* is especially striking in these moments. In both, readers are tantalized by excerpts of different novels purporting to be part of the same impossible book—and, of course, *Paradoxical Undressing* shares a penchant for addressing its reader directly with Calvino's book (which famously starts, “You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on*



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a winter's night a traveler"). Yet there are important differences, too: While the engine of Calvino's novel is the reader's desire for the book, or for the experience of reading it, what seems to motivate Oyeyemi's novel is something stranger: the desire the book itself possesses.

**I**n *Parasol Against the Axe*, books desire readers and cities desire visitors and residents—a reversal of the anthropocentric way we're used to thinking about these interactions. It is these reversals that Oyeyemi ultimately seems interested in narrating: What might it look like if books and cities really could speak for themselves, aside from their authors or various kinds of human ambassadors? Or if, instead of a reader's impression of a book, we were somehow party to the book's impression of its readers? Likewise, imagine that instead of a travelogue, we could get a sense of the city's own judgmental log of the travelers who pass through it. While some of Oyeyemi's earlier books disassembled and reconstructed familiar fairy tales—*Mr. Fox* took on "Bluebeard," *Boy Snow Bird* looked at "Snow White," and *Gingerbread* toyed with "Hansel and Gretel"—*Parasol Against the Axe* is more interested in interrogating the fairy-tale logic we take for granted in real life. Here, the magical belief under examination is the idea that anyone can ever really know a city or a text comprehensively. The "Prague book" is like Prague itself: It has other ideas about what it is that transcend any one reader's or visitor's conception. Books and cities, Oyeyemi argues, have lives of their own.

If you're confused, don't worry; the confusion is part of the experience of reading Oyeyemi's novel. It is an essential element that many of her readers have learned to savor. It's perhaps fitting that the most specific claim that can be made about *Parasol Against the Axe* is about the futility of making decisive claims. The book resists the very idea of being about something; it demonstrates Oyeyemi's allergy to simplistic meanings or easy takeaways, which is more evident in this novel than any of her others. Early on,

Hero wanders aimlessly through the "aggressively coded streets" of the city, chatting to her teenage son on the phone. The very buildings call out for interpretation; walls speak out "in etched and welded symbols. So did doors and many of the window frames." Similarly vibrant images and possible symbols dance through Oyeyemi's prose but refuse stable meanings; her work constantly suggests allegory but does not require it. Certain keywords—*race, migration, violence, sexuality, desire*—mill around in her books, summoned up but not given clear tasks.

As a result, there is a uniquely idiosyncratic, sometimes pleurably frustrating feeling of loneliness when it comes to reading Oyeyemi. Trying to tell someone else about it feels like trying to relate the events of a dream. The suspicion arises, impossible though it may seem, that like her characters and their novel, everyone who reads *Parasol*

**Oyeyemi's new novel is something even more unexpected than her previous ones: It is a book about an ever-changing book.**

*Against the Axe* may have read a different book. Talking about *Paradoxical Undressing* with other readers, Hero finds herself wishing she could inhabit "whatever it is that's happened between them and the book. The process so personal it's a person..." Even if cer-

tain readers are frustrated by Oyeyemi's refusal to reveal what *Parasol Against the Axe* "means" by the end of the book, the very act of this refusal is invigorating on its own: Just because an object doesn't offer a clear-cut meaning doesn't make your encounter with it meaningless.

Here's one last way to think about Oyeyemi: In a 1977 review of Calvino's *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, John Gardner wrote that "like Kafka—like Chaucer—Calvino makes plodding comedy of our scholastic need to explain things." So too does Oyeyemi. Like the novels of the Italian fabulist, *Parasol Against the Axe* proves that Oyeyemi is more interested in exploring what storytelling does to the desires and decisions of her readers than in what happens in those stories or in the blunt meanings we can extract from them. If we enter her books, much less leave them, with the hope of something else—well, the joke's on us. **N**

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# After History Ended

*How the chaos and excesses of the 1990s led to the politics of today*

BY DAVID KLION

**W**HEN DISCUSSING 1989 AND THE YEARS THAT FOLLOWED, it can seem obligatory to the point of cliché to mention Francis Fukuyama’s essay “The End of History?,” published just months ahead of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Though no one, including the author, would argue that history actually ended in 1989, most everyone since then has felt compelled to reckon with Fukuyama’s central thesis: that Western liberalism and capitalism had, by the end of the 20th century, won decisively and globally over their major ideological rivals. Even 35 years later—in the wake of 9/11, the 2008 financial crisis, the rise of Donald Trump and other right-wing populists, the Covid-19 pandemic, a resurgent socialist movement in the United States, and a renewed era of great-power confrontation—it is hard to dismiss altogether Fukuyama’s claim that certain political and economic ideas have become hegemonic and are honored today even in the breach. One might debate whether these ideas are truly liberal in spirit or practice, and one can warn of emergent challenges today, but almost everyone can agree that they stood triumphant in 1989 and have dominated ever since.

But even at the time, Fukuyama was far more anxious than triumphalist in his avowals of a new liberal and capitalist age. He was sure that communism had been defeated, but he foresaw a looming crisis for the political and economic systems he himself championed: “In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy,” he predicted, “just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history.” He also feared that rising nationalism and intra-ethnic conflict—already visible at the time with the disintegration of Yugoslavia—might foil the illusory tranquility of this new world order.

These uncertainties about a liberal future sit at the center of John Ganz’s accomplished debut, *When the Clock Broke*:

*Con Men, Conspiracists, and How America Cracked Up in the Early 1990s*. While many Americans in 1989 “believed they were witnessing the ultimate victory of liberal democracy,” Ganz notes, “others thought they were observing its death throes.” A whirlwind tour of the myriad right-wing insurgencies that punctuated the George H.W. Bush years, *When the Clock Broke* presents the post-Cold War United States not as a victorious empire but an ailing nation plagued by deindustrialization, racist militias, millenarian sects, extremist demagoguery, urban unrest, conspiracy theories, and generalized despair. If that sounds a lot like the Trump era, well, that’s precisely Ganz’s point. Trump’s election in 2016, he writes in his introduction, “represented the crystallization of elements that were still inchoate in the period of this book.” The supposedly ascendant United States at the end of history, in other words, already demonstrated all the symptoms of its present maladies.

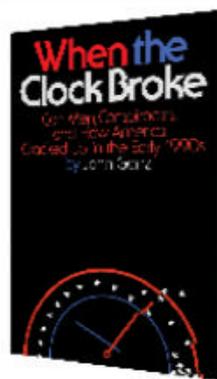


Over the past several years, Ganz has become known as an acerbic combatant in the often internecine political debates on social media, but his considerable talents are better appreciated in his *Unpopular Front* newsletter, which has offered everything from nuanced commentaries on the wars in Ukraine and Gaza to deeply researched investigations into the history of France’s Third Republic. *When the Clock Broke*, which is an expansion of a 2018 essay Ganz wrote for *The Baffler*, replicates this approach. Like *Unpopular Front*, it showcases sophisticated political argumentation, erudite prose, enviable rigor, and a depth of knowledge.

A historian outside the academy and a political journalist without a staff job, Ganz invites comparisons to Rick Perlstein, who is thanked in the acknowledgments and whose cover blurb proclaims Ganz as “the most important young political writer of his generation.” Like Perlstein, Ganz tends to use an immersive approach to writing about the past: *When the Clock Broke* not only recounts but seeks to approximate the experience of living through 1989 to 1993.

Functioning almost as a sequel to Perlstein’s acclaimed multivolume history of the conservative movement from Barry Goldwater to Ronald Reagan, *When the Clock Broke* is similarly concerned with the nation’s rightward drift and wants to understand where it came from. “American democracy is often spoken of as being in peril. This book by and large agrees with this thesis,” Ganz writes. “Others point out that democracy in America nev-

*David Klion last wrote for Books & the Arts on Joe Biden’s foreign policy. He is working on a book about the legacy of neoconservatism.*



### When the Clock Broke

*Con Men, Conspiracists, and How America Cracked Up in the Early 1990s*  
By John Ganz  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux.  
432 pp. \$30

er fully existed in the first place: for them, it has always been a nation enchained by great inequalities and ruled by an unrepresentative system designed largely to keep those chains in place. This book also agrees with that thesis.” In *When the Clock Broke*, Ganz pursues both of these arguments, emphasizing throughout not only the emerging villains but also the circumstances out of which they emerged. The origins of our times, he reminds us, have their own origins in the *longue durée* of American history.

In accounting for the rise of the Klansman turned congressman David Duke, for instance, Ganz feels compelled to acquaint readers with the deep roots of Louisiana history: “The alluvial plains and dense swampland of the Mississippi Delta were less like a [laboratory of democracy] than a hothouse or a petri dish of inchoate American fascism,” he writes in a characteristic passage, before briskly recounting the region’s French and Spanish colonial history, its brutal 19th-century planter class, its corrupt urban politicians, its vigilante-enforced white supremacist social order, and the boom-and-bust cycles engendered by its oil resources. Similarly, in introducing us to the Weaver family, made infamous in the 1992 Ruby Ridge shootout in Idaho, Ganz walks us through the family’s background in Iowa, in the process illustrating how shifts in technology and global commodity price fluctuations

in the 1970s and ’80s drove farming communities in the Great Plains to despair—which in turn left men like Randy Weaver “even more sullen and angry, open to more radical views.”

To Ganz, we can’t know John Gotti without knowing a little about the lumpenproletariat of Naples or the social clubs of East New York; we can’t know Rush Limbaugh without a sense of what it was like to go to high school in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, in the 1960s; we can’t know Ross Perot without a grasp of how Sun Belt entrepreneurs raided Great Society spending programs to build their fortunes. Ganz’s subjects, to paraphrase Kamala Harris, didn’t just fall out of a coconut tree—they exist in the context of all that came before them (an essentially Marxist insight). If, like Ganz, you are an older millennial, you might experience *When the Clock Broke* as I did—as an informed adult’s reconsideration of what our parents were muttering about at the dinner table back when we were learning how to add and subtract. It’s to Ganz’s great credit that he is able to write about both wider historical trends and idiosyncratic biographical details while also keeping his story lively and amusing.



Though frequently leavened with a dry sense of humor, Ganz’s overall portrait of the United States at the end of history is a grim one. “The entire ’80s economy ran on debt: borrowed money and borrowed time,” he notes. It was the first President Bush’s misfortune, even as he claimed victory over Saddam Hussein and his approval rating soared, that the bills came due on his watch: The savings-and-loan sector collapsed in scandal, banks failed, oil prices surged, crack and homelessness flooded dilapidated inner cities, military bases closed, factory jobs moved abroad, and Brooklyn and Los Angeles exploded in race riots. The tech boom that would buoy Wall Street through the next few decades hadn’t fully begun, and the national mood was one of omnidirectional rage. It was an ideal environment for demagogues.

As concerned as he is with describing the conditions that produced these demagogues, Ganz is equally deft in characterizing their individual personalities. Duke is

“caught between his desire for publicity and mainstream acceptance and his infatuation with the secretive underworld of extremism,” a doomed position neatly reflected in his pseudonymous side gig publishing pornographic literature that an aide calls “too hard-core for the right wing and too soft-core for the perverts.”

Limbaugh—“a square with a flattop, he liked being the guy playing the records more than he liked the records”—is a shy introvert in person whose inner confidence emerges only in a broadcasting studio. Perot, the corporate welfare profiteer turned populist,

had one foot in the future and one in the past. On the one hand, he was a double throwback: there was all the mythological Americana, the cowboy and Western imagery, the Texas accent, the folksy idioms, the Norman Rockwells. He was also a throwback to an-

other, more recent past, a past in contradiction with the America of self-reliance and rugged individualism but increasingly the source of its own nostalgia: the postwar regime of industrial prosperity, economic security, and corporate paternalism.

**“Bush did not aspire to the presidency out of political passion; his ambition was for a successful career.”**

out of step with the times, makes for a perfect foil:

Bush did not aspire to the presidency out of a sense of political passion; his ambition was for a successful career befitting a person who was quite literally of the senatorial class: it was simply the last step in the cursus

Each of these men, in his own way, is a grasping outsider thirsty for adulation and status commensurate with new money. The patrician George H.W. Bush, introduced early as a politician profoundly

honorum of ascending offices. He had no interest in the permanent campaign of his predecessor, the “Great Communicator”: he was the representative of a class bred to govern, not to lead. Its predominance was taken for granted. He had been happiest as leader of the nation’s Super Secret Club for Privileged Boys, the Central Intelligence Agency, and he took with him the clichés and behavior of a bureaucrat: everything was a contingency, a particular case to be reacted to and then managed competently—“prudent” was one of his favorite words, as Dana Carvey’s famous *Saturday Night Live* send-up of the president highlighted with glee. He possessed the ditziness of the high WASPs: a love for games, toys, and practical jokes; he spoke in non sequiturs and inside or private gags. It was difficult, even for him, to know what he really meant sometimes.

No wonder, then, that Bush’s 1992 reelection campaign was “totally bereft

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*American Absolutism* explores what happens when human adaptation loses viability as it comes face-to-face with an exponentially evolving complexity that is the modern human condition.

of ideas, direction, or meaning,” thereby creating an opening for candidates who had all of the above. Though Bill Clinton is not a central focus of the book, Ganz does explore the ideas that shaped Bush’s successful Democratic challenger. Clinton, we learn, studied at Georgetown under a professor named Carroll Quigley, the author of *Tragedy and Hope*, a 1,300-page argument for a secular Puritanism that defended social responsibility against 1960s counterculture excesses. Quigley’s ideas peppered Clinton’s “New Covenant” campaign rhetoric and were also popular with the latter-day John Birchers who supported Perot, and who passed around bootleg copies of *Tragedy and Hope* at gun shows.

Pat Buchanan, who challenged Bush in the Republican primary, certainly wasn’t lacking in ideas either. In the writings of Samuel Francis and the speeches of Buchanan closely informed by them, Ganz sees the intellectual roots of what Paul Gottfried first termed “paleoconservatism,” which developed in reaction to the more cosmopolitan (read: Jewish) neoconservatism embraced by the Reagan administration. “If the neocons held up mid-century New York as the height of U.S. civilization, the paleos wanted to go much further back: to the 1920s at least, and preferably back to the nineteenth century, to the world before Lincoln and the Civil War,” Ganz writes. “The paleo aesthetic was American Gothic: white-sided Presbyterian and Congregational churches in small towns; stern, industrious folk; farmers, homesteaders, and frontiersmen.” During the Reagan years, the paleocons Russell Kirk and Joseph Sobran charged the leading neocons, Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz, with “dual loyalty” over their fervent support for Israel; the neocons returned fire with charges of antisemitism, while William F. Buckley made an awkward attempt to broker peace between the conservative factions. In the 1980s, these battles unfolded in the pages of small-circulation magazines like Buckley’s *National Review*, but in 1992 they would also play out electorally with Buchanan’s failed but damaging primary challenge to Bush, during which he articulated the case for a “new nationalism” that would “put America first”—language that would be echoed by Francis in the campaign’s wake

Francis, as Ganz discusses, also took a

particular interest in the Mafia as an American cultural archetype—as did Murray Rothbard, another right-wing thinker that Ganz spotlights (Rothbard’s 1992 pledge, “We shall break the clock of social democracy,” inspired Ganz’s title). Both Francis and Rothbard reacted to Martin Scorsese’s *Goodfellas*, released in 1990, by contrasting its sordid rendering of the mob with the quasi-feudal, honor-and-loyalty-bound society portrayed in Francis Ford Coppola’s earlier *Godfather* films. “While *The Godfather* was essentially a right-wing utopia, Rothbard believed the assault on property and persons in *Goodfellas* reflected the actually existing liberal dystopia of street violence,” Ganz writes. Similarly, “Francis thought the famiglia in *The Godfather* stood for an earlier, more wholesome and integrated social form fighting to keep itself intact in an American culture that threatened to dissolve it.”

The widespread fascination with mob culture in both its idealized and debased imaginings, Ganz argues, is also the cultural context in which a real-life mob boss like Gotti could become a folk hero to many New Yorkers—to the point where Rudy Giuliani, who built his early career on prosecuting mobsters, would ultimately co-opt the style (and, years later, the criminality) of Italian American wiseguys in his bid for political office. It’s also the context in which another tough-talking vulgarian from the outer boroughs—one who did more than his share of business with mafiosi—would find a receptive national constituency on the right.

**W**

hen *the Clock Broke* ends rather abruptly in 1993, just past Clinton’s inauguration as president after having won a mere 43 percent plurality of the popular vote (Perot won an astonishing 19 percent, the highest total any third-party candidate

has received since 1912). Surveying the national landscape, Ganz gives us a sort of montage of what his antiheroes were up to at the dawn of the Clinton era. We see Perot plugging a new book inveighing against NAFTA, which Clinton would sign into law the following year with Republican support and considerable Democratic defection; we see Francis speaking at a Buchanan-affiliated event and drawing explicit inspiration from the way Adolf Hitler and the Nazis regrouped after the failed 1923 Beer Hall Putsch. Finally, Ganz checks in on Donald Trump, a recurring minor character throughout the book, who by 1993 was reeling from bankruptcies. We listen in on Trump as he meets with the aging, fascism-influenced architect Philip Johnson to discuss a potential redesign of the Trump Taj Mahal casino in Atlantic City. After listening to the future president’s inimitable bluster for a while,

Johnson tells him, “You’d make a good mafioso.” To which Trump replies, “One of the greatest.”

It’s a hell of a kicker, and Ganz is confident enough as a writer not to feel the need to explain it any further: He trusts us to get the punch line. We already have been, and perhaps once again will be, governed by a mobster of historic proportions, albeit one more in the *Goodfellas* than the *Godfather* mode. Everything Ganz has shown us about the United States of the early 1990s—the fraying social fabric, the deregulation of talk radio, the far-right insurgency against the Republican old guard, the radicalized angry white men—would eventually culminate in the presidency of Donald Trump.

Ganz’s story is compellingly told, with a sharp eye for detail and for unexpected connections, and his implicit argument is largely persuasive, yet one might still quibble with his decision to stop where he does. Without a brief discussion at the end of what happened during the



**Ganz is as deft at characterizing the personalities of the 1990s-era politicians as he is at describing the conditions that produced them.**

## Witch

“I’m shrinking,” I shrieked,  
 meaning aging,  
 nearing death

because I thought that to pretend  
 I was the witch  
 In The Wizard of Oz

was funny  
 and would thus communicate

if not exactly my feelings. something

\*

Cousin Rust,  
 with your look of blood  
 and sunset,

I’m almost in love  
 with the lace you’ve made  
 of metal

RAE ARMANTROUT

eventful 23-year gap between the end of his book and Trump’s election in 2016, the reader is left wondering why it would take another generation for the toxic political trends of the early 1990s to coalesce in their now-familiar form.

The future War on Terror, for instance, is briefly hinted at in the concluding overview of 1993, when Ganz notes that “a group known as Al-Qaeda” detonated a bomb at the World Trade Center in a vain attempt “to send one tower crashing into the other, bringing down both skyscrapers in the process. It seemed an outlandish and impossible goal: the bomb had barely damaged the building.” It’s a clever way to indicate that a lot more history is going to unfurl between then and now, but it also allows the book to avoid arguing anything more specific about that history.

To be sure, anyone reading this book is likely to recall the major developments of recent decades and would also be able to draw their own connections to the world we currently live in. Indeed, a number of well-regarded recent works of popular history have already traced the rise of Trump to the aftermath of 9/11 (Spencer Ackerman’s *Reign of Terror*), to the 2008 financial crisis (Adam Tooze’s *Crashed*), and to the racist backlash against Barack Obama’s presidency (Ta-Nehisi Coates’s *We Were Eight Years in Power*), to say nothing of the widely discussed failures of the Hillary Clinton campaign or the much-debated role of Russian election interference. And so it is understandable why Ganz would instead seek explanations in an era further removed from recent news cycles. Still, without a little more about how his subjects and their political projects fared during the Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama presidencies, we are left to speculate on whether the seeds planted during the George H.W. Bush years were inevitably going to blossom into the Trump presidency, and whether there was anything that Americans might have done in the interregnum to avoid that outcome.

As we confront a potential Trump restoration, this question isn’t merely academic. As Ganz convincingly demonstrates, Trump represents a constellation of reactionary forces that emerged at the supposed end of history—but history never ends, and what comes next is up to us. **N**



# Don't Try This at Home

*The rise of the influencer chef*

BY AARON TIMMS

**O** WEN HAN IS MAKING A SANDWICH. HE DOES THIS OFTEN. In fact, making sandwiches is the primary source of Han's celebrity, the reason why he has accumulated 7.3 million followers across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Where is this man from? How did he learn to cook? What drives his passion for the sandwich? What hunger leads him to seek, on a weekly basis, some fresh solution to the modern riddle of how best to combine protein, fat, and heat within a bread envelope, and to post the answer in video form online?

The answers to these questions undoubtedly exist out there on the Internet, but at this precise moment, as he rakes a chef's knife across the top of a freshly prepared spicy chicken panini, steel and griddled bread tinning together like swords meeting in medieval combat, we're far more interested in what he's making.

Han slices open a sourdough boule. He slaps two chicken breasts onto the cutting board, pats them dry, then hits them with a hail of salt. He tosses the breasts skin-down into a crackling pan, drops two iron weights on top of them, removes the weights, turns the breasts over, then foams them in a bath of garlicky butter. He sticks the pan in the oven and shoves the door shut. Next comes the sauce:

A food processor is slammed onto the counter, and chipotle, garlic, eggs, and oil are blended together to produce an aioli. A tablespoon of the sauce is scooped up for the viewer's enjoyment, then cracked back into the machine. Restored to the cutting board, the cooked chicken breasts are scalloped into even ribbons with a giant cleaver, then hooked off the counter with a bench scraper.

For the panini's assembly, we are given an overhead view of a slice of bread as each layer is placed on top of it. A single, calligraphic smear of aioli comes first, followed by two slices of cheddar cheese and then lobes of rested chicken breast, all arranged into a snug puzzle. Next, a squall of additions are seen for the first time: a tomato-and-hatch-chili salsa, strips of

crispy bacon, a nest of finely shredded red onion, micro-cilantro, and two squares of pepper jack. The crowning slice of bread is applied before the sandwich is spanked into a hot buttered pan, squashed with a long grill press, flipped, and then plopped back onto the board, at which point the video loops back to its beginning, where we see Han cleave the finished article and display the halved sandwich's stratigraphic section.

The video of this spicy-chicken panini's creation lasts 31 seconds. Throughout, the camera remains tightly trained on the workspace: We glimpse Han's face only once, at the beginning, as he bites into the panini; otherwise he is seen only as a set of disembodied hands. Meanwhile, any questions about how we might replicate his process are left unanswered. The TikTok video includes no recipe. On Instagram, we get a desultory list of ingredients in the caption, but there are no instructions on how to re-create this creamy pocket at home. The clip unrolls amid an accelerated blur of motion and a high-fidelity aural attack of thwacks, bubbles, splashes, and echoing chops. We watch the sandwich being made, but we don't necessarily learn how to make it.

The human worker may be an endangered species, but the human chef is in great shape. Across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, an unceasing torrent of videos, shorts, and stories about the making of eatables assails the hungry and curious online viewer with visions of amateur and professional cooks pickling, grating, toasting, roasting, draining, and straining the ingredients to make vitello tonnato, hachis parmentier, fesenjoon, or the perfect cheesesteak. Not since the release of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, almost a century ago, has the human body at work enjoyed such important cinematic exposure. But whereas the peons of Lang's Bauhaus dystopia slaved in synchronized anonymity underground while tower-dwelling elites frolicked in libraries and lush gardens, the toil of these online culinarians bridges the gap between production and recreation: We watch them labor without having any sense of how we might do so as well. This is work transformed into spectacle, the kitchen made into theater, a reintegration of the factory floor into an exalted realm of leisure. While the world ends, we watch the chefs cook.

**W**

ith followers in the multi-millions on TikTok and Instagram, Han represents the vanguard of a new breed of culinary abbreviators, who are united in their commitment to an increasingly compressed and assaultive style in food TV. Many of these influencer chefs also produce, in varying quantities and with varying frequency, older-fashioned cooking videos with straight-to-camera exposition and more of food TV's historical chattiness. But long-form is not where their true talents lie. The setting in which they're most at home, and from which they exert their black-gloved grip (the gloves in these productions are always black) over the Internet's collective culinary consciousness, is the reel, a short video—usually less than a minute in length—that dispenses with the conversational throat-clearing of traditional TV and gets straight to the action. Explanations, descriptions of ingredients, pauses to allow the viewer time to catch up and understand each step: The reel dispenses with them all. These chefs love the quick cut, the chopping-board close-up, and the high-definition kitchen sound effect almost as much as the food itself.

Perhaps food TV was always about something else besides the food, but this new generation of food filmmakers aspires to create a very different form of culinary entertainment than in the past, one in which process—the prepping, the searing, the salamandering—matters more than the result. Autonomous sensory meridian response, the frisson of bodily pleasure produced by the stimulus of exaggerated sound—and in this case by the dance of fingers and knives prepping food—is key to their style, even if each practitioner applies their own individual touch.

Canadian chef Laurent Dagenais (@laurent.dagenais; 3.9 million followers across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube), who always seems to be smoking a bouquet garni like it's a joint, is a master of the finely hashed onion, the rolled and chiffonaded herb bundle, the head of garlic punched into submission over the flat of a big knife. Kian Hiatt (@cooking\_with\_kian; 8.9 million

followers) is 14 years old and obliterates alliums with the speed and accuracy of a ballistic missile. Olivia Tiedmann (@olivatied; 4.3 million followers) cooks risotto like she's playing punk rock and films it that way too, the hand holding the camera as shaky as the hand making the food is deceptively assured. The bench scraper and the thin-spouted oil can are among the favored tools of the New Zealand–Australian chef Andy Hearnden (@andycooks; 14.5 million followers), while no chef peels the top off a quart container or unscrews a bottle cap more emphatically than Jesse Jenkins (@adip\_food; 470,000 followers), who does his best work with liquids, drawing out stirs, pours, simmers, and drizzles for maximal paresthesia.

Albert Niazhvinski (@albert\_cancook; 37.4 million followers) and Bayashi (@bayashi.tv; 86.7 million followers) are lords of the stack, piling chicken breasts, steaks, burger patties, and cheese slices into sweaty towers that are as structurally unviable as their finished work often appears inedible. In the captions to his videos, Bayashi likes to ask “Eat or

pass?”; in the comments, “pass” almost always wins. Meanwhile, Niazhvinski is as much a mime as he is a chef: His narratives, which are usually framed as a kind of quest born of deprivation (the food he ordered for delivery shows up at his house, but the packages are all empty; he's just undergone surgery and is faced with the horror of a tray of hospital food; he's on trial for crimes against cooking and has to prove his innocence; he's in jail), have the slapstick inventiveness of silent-film comedy, while being beseechingly loud at the same time.

**Y**

es, but how do they *do* it? For many years, the point of food TV was to answer this basic question, to reveal the mysteries of the stovetop to the harried and clueless home cook. The earliest and most influential food shows on US television, such

*Aaron Timms is a critic and essayist. He's currently working on a book about modern food culture.*

**This is cooking as spectacle, the kitchen as theater, the zone of labor as a site for entertainment.**

as James Beard's *I Love to Eat* and Julia Child's *The French Chef*, were instructive in nature, guiding the home viewer through the precise steps needed to bake a whole striped bass, roast a chicken, or trim and truss a boneless leg of lamb; they were an education in domesticity. Food TV stayed this way until the end of the last century, before exploding in size and variety under the dual demands of cable and streaming. Starting in the 2000s, competition shows (*Top Chef*, *Chopped*, *Beat Bobby Flay*), travelogues (Anthony Bourdain's *No Reservations*, Guy Fieri's *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*), and a series of mystico-military boot camps and restaurant turnaround projects (*Worst Cooks in America*, Gordon Ramsay's *Kitchen Nightmares*) joined the more conventional output of instructional cooks like Martha Stewart and Rachael Ray as cornerstones of food TV.

As chefs became public figures and eventually celebrities in their own right, the attention surrounding them metastasized into a kind of cult. Essential to this new ideology—the ideology of the foodie—was the idea of the chef as artistic genius, a singular creator conjuring mind-bending fantasias of flavor and texture into being via the alchemy of some unaccountable inspiration. Gone was the actual work these geniuses did. In the documentaries and profiles of the new celebrity chefs, the question of who did the preparation and cooking to wrestle these extravagant, improbable creations into material reality was rarely addressed. Ferran Adrià's liquid olive, Massimo Bottura's splattered lemon tart, and Marcus Samuelsson's meatballs simply appeared fully formed on the plate for our screen-mediated admiration, miracles of immaculate culinary conception. The workers who produced them were tucked away safely backstage, their efforts, ambitions, and identities subordinated to the glorification of a greater kitchen god.

The erasing pomposity of celebrity-chef culture reached its peak with the first few seasons of the Netflix series *Chef's Table*, which profiles the life and work of a different chef in every episode. From its self-important but accessibly middle-brow soundtrack (the “Winter” concerto from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*) to its rich tableaux of precious-plated fine-dining dishes and long tracking shots of its subjects in brooding, ambulant contemplation, *Chef's Table* has

arguably done more than any other TV show to popularize the notion that restaurant cooking is a creative endeavor equal in prestige to filmmaking, writing, or making music.

The episode on the Argentine chef and barbecue guru Francis Mallmann, from the show's first season, exemplified all the excesses and silliness of this self-serious turn to chef worship. Airing at a time before TikTok and Instagram

had fully inundated the Internet with cooking content, the episode offered us a lavishly produced portrait of the man who is often described as South America's most famous chef, and nowhere more powerfully so than in his own mind. We are introduced to Mallmann as he cooks slabs of meat and various intimidatingly large tubers over (and sometimes directly in) a fire on the small island he owns in a mountain-ringed lake at the tip of Patagonia; the action switches between scenes of him blistering whole animal carcasses over blazing pits in the Patagonian wilderness and shots of him seated lakeside in a blanket-wearing Andean poncho, musing villainously on food, friendship, sex, and the necessity of perpetual rupture.

The cooks doing all the work to prepare these feasts are shown only fleetingly, as disciples striving silently to realize the vision of their leader, this great master of the coals. One scene shows a set of rugged young underlings filling empanadas in a line while Mallmann describes how wonderful it is to have

help: “When we cook outside for big parties, I usually have a lot of staff. I like to have a band of gypsy chefs. We call it *maestranza*, which is a beautiful word in Spanish. *Maestranza* means ‘the people who are around you helping.’ It's very romantic.” On the rare occasions we hear directly from the members of the *maestranza*, they remain nameless.

The episode ends with a jagged crescendo of strings and Mallmann blivi-

**The erasing pomposity of celebrity-chef culture reached its peak with Netflix's *Chef's Table*.**

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## Of Historical Significance

Even the blossoms blown  
     off in a throb of wind

so god help us  
     to make love with-

out becoming a plot  
     of fresh earth some

day the night curved  
     as a sky sinking

inside an eye I  
     walk across

a yard of fallen  
     apples kicking

them to reveal still-  
     damp flesh & hear

the feet before  
     the first snow fell

on our lovers  
     & land before

we worshipped the good  
     morning in a tongue

trimmed of light I lift  
     flowers I forgot

the names to in  
     any English & say

your names the way  
     I was taught one

after the other.

MICHAEL WASSON

ating about the radical possibilities of uncertainty over a montage of some of the most unadventurous food imaginable: roast chicken with honey gremolata, baked salmon with aioli, mussels in garlic and white wine, pumpkin and goat cheese. “Embrace risk,” the message seems to be, “and roast a chicken!” Shoveling earth to build a pit for the realization of Mallmann’s fiery mediocrities, their faces obscured by the setting sun, the assistants pictured in this final scene bear an uncanny resemblance to the nameless machinists of *Metropolis*’s vast subterranean chambers. The labor is essential; the laborers are replaceable.



The new food “TV” of influencer chefs is perhaps best read as a reaction against the orchestral self-importance of shows like *Chef’s Table*. A creature of the Internet rather than traditional television, it is shot on phones rather than film or videotape and embraces the DIY production ethos of online. Instead of high art, popular standards of the classical music repertory, and fresco-like presentations of tables laden with finished dishes, the new food TV emphasizes skill, artisanship, assembly; instead of faux-philosophical ruminations on the creative process, we see the mechanics of cooking in action. In this way, the new culinary entertainment owes its parentage to an earlier era of food television, in which small-screen cooks enacted the labor of production for their audiences. But there is a difference, of course: The new food TV, unlike the work of its televisual ancestors like Beard or Child, is not designed to offer a step-by-step guide to putting the dishes together; it exists first and foremost as a demonstration of skill. If the streaming services dish up a form of prestige chef TV that is always slowing things down to disguise the mundanity of what’s happening on-screen, then the new food TV speeds everything up. It seeks to bewilder rather than guide, to impress rather than instruct. “You might want to try this at home,” it tells us, “but you probably can’t.”

This new culinary visual aesthetic of quick cuts—both on the chopping board and in the editing suite—has not yet caught on among the streaming services, but in the larger world of documentary filmmaking, the ergonomics of cooking

are receiving fresh appreciation. Offering a take on the labor theory of culinary value that diverges radically from Netflix's self-wetting exercises in chef worship, the new four-hour Frederick Wiseman documentary *Menus-Plaisirs—Les Troisgros*, now screening on PBS, revels in the small pleasures (the pun of the film's title) of kitchen work at a three-Michelin-star restaurant in rural France. Where shows like *Chef's Table* gloss over the off-screen exertions needed to bring restaurant-quality food to the plate, Wiseman makes prep, recipe testing, the trade-off between human effort and gastronomic invention, and the often anguished conversations that accompany the journey of a basket of produce from the delivery truck to the table the absolute focus of his camera's attention.

As in the reels of TikTok and Instagram, here too we see cooks cooking. We watch them receive the produce: sacks of potatoes, crates of asparagus and spring onions, boxes of agitated crayfish. We see them gut and butcher fish, french lamb racks, air great lakes of tempered chocolate. Herbs are bruised, garlic is shaved on a baby mandoline, snails pop in the pan under the blanket of a fast reducing sauce. The camera lingers as much on the work itself as on the faces of those performing it. Wiseman presents the cooks as preternaturally still and emotionless, figures of deep concentration and calm. Like the influencer chefs, they are not artists so much as artisans showing off their craft.

We also see moments of real tension, along with the gentle exercise of a resolving authority. One particularly memorable scene shows the restaurant's patriarch and head chef, Michel Troisgros, patiently chiding a young cook who has failed to correctly exsanguinate a tray of brains, thereby rendering the organs unusable. Troisgros ushers the cook into a small library set off to the side of the kitchen and reads from the *Larousse Gastronomique*: "Preparing brains. Wash the brain under cold running water, then remove the membranes and the blood vessels.' You see, if you'd read this, you'd have known." At another point, the elder Troisgros attempts to persuade his son Léo, also a chef in the Troisgros restaurant group, to remove almond puree from an elderberry, rhubarb, fromage blanc, and almond sauce that he's been working on to go with a dish of white

asparagus. A mousseline of almond has already been approved for inclusion in another dish; to run two almond sauces on the same menu would be gauche. "Why not do elderberry without the almonds?" Michel asks. His face buried in his hands, Léo exasperatedly replies: "Because I've been working on this for three weeks."

It's strangely mesmerizing stuff, the workplace conversation turned into high observational art. But when one thinks about it, it's also not very different from the reels of the influencer chefs, which it's possible to binge in great loops that eventually extend to lengths that would do Wiseman proud. There is, of course, a considerable gulf in artistic ambition between the documentaries of Wiseman and the work of the culinary influencers, but in their abbreviated form, the reels are just as gripping, just as detailed, just as dedicated to documenting the minutiae of culinary artistry as *Menus-Plaisirs—Les Troisgros* is. The kinship between a cinematic anthropologist like Wiseman and a TikToker making 30-second sandwich videos might not seem immediately obvious; Wiseman spends months stalking his subjects, and his films invariably circle some evanescent truth in human relations. But the influencer chefs and the Wiseman revealed in *Menus-Plaisirs* share a basic concern with gastronomic procedure: They value the guts of production over the glory of the finished dish. Their creations are variants of the same spectacle, involving the same basic act: a single cook dicing an onion, infusing an oil, cleaning an organ, or searing a slab of meat.

The new food TV, whether it shows someone frying a Dorito-crusting mac-and-cheese doughnut in a prison cell (@albert\_cancook; 37.4 million followers) or a garlanded culinary maestro plating a ring of passion-fruit-sauced kidneys (Michel Troisgros; not on social media), is not instructional in the manner of traditional cooking content. On the contrary, it's aggressively anti-instructional, and seeks instead to celebrate skill. In place of education, it delights in the pure performance of professional cookery: the precise knife-work and fluency with fire, the embarrassment of counter equipment, all those enragingly uniform cuts and cheffy flourishes with unprocessed ingredients in hand. In this way, it rep-

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resents a classic assertion of craft and artistry—a display that's somewhat reminiscent of the magician's sleight of hand and connects to a historical fashion, among practitioners of the trades, for displaying a skill while obscuring its inner workings. Want to try turning an artichoke at home? Don't—watch a professional do it instead.

This mechanic entertainment is designed not for replication but admiration, complementing the broader trend in the restaurant world of open kitchens and special "chef's table" seatings for groups at the very edge of the pass. It fits a society-wide desire to be close to the culinary action of food-making without having to get involved in the messy business of actually making anything. Food is, of course, consumed as much with the eyes as with the tongue. But its visual catchment now exceeds what's on the plate, extending into the prep kitchen, the walk-in, the garde-manger, and the sauté station. When we eat today, and even when we dream of eating, the real meal is the feast of others' labor.



# Dreams of Creation

*Hari Kunzru's novels of artistic and political frustration*

BY NAWAL ARJINI

**O**CCUPATIONAL HAZARDS ABOUND FOR JAY, THE NARRATOR of Hari Kunzru's latest novel, *Blue Ruin*. We meet him in 2020, in the early days of Covid, as he delivers groceries in upstate New York. He has already contracted the virus and is suffering from its aftereffects—his breathing is labored, his heart fragile—and when he pulls up to a house to make a delivery, he realizes that one of the customers is his ex-girlfriend Alice, whom Jay hasn't seen since she left him for his best friend decades ago in England. As he carries her packages to the porch, his weakened body gives out. Alice watches him collapse in front of the car, which has also been, for some time, Jay's home. Though the property, which turns out to be a vast estate belonging to an absent billionaire, is supposed to be closed to visitors, Alice takes him to a barn on the grounds where he can recover in secret.

Covid, cardiac stress, economic uncertainty, accidentally delivering your ex-girlfriend's groceries—these are some of the perils of gig life, and Kunzru extensively details many more. But in addition to his misery as a delivery driver, Jay is (or was) a conceptual artist, and his true difficulty lies in his struggle to distinguish between art and life. Since his days at art school in England, where he began his

career as a painter and later became a performance artist, Jay has been unable to outrun either himself or his practice. His life in America might be part of his final art project, one that has taken him across continents, from autonomous squatters' zones to delivery workers' tenements—a performance that has never ended and that he's almost forgotten was a performance at all.

*Blue Ruin* is Kunzru's third in a series of novels about, more or less, work-life balance—how the yearning to work at one's art is weighed against the crushing tedium of the nonartistic work one does to stay afloat. In these novels, history lurks in the shadows, full of petty acts of violence (cheating, stealing) and larger injustices (slavery, fascism). This history has constructed the worlds of the narra-

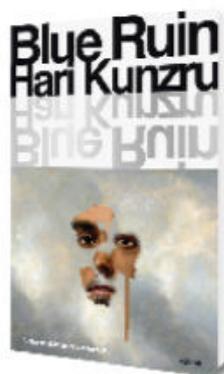
tors of this trilogy, all creatively and intellectually inclined men, and despite their best efforts, they cannot fully transcend it. The young, white stoner of *White Tears* has a love for the blues so strong as to be parasitic. He trades his talent as a music producer to his rich friend for a room in his apartment and a window into a lifestyle far beyond his reach and finds himself haunted by the ghost of a singer he'd sampled. *Red Pill* is narrated by a writer whose intellectual aspirations have been hijacked by an addictive TV show, which he's convinced is trying to turn its viewers into far-right nihilists. Now, in *Blue Ruin*, we meet one final iteration of this type, an obsessive loner who finds himself susceptible to the romantic idea that he might be able, one day, to finally and completely express himself in a work of art.

Taken together, these novels constitute a study of artists devoted, perhaps overdevoted, to the idea of art as the highest human calling, whose belief in this idea never wavers even as reality gives them all reasons to abandon it. Just as Kunzru's protagonists struggle to align their lives with their dreams of creation, the novels themselves serve as documents of the difficult process through which art and the real world are reconciled.

**W**e first encounter Jay half-way through his life, which has mostly been going downhill since the dissolution of his relationship with Alice in London in the 1990s. They met in their 20s at a rank Shoreditch after-party; at the time, Jay was a striving, working-class art school graduate trying to figure out what he wanted his work to be, and Alice was an aspiring curator hiding the fact that she was living in her aunt's posh Knightsbridge apartment. After that blurry first encounter, they meet briefly at a film screening, then again at one of Jay's early performance pieces, a reconstruction of the abuse he suffered at the hands of his stepfather, who once locked him on a balcony for several hours. (We learn some way through the story that Jay is half-Black, raised by his white mother, though he ran away as a teenager to escape his racially abusive stepfather.)

Alice is impressed with Jay's work and the honesty of his alienation, which seems a world apart from the highly monetizable cynicism of their contemporaries. She later helps Jay and Rob, his closest art school friend, to set up a gallery in an East London squat. Though it debuts to unexpected success, their landlord shuts it down soon after, leaving Jay adrift on a wave of drugs and ennui. Eventually, with Jay's few acclaimed performances leaving him no more certain of his place in the art world, Alice leaves him for Rob, who has learned to make good on his ambition, and she and Jay lose touch.

*Nawal Arjini is on the editorial staff at The New York Review of Books.*



### Blue Ruin

A Novel

By Hari Kunzru

Knopf.

272 pp. \$28

"There are really only two kinds of artist," Jay tells the reader. "You're either an intellectual or a savage." Rob, in their time as friends, proved to be a savage; he paints big, glamorous canvases designed to be snapped up by credulous buyers. In London, he revels in "being part of a fashionable scene" and "talked about as a rising star." He goes around "dolloed up like a court jester," ready to "take his rightful place as a Young British Artist." Even before they graduate from art school, Jay thinks that Rob has "achieved what we all wanted, the blissful dissolution of art into life."

Jay, an intellectual, lives instead in a closed circuit of reading theory and making ephemeral performance art. After the breakup with Alice, he became even more militant in his commitment to, in Jay's words, "erasing my presence" in his own work. His performances became "extreme": He "fasted, drinking nothing but water...[taped] black plastic over the windows and [lived] in darkness." He'd "spend whole days wearing headphones and wax plugs in [his] ears, trying to experience a world without external sound, the pure frequency of reality."

"The only duty the artist has is to become more completely him or herself," Jay writes in his diary. For his thesis show, he locks himself inside a

cell with nothing but basic facilities and an easel. After three days, he emerges with a Polaroid of a painting, which he shows to his teachers and then destroys the canvas. Jay wants to make art that is deliberate in its wastefulness, that shows his "creativity without hope of recompense." In another early conceptual work, he nearly gets himself blacklisted by trying to stage a performance revealing how the prestigious gallery hosting the show paid its cleaning staff less than the minimum wage.

"Most of my work at that time wasn't intended for anyone else to see," Jay realizes later. "My work—and not just my work, everyone's work, the work of all artists—was an alibi for the desire to put a frame around a certain part of life, to declare that inside the frame was art, and outside was not." After he is nominated for a big prize, he recoils from the attention and refuses to be photographed—"eventually compromising" by wearing a mask of a Young British Artist's face. He also revises his diary entry: "The only duty the artist has is to forget himself, to forget he ever existed."

By the time Jay shows up at the compound with Alice's groceries, he has almost achieved this state of nonbeing: He has left London without his passport, floating on the margins of European society and winding up in North America without papers. His encounter with Alice is jarring, bringing with it memories of his old hopes and the London art scene—but it's his reconnection with Rob, his old friend and fellow squatter, that really tests his sense of continuity with his younger self and whether the distance he has created between himself and the art world—not just the art market, but also his fellow artists—has really been worth it.

**T**he latter-day Jay recounts this past as he recovers in the barn on the billionaire's estate. Alice and Jay are trying to keep his presence a secret from the other people on the property: from Rob, especially, but also from Rob's gallerist, Marshal, and Marshal's younger girlfriend, Nicole—who, like Jay, is Black. Jay, of course, is soon discovered: Convinced of the imminent breakdown of society, Marshal hunts him down after he "got a call" tipping him

## Woke Ghazal

It was “Black cool” before it was cool. Before it was “woke,”  
it was funky and fly, fleek and bae. Before it was FUBU, it was woke.

Our language, just like every other catch phrase and dance move, taken, appropriated, pop-culturalized  
into a tweetable talking point. Now we’re “woke.”

I have always loved that word. The shorthand of a head nod from  
someone who looks like me, talks like me. I see you, sis. “Stay woke!”

But I get it. The raised fist of vernacular meaning, *We’ve been through some things*  
can be uncomfortable. If you know, you know. If you don’t, are you unwoke?

Is your man cheating on you? Is your girl stepping out? On his groove  
“Redbone,” Childish Gambino tells us not to close our eyes. “Stay woke.”

In the 1920s, Marcus Garvey writes “Wake up, Ethiopia! Wake up, Africa!”  
while Lead Belly’s lyrics remind us about the Scottsboro Nine: “best stay woke.”

On “Master Teacher,” Erykah Badu croons about “a beautiful world” she’s trying to find, from her album  
New Amerykah Pt. 1. She sings “I have longed to stay awake.”

Sometimes I give my son The Talk without speaking. That spark of sorrow lit between generations.  
Protect yourself, baby boy. Watch your back. Stay woke.

Ferguson, MO. Michael Brown. Walking while Black. Police left his body in the street—  
August heat—for four hours. Someone’s son. Protests ignite. #BlackLivesMatter #StayWoke

If they didn’t know what you were talking about, you wouldn’t be in trouble says  
my father—the vet, the cop. If you know, you know. We know. January, Stay woke.

JANUARY G. O’NEIL

off about Jay and marches him to the house at gunpoint. As everything gets cleared up, Jay is less disconcerted by the guns and zip ties than he is by learning that Marshal turns out to remember—and admire—his art.

This discovery, and the fact that Alice has been hiding Jay, disrupts the tense equilibrium of the compound for good. Marshal, we learn, has promised his backer—the absentee paranoid billionaire who owns the estate—a huge new piece by Rob, but it becomes increasingly clear that Rob has spent his time there high, drunk, and unable to paint, threatening to sink his family (he has a daughter with Alice, though we never meet her) into deep debt. “I always assumed you’d be writing books, running a museum,” Jay tells Alice when they reconnect. No, she replies: “I clean up Rob’s messes.” However successful an artist becomes, they remain in a world of bills and overflowing trash.

Jay brings the baggage of the past onto the estate, and soon the present intrudes too: Everyone except Jay, who avoids the Internet, gets news of George Floyd’s murder near the end of the book. Nicole, who has family in New York City, wants to return as soon as she hears news of the uprisings. But Marshal has to stay because the billionaire has decided to return to the estate from his New Zealand compound. Meanwhile, Jay turns out to be the only one who can provoke Rob into actually finishing the promised piece. Marshal’s indifference to Floyd’s killing, and his willingness to call the police on Rob when he locks himself in his studio with a gun, finally forces Nicole to leave. Jay, having set Rob back at his canvas and nervous about his own status as an undocumented immigrant when the police arrive, leaves for the city after Nicole, and the book ends there.

These reminders of the real world are pointed (we are meant to remember that Peter Thiel planned to build an elaborate bunker in New Zealand) but also delicate (George Floyd is not named, though the video of his death is briefly described). These are gestures at a political analysis that we never quite get, either implicitly or diegetically. The problems and villains of our own world are present in the novel, but without a momentum of their own; it’s as if they’re there just to remind us that, even in our fictional reverie, we haven’t escaped them.



Following Jay over two continents and several decades, *Blue Ruin* picks up threads and motifs from Kunzru’s earlier books: a warped sense of time; the oppressive aesthetics of the über-rich; an interest in technofuturism, drugs, and a counter-bourgeoisie of punks, anarchists, and squatters.

While *Red Pill* and *White Tears* are more preoccupied with the problem of how to properly consume and interpret art than how to create it, all three books are studies in the tension between creation and the outside world, holding dear the untimeliness of artistic production and exploring the mania it can produce.

For a writer so preoccupied with the distinction between art and life, Kunzru is steadfastly uninterested in autofiction. As his characters struggle with what to make of their art, we can imagine Kunzru at his desk, working out his own questions on the page. But his characters are mostly free of the vertiginous interiority of their autofictional peers. In fact, his characters are often opaque, even to themselves. They act (or, more often, don’t act) and then peer back to try to figure out why; often it’s because they lie in the shadow of someone more charismatic and forceful, whose magnetism is a great and bitter mystery.

Kunzru seems to use his fiction as a way to test a set of theses—in the case of *Blue Ruin*, on whiteness and race; on the entrenchment of the far right in polite society; on how visions of the future have yielded from the domain of art to that of technology; on the sinister power of charisma; on the intrusion of the real world into the realm of creative expression, and vice versa. His novels also aspire to be works of intellectual and political argument; in this way, they are like his essays for *Harper’s* and *The New York Review of Books*, many of which are also efforts to investigate, for example, the appeal and pervasiveness of neo-Nazism or the demise of the welfare state, and to resurface punk esoterica and other forgotten histories of underground music.

But these efforts, which make for excellent essays, don’t always make for fully rounded novels. As the outside world, the reader’s world, enters into these books more and more by their conclusion, the rich questions about art come to feel a little inadequate, overwhelmed by the drama of world events. Just at the point where the reader might



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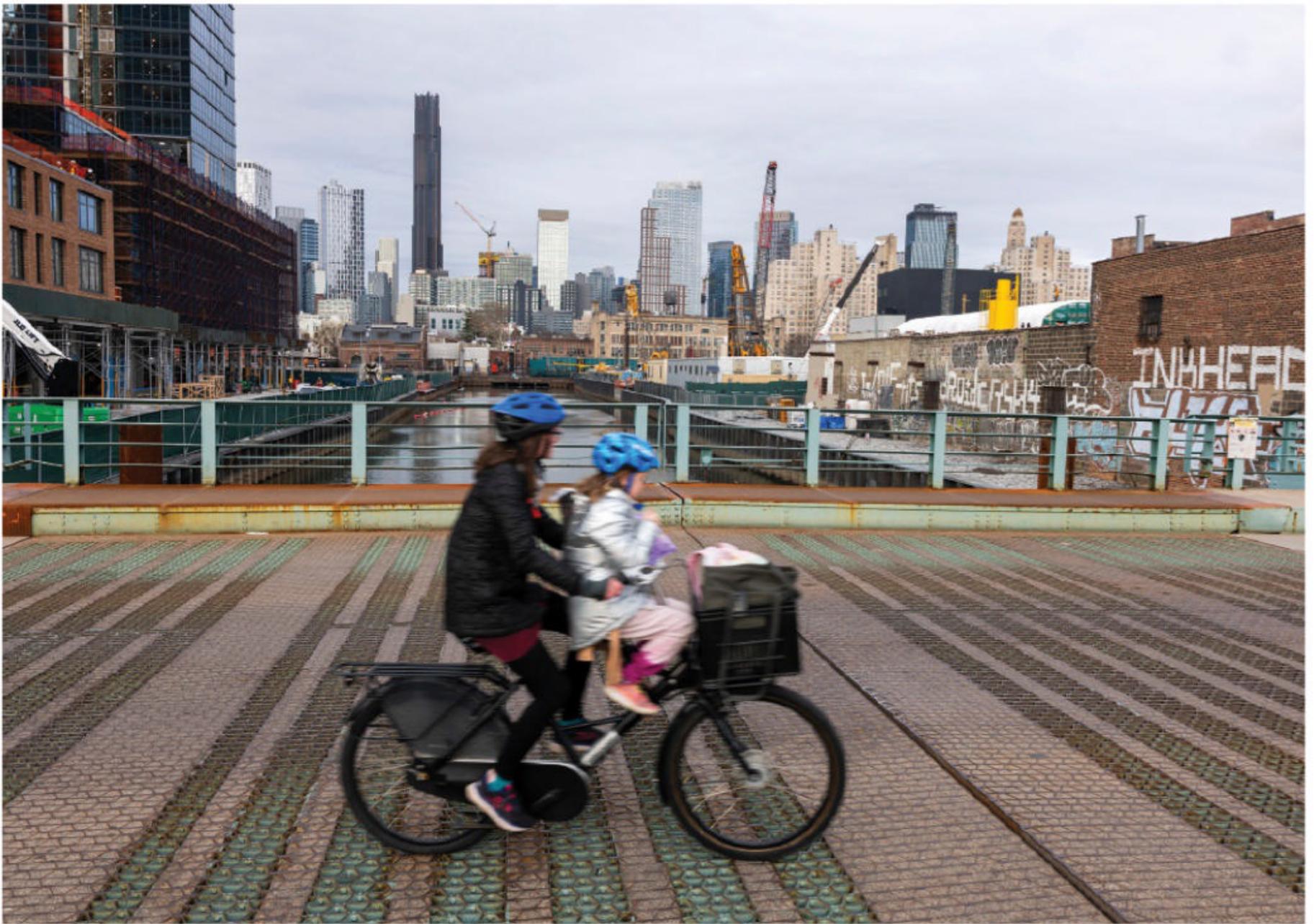
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hope to have their understanding of reality expanded or challenged, the novels instead succumb to it—to the real world and its specific problems. *White Tears* ends with the revelation that the lost blues genius who haunts the narrator and his roommate for most of the book died on the chain gang that made the latter’s family rich. *Red Pill* concludes with Donald Trump’s election. And though the pandemic recedes to a buzz in the background of *Blue Ruin*, the murder of George Floyd informs its final chapters.

Kunzru’s novels, preoccupied as they are with art—who makes it, what makes an artist, what makes art—have a searching, questing tone that his authoritative and persuasive essays on politics and history do not. “For me,” Jay says, “making art was inescapably cerebral.” He might have been working in any medium—music, in the case of *White Tears*, or prose, as in *Red Pill*, or performance art in *Blue Ruin*; the struggle to create remains a social one, a problem that must be worked out in relation to a flawed world. As Kunzru’s readers know, this work never ends.



# The View From Whole Foods

*The transformation of Gowanus*

BY KARRIE JACOBS

**R**OUGHLY 15 YEARS AGO, I STOOD ON THE BANKS OF BUSINESS Bay, a man-made extension of the natural waterway where the city of Dubai was founded, gazing across the water at the 163-story Burj Khalifa, then under construction, and an entire skyline's worth of lesser towers—all being erected at once. The Emirati developer who had taken me to this viewing spot explained, "We are trying to build in 10 years what other people take 100 years to build."

I recalled this scene recently while standing on the roof deck of the Whole Foods in Brooklyn's Gowanus neighborhood, a once-obscure section of the borough named after its profoundly polluted canal. I gazed past the store's parking lot with its eco-friendly gestures—photovoltaic panels atop uptilted parking canopies and tiny egg-beater-style windmills mounted on poles—and took in a small city's worth of

buildings, maybe even 100 years' worth, that hadn't existed the last time I checked.

The view from Whole Foods was the product of a rezoning effort that began in 2016 and was finalized in 2021, with the goal of transforming a neighborhood once dominated by industry and its toxic by-products into a high-density residential area. The aim was to build around 8,500 new apartments over the course of 15

years, including roughly 3,000 affordable units, in an area best known for being a Superfund site.

However, it looks and feels as if every single one of those apartments is being constructed at once. (According to the Department of City Planning, permits were issued for 52 buildings containing 7,450 apartments between the adoption of the new zoning in late 2021 and the end of 2023.) From atop Whole Foods, I could see several completed blocks of mid-rise buildings lining the banks of the canal, and more under construction. Then, farther north, stands a cluster of glassy high-rises nearing completion. Nearby, almost next-door, is a rust-colored building that, more than a century ago, was built as the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Power Station to provide elec-

tricity to the borough's streetcar system. Now, after years of abandonment—in the early 2000s, it was known to squatters and graffiti artists as the Batcave—it has been stunningly rehabilitated into an arts hub by the renowned Swiss architecture firm Herzog & de Meuron, working with a local company, PBDW Architects.

Powerhouse Arts, as the facility is now known, is a nonprofit organization that provides space to local artists, craftspeople, and fabricators. The building's great hall, with its brick walls covered in Batcave-era graffiti, is Brooklyn's version of that cave in Lascaux. From its windows, one gets another set of views of a changing neighborhood. The Powerhouse, with its artistic leanings, feels like a rebuke to the development happening all around it, and yet it may be the ultimate symbol of that transformation.

**G**owanus, the neighborhood, is a low-lying piece of ground between the more desirable Carroll Gardens and Park Slope. Its canal is the product of the mid-19th-century penchant for transforming natural waterfronts into industrial zones. Once a creek that meandered through a bucolic salt marsh, it soon became one of the nation's most heavily used shipping channels, lined with gas plants, foundries, and coal yards. Serving as a terminus for goods and natural resources, the canal also became filled with toxic by-products. In 2010, it was declared a Superfund site, and contractors hired by the original polluters' corporate descendants (most notably National Grid), under the supervision of the Environmental Protection Agency, began to dredge some 10 feet of sediment from the canal's bottom to remove coal tar and other deadly contaminants.

Gowanus has long been, both literally and figuratively, a backwater. It is home to two massive public housing projects, the Gowanus Houses and Wyckoff Gardens, with a total of 1,662 apartments, though until recently, much of the neighborhood's housing has been small two- and three-story row houses. In addition, there are endless blocks of low-rise brick industrial buildings, a few of which are still

used for manufacturing. One open doorway on Nevins Street reveals a factory making Santeria candles.

Like all undervalued and overlooked areas, Gowanus also has its fair share of artists, who have used the old warehouses and low-density manufacturing sites as residences and studios. But Gowanus took longer to gentrify than the other New York City industrial zones colonized by artists. Perhaps because it is a bit out of the way, primarily served by the painfully local R train, it was slow to change: The remaining old-timers still spend their summer evenings sitting in beach chairs on the sidewalks.

Gowanus was also my first home in New York City. In 1984, I rented a \$525-a-month floor-through with a shower in the hall, in a building on Union Street, half a block from the canal. From my apartment's windows, I could monitor the comings and goings of an older New York, watching the workers from a local casket manufacturer wheel the finished coffins—some decorated with bas-reliefs of *The Last Supper*—across the street to a warehouse and shipping facility on the other side of Union. Back then, the only person talking about neighborhood transformation was Salvatore “Buddy” Scotto, whose family owned a liquor store and a funeral home in Carroll Gardens. He'd tell anyone who would listen that the canal should be an attraction like the San Antonio River Walk.

**F**or many years—decades, really—the idea of a different Gowanus wasn't anyone's top priority. The old Gowanus remained mostly intact, even as the surrounding Brooklyn neighborhoods were gentrified. Now, though my former building and its immediate neighbors still stand, the old neighborhood is rapidly being replaced. The casket company is gone; it sold its properties to developers in 2019. The warehouse is being supplanted by 585 Union Street, a massive nine-story mixed-use building with an undulating façade designed by the architecture firm Fogarty Finger; it will have 224 apartments, 25 percent of which have been designated as affordable.

Across the street, another astonishingly huge complex is under construction that will occupy much of the block between Union and President streets—

including the site of the casket factory. Cantilevered menacingly over the flagship of the now-defunct Ample Hills ice cream empire, it also wraps around the Royal Palms shuffleboard bar; both businesses were harbingers of change, along with an influx of artisanal eateries, stylish barbecue joints, and the inevitable microbreweries.

Stubborn bits of the old Gowanus do remain. The two public housing complexes aren't going anywhere. Nor are many of the artists: At the northwest corner of Union and Nevins, a little pottery shop sells wheel-thrown porcelain by the potter Claire Weissberg. Her building has housed artists since the 1970s and has been owned collectively by them since 2005. The Gowanus Dredger Canoe Club, an intrepid group of urban naturalists that has been offering canoe rides on the canal since 1999, occupies a plum storefront in one of the new mid-rise buildings on the canal.

The presence of the holdouts, however, only underscores the vastness of the reinvention all around them. Walking around Gowanus, it's easy to recoil in horror at the scale of the undertaking. It's reminiscent of what happened along the Williamsburg-Greenpoint waterfront after those neighborhoods were rezoned in 2005 and the crumbling industrial buildings that had been reclaimed by artists and assorted counterculture types were replaced wholesale by swank apartments. “Certainly, the construction is all happening at once,” acknowledges Andrea Parker, the executive director of Gowanus Canal Conservancy (GCC), an organization founded in 2006. “The reason that's happening is that the planning process leading up to the Gowanus rezoning lasted, I think, far longer than anyone expected.”

Of course, it is not just the length of the planning process that has driven the current frenzy. It is also the fact that developers had to get their buildings started to take advantage of a tax break known as 421a, which was about to be abolished by the New York State Legislature. Originally, for new buildings to qualify, they had to be completed by 2026, but in late April the deadline was extended to 2031. (Governor Kathy Hochul's 2025 budget also replaces the old tax break with a new one, 485x, with a revamped set of affordability rules for participating developers.)

*Karrie Jacobs is a veteran critic and observer of New York City's architecture and a strong advocate of conducting research by walking around.*

**P**arker, who was trained as a landscape architect, is deeply concerned about the environmental management of the canal and its growing number of green spaces, including green roofs and rain gardens. But that doesn't make her an opponent of the development. And that's the unusual part of this story.

Along with 30 community members, including residents of the public housing complexes (which are run by the New York City Housing Authority) and leaders of a variety of long-standing neighborhood groups, Parker is part of something called the Gowanus Oversight Task Force, a volunteer organization formed specifically to oversee the deal that the community made with the city. The quid pro quo gave the city its rezoning in exchange for a broad range of public benefits, including a waterfront park, a new school, a rehabbed library, affordable housing, flood control, and the continued existence of an area zoned for industrial use.

Traditionally, development battles in New York City pit real estate interests with a plan against local residents who oppose it. But what is happening in Gowanus, once you get past the frenetic construction, is something more interesting: A coalition of neighborhood organizations went into the process knowing what it wanted and came out with tangible gains.

In the early stages, an organization called the Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition convened residents of the Gowanus Houses and Wyckoff Gardens, the leaders of a nonprofit developer of affordable housing called the Fifth Avenue Committee, a number of local arts organizations, and environmental groups including the GCC. This coalition came up with over 50 "points of agreement," including comprehensive in-unit renovations for all of the apartments at Gowanus Houses and Wyckoff Gardens and the "full remediation" of a former gasworks that will become Gowanus Green, a neighborhood-scaled affordable housing development. Master-planned by the architecture firm Marvel, it will have approximately 950 units, a public school, and a waterfront park.

One of the most significant benefits that the neighborhood extracted from the rezoning pro-

cess is a commitment to the Gowanus Lowlands Master Plan, drafted by the GCC and the landscape architecture firm SCAPE in 2019. The plan offers a sophisticated template in which the cleaned-up canal becomes the spine linking a series of public spaces, including waterfront parks, esplanade gardens, and maybe even a couple of public restrooms. "By 2031 or '32, we'll have, overall, a 20-acre network of parks," Parker notes. And unlike the discrete parks built by developers along the East River waterfront under the 2005 rezoning of Williamsburg and Greenpoint, "it will all connect."

In addition, rain gardens and green roofs will play an important part in mitigating the flooding caused by heavy rains, and the new buildings are required to store their wastewater on-site during storms. Two massive tanks designed to contain what's known as "combined sewer overflow" (or CSO) are being built at opposite ends of the canal. One of the CSO facilities, at the corner of Douglass and Nevins streets, will hold 8 million gallons in a set of underground tanks housed in a building designed by Selldorf Architects (the firm responsible for the visitor-friendly waterfront industrial recycling facility in Brooklyn's Sunset Park).

The tanks will be hidden behind walls made of terra-cotta louvers that will "unveil in certain areas the internal process to the public," according to the architect's website. The facility will also be surrounded by a 1.6-acre public space and educational displays about the history of the neighborhood and the nature of the technology within. It's a bold switcheroo in which the neighborhood's long-standing sewage problem morphs into an amenity or maybe even an attraction. In a way, it's emblematic of the whole lemons-to-lemonade approach to the neighborhood's transformation.

**W**hat appears at first glance as a cataclysm is, on closer inspection, a possible model for how New York City neighborhoods should manage the business of growth and the addition of much-needed housing.

Parker says the neighborhood coal-

ition won "an unprecedented quantity and scope of commitments to neighborhood benefits" from the city as part of negotiations during the upzoning. "But so often in New York, the City makes commitments and does not follow through." One of the "deal-breaker" demands of the Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice was accountability, and a task force was formed to monitor the city's adherence to the agreement. "The city has to report progress on the commitments to the Gowanus Oversight Task Force on a quarterly basis," Parker adds.

In 2019, when the Gowanus rezoning was still a work in progress, I spoke with Brad Lander, then the city councilmember whose district covered much of the neighborhood.

The conversation was mostly about how narrow and reductive public participation in planning generally is, the YIMBY-versus-NIMBY dynamic. Lander pointed to the Gowanus plan and explained, "We decided to work together and build something more like political power, to go to City Hall and say, 'Here are the principles we support. If you are willing to live up to those principles, then we could support a rezoning.'"

Recently, I asked Lander, now New York City's comptroller, whether that strategy of amassing political power could be a model for how a city that desperately needs more housing—and especially more affordable housing—might make plans that benefit everyone. "I think we did a good job in the planning process, but really what I think mattered is that people had built institutions over the years which built civic power for their values," Lander replied. "That civic power was able to show up through a planning process. And that's not easy to replicate." But, he added, it is not impossible. In "a certain way, this is just democracy, with grassroots organizing elaborated in land use."

So the next time you find yourself on some Whole Foods roof deck staring in disbelief at a neighborhood being consumed by construction, how you interpret what you see might depend on your faith in civic power. Because the quality that Lander cited—"just democracy"—is the very thing that's being tested everywhere, no matter which way you look. **N**

**Rain gardens and green roofs will play an important part in a transformed Gowanus.**

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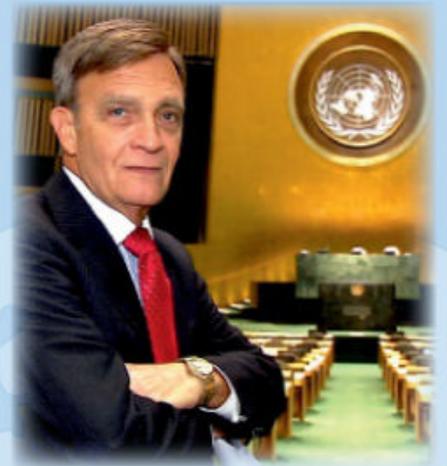
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**Bill Miller** is an accredited journalist at the UN for the Washington International and has written extensively on UN issues.

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Bill developed an interest in international issues and the UN when he served as a US Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic. In his first year he worked as a community developer in a remote rural area; his second year he was Professor of Social Work at the Madre y Maestra University in Santiago, the country's second largest city.

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