

THE Nation.

EST. 1865

OCT. 5/12, 2020

ORLANDO
PATTERSON'S
MODERN WORLD
ADOM GETACHEW

MITCH'S
PITCH
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The Drowned and the Saved Saved

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Emmer Sewell's Porch: This image of the Alabama artist's home appeared as part of "We Will Walk—Art and Resistance in the American South" at Turner Contemporary in Margate, England.

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EDITORIAL / D.D. GUTTENPLAN

Not Just a New Look

A

S YOU CAN SEE, *THE NATION* HAS MADE SOME CHANGES. WHEN E.L. GODKIN AND his fellow editors put Volume 1, Number 1, of *The Nation* to bed in July 1865, they noted, “It has been a week singularly barren of exciting events.” That is not a claim any of us would make today.

Change has been a constant in the magazine’s history—and one of the keys to our longevity. In 1865, Godkin sent John Richard Dennett on horseback to report on “The South as It Is,” a searing account of defeat and devastation that also conveys, forcefully enough to still shock readers today, the recalcitrance, resentment, and deeply rooted racism that persisted after the close of the Civil War.

Nowadays *Nation* correspondents seldom travel on horseback. But in the past year alone they’ve reported on wildfires in Australia; the rise of Hindu nationalism in India; climate catastrophe in Senegal and Alaska; environmental activism in Canada, Europe, and the United States; and the desperate plight of immigrants along our southern border. Not to mention President Donald Trump’s weapons of mass distraction—and the dangerous administrative moves and personnel changes under all the noise. And that was before the coronavirus, which saw us add photographers, artists, writers, and even an epidemiologist to our pages to help *Nation* readers make sense of the science—and the politics—of this pandemic.

Still, why change the way the magazine looks? Because our relationship to our readers and to the world we cover has changed. From 1865 until some point in the last decade, *The Nation* functioned partly as a weekly news magazine—and looked it. We still break important stories, often agenda-setting stories, by award-winning writers. But we do that now every day of the week, on TheNation.com.

News, particularly news that someone in power doesn’t want you to know—whether that’s our recent cover story on Bill Gates’s self-dealing or our new D.C. correspondent Ken Klippenstein’s exposé of the Border Patrol’s involvement in domestic counterinsurgency—remains an important part of *The Nation*’s mission. So does paying attention to the people, places, movements, and machinations the mainstream media treats with malign neglect. But we’ve found that readers of our print magazine increasingly come to us for analysis, perspective, political argument, debate—and the kind of deep dive that, in the hands of a great reporter, can open minds and change the world. Stories with impact. Stories that stay with you. And stories that you’ll want to spend time with.

When we asked print readers what they wanted more of, their answers were clear: more investigative journalism, more political news unavailable elsewhere, and more analysis from *The Nation*’s distinctive progressive perspective. More great stories. More strong arguments. More fearless reporting. With more time between

issues to enjoy each print edition of *The Nation*.

So that’s what we’re going to deliver—twice a month, with 20 percent more pages in each issue (four of those will be special 64-page double issues) that offer even more room for vivid reporting, long-form analysis, and hard-hitting investigations.

Turn the page, and you’ll find the same showcase for our brilliant columnists, along with an expanded menu of compelling dispatches, debate, and data crucial to understanding the events we cover. Where a picture is worth a thousand words, we’ll use the picture. And where a graph or cartoon delivers information that words struggle to convey, we’ll save our words for where they’re needed.

We've found that readers of our print magazine come to us for the kind of deep dive that can change the world.

In our expanded features section, for instance, which will allow for a greater variety of settings, subjects, voices, perspectives, article lengths, and angles of approach in every issue. Or our expanded Books and Arts coverage, giving our critics more room to develop their arguments and our editors the chance to showcase a wider variety of writers and artifacts.

A word about looks. The difference between redesign and redecoration is that while both change what you see in front of you, the former is driven by ideas. There are a lot of adjectives we hope will come to mind when readers hold this new *Nation* in their hands: crisp, clean, intelligent, modern, engaging, beautiful, intentional. As editor, my focus is always on content—what we cover, how we cover it, and whether publishing a given article will inform, enlighten, or delight our readers. Because at *The Nation*,

we don't take any reader—or any reader's time—for granted.

Finally, we should talk about what we've lost these past few months. First, of course, the people whose lives were cruelly cut short, including some who had been members of the *Nation* family for many years. That these losses have fallen so unequally—on people of color, the poor, the incarcerated, the elderly, tearing gaping holes in our already fraying social fabric—has only added insult to grievous injury. We have also sustained incalculable losses in our culture, our politics, and our daily experience of the world. We began planning for this redesign long before a single case of Covid-19 had been diagnosed. Yet after months of relying on our electronic devices not just for news or opinions but for work meetings, family gatherings, and even weddings and funerals, it is easier to see what's missing. Theater. Live music. Sharing the dark with others at the movies. Sharing the light with others in museums, playgrounds, or buses. The rich, fraught, undigitized assemblage of analog life.

We've had books but no live poetry readings. We still have a presidential election of sorts going on now, but without campaign rallies and with an absolute prohibition—at least by the Democratic nominees—on pressing the flesh. And thanks to the men and women of the US Postal Service, we've had magazines. Which, like vinyl records and film photography, have been consigned by many to the past.

We disagree. We believe that print on paper, though as old as Gutenberg or his Chinese predecessors, is a medium with a future. So in reimagining *The Nation* for the 21st century, we asked our creative director, Robert Best, for a magazine that is unabashedly “in print,” reveling in striking typography, uncluttered design, powerful language, and the invocation of stillness and sustained attention.

Why publish on paper at all? Because of what only paper can give you: an analog experience in a digital age. Read on! And then let us know what you think.

Trump's withdrawal benefited oil executives, who have donated millions of dollars to his reelection campaign, and the small, strange fringe of climate deniers who continue to insist that the planet is cooling. But most people living in the rational world were appalled. Polling showed widespread opposition, and by some measures, Trump is more out of line with the American populace on environmental issues than any other. In his withdrawal announcement he said he'd been elected “to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris”; before the day was out, Pittsburgh's mayor had pledged that his city would follow the guidelines set in the French capital.

We're at the last possible moment to turn the wheel of the supertanker that is our government.

Young people, above all, have despised the president's climate moves: Poll after poll shows that climate change is a top-tier issue with them and often the most important one—mostly, I think, because they've come to understand how tightly linked it is not just to their future but to questions of justice, equity, and race.

Here's the truth: At this late date, meeting the promises set in Paris will be nowhere near enough. If you add up the various pledges that nations made at that conference, they plan on moving so timidly that the planet's temperature will still rise more than 3 degrees Celsius from preindustrial levels. So far, we've raised the mercury 1 degree Celsius, and that's been enough to melt millions of square miles of ice in the Arctic, extend fire seasons for months, and dramatically alter the planet's rainfall patterns. Settling for 3 degrees is kind of like writing a global suicide note.

Happily, we could go much faster if we wanted. The price of solar and wind power has fallen so fast and so far in the last few years that they are now the cheapest power on earth. There are plenty of calculations to show it will soon be cheaper to build solar and wind farms than to operate the fossil fuel power stations we've already built. Climate-smart investments are also better for workers and economic equality. “We need to have climate justice, which means to invest in green energy, [which] creates three times more jobs than to invest in fossil fuel energy,” United Nations Secretary General António Guterres said in an interview with *Covering Climate Now* in September. If we wanted to make it happen, in other words, an energy

COMMENT / BILL MCKIBBEN

Vote as if the Climate Depends on It

Because it does.

To understand the planetary importance of this autumn's presidential election, check the calendar. Voting ends on November 3—and by a fluke of timing, on the morning of November 4 the United States is scheduled to pull out of the Paris Agreement.

President Trump announced that we would abrogate our Paris commitments during a Rose Garden speech in 2017. But under the terms of the accords, it takes three years to formalize the withdrawal. So on Election Day it won't be just Americans watching: The people of the world will see whether the country that has poured more carbon into the atmosphere than any other over the course of history will become the only country that refuses to cooperate in the one international effort to do something about the climate crisis.

revolution is entirely possible. The best new study shows that the United States could cut its current power sector emissions 80 percent by 2035 and create 20 million jobs along the way.

Joe Biden and Kamala Harris haven't pledged to move that quickly, but their climate plan is the farthest-reaching of any presidential ticket in history. More to the point, we can pressure them to go farther and faster. Already, seeing the polling on the wall, they've adopted many of the proposals of climate stalwarts like Washington Governor Jay Inslee. A team of Biden and Bernie Sanders representatives worked out a pragmatic but powerful compromise in talks before the Democratic National Convention; the Biden-Harris ticket seems primed to use a transition to green energy as a crucial part of a push to rebuild the pandemic-devastated economy.

**Captain Trump
wants to steer us
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global warming has always been crippled by the political power of Big Oil. But that power has begun to slip. Once the biggest economic force on the planet, the oil industry is a shadow of its former self. (You could buy all the oil companies in America for less than the cost of Apple; Tesla is worth more than any other auto company on earth.) And so it's possible that the hammerlock on policy exercised by this reckless industry will loosen if Trump is beaten.

But only if he's beaten. Four more years will be enough to cement in place his anti-environmental policies and to make sure it's too late to really change course. The world's climate scientists declared in 2018 that if we had any chance of meeting sane climate targets, we had to cut emissions almost in half by 2030. That's less than 10 years away. We're at the last possible moment to turn the wheel of the supertanker that is our government. Captain Trump wants to steer us straight onto the rocks, mumbling all the while about hoaxes. If we let him do it, history won't forgive us. Nor will the rest of the world. **N**

Bill McKibben is the founder of 350.org.

IN MEMORIAM

David Graeber (1961–2020)

The anthropologist who coined “the 99 percent” and “bullshit jobs” died at age 59.



MET DAVID GRAEBER ON AUGUST 2, 2011, AT the first general assembly of Occupy Wall Street. It was chaotic, with socialists using a microphone to try to wrangle us anarchists. We wanted something a little less hierarchical, so a handful of us sat in a circle at the other side of the small Wall Street park. Graeber saw us and came over. “Hi, I’m David. Can I sit with you?”

I didn’t connect the middle-aged man in a baseball cap with his newly released masterwork, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*. And he didn’t help: He didn’t grandstand or lecture or say a pointed word about debt or do anything I would expect from an admired intellectual at a political meeting. Mostly, he listened. Afterward, I heard the whispers: *That was David Graeber!*



“The anarchist anthropologist” wrote about mutual belonging and rebellion.

When he couldn’t find another US teaching job, he never doubted he was blacklisted. Yale and the rest of the American academy weren’t wrong to be afraid of him, but abroad Graeber was in demand. By the end of his life, he’d become a professor at the London School of Economics.

Of the 21st century American left’s writers, Graeber is among the most likely to be read in 100 years—not just because his work is so original, so varied, and so deep but also because it speaks to transhistorical practices of mutual belonging and rebellion against authority. And yet he never settled into a self-satisfied intellectual groove. Forever known, over his protestations, as “the anarchist anthropologist” after his influential collection *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, he wrote on subjects ranging from the politics of rural Madagascar to participant observation of the global justice movement to the fascist messaging of superhero movies. He could also turn an evocative phrase; I can’t guess whether “the 99 percent” or “bullshit jobs” will be more influential.

Some people think anarchists don’t have leaders, but that’s not true. Graeber led with his actions as well as his intellect, and he was dependable in a way that few famous men are. The collective struggle for liberation always came first.

Malcolm Harris

Malcolm Harris is the author of *Kids These Days: Human Capital and the Making of Millennials*.

Objection! Elie Mystal



The Real Election Has Already Begun

The only way Democrats can prevent Trump from stealing the election is if overwhelming numbers vote early—and in person.

ICAN'T KEEP UP WITH ALL THE DIFFERENT ways Donald Trump is trying to steal the upcoming presidential election. And I can't keep track of all the ways he is trying to undermine faith in the election so that he can declare himself the winner even if he loses.

As of this writing, Trump's proposed election-rigging schemes have ranged from delaying the election because of Covid-19 (which he can't do) to declaring a winner by the end of election night, even if votes remain to be counted (which he also can't do). He has insisted that mail-in voting increases the likelihood of fraud (which it does not), and he, along with his partner in corruption Bill Barr, have told Trump voters to vote twice (which is fraud). Meanwhile, Postmaster General Louis DeJoy has crippled the Postal Service to the point that people fear their mail-in votes won't get to their local Board of Elections in time to be counted, while courts have refused to extend deadlines to request, receive, and submit absentee ballots. Trump and Barr have even suggested sending armed goons to voting locations to "secure" the vote, which is a clear indication that they intend to engage in voter intimidation on Election Day.

And I'm writing this in September! I can't imagine what Trump will have said to undermine the election between the time I finish this sentence and the time you read it.

There isn't a lot Democrats can do to prevent Trump's assault on democracy. They've given dire warnings, but at this point the warnings are a little bit like a smoke alarm going off after a house has burned to a crisp. They've held congressional oversight hearings, but they're not going to impeach anybody, and anybody they did impeach would be acquitted by the craven and complicit Republican Senate. They've tried to get the mainstream media to correct Trump's lies, but the presidential stenographers employed by many news outlets long ago decided that access was more valuable than the US system of self-government.

So we are stuck in a difficult spot. Instead of a concrete solution to stop Trump from stealing an election he is unlikely to win fairly, we're left living out the plot of the movie *Major League*: As Tom Berenger's character says when he learns that his team's owner is planning to tank the team so she

can move it to a new city, "I guess there's only one thing left to do.... Win the whole fuckin' thing."

Theoretically, it's possible. But the only way to win the whole effing thing is if people overcome the urge to procrastinate and vote before Election Day. If we don't, Trump has too many avenues to engage in shenanigans. To counteract that, we need to vote early—and in person, if possible.

Not everybody can vote in person, of course. I'm not a Republican, which means I don't believe Grandma needs to risk death in order to win an election. The most you can reasonably ask of a person for whom going to the polls is too dangerous is to request and return an absentee ballot. But if your state offers early in-person voting and it's safe for you to do so, you should.

There are different kinds of early in-person voting, depending on the state. Some offer in-person absentee voting. That means you go to a designated location (usually the county Board of Elections office), sign in with an election official, fill out your absentee ballot, and then hand it to a poll worker. Other states offer plain old early in-person voting, which is just like regular Election Day voting but earlier. And some states offer both, depending on how early a person is trying to vote.

Either option is good. The benefits of regular early in-person voting are obvious: Polling locations are likely to be less crowded, and you can be sure your vote is tabulated by Election Day. But in-person absentee voting is also useful. Even if your state won't count ballots until Election Day, voting in person ensures that your ballot will be there by then, thus avoiding any postal delays. It gives voters the confidence that an actual person received their vote. And it lessens the chances that poll workers will be overwhelmed on Election Day.

The most important benefit of in-person absentee voting is that it reduces the chance that Trumpy election officials will throw away your ballot because of a clerical mistake, lateness, or an allegation of a mismatched signature.

Stanford Law School professor Nate Persily put it this way: "In all likelihood, half a million mail ballots will go uncounted in this election due to lateness,

missing signatures, signature mismatches, and other problems. We need to make sure that number does not grow to a million votes lost."

We already know which voters are disproportionately affected by these kinds of issues. A Healthy Elections Project re-

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port written by MIT researcher Diana Cao shows that in Florida's 2020 primaries, 1.3 percent of mail-in votes were not counted. When the uncounted ballots are broken down by age and race, skews become apparent. Over 3.5 percent of ballots from voters ages 18 to 29 were rejected, and over 2 percent of the ballots from Black voters and another 2 percent from Hispanic voters.

In-person absentee voting starts in September in some states. New Jersey allows in-person absentee voting at county Board of Elections offices starting September 19. Some California counties get going October 5. By October 19, states with more than half of the electoral votes will offer in-person absentee voting, and some states will have moved to regular early voting by then.

The November 3 election is the show; it's the performative civic engagement our carnival barker of a president believes he can manipulate to his advantage. The real election, the real fight to get voters to the polls to save our democracy, has already begun. **N**

IN OUR ORBIT

A Revolution on TV

Readers who came of age during the current television multiverse may find themselves struggling to grasp the cultural dominance once enjoyed by *The Tonight Show* on NBC. One of the many pleasures of *The Sit-In*, a new documentary inspired by Joan Walsh's reporting in *The Nation* and available on NBC's Peacock streaming service, is the film's account of how, during a week in February 1968, Americans came to have a national conversation on race, injustice, and the Vietnam War—organized and orchestrated by Harry Belafonte.

A chart-topping recording artist, acclaimed actor, and committed activist, he initially turned down an offer to fill in for host Johnny Carson, changing his mind only after being promised control over his guest list. The result was history making: Belafonte's interview with his dear friend Martin Luther King Jr. showcases King's warmth, humor, and humanity a month and a half before his assassination. The conversation with Robert F. Kennedy is more formal, but Kennedy, too, allows Belafonte and viewers to listen as he thinks aloud about the often hollow promise of American life. Belafonte's "sit-in" topped the ratings—providing proof of concept for "must-see TV."

—D.D. Guttenplan

Subject to Debate

Katha Pollitt



ANDY FRIEDMAN

Marrying Money

A new book by Melania Trump's ex-best friend shows how the first lady sold her soul.

IUSED TO FEEL SORRY FOR MELANIA TRUMP. ALL SHE wanted, I imagined, was to be one of those rich private-school moms who spend their life getting spa treatments and lunching with their girlfriends at chic little Upper East Side restaurants. Instead, she ended up trapped with a sociopath in a tower full of gold toilets. People put too much stock in the concept of agency, I would say. Sometimes you make a mistake and you can't get out of it. And because she's a woman, she gets double the blame, like Marie Antoinette. These days, she gets more grief than her husband, Louis XVI, the king of France.

I wasn't the only one who felt this way. Every time a photo appeared of Melania frowning next to her husband or refusing to take his hand, the "free Melania" memes would go up on Twitter. It was hard to believe that a beautiful young woman would choose, with eyes wide open, a man as nasty, selfish, and crude as Donald Trump. There are other rich men in New York, after all. Maybe he wasn't so awful when they married, I thought, and now she is paralyzed by shyness and depression.

Not a bit of it, says Stephanie Winston Wolkoff in her tell-not-quite-all, *Melania and Me: The Rise and Fall of My Friendship With the First Lady*. As she describes it, the two were close for years, with cozy monthly lunches and an endless stream of texts filled with XOs and emojis. Wolkoff writes that Melania was "smart, genuine, trustworthy, and grounded," possessed of an "inexplicable calm." "When Donald gets flustered—you can tell because his face goes from tempered orange to bright red—all he has to do is look at her, and he settles down." (News to me and anyone else with a television.) Melania was unperturbed by the leak of the *Access Hollywood* tape in October 2016. "He is who he is," Wolkoff writes Melania told her over grilled salmon at the Mark Hotel.

What went wrong? As she tells it, devotion to her friend led Wolkoff, a former director of special events at *Vogue* and a key planner of the annual Met Gala, to take on the mammoth task of helping organize the four days of inaugural festivities after the election of Melania's husband. The tsuris for which his administration has become notorious was already present: Besides Ivanka Trump, constantly angling to push Melania aside, there were incompetent underlings, officious men like Wolkoff's nemesis and onetime Trump campaign aide Rick Gates, and general wheeling and dealing, including among the Trumps themselves. Top names from the worlds of fashion and party planning were mostly Hillary Clinton supporters and wouldn't help; first-class performers refused their services.

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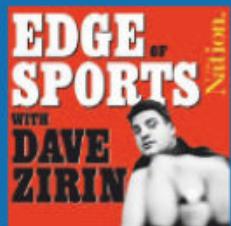
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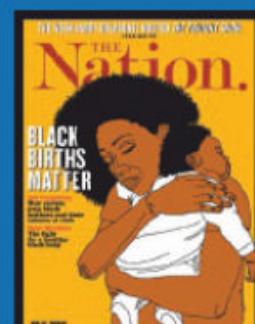
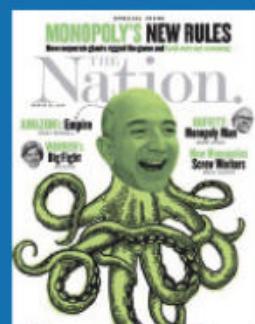
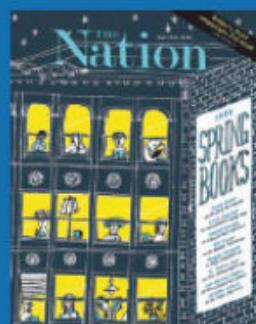
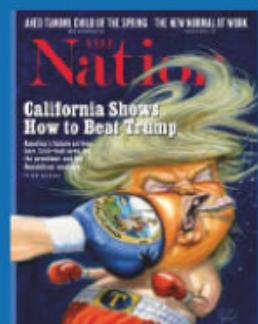
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You'd think Wolkoff would have run screaming back to New York. Instead she became the first lady's senior adviser, organizing everything from the design of state-dinner invitations and the new paint for Melania's bedroom to trying, mostly unsuccessfully, to get her to wear American designers instead of the European ones she preferred. The work was exhausting, frustrating, and demeaning, and eventually Wolkoff ended up in the hospital with serious nerve damage from the undignified schlepping she was forced to do. The reason she stayed—and I take this with a grain of salt—despite backstabbing by Ivanka and her allies, was "patriotism," Wolkoff writes, plus her conviction that she and Melania could do wonderful things for children with the anti-cyberbullying Be Best initiative. ("I warned her that the phrase sounded illiterate," Wolkoff mentions.) One problem with this plan, of course, was that Donald is the world's biggest cyberbully. Another was that Melania wasn't very interested in Be Best or, indeed, much of anything besides clothes and facials and expressing, in passive-aggressive ways, her contempt for anyone who criticized her. In any case, the dream came crashing

It was hard to believe that a beautiful young woman would choose a man as nasty, selfish, and crude as Donald Trump.



OPPART / BRIAN STAUFFER



down, Wolkoff says, when she was made the fall guy for the financial shenanigans of the inaugural and sent packing. Melania refused to help her and slowly froze her out. No more lunches. No more emojis. Instead, dear reader, this book—with tapes, Wolkoff claims, to back it up.

Wolkoff presents herself as the most trusting best friend since Banquo, but to do this, she has to leave out a lot. There is almost nothing in the book about politics; it's all about her personal commitment to her friend. But Melania has been a political figure all along. Remember her public support for Donald's promotion of the false and racist claim that Barack Obama was Kenyan? What did Wolkoff feel at the rally she attended where, after a brief introduction by Melania, Donald "riled up the crowd"? Wolkoff claims she had no interest in politics before casting her first vote in 2016, for Donald, and we're left to assume she voted merely out of personal loyalty. But she moved in a world that was strongly Democratic; *The New York Times* reported that she donated \$10,000 to the Democratic National Committee in 2014. It is hard to believe she was unaware of Donald's opposition to

legal abortion and LGBTQ rights, his vow to build the wall, his claim that global warming was a hoax, his attacks on the media, and his overt appeals to the religious fanaticism, racism, xenophobia, ignorance, and sexism of his base. Could it be that she was kind of a Trumper herself and her infatuation with Melania is little more than a cover story?

On the other hand, plenty of vaguely liberal wealthy people supported Donald out of financial self-interest. Note that her husband, David Wolkoff, is a real estate biggie whose family is famous for demolishing the 5Pointz artists' building in New York's Long Island City to build high-priced condo towers. Maybe she is more of a Melania than she wants the reader to think.

Still, we owe Stephanie Winston Wolkoff some gratitude. Her portrait of Melania as cold, hostile, and self-centered and "not a normal woman" seems right. Without Wolkoff, we might not know that the first lady refused to move into the White House until the toilets and showers used by the Obamas had been replaced. And we wouldn't know what Melania said after she visited the detention camps at the border in her infamous "I really don't care. Do U?" Zara jacket.

According to Wolkoff: "The patrols told me the kids say, 'Wow, I get a bed? I will have a cabinet for my clothes?' It's more than they have in their own country where they sleep on the floor." **N**



THE LEAK / KEN KLIPPENSTEIN

Vote of No Confidence

1 “Office of Intelligence and Analysis”

I&A is one of the array of government organizations that make up the intelligence community, a consortium of elite spy agencies including the CIA and National Security Agency. As a subagency in the DHS, I&A monitors domestic terrorism threats.

2 “Threats to the 2020 Election Season”

President Trump has repeatedly and falsely alleged massive voter fraud in the 2016 election, and he continues to do so ahead of the 2020 election. The Transition Integrity Project, a bipartisan election monitoring group, recently conducted a series of “war games” simulating the 2020 election. The exercises anticipated possible street violence, especially in the event of a contested outcome. “The potential for violent conflict is high,” the organization concluded.

AS THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION DRAWS NEAR, SO DOES the fear of political violence—and not just among progressives. A concerned law enforcement source provided *The Nation* with the following Department of Homeland Security intelligence assessment, which deems white supremacists the principal threat to safe elections in 2020.

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2

(U) Physical Threats to the 2020 Election Season

3 (U//FOUO) We assess ideologically-motivated violent extremists and other violent actors could quickly mobilize to threaten or engage in violence against election or campaign-related targets in response to perceived partisan and policy-based grievances.* While we currently lack credible threat reporting of attack plotting during the 2020 election season, we assess that open-air, publicly accessible parts of physical election infrastructure, such as campaign-associated mass gatherings, polling places, and voter registration events, would be the most likely flashpoints for potential violence.

- (U) Through early 2020, multiple assaults have occurred at places like polling stations and rallies. In one instance, an individual drove his vehicle into a voter registration tent, according to US news media reports. Violent actors targeted political party offices with arson attacks in Wyoming on 6 September 2018 and North Carolina on 15 October 2016.
- (U) Since 2016, violent actors have exploited peaceful campaign rallies and protests to clash with individuals holding opposing political views, according to local and national US news media reports. For example, at an unofficial rally in 2017, physical altercations between otherwise lawful protesters and counter-protesters resulted in several arrests and at least 11 people injured.

5 (U//FOUO) We assess individuals harboring violent extremist ideologies and other violent actors likely will continue to threaten or target candidates, public figures, and members of the general public who these actors perceive as opposing their worldview, which is consistent with past attack plotting and historical drivers for violent activity. We continue to assess lone offender white supremacist extremists and other lone offender domestic terrorist actors with personalized ideologies, including those based on grievances against a target's perceived or actual political affiliation, policies, or worldview, pose the greatest threat of lethal violence. **6**

- (U//FOUO) Two separate domestic terrorists with partisan-based grievances have targeted politicians, public figures, and a national media organization based on their perceived or actual political affiliations since 2017, according to a DOJ press release and press reporting.

* (U//FOUO) For the purposes of this paper, the term violent actors refers to groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in unlawful acts of violence with the intent to cause serious bodily harm and/or damage to critical infrastructure.

(U) Prepared by the Counterterrorism Mission Center. Coordinated within the DHS Intelligence Enterprise (CISA, CWMD, I&A, ICE, USCG) and with NCTC. For questions, contact DHS-SPS-RFI@hq.dhs.gov.

UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

3 “FOUO”

An abbreviation of “for official use only,” it is a security designation for sensitive but unclassified information. It is intended to keep documents from public disclosure.

4 “violent actors have exploited”

According to an FBI report obtained by *The Nation* in June, far-right extremists sought to provoke unrest at protests by violently targeting both civilians and law enforcement.

5 “white supremacist extremists”

In recent years, the majority of extremist-related murders in the United States have been carried out by white supremacists. While the FBI recently elevated “racially motivated violent extremists” to a national threat priority, the Trump administration has reportedly been reluctant to go after them.

6 “pose the greatest threat of lethal violence”

I&A identifies white supremacists as the leading threat to election security—above even foreign terrorist groups like ISIS.



THE ARGUMENT

Cancel the Presidential Debates—Permanently

EDWARD BURMILA

IMAGINE HATING YOURSELF ENOUGH TO watch a presidential debate featuring Donald Trump. What reason would you possibly have? To make sure he's a lying sociopath? To see if he's a worse choice than Joe Biden? To gain useful insights into American politics?

In truth, there is no point, especially in a format that will involve remote participation because of the pandemic. Nothing will be revealed that we don't already know and know so thoroughly that we can barely stand to hear it again. We could cancel the upcoming debates and lose nothing. Hell, we'd gain precious minutes of our lives we might otherwise be tempted to waste.

But the problem with general-election presidential debates is larger than Trump or 2020. They are an anachronism of a bygone media era. We no longer need debates to expose us to the major party nominees. Today they serve no purpose beyond entertainment for politics junkies, cheap ratings for cable news, and fodder for conservatives to shriek about biased moderation. Covid-19 provides the perfect opportunity to jettison presidential debates for good.

Some of the earliest research on debates suggested they can matter under four conditions: if the election is close, many voters are undecided, one or both candidates are unknown, or partisanship is low. Aside from a close election, there is little chance of the other conditions being met now. Things have changed. According to a University of Missouri study from 2013, debates "typically induce very little change in voter preference." In 1960 or even 1992, direct exposure to the candidates was rarer. The debates were among our few chances to see and hear them.

Scholars say that while debates may not affect voter choice, they can make viewers better informed. Perhaps a tightly moderated Ronald Reagan–Walter Mondale debate could do that 36 years ago, in the pre-social-media era of the slower, more limited news cycle. But any information gleaned from a debate in 2016 was likely to be incomplete, misleading, or false. Trump exacerbates the limitations of debates with his pathological lying, and the rise of spin rooms as a venue for twisting debate content has been degrading the information function of debates. Everything that a voter could care to know, including countless hours of video of the candidate in a range of settings, is so widely accessible now that debates, at best, add nothing

ing and, at worst, serve as a venue for spreading misinformation.

Debates for other offices or in presidential primaries remain useful. Voters need some guidance when the options are plentiful and many candidates are unfamiliar. By autumn, though, voters know the presidential nominees to the point of tedium.

Underexposure has given way to overexposure as debates take on the feeling of sweeps week for cable news ratings. Yet viewership is limited. Ratings include everyone who watches any part of a program and tend to drop sharply after the first debate. To gin up interest, media outlets subject us to gimmicks like ghastly "undecided" voter panels, which mix voters who don't sound undecided at all with voters who could write everything they know about politics on a sugar packet. Moderators epitomize the mainstream media tradition of being browbeaten into "balanced" questions and statements that accrue benefits to Republican candidates, whose strategy is to lie and then scream bloody murder if challenged. Rules limiting rebuttals and interactions (which, of course, Trump simply ignores) increase the stilted, stage-managed feeling of it all. It's not a debate. It's dueling sound bites. It's civics cosplay.

Repeating the rituals of politics as we remember it will not bring it back. The shift in electoral politics from an earnest but flawed attempt to make informed decisions to a *Gangs of New York*-style melee of tribalism and vulgar entertainment is not a passing fad but the new normal. If no one is learning from debates and no viewers are changing their minds, what are we still doing this for, other than the grinding routine of having "always" done it this way (intermittently since 1960)? Debates are now bad

entertainment for people whose favorite TV show is politics, and they can make do elsewhere. Watch reruns of *The West Wing* or something.

The necessity of social distancing brought about by the pandemic, combined with the outrageousness of the Trump presidency, creates an opening to rid ourselves of the silly spectacle that debates have become. But not only in 2020. For good. We will regret passing on this chance. **N**

**We could cancel
the upcoming debates
and lose nothing.
Hell, we'd gain precious
minutes of our lives.**



SNAPSHOT / Harold Postic

Breathtaking

Cars drive along San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge at midday under an orange smoke-filled sky on September 9. Dangerous dry winds whipped up California's record-breaking wildfires as hundreds of residents were evacuated by helicopter and tens of thousands of homes were plunged into darkness by power outages across the western United States. The hazardous smoke smothered much of the West Coast.

By the Numbers



4.6M

Acres burning across 10 states, as of September 14—an area the size of Rhode Island and Connecticut combined

529

Highest recorded measure of fine inhalable particles in Portland's Air Quality Index, on September 12; levels over 100 are deemed unhealthy

4.5M

Homes built in areas at risk of wildfire in the US

20%

Share of California fire camp crews made up of incarcerated people

900%

Increase in area burned by wildfires across the western US since 1984

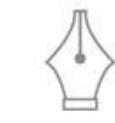
80%

Likelihood of a megadrought hitting the southwestern US by 2100

62%

Increase in annual global carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels since 1990

—Meerabelle Jesuthasan



DeadlinePoet
CALVIN TRILLIN

At a Military Cemetery, Trump Reflects on His Only War Hero

He was the very model of a neighborhood podiatrist.

For he could find the bone spurs that these losers' doctors always missed.

So if your name was on the list of those he needed to assist,

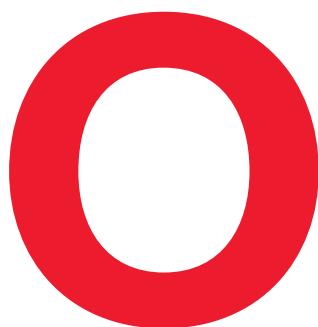
He'd swear those bone spurs did exist, and, if need be, throw in a cyst.

He was the very model of a neighborhood podiatrist.

Britain's long, long road to a just transition

In the UK, phasing out fossil fuels isn't a political issue. And that's a problem.

BY DANIEL JUDT



NIN THE FINAL DAY OF THE OXFORD CITIZENS ASSEMBLY on Climate Change—a cold, gray British October Sunday almost a year ago—I witnessed a strangely moving exercise in direct democracy. Strange because it seemed, at first, mundane and almost childish: Assembly members were instructed to write letters

from their future selves, imagining what it would be like to live in Oxford after the city had zeroed out its carbon emissions. When they had finished, some volunteered to read their letters out loud.

Slowly, detail by detail, a world came into view. A net zero Oxford had no cars, one assembly member declared or, another amended, perhaps one shared car per block. No cars meant no parking lots, she added. Replace them with parks. Roads narrowed into bike routes. Sidewalks broadened. One member proposed public solar-powered boat-buses, cruising along the river Isis—for leisure, another clarified, since most people would work from home. Those homes, said a third, would be stripped of their gas lines and warmed by electric heat pumps.

The more people spoke, the more radical their proposals became. “I’ve got wind farms on the outskirts of Oxford!” one shouted. The iconic university library became a solar tower. Cornmarket, Oxford’s main drag, which today is lined with garish souvenir shops and fast-food joints, was turned into a community apple orchard. St. Giles, another major artery, was converted into woodland. One of the final speakers, a middle-aged man, captured the mood with gusto. “We did it,” he said. “We didn’t like the way successive governments had made the problem worse—not even just ignored it but actually made it worse—so we took over the government and solved the problem for ourselves.”

CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLIES ARE A NEW TAKE ON A VERY OLD IDEA: THE Athenian deliberative forum refashioned for a world of representative democracies. A governing body convenes a small group of citizens, randomly selected but demographically representative, to deliberate on a set policy question. After hearing from experts and politicians, the citizens debate among themselves and advise the governing body on what to do. Such assemblies have become something of a fad across Europe in recent years. In 2017, Ireland held a national one on abortion that played an important role in breaking the political deadlock around the issue. In 2019, Belgium moved to establish a permanent regional assembly that would take

over some of the local parliament’s governing responsibilities.

The concept has caught on in the UK, too—and become linked to one issue in particular. In the past year there have been 25 assemblies across the country, and 14 have focused on the climate crisis. There has been a national citizens’ assembly on the issue, which wrapped up its proceedings (via video conference) in late June. The Oxford assembly, which had been in the works since early 2019, was the first.

The wind rises:
All of the UK’s remaining coal-fired power stations, including Drax (upper left), will be phased out by 2024 in favor of renewable energy like the Thames Array (bottom).

Daniel Judd is a graduate student in political theory at Oxford University.

The UK’s emission reductions since 1990 are, on some measurements, unmatched by any other nation.

It is not a coincidence that these climate assemblies are having their moment now or that they are having it in Britain. Over the past decade, the UK has charted an aggressive course on climate action, though it has been muffled by the divisive chaos of Brexit. The UK’s emission reductions since 1990 are, on some measurements, unmatched by any other nation. Last year it became the first major economy to put a target of net zero emissions by 2050 into binding legislation. The country can boast what is, at least on the surface, an impressive political consensus around the need for rapid climate action. And yet, perhaps because of the very strengths that have gotten it this far, the UK has found itself ill-equipped to deal with a now urgent question of climate justice. It is the same question that motivated the series this article concludes: What would it mean for the transition to a net zero society to be just?

THE UK’S PATH TO A NET ZERO commitment was, to all appearances, remarkably smooth. On May 2, 2019, the Committee on Climate Change, an independent group tasked with advising the government on climate policy, released a report titled *Net Zero: The UK’s Contribution to Stopping Global Warming*. It was a doorstop of a document—300 pages of policy recommendations—but the bottom line was clear: The UK could and should increase its 2050 reduction target from 80 percent of greenhouse gas emissions compared with 1990 levels to 100 percent. Going net zero, the CCC emphasized, was economically prudent and ethically necessary. It advised the government that the new target “should be set in legislation as soon as possible.”

The timing was fortuitous. The climate activist group Extinction Rebellion (XR) staged major actions in the fall of 2018 and in April 2019, bringing Central London to a standstill. Greta Thunberg,



who arrived for the 2019 protests, stopped by Parliament and administered one of her vintage dressing-downs, prompting chastened MPs to declare a climate emergency the day before the CCC released its report. And Prime Minister Theresa May, her resignation looming, seemed desperate to put something besides a bungled Brexit to her name. On June 12 her government introduced the net zero target in Parliament. On June 26, Parliament approved it with overwhelming support. On June 27, less than a month before stepping down, May signed it into law. "She's in the dying embers of her premiership, and she rolled this very simple net zero grenade," recalled Luke Pollard, a Labour MP from Plymouth and the shadow secretary for the environment. He added, in a tone of grudging admiration, "It was very good politics."

The day that the UK's commitment became official, the French Parliament passed its version of the same target. In May of this year, Spain, still reeling from a devastating coronavirus outbreak, introduced legislation committing the country to net zero by 2050 as part of its postpandemic recovery plan. Net zero by 2050 is the keystone of Joe Biden's climate agenda. The UK did not spark this shift on its own. But it was

the first domino to fall, and it did so without acrimonious debate or climate-denying culture wars.

Extinction Rebellion:
Last October the group's first major protest brought central London to a standstill.

THE ROOTS OF THIS REMARKABLE CONSENSUS STRETCH back to November 2008, when Gordon Brown's Labour government, with support from the Conservative opposition and at the urging of then-Energy Secretary Ed Miliband, enacted the Climate Change Act, which established a series of five-year targets leading up to a goal by 2050 of 80 percent fewer emissions than in 1990. Just as important, however, it created the CCC, a group of scientists and policy experts charged with advising governments on what their emission targets should be and warning them (in sharply worded letters that read like a delinquent student's report card) when their policies are falling short.

Over the past 12 years, the committee has become something of an untouchable institution in UK climate politics. Activists and policymakers across the political spectrum—even those who dispute the CCC's recommendations—are reluctant to criticize it (with a few exceptions, most notably the British climate journalist George Mon-

biot). "It's hard to overstate how important it's been to the transition," said Joss Garman, the UK director of the European Climate Foundation. The committee's strictly scientific, just-the-facts-ma'am approach helped turn the climate debate into "a very clear technocratic choice," he continued. "It's almost like having an [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] for your own country."

The government tapped Adair Turner, Baron of Ecchinswell and a member of the House of Lords, to chair the committee. Turner, who stepped down in 2012, is a self-described technocrat with an impeccably establishment (and fossil-fuel-friendly) résumé—BP, JPMorgan Chase, McKinsey, Merrill Lynch—that speaks to the committee's anti-political approach: Climate change is a technical problem, and no one is the enemy. (When I reached him in June, he seemed eager to display different credentials, thrice invoking the labor theory of value and insisting that, on this one point, "Marx has it right.")

By Turner's account, the committee quickly realized that "the only route to a zero-carbon economy is deep electrification." This approach—"clean up electricity; electrify everything," as *Vox* climate reporter David Roberts put it in 2017—is today widely regarded as the best route to net zero. There is now a clear and feasible path to zero-emission electricity production. So Step 1 is to green the energy grid, and Step 2 is to hook everything up to it.

On Step 1, the UK's record has been undeniably impressive. In 2008 some 80 percent of the UK's electricity came from fossil fuels. Coal, the country's staple energy source since the mid-1800s, began to decline in the 1980s, but it was replaced by a glut of oil from the North Sea. Today only four coal-fired power stations remain in the country. All will be phased out by 2024. Natural gas still accounts for nearly 40 percent of the UK's electricity generation, but that is down by a quarter from 2008.

Meanwhile, the renewables sector, mostly driven by a boom in offshore wind farms, is thriving. "The good news," Turner recalled, "is that decarbonizing electricity and building lots of green electricity is now cheaper and easier, faster than we dared dream in 2008." A good metric for this dramatic transformation is carbon intensity, or how much carbon dioxide each kilowatt-hour of electricity produces. In 2008 the carbon intensity of UK electricity was 495 grams of CO₂ per kilowatt-hour. By 2018 it had tumbled to 207. US electricity, for comparison, had a carbon intensity of 450 in 2016.

These advances in clean energy have led the UK to an overall emission reduction trend unmatched by any other nation. According to an analysis by Carbon Brief, the UK's CO₂ emissions in 2019 were 41 percent lower than

"The good news is that decarbonizing electricity and building lots of green electricity is now cheaper and easier than we dared dream in 2008."

—Adair Turner, former chair, Committee on Climate Change

they were in 1990 and the lowest since 1888. From 2010 to 2018, the UK boasted the fastest rate of decline in CO₂ emissions of any major economy—and, what is more staggering for such a small country, it was nearly the largest absolute decline as well (though this says more about what bigger nations haven't done than what the UK has). Only the United States, by virtue of its size, has cut more in absolute terms, but its rate of decline is one-eighth that of the UK.

However, this sparkling record comes with three crucial lines of fine print: one for the “net,” one for the “zero,” and one for the 2050 deadline.

First, going net zero does not actually require the UK to stop producing emissions. The country intends to achieve some of its reductions by using a technology called carbon capture and storage (CCS), which takes emissions from large sources—cement factories and power plants—and sequesters them underground. The commission said CCS will be a necessity if the UK is to reach net zero, and the current government is singing its praises. But there are no operational carbon capture facilities in the UK. “These things have the characteristics of a time machine,” said Duncan McLaren, a professor of climate policy at Lancaster University who has written extensively about CCS. “They promise to do something in the future, which even in the most well-meaning hands ends up meaning delay in the present.”

Moreover—this is the fine print for the “zero”—the UK’s target applies only to territorial emissions, or those that are produced on UK soil. This is standard practice for national reduction targets, but it means that the UK could outsource more and more of its emissions to other countries (for instance, by closing down its steel factories and importing from China or elsewhere in Europe), which would result in global emissions staying the same or possibly growing, even as the UK’s plummeted. If you measure consumption

emissions rather than territorial ones, the UK’s reductions since 1990 amount to just over 10 percent—a much less impressive achievement.

And then there is that deadline. The CCC insists that 2050 is “the earliest credible date” by which net zero would be “deliverable alongside other government objectives” and that an earlier date “could lead to a need for punitive policies and early capital scrappage to stay on track to the target.” Mike Thompson, the director of carbon budgets at the CCC, said, “You could maybe do 2045 if it went absolutely perfectly, without having to scrap things early.” But that is a crucial caveat. Activists who push for a date earlier than 2050 argue that avoiding early capital scrappage (shutting down dirty power plants and leaving fossil fuels in the ground) and preserving other government objectives (GDP!) should not be the determining factors in climate planning. Just the opposite: If the UK can feasibly get to net zero before 2050, as it indeed can, then that should be the government’s primary objective—scrappage be damned.

These three lines of fine print will limn the size and scope of the UK’s achievement when it reaches its target. If the country reaches it: In February 2019, a few months before issuing the net zero report, the CCC sent a letter to the government warning that despite its impressive headline figures, the UK had failed to meet 15 of 18 mini-targets in its second budget, which ended in 2017. It was on track to meet its third budget (for 2022) but not its fourth or fifth. In other words, the UK’s emission reductions, so impressive for the past decade, would soon come shuddering to a halt.

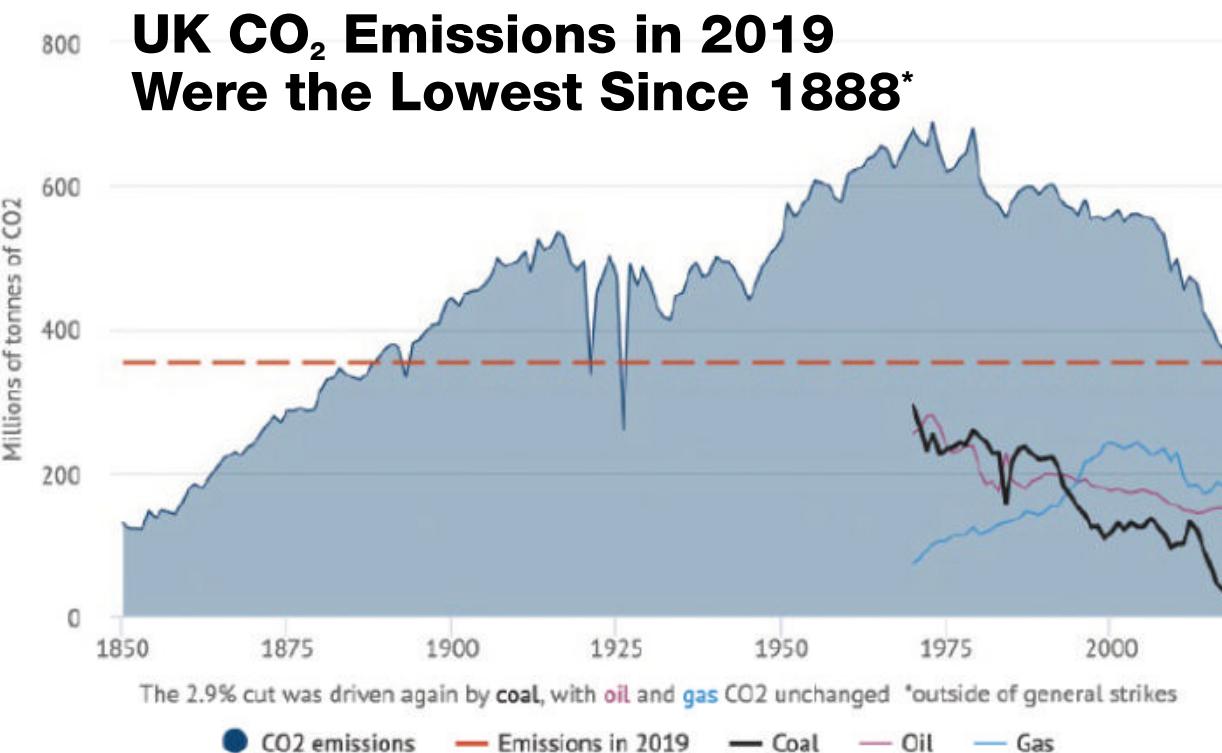


Electricity production was Britain’s low-hanging fruit. We always knew some sectors were more difficult.

THE PROBLEM LIES IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE ELECTRIFICATION STRATEGY: Electrify everything. The UK has made great strides toward greening its electricity production, but it has done comparably little to connect polluting sectors to that greener grid. This was, in part, a conscious choice. Electricity production was Britain’s “low-hanging fruit,” Turner recalled, and the committee “always knew that there were some sectors which were more difficult...but we almost consciously left those aside within our early work.” Three areas remain particularly troublesome: agriculture, transport, and heating.

In agriculture, the problem is land. The CCC maintains that at least one-fifth of the land now used for agriculture will need to be “moved into long-term, natural carbon storage”—translation: plant more trees and restore more peatland—if the country is to hit net zero by 2050. For the moment, though, incentives for farmers to give up land are ill-conceived at best and nonexistent at worst. What’s more, a change in land use will mean a change in the British diet. The CCC conservatively calls for a 20 percent drop in red meat and lamb consumption by midcentury. Otherwise, better land use in the UK will mean more imported meat, worsening land use patterns in, say, Brazil.

Transportation, which as of 2018 accounted for just over one-third of the UK’s territorial emissions, is perhaps



an even greater challenge. This year the government declared that new gasoline and diesel cars will no longer be sold in the UK by 2035. But the CCC insists that even this is too late—it recommends 2030—and has emphasized that the country will need at least 27,000 more rapid chargers on the roads before the ban on fossil-fuel cars goes into effect. This is absolutely doable. It's just that very little has been done.



So far, the UK's path to net zero has been, by and large, invisible. Now, though, the country has reached a turning point.

That's the technical term," McLaren said. In July, Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced a £3 billion (nearly \$4 billion) program to decarbonize the UK's building stock, but this is nowhere near enough. The CCC argues the initial annual investment needed to pull off the transformation will be approximately £15 billion.

AGRICULTURE, TRANSPORTATION, HEATING—WHY HAVE THESE SECTORS proved so difficult to decarbonize? To some degree, the answer is scientific. There are certain carbon-intensive aspects to all three that remain difficult to green. But these scientific concerns rest atop a political rationale. What these sectors have in common is that their decarbonization will have a direct impact on the daily lives of the British public. Farmland will be transformed into forest or repurposed for different crops (and animals). Your car will need a plug (or you won't have a car at all). Your drafty windows will be replaced. Your plumbing will be renovated. You will trade your gas stove for an electric one.

In other words, the UK's path to net zero so far has been, by and large, an invisible one. Now, though, the country has reached a turning point. Should it continue to decarbonize, it will have to deal with what the CCC terms the "more visible" sectors of the economy. And the more visible the change, the argument runs, the more politically difficult it will be to implement. "People don't really notice where their electricity is coming from," Garman reasoned. "Whereas when you're starting to talk to people about what cars they drive and what heating they have in their kitchens and what their diet looks like and, to a certain extent, about their lifestyle, it does get more difficult, obviously." Thompson agreed. "The targets are getting harder," he said, but not on a technical level. "They're requiring us to get into sectors that require people to do things differently."

Here, the advantages of the UK's hypertechnocratic approach to climate politics become limitations. The CCC is an institution built to generate consensus not by working through questions of climate justice but by setting them aside. Unless instructed otherwise, it will attempt to isolate the technical elements of climate change from the political ones and leave the latter untouched, or as Turner put it (and he meant this positively), "build a decarbonized version of what we had before." This is a technocrat's logic: The less we interfere with peoples' lives, the more easily we can get on with changing things. But it is also a political calculus. The less we interfere with peoples' lives, the less likely they are to blame us for changes they don't like.

Or don't know about. A government survey conducted in March found that 64 percent of UK citizens had never heard of net zero. That some two-thirds of the UK public remains unaware of the country's single most important policy goal for the next 30 years is perhaps due, among other factors, to the sheer lack of climate

politics in the UK since 2008, when the veneer of cross-party consensus made the climate crisis appear a purely scientific issue.

That veneer has begun to crack. In the 2019 election, Labour called for a green industrial revolution and promised to shoot for net zero in the 2030s. The Conservatives stuck with 2050 and avoided the topic, to the point that Boris Johnson refused to even attend a climate debate with all the other prime ministerial candidates. Amid the coronavirus pandemic, calls for a radical Green New Deal have abounded on the British left and been rejected by the right—a signal that the era of polite climate cooperation is coming to an end.

And then there is Extinction Rebellion, whose rambunctious actions have thrust the climate crisis into public awareness, although XR also contains traces of the same anti-partisan logic that undergirds the technocracy it seeks to transcend. At a rally last October, an XR organizer explained that the group wanted to avoid the "[Al] Gore route," which had turned climate politics into a left-right issue in the United States. By contrast, Extinction Rebellion prefers to skirt electoral battles and go "beyond politics," as its slogan states. One of its core demands, displayed on banners at every XR event, is for a legally binding nationwide citizens' assembly.

I ATTENDED THE OXFORD ASSEMBLY BECAUSE I wanted to see if advocates like Extinction Rebellion were right to claim that the format can serve a double purpose: restore people's faith in democracy and generate radical climate policies. For much of the weekend I remained unconvinced. Ipsos MORI, a giant polling company, ran the meeting less like a town hall than a carefully supervised focus group. Members of the Oxford City Council





27 K Additional rapid chargers for cars and buses



20 % Share of current UK farmland turned into forest or peatland



£ 15 B Cost to replace gas boilers with heat pumps

lined the walls, eyeing the citizens as though observing an experiment. The proposals presented to the assembly members for deliberation were mostly modest and moderate. It didn't help that the assembly was held at the Thatcher Business Education Centre, an awful building whose windowless cream facade, broken only by a single black revolving door framed by tinted glass and a few strips of ribbed black marble, resembles a Brutalist mausoleum, giving the impression that democracy was being interred.

But all that changed with the final exercise, the letters from a net zero Oxford. For a moment, it was possible to glimpse the power of a truly democratic climate politics. Here were 40-odd citizens, well informed after a weekend of presentations by climate experts and encouraged to decide how their community should look in a fossil-fuel-free world. The vision that emerged was remarkable for its willingness to address those visible sectors (agriculture, transportation, heating) that the government has shied away from and to address them radically, not avoiding change but seeking it out. Here was an acknowledgment of what has become a common refrain: There will be no returning to normal if we are to tackle the climate crisis—and this is no obstacle but a tremendous opportunity.

Still, as long as assemblies are bound to the narrow agenda set by governing bodies and their recommendations remain nonbinding—both true for every climate assembly so far in the UK—their immediate impact will be only as radical as politicians want it to be. The UK-wide assembly, which began before the coronavirus crisis and ended in its midst, put out a final report on September 8 report calling for a green recovery. But Parliament, with its dominant Tory majority, will likely pick at the national assembly's recommendations until they align with the party's platform.

Perhaps it is better to think of climate assemblies not as a solution but as a symptom. They are an indication that the UK has reached a moment when the question of what makes an energy transition just has become unavoidable. In that sense, the assemblies raise an important

point for climate politics around the world. There is clearly an inherent injustice to our carbon-choked present. However, that does not mean there is an inherent justice to a carbon-free future. Getting to net zero is a necessary condition for a just transition, but it is not sufficient. There needs to be a justice to the transition itself—a justice to the process by which we decide how we will remake our lives.

PERHAPS THAT IS ALSO THE LESSON OF THIS SERIES, which attempted to take the measure of a just transition across three very different backgrounds. In Senegal, one of many unequivocal victims of the climate crisis across the Global South, frontline communities are grappling with the true toll of climate injustice in a way that we in the West have yet to do. For them, the idea that the climate crisis is fundamentally a question of justice is obvious. In Australia, which holds the (for now) unique position of contributing to the climate crisis as well as being severely affected by it, the connections between climate change and justice remain threadbare. But they are starting to meld beneath the flames of each successive summer.

In both places I witnessed microcosms of a global trend: The choice we now face in responding to the climate crisis is between a just transition and just a transition. This is a choice not about whether to transition away from a fossil-fuel economy but instead about how that transition ought to look—what kind of economic, social, and political arrangements should bring it about and what kind of economic, social, and political arrangements it should produce. We can choose a radical and open transformation of both our energy and our political systems. Or we can choose an invisible transition: maximum energy transformation, minimum political reform.

Yet we are also coming to see that this second option is not really an option at all. That is the reality in the UK. The country has pursued an invisible transition further and more capably than any other developed nation, and its progress toward net



The choice we now face in responding to the climate crisis is between a just transition and just a transition.

By the numbers:
The scale of what needs to change for the UK to continue to meet its carbon targets.



Trapped and bereft:
A Haitian woman
stands on what
remains of her home
in the shantytown
known as the Mud,
September 5, 2019.

In the Bahamas, as across the globe, the world has failed the people most

THE ISLAND OF ABACO, VIEWED FROM ABOVE, looks like a drowned sandbar, hardly terrestrial at all. It's one of the northernmost islands of the Bahamian archipelago, which sits atop a wide limestone platform just a few dozen feet under the sea. From space, its pure white sands and fluorescent waters

glow like an emerald necklace, visually striking against the muted browns and greens of the rest of the planet. Viewed from the oval window of my flight, slicing through a cloudless sky, the waters shimmered in dazzling shades of lapis lazuli.

On the ground, the scene looks more like a *Mad Max* movie. When I arrived this year, several months had passed since Hurricane Dorian, the Category 5 monster storm that pummeled the northern Bahamas in September 2019. The road leading out of the island's small airport was clear but lined on either side by mounds of rubble punctuated by alien-looking stalks, the remains of pine trees stripped of leaves and branches by Dorian's gales. The built environment had been pulverized into varying-size piles of debris, destroying the visual cues—signs, colors, the shapes of buildings—that mark the distinctions among neighbor-

hoods, commercial districts, and open lands. It had a discombobulating effect. Now and then, a heavy vehicle of some kind lurched by at speed, barreling down the empty roads.

Before the storm, the northern islands of the Bahamas were home to a polyglot population consisting of wealthy American transplants; English-speaking descendants of British colonists, Southern planters, and enslaved Africans; and a sizable but poorly documented population of Kreyol-speaking people from Haiti, who were drawn by the islands' once-plentiful jobs in the tourism industry as well as their alluring proximity to Florida and its thriving Haitian communities. People from Haiti are the largest minority group in the Bahamas, accounting for as much as one-fifth of the population, according to some estimates, including thousands on Abaco. Many of them lived in shantytowns.

But those informal settlements, which once sprawled across Abaco, no longer exist. Frankie

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vulnerable to climate change.

BY SONIA SHAH

Fleuridor, an affable DJ and father of three who served as my interpreter, had lived in one of the largest, called the Mudd because it was on what was once a swamp. He described a place, visible in pre-Dorian video footage, where bare-chested children ran down footpaths between small brightly painted houses with numbers hand-drawn on their walls, their doorways strung with scraps of bedsheets in lieu of doors. Inside, women styled one another's hair while young men wearing tattered tank tops lounged on the low flat roofs in the bleached sunshine. In the evenings, elderly men gathered for games of dominoes next to the scruffy lot kids used as an impromptu soccer pitch.

When I arrived, not even a stick of debris remained of the Mudd—or any of the other Haitian shantytowns that were in Abaco before the storm. Thanks to a combination of historical neglect, forced displacement, and a collective failure on the part of the international commu-

nity to address the needs of people vulnerable to climate disasters, these communities have been erased from the landscape.

The people who lived in Abaco's shantytowns did not evacuate the island before the storm, often because they could not. Thousands of them died as a result, according to estimates by epidemiologist Vincent Degennaro. The traumatized survivors were barred by the government from rebuilding and were targeted by stepped-up immigration raids. Many were deported to Haiti. Others, deprived of shelter and aid, went into hiding on the island. When I drove to the site of their former neighborhoods, I found bare expanses of dirt surrounded by newly erected fencing. Yellow bulldozers growled nearby.

In part, the devastation of Abaco's Haitian communities was shaped by specific circumstances. Residents had been trapped on the most exposed parts of the island by deep historical forces tipped into motion centuries earlier. Their erasure was also the result of a more recent failure that implicates many more of us around the planet—and could befall millions of people in the years to come.

Around the world, policy-makers and governments recognize that as the climate crisis deepens, the marginalized communities of low-lying island nations will bear the heaviest burdens. Thanks to the hydrocarbon-fueled lifestyles of the wealthy around the world, as many as 200 million people will need to leave their homes as seas rise, deserts spread, and increasingly severe storms strike, according to the United Nations International Organization for Migration. Those people's survival hinges on bilateral and regional agreements that would allow them to move legally across borders to reach safer ground before or after disasters unfold. But even as the risk of catastrophic climate disasters has risen, efforts to build an infrastructure to facilitate such movements have collapsed.

The result is that marginalized populations around the world have been left trapped and exposed to climate disasters, providing opportunities for indifferent, underresourced, or patently sectarian government officials to realize brutal policy goals impossible to achieve during normal times.

This is what has befallen the Haitian residents of the Bahamas. Subjected to the hurricane's ravages and the campaign against them that followed, they have faced the current season of climate fury and the spread of the novel coronavirus in vulnerable positions. Their homes have been destroyed and their social networks shattered by deportations. Little protects them besides the translucent layers of polypropylene tents, surreptitiously donated and strung up in hidden corners of the islands.

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN MOVING BETWEEN THE ISLAND NATIONS OF HAITI AND the Bahamas, separated by less than 80 miles of turquoise water, since pre-Colombian times. But as their postcolonial political and economic trajectories diverged, the threads between the two nations weakened, and their once-reciprocal relationship deteriorated. In Haiti a revolution led by the island's enslaved population overthrew French colonial rule in 1804, making it "the most revolutionary revolution in an age of them," as historian Edward E. Baptist has described it. Many of the French fled, including to the Bahamas, where they joined the Southern planters who settled there after fleeing the American Revolution. Fearful of a similar insurrection, they pursued a steady policy of divide and conquer, urging the Black Bahamians they ruled to view Black Haitians as inherently dangerous and bloodthirsty. They offered rewards to spy on Haitians and report their misconduct to the authorities, historian Keith Tinker wrote.

By the mid-20th century, the Bahamas had started to capitalize on its prox-

"That was no hurricane. That was the name that they gave it...to fool us humans. But that wasn't no hurricane."

—Celia

imity to the United States by remaking itself as a convenient destination for mass tourism. Haiti, meanwhile, was on a different path, destabilized by punishing “reparations” imposed by France, decades of US occupation and intervention, and a succession of brutal US-backed dictatorships. Beginning in the 1970s, Haitians streamed out of the country in search of refuge.

They found little in their immediate neighbor to the north.

Even those with relatively well-paid jobs didn't have the funds for the costly flights or ferries required to get off the island.

A new racial order and plantation economy emerged, with whites and Afro-Bahamians on top and Haitians occupying the lowest rung. Political leaders enacted a series of byzantine citizenship laws to target people of Haitian descent, limiting birth-right citizenship in ways that rendered generations of children born of Haitian parents stateless and preventing many from entering universities and trade schools. Bahamian detention centers brimmed with Haitian migrants awaiting deportation.

As the primary landmass between the United States and Haiti, the Bahamas also proved critical to US efforts to prevent Haitians from reaching its shores. Steeped in their own long-standing anti-Haitian bias, US policy-makers went to “extraordinary lengths” to prevent Haitians from coming to this country, as the Migration Policy Institute put it, including sending Coast Guard boats to sweep the high seas for desperate asylum seekers and force them back to Haiti. In 1993 the Supreme Court upheld this policy, and by 2004, the US had inked an agreement with the Bahamas to police Bahamian waters and turn back unwanted migrants, many of them from Haiti. The US regularly pumped the Bahamas with security aid and, at one point, sent paid informants to secretly investigate corruption in Bahamian immigration processes, which might allow Haitians to illicitly enter the country.

Still, Haitians kept arriving in the Bahamas, and by 2019, the Haitian community had grown to account for one-fifth of the population. They were routinely blamed

for “every social and medical ill imaginable,” a study funded by the International Organization for Migration reported. On Abaco, communities refused to allow Haitians to settle in their neighborhoods, forcing Haitians to squat in shacks or on the edges of agricultural fields in ad hoc settlements that eventually developed into sprawling shantytowns like the Mudd. From there, residents went off each day to work at low-wage jobs tending gardens and cleaning Abaco’s lush resorts and private beachside mansions.

Bahamian politicians repeatedly threatened to raze these communities. Neighboring property owners positioned dumpsters full of burning garbage on the edge of the Mudd, filling its lanes with noxious fumes. But owners were stymied in realizing their goals by human rights activists who filed lawsuits against the government. Employers exerted political pressure to shield the shantytowns from destruction because they relied on Haitians’ cheap labor. It was common, said anthropologist Bertin Louis, for Bahamians to refer to the Haitian people who worked for them in terms reminiscent of earlier, more brutal eras, almost as if they were property. They would call a Haitian person they employed not by his or her name or profession but simply as “my Haitian.”

Then Dorian arrived.

AT 10 AM ON THE DAY THAT DORIAN struck the northern Bahamas, the sky looked like midnight, the rain tasted like saltwater, and the shantytowns bustled. By then, the islands’ wealthy residents had left. They’d hired local workers to prepare their mansions for the storm and taken off in their helicopters, private jets, or chartered boats. But the mostly Haitian workers who cleaned the resorts and tended their gardens stayed put, despite the government’s emergency evacuation order. Even those with relatively well-paid jobs didn’t have the funds for the costly flights or ferries required to get off the island, not even to the nearby capital, Nassau. Others preferred “to stare down a category 5 hurricane,” noted human rights lawyer Fred Smith, rather than subject themselves to government-run hurricane shelters where they’d have to “entrust their safety to officials who have repeatedly targeted them illegally.”

As the storm approached, shantytown residents took shelter wherever they could—in community centers, in churches, under abandoned machinery. Most of the structures failed. Hurricane Dorian’s 185-mph winds tore children from their mothers’ arms, lifted roofs, catapulted vehicles, and scoured the forests of vegetation. Celia, 27, stayed at home with her mother and infant cousin to cook some food to take with them to a church where they planned to ride out the storm.

Revolutionaries:

Formerly enslaved men fight French colonists during Haiti's historic revolution of 1791 to 1804.



But before they could get there, a piece of flying debris killed her mother, and the church collapsed, killing almost everyone inside, including Celia's brother. Claudia Brave, an effervescent 18-year-old who had been squatting on agricultural land, huddled in an abandoned school bus; her neighbors hid under an old tractor.

Behind the wind came a storm surge over 20 feet high, inundating Abaco. Even a minor surge would have flooded the shantytowns, which were just a few feet above sea level. The waters surrounding the island have been steadily rising for years, thanks in part to the carbon unleashed by the motorboat-riding tourists from the United States and Europe who fueled the Bahamian economy. In a small church painted pink, water rose so high that those who took refuge there had to climb up to the rafters, where they balanced precariously on narrow wooden beams above the swirling water. Outside, the deluge pushed a rusty vessel, notorious for smuggling people from Haiti, into the center of town. The unlucky were lifted up and washed away. Those who grabbed passing debris to use as life rafts—as did one man, who described floating with his small children atop a mattress—watched their neighbors' bodies drift by in the currents, 40 to 50 at a time.

It felt to the locals, many of whom survived more than one hurricane before, like something altogether new. Dorian had been fueled by seas a full degree Celsius warmer than in the past, and thanks to the collapse of atmospheric winds in the subtropics, it stalled over the Bahamas for some 40 hours. “That was no hurricane!” said Celia. “That was the name that they gave it...to fool us humans. But that wasn’t no hurricane.”

IT’S IMPOSSIBLE TO KNOW HOW MANY PEOPLE might have reached safer ground before Dorian’s arrival—or in other parts of the Bahamas, in the United States, or elsewhere in the Caribbean—had they not been constrained by a legal infrastructure that trapped them in place. Other countries in the region used strict immigration policies to target Haitians as unwanted. The United States prevented them from seeking asylum. And no country in the world recognized the rights of people like them, exposed to climate displacement, to cross international borders. For many, moving to safety would have required a perilous illicit journey and accepting a life in the shadows to follow.

Scientists and policy-makers have long known that legal pathways to migration could allow people to leave areas vulnerable to the ef-

fects of climate change before disaster strikes. While the average hurricane increases migration flows by 6 percent, more damaging storms, of the kind that are expected to hit the Atlantic as climate change progresses, lead to spikes of more than 30 percent. Island nations, where short-term moves to safe ground are not feasible, are especially vulnerable—and the marginalized populations on those islands even more so.

The conventional objection to paving legal pathways for migrants casts their arrival as intrinsically disruptive. Just the opposite is true, however: If allowed to move, migrants can save their lives and improve the resilience of the societies they join as well as those they leave behind. Despite the best efforts of US policy-makers to keep Haitian migrants from US shores, those who have made it to the country have prospered, raising children who acquire advanced degrees at a rate higher than locals do. The immigrants share their hard-won economic prosperity with their relatives in Haiti, sending back over \$3 billion a year.

In recognition of these realities, a variety of efforts to build the necessary legal infrastructure have been launched in recent years. In 2015, an ad hoc group of UN negotiators and international nongovernmental organizations proposed that the United

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change be amended to include a “climate change displacement coordination facility” that would foster regional and bilateral treaties to manage climate-driven migration. The facility would have been part of a larger legal framework called the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, under which poorer countries that bear the brunt of the climate crisis would have received technical and financial support.

Also in 2015, officials from Switzerland and Norway proposed that UN treaties on migration and refugees incorporate the Nansen Agenda for Protection, which outlines new

safeguards for climate-displaced people. And in 2019 in the United States, legislation calling for the creation of a federal program to accept tens of thousands of climate migrants every year was introduced in Congress by Representative Nydia Velázquez of New York and Senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts.

But these efforts quickly fell apart amid the global rise of anti-migrant political movements. Beginning around 2015, a raft of right-wing populist leaders clambered to power in the United States, the UK, and elsewhere in Europe, proclaiming that they would drive back a coming tsunami of unwanted outsiders. If they didn’t, a writer for a white nationalist US website said, “migration triggered by climate change would overwhelm us.” In their rhetoric, climate-driven migration was framed as a kind of “degradation narrative,” as the writer Betsy Hartmann put it, recalling old colonial tropes about downtrodden and destructive dark-skinned people overwhelming fairer, more prosperous ones.

As anti-migrant populism resurged across the West, wealthy countries resisted taking on any liability through the Warsaw Mechanism, under which they would have to compensate poorer, more heavily affected ones. Richer nations also pushed back against the proposal for a climate change displacement coordination facility, forcing policy-makers to strip it from the 2016 Paris Agreement—a “deplorable out-



Shifting climate, shifting populations:
Residents of the Philippines wait for evacuation after Typhoon Haiyan, November 2013.

The conventional objection to paving legal pathways for migrants casts their arrival as intrinsically disruptive. Just the opposite is true, however.

come for those affected by climate displacement," one observer wrote.

Meanwhile, the Nansen Agenda became a key sticking point during negotiations over UN agreements on refugees and migration that began in 2016, humanitarian activist Arjun Claire and forced-displacement expert Jérôme Élie said. "Several States," they wrote, "cautioned against what they perceived as a potential broadening of the refugee definition." In the end, the Nansen Agenda was stripped from the 2018 UN agreement known as the Global Compact on Refugees and replaced with a "symbolic recognition" of the needs of climate-displaced people, said international human rights lawyer Walter Kälin. Even so, anti-migrant protests ensued in countries whose leaders had agreed to the compact. In Belgium, police used water cannons to disperse thousands of protesters who gathered to berate the Belgian prime minister for signing on, spurring his resignation.

In the period that followed, political leaders exploited the vacuum in legal protections, neglecting exposed populations and using their displacement to jump-start redevelopment plans. Whole populations of some islands in Antigua and Barbuda and the Bahamas were displaced by hurricanes. In Barbuda, people who lost their homes to Hurricane Irma in 2017 were stripped of their land rights while still shell-shocked and living in shelters. Government officials decreed that their land, which had traditionally been communally held, would be sold to celebrity investors to build luxury resorts. In Kiribati, a new president announced plans to build lavish resorts on his sinking islands, denying that human activity had anything to do with climate change and arresting commentators who dared say otherwise.

In the post-Dorian Bahamas, what human rights activists called a campaign of de facto ethnic cleansing unfolded.

AFTER DORIAN RECEDED, TRAUMATIZED SURVIVORS fled the devastated islands. Some made their way to Florida aboard cruise ships and found temporary refuge among friends and family. But President Trump claimed, without evidence, that there were "very bad people" among the survivors, and safe passage to the United States was quickly rescinded. The US refused to offer them even temporary legal status. Dozens of hurricane survivors who attempted to board a boat bound for Fort Lauderdale were prevented from leaving, with US officials claiming, unexpectedly, that those with Bahamian passports required visas.

Many Haitian hurricane survivors ended up in shelters in Nassau. Within weeks, videos calling for them to be shot on sight or starved in the shelters made the rounds on social media. Anti-Haitian demonstrators gathered outside the shelters, holding Bahamian flags and jeering at evacuees as they entered. "We want you out of our country!" they yelled. "Repatriation!"

In early October, as Abaco lay in shambles, Prime Minister Hubert Minnis delivered an address to the House Assembly about the island. "We will eradicate shantytowns and return law

to our country," he proclaimed. Government officials issued a ban on rebuilding in the shantytowns. They declared work permits invalid if survivors had lost their jobs because of the storm, as many did. They threatened those who ventured out of the shelters with deportation if their papers were not in order. They stepped up their nighttime raids of Nassau's shantytowns, apprehending traumatized hurricane survivors who sought refuge there. Hundreds were thrown into detention cen-

ters, where they stayed for weeks and were then packed onto chartered flights to Haiti.

On Abaco, government-hired contractors bulldozed the ruins of the shantytowns and enclosed the flattened sites in fencing. Untold numbers of human remains vanished with the debris. None of the contractors attempted to extract remains for identification and burial. "They are just bulldozing these communities and forcibly dispossessing people," some of whom "are looking for the bodies of their kids," said Bahamian human rights activist Paco Nunez.

UN observers, NGOs, and diplomats objected to the government's anti-Haitian campaign, to little effect. A leader of an NGO that facilitated a visit by UN human rights observers to Abaco in October and December said she was warned by local officials to focus on Bahamian and not Haitian hurricane survivors. She said that in one instance, local officials physically blocked NGOs from providing aid to Haitian survivors on the island. "The minute we say anything" about their rights and needs, said another, "the government will kick us out."

When I visited, the Haitian hurricane survivors who remained on Abaco lived amid the rubble as fugitives, subsisting on illicit handouts from charity groups. They slept in broken-down cars and donated tents pitched in the shadow of churches from which the pastors had fled. They told me of nighttime raids by immigration officials and of being chased, beaten, and extorted for the few valuables they had left. One man was beaten so badly, I was informed, that he had to be hospitalized and later died.

Meanwhile, non-Haitian Abaco residents said they were glad to see their Haitian neighbors gone. "It's a blessing in disguise," one businessman told me. The Haitians were mostly criminals, said another, a pastor with a pendant reading "100% Bahamian" on a gold chain around his neck. Rumors swirled that some of the land they'd lived on might be turned into a shopping mall or developed for tourism. Developers have already started sniffing around.

NMARCH, COVID-19 ARRIVED IN THE BAHAMAS. Within days of the first reported case, a partial nationwide shutdown and curfew went into effect. On Abaco, residents and aid workers said, Bahamian soldiers surrounded the tents in which Haitian hurricane survivors had been living and told them to leave, rounding up some of them for deportation and justifying their actions as a public health effort. Just where they ended up remains obscure. Those who were able to escape were driven even deeper into the shadows just beyond Abaco's beaches. There, in makeshift shelters on abandoned agricultural lands, they face this year's hurricane season even more exposed than they were before.

Haitian hurricane survivors who remained on Abaco lived as fugitives, subsisting on illicit handouts from charity groups.

It may seem that the predicament facing the Haitian community in the Bahamas is that of a tiny population inhabiting a small and distant island. But our collective failure to protect marginalized peoples living in the corners of the planet will soon have much larger ramifications for all of us. By choking off pathways for people to move, we've left more of us vulnerable to climate shocks and the whims of local power structures while increasing the probability of disruptive, crisis-driven mass movements.

In 2019 the number of people uprooted by natural disasters exceeded the number of those displaced by conflict and violence by a factor of three, with tropical storms, monsoon floods, and other climate calamities propelling more than 24 million people around the world out of their homes. That number will continue to increase in the coming years. Their movements do not have to proceed as a sequence of calamities. Given our understanding of how climate shocks influence migration, we can predict needs and manage migration in ways that make it safe, orderly, and humane. Legal pathways to migrate could allow people to leave vulnerable areas slowly, before disasters strike. Resources to increase resilience could reduce some people's vulnerability and risk of displacement, moderating the pace of migration.

"It might be too late to avert a climate crisis," said climate migration expert Jane McAdam, who directs the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at the University of New South Wales. "But we can avert a displacement crisis if we start to act now."

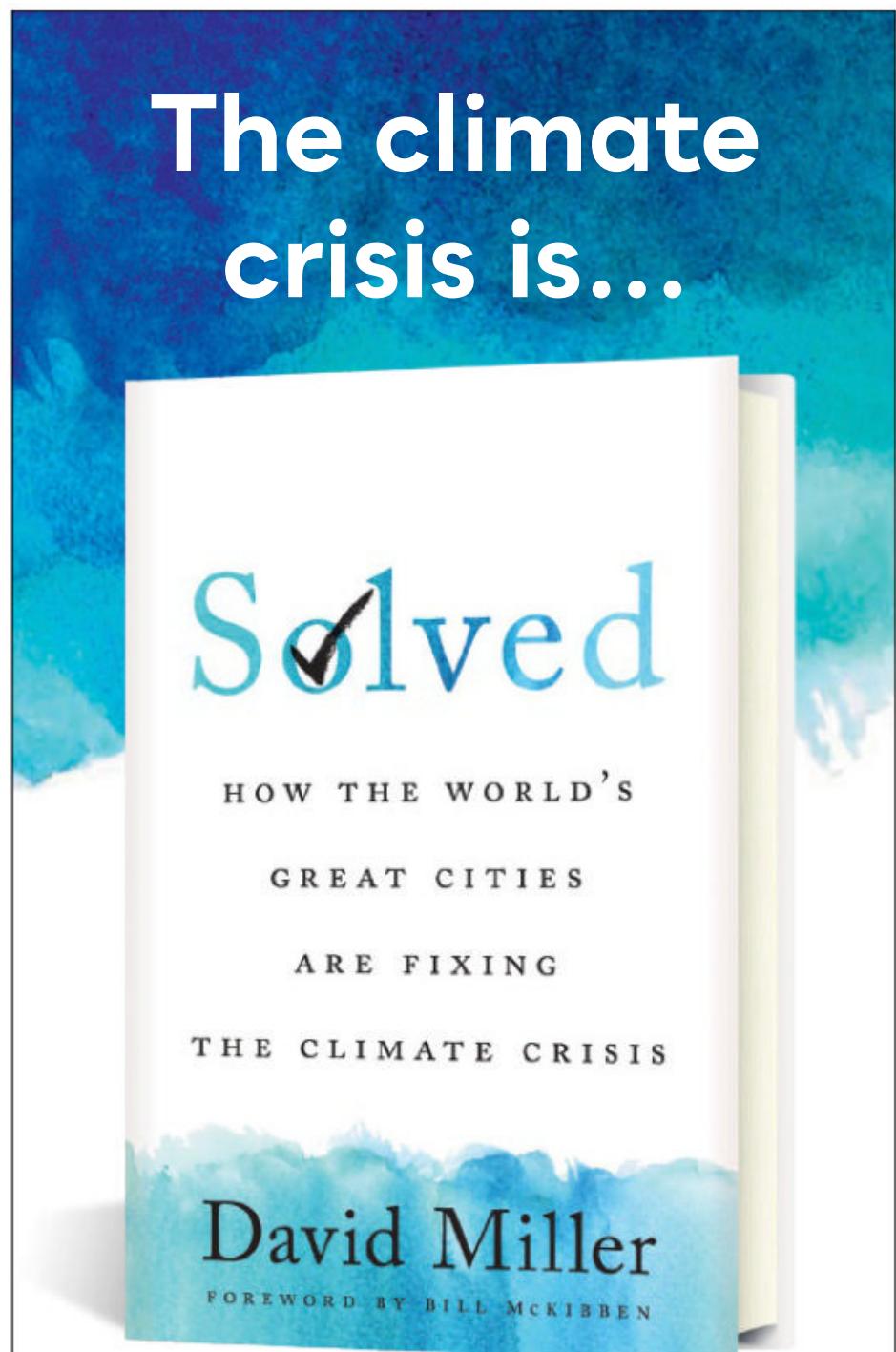
In our time of multiplying crises, the political will to do so may seem distant. But that may change as climate chaos bears down and many more of us find ourselves exposed and yet trapped, like those of the shantytowns of Abaco, in the dark of a coming storm. **N**

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SWAMP THINKING

Can a political newcomer unseat Kentucky's most aggressive campaigner?

BY BOB MOSER

THE WEEK AFTER JULY 4, RARE SIGHTINGS OF A STRANGE CREATURE from the East began to be reported across Kentucky. When he visits the state he's represented in the Senate since 1985, Mitch McConnell, the jowly old swamp monster from Washington, D.C., doesn't typically roam far from the tony Louisville neighborhood where he maintains a residence. As an elder Democrat told me last summer at Fancy Farm, the state's annual political picnic, "If you see that buzzard popping up all around Kentucky all of a sudden, you can damn well be sure of one thing: He must be up for reelection."

Sure enough, as he pursues his seventh term in the Senate, McConnell was popping up in all kinds of unlikely places during Congress's traditional two-week July 4 recess. The Senate majority leader had left Washington amid howls of protest over his refusal to cancel the break; Democrats, as well, seemed to believe that passing another coronavirus relief package to deal with the pandemic and the economic meltdown ought to take precedence over vacationing or campaigning.

McConnell didn't bat an eye. For him, there has never been any business more urgent than his next campaign. "He really exemplifies more than anyone else in Washington the permanent campaign mindset, where everything is about winning the next election and nothing else matters," explains Alec MacGillis, the author of a biography of McConnell aptly titled *The Cynic*. "For McConnell, it's not really about what he does while he's in power to address problems or [pursue] his party's policy goals, whatever they might be. It's really only about setting himself up to win the next race."

And so the millions of Americans desperately worried about evictions, school reopening plans, stimulus checks, unemployment benefits—not to mention life and death amid surging cases of Covid-19—would just have to cool their jets until McConnell returned on July 20. He had far more pressing matters to attend to in Morehead and Willisburg, Bardstown and Glasgow, Bowling Green and Henderson, Leitchfield and Covington, to name just a few of his stops. He wasn't holding rallies in these places; he doesn't do rallies, any more than he mixes and mingles with voters. This was a carefully scripted photo-op tour designed to highlight the senator's caring, compassion, generosity, and statesmanlike leadership during the pandemic.

On Monday, July 6, for instance, you could find the Senate majority leader standing at a microphone at Bardstown's Flaget Memorial Hospital, which received funding from the Cares Act

passed in March. Virtually every stop on his recess itinerary was a hospital or health clinic that got funding—meaning that, everywhere he goes, he is sure to be praised and thanked before his carefully calibrated remarks, which urge Kentuckians to practice personal responsibility during the pandemic. "Everybody's got a role to play to get through this," McConnell solemnly intoned in the distinctive, deep-down drawl he acquired as a child in Alabama and Georgia. "Clearly, a lot of people thought when we started opening up the economy again, 'Let the good times roll.' And a lot of people went out, and we've seen the spiking of cases." His face was a perfect rictus of disapproval. "Since we're not gonna shut down the economy again, we've gotta figure out how to work through this, and the single best thing we can do is wear a mask." He waved a light blue disposable model in the air for effect.

It's much the same in town after town. The senator knows that his sermonettes on mask wearing will make perfect bits for the local 6 o'clock news or the next morning's local paper, which will also surely mention how much money

For Mitch McConnell, there has never been any business more urgent than his next campaign.

Bob Moser, the author of *Blue Dixie: Awakening the South's Democratic Majority*, writes about politics and religion for The New Yorker and other outlets.



McConnell directed to the clinic or hospital to help it weather the crisis. While he's traipsing around the state displaying his benevolence and his sober leadership, his campaign is reinforcing the message by airing a new ad called "Saved," featuring a series of small-business owners thanking him for rescuing their livelihoods with the Paycheck Protection Program. This is vintage McConnell—every six years, anyway.

He knows that he needs to gin up all the positive spin he can between now and November. He has never been popular—and certainly not beloved—in Kentucky, even among Republicans. But ever since he became majority leader after his re-election in 2014, he's consistently ranked as one of the most loathed members of Congress back home; in August 2017, McConnell's approval rating in Kentucky was at an almost unthinkable 18 percent. His survival instinct told him in 2017 that his best bet for the next election was to hitch his wagon to Donald Trump, who carried Kentucky by 30 points in 2016, even though McConnell reportedly detests the president. So he became Trump's unlikely but faithful lieutenant, delivering the few major policy triumphs the president can claim—all those conservative judges and all those tax cuts for the rich, most notably.

Clinging to Trump looked like a better strategy one year ago than it does today, of course. But despite Trump's terrible and awful 2020, he's still far more popular than the senator. And so, no matter what depths of insanity and depravity Trump may plumb between now and November, McConnell is stuck; he can't afford to poke the bear, risk becoming a target of Trump's wrath, and alienate the president's fans in Kentucky. The careful and calculating McConnell has no choice but to clutch the coattails of the most undisciplined politician in American history.

Meanwhile, for the first time ever, the senator is experiencing another reality: He's being beaten in fundraising and hit early on the airwaves by his Democratic opponent, Amy McGrath, while being attacked by a host of well-funded PACs and groups hell-bent on taking him down. McConnell had always wanted to be majority leader,

but it sure is complicating things when it comes to winning again. "He's never undergone this level of early and sustained attacks," says Al Cross, the dean of Kentucky political journalists, who has covered McConnell for nearly three decades. "He's never been under this level of intense scrutiny at the national level.... And because he has no reservoir of popularity or loyalty to draw on, he has to stick

with Trump, come hell or high water."

Even with so much stacked against him, however, you'd be hard-pressed to find a political observer who believes McConnell can lose. (Pollsters mostly rate the race as likely Republican.) That's partly because the GOP wins almost everything in Kentucky these days and because Trump will almost surely carry the state again. It's also because no one can really conceive of McConnell losing; deservedly or not, he's widely considered the cannier, most ruthless, most strategically brilliant politician around—while this year's opponent, despite her fundraising prowess, emerged from June's Democratic primary looking fatally flawed and hopelessly overmatched.

MCGRATH WAS SUPPOSED TO SAIL SMOOTHLY TO THE Democratic nomination this June. She became a rising star in a flash in 2017, when her long-shot campaign for the House kicked off with one of the buzziest videos of the midterm elections, a slick biographical spot about how she became the first woman Marine to fly an F/A-18 in combat and how she'd returned to

her native state with a "new mission" to "take on a Congress full of career politicians who treat the people of Kentucky like they're disposable." She fell just short of unseating Republican Andy Barr, a McConnell acolyte, after committing some rookie blunders that Republicans used to redefine the centrist Marine on a mission as a secret left-wing radical.

At a fundraiser in Massachusetts in 2018, McGrath was a little too eager to please her audience, claiming, "I am further left, I am more progressive, than anyone in the state of



Kentucky." And on a talk-radio show back home, she answered questions about abortion by robotically repeating her prepared talking point—"I don't think the government should be involved in a woman's right to choose what is happening to her body"—even after the host asked, "So you think a woman on the way to the hospital to give birth could decide to abort it instead?" By November, these audio clips had been aired so often on radio and TV in McGrath's district that most voters probably could have repeated them verbatim. But she raised a ton of money from admirers around the country and shaved around 19 points off Barr's previous margin of victory, and that was enough for Chuck Schumer, the Democratic Senate leader, to recruit her to try again in 2020, this time against McConnell.

By June 1, three weeks before this summer's primary, McGrath had hauled in nearly \$41 million, more than any other Senate candidate in the country. Which made it all the more shocking when she came within a whisker of losing the nomination to Charles Booker, a first-term state representative who entered the race late, in January, and started the final stretch with less than \$300,000 to spend. If McGrath would have lost with all that money and all her other advantages, "it would have been one of the biggest pratfalls in American political history," Cross says.

McGrath had nearly sunk her chances long before—as soon as she announced her candidacy in July 2019, in fact. After promoting her bid on *Morning Joe*, she "promptly fired a Sidewinder missile into her own foot," as *Courier-Journal* columnist Joseph Gerth put it, by criticizing McConnell for not being helpful enough in turning Trump's "good ideas" into policy. "The things that Kentuckians voted for Trump for are not being done," she said. "He's not able to get it done because of Senator McConnell." In a later interview, she was asked whether she considered herself a "pro-Trump Democrat" and demurred rather than denying it. "This isn't about being pro-Trump or anti-Trump," she said. "You can't put me in some partisan box. And this is the major

Amy McGrath nearly sank her chances right after she announced her candidacy.

difference between me and someone like Senator McConnell. If it's a good idea, I'm for it. It doesn't matter if you wear a red jersey or a blue jersey."

If that wasn't enough to make progressives cringe, there was worse to come when the interviewers turned to the controversial Supreme Court confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh. How would she have voted? McGrath, who had tweeted her opposition to Kavanaugh in July, hemmed, hawed, then finally answered, "Yeah, I probably would have voted for him."

Cue Twitter eruption. By 7:30 PM, McGrath had hastily reversed course, tweeting that "upon further reflection and further understanding of his record, I would have voted no." For some on the left, she was now permanently branded as a pro-Trump Democrat so eager to pander to the right that she had become pro-Kavanaugh. To conservatives, she looked like a flip-flopper who'd caved easily to pressure from the social-justice warriors. ("Take your third position on this later," one Republican Senate aide chirped. "The night is still young.") To others, she looked just plain inept, especially for a candidate who wanted to knock off McConnell.

Forgotten amid the chorus of hoots and jeers was the news that should have emerged from McGrath's moment in the spotlight as McConnell's new challenger: In spite of everything, she'd raised a record \$2.5 million in the first 24 hours after her launch video dropped. National donors never stopped ponying up for McGrath, especially as no viable Democratic challengers emerged until Booker stepped forward. Her campaign's anti-McConnell messaging was often sharp and timely on social media and in her daily e-mail blasts. She ran a general-election campaign from the beginning, which seemed like a safe thing to do. By April, Booker had climbed into second place, but with only 11 percent.

Booker, who likes to note that he lives in one of the poorest zip codes in Kentucky, the predominantly African American West End of Louisville, ran on a bold and clear set of progressive ideas (universal basic income, a Green New Deal, and systemic criminal justice reform). He wowed Democrats from the start with his "hood to the holler" message of bringing together working Kentuckians across racial and geographic divides—or at least he wowed the Democrats he could reach, without much money to advertise and with the pandemic preventing him from whipping up support in person across the state. Liberal donors nationally had long assumed that McGrath was the anti-McConnell candidate for 2020, just as Schumer intended, and Booker garnered little attention outside Kentucky. Until everything changed.

On May 28—three days after the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police ignited protests across the country and 26 days be-

fore the primary—audio of the fatal police shooting in Louisville of medical worker Breonna Taylor two months earlier became public. The West End rose up immediately, followed by protests across the state, and Booker quickly emerged as a leading and powerfully resonant voice of both calm and defiance. On June 1 he showed up for the only Democratic debate of the primary, fresh from the streets. His campaign-long message was made for the moment; McGrath was not ready for it. When a moderator asked whether she'd been "on the ground with the protesters," she admitted she hadn't. Why? "I've been with my family," she said, "and I've had some family, um, things going on."

Booker, with donations finally pouring in, turned McGrath's deer-in-the-headlights moment into a devastating ad, juxtaposing it with footage of him speaking into a bullhorn as a "good troublemaker." He soon picked up endorsements from the state's major newspapers and from national politicians, including Senators Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez; he also led rallies around the state and soared in the polls. In all his time covering Kentucky politics, Cross had never seen the likes of it. "He just caught fire—caught a wave like no candidate I've ever seen," Cross says.

Turnout in the Democratic primary was far higher than anticipated, no doubt because of the first-time voters Booker had inspired. On election night he was in the lead, but since most ballots were mailed in, it was a week before the final tally. McGrath was probably saved, barely, by the ballots that were sent in before Booker's surge. "If the primary had been postponed or all the ballots cast in the last week," Cross says, "he would have won."

MCCONNELL HAS RICHLY EARNED HIS REPUTATION AS A MASTER OF THE art of political destruction, ever since his first local race in 1977. He learned it in part out of necessity. Blessed with almost none of the assets that typically make for a winning politician—charisma, eloquence, ideological passion, wealth—he decided early on that his surest path to victory was to make his opponents even more disliked than he is. For Team Mitch, nothing is off-limits. McConnell has used marital strife, allegedly corrupt family members, inherited wealth, prescription drug habits, and membership in a fox-hunting club to paint his opponents as corrupt, darkly menacing, out of control, or elitist and alien.





“McConnell’s campaign style is personal destruction,” writes Matt Jones, the founder and much-loved host of Kentucky Sports Radio, in his book *Mitch, Please!* When Jones was merely pondering a Democratic run for the Senate, he found that he already had a McConnell tracker following him; a private investigator was digging for dirt. McConnell himself captured the spirit of the operation in a secretly recorded 2013 meeting about a potential opponent. “When anybody sticks their head up,” he told his minions, “do them out.” To destroy the reputation of an opponent in the comprehensive way that McConnell prefers, it’s essential to have an overwhelming financial advantage to drown out the Democrat’s defenses. “As I always say,” McConnell writes in his 2016 memoir, *The Long Game*, “the three most important words in politics are ‘cash on hand.’” From the start, he’s been a relentless fundraiser, someone who does generous favors for his corporate and wealthy benefactors and, of course, expects generous returns from them. As former Republican senator Alan Simpson told McConnell’s biographer MacGillis, “When you raise the flag and somebody hollers from the back of the room, ‘Does anyone want to go to a fundraiser and raise some bucks?’ Mitch will be right there.... It’s a joy to him. He gets a twinkle in his eye and his step quickens.”

It’s this idiosyncrasy that allowed McConnell, possessed of none of the back-slapping bonhomie that usually helps senators climb the leadership ladder, to move up through the years. He also became the most ardent foe of campaign finance reform in the chamber, even when it was being championed by fellow Republicans like John McCain. While others in the party were reluctant to speak out against the McCain-Feingold Act, the most ambitious effort to rein in political money in recent decades, McConnell took on the fight. After the bill passed, he challenged it in court and founded a legal center dedicated to overturning it, and his efforts bore fruit in the *Citizens United* decision that created the dark-money-driven chaos of today.

Not surprisingly, McConnell is pretty darn good at exploiting the system he did so much to create. In his two most recent races, he had \$10 million and \$12 million advantages over his Democratic opponents. Through the first two quarters of this year, he raised more than ever: \$36 million, almost 90 percent of which came from out-of-state donors (aka Wall Street & Co.). Even so, McGrath raised more. Supplementing her efforts, the Ditch Mitch Fund, a PAC operated by political operative Ryan Aquilina, had raised \$14 million by early September that will be used to go after McConnell on talk-radio stations in

Mitch McConnell in 1997 (above). He has served in the Senate for the Republican Party since 1985.

“As I always say,”
McConnell writes in his
memoir, “the three most
important words in politics are ‘cash on hand.’”

Kentucky, on Fox News and social media, and in other spots where Trump voters who dislike McConnell may roam. “There’s so much money coming in, for her campaign and our fund, that we’re able to get a little creative,” Aquilina says. “When you talk to people [in Kentucky] who voted for Trump, the reason they like him is the reason they hate McConnell. A lot of them still believe Trump is taking on the establishment; they all think McConnell is part of the swamp and just in it for himself.”

In the past, McConnell ran against experienced politicians with voting records, donors, allies, years of speeches, and financial disclosures that could be exploited and exaggerated. But McGrath spent almost her whole adult life either at the Naval Academy, where she later taught, or in the Marine Corps. She has three young children, she’s never been divorced, and her husband is a Republican. Team Mitch will find something to use on her, no doubt. But McGrath’s life doesn’t appear to offer much grist for the Team Mitch mill.

Since McGrath entered the race, McConnell’s campaign has been left to revive and repackage the two gaffes that Barr used against her in 2018. The campaign’s reaction to the news of her narrow win in June was typical: “Extreme Amy McGrath...is just another tool of the Washington Democratic establishment who has no idea what matters most to Kentuckians,” said McConnell’s campaign press secretary, Kate Cooksey. “It’s clear this self-proclaimed most liberal person in Kentucky who supports government-run health care and abortion even in the ninth month does not represent Kentucky values.”

This is stale, boilerplate stuff—unworthy, really, of a McConnell campaign. But that’s the same note it has been sounding for 13 months. And branding McGrath as a left-wing extremist is a harder sell after Booker and Mike Broihier, the other progressive candidate who challenged her in the Democratic primary, ran ads throughout May and June castigating her for being too moderate, too Trump-positive, and not even a real Democrat. In a sign that a screw is loose somewhere in McConnell’s campaign, Team Mitch released an attack ad in early July called “Reviews,” which quoted negative comments about McGrath during the primary campaign and had Booker castigating her for peddling “BS” to Kentuckians. “That’s a completely different argument than the one they’ve been making all along, that she’s too extreme,” Cross says.

While Team Mitch is apparently still searching for something to hit McGrath with that isn’t already well-worn, her campaign and the anti-McConnell PACs and groups have what can only be called an embarrassment of riches when it comes to angles of attack against him.

Name any political sin you like, and the chances are exceedingly strong that McConnell—like the Democratic Senate leader of yore to whom he's sometimes compared, Lyndon Johnson—has committed it repeatedly for four decades and counting.

WHILE MCGRATH'S CAMPAIGN for the Senate has already been left for dead twice, one close political observer who's never stopped taking her seriously is her opponent. Team Mitch began hitting "Extreme Amy" the moment she stepped into the race (and then stepped in it), and McConnell's refusal to miss a day of recess when he can be in Kentucky campaigning doesn't suggest that he's feeling a sense of blithe confidence about what awaits him this fall. Of course, he has never been one to take victory for granted; it's one big reason he's never experienced a defeat.

But in mid-July, there was one tangible sign that McConnell has his worries. The Senate Leadership Fund, run by McConnell's former chief of staff, which raises megamillions to help other GOP senators fend off challenges (and keep them loyal to their leader), announced that it had bought \$10 million worth of TV time in Kentucky for the fall. Soon after, another McConnell-affiliated PAC booked \$4.5 million worth of airtime in Kentucky for August. "I know it's a cliché," Aquilina says, "but money speaks volumes. Why are national Republicans spending \$15 million, so far, in a state that Trump won by 30 points? To take it away from Kansas and Montana and Colorado, that says a lot. Clearly, they think Kentucky's a competitive state." Maybe. But if it comes down to a choice between helping other Republicans who are struggling to hold onto their seats—or even the party's majority in the Senate—and his own survival, McConnell has shown that he will choose the latter every time.

McConnell has his challenges—not least the fact that, as Senate majority leader without a functioning president, he can't avoid doing some governing and legislating during a running national emergency. He won't be able to avoid sharing the blame if the pandemic continues to rage out of control, especially if it spikes in Kentucky. Thus far it hasn't, because of the steady leadership of Governor Andy Beshear, a Democrat who defeated incumbent Republican and Trump disciple Matt Bevin last fall. Beshear's victory buoyed the hopes of Kentucky Democrats for 2020, but it's a slender reed: His party still lost every other statewide election. "If anything, Kentucky is getting even more red,"



Louisville-based Perry Bacon Jr. wrote for *FiveThirtyEight* last November after the off-year elections. But key suburban voters, who are rebelling against Trump all across the country, have been trending blue in Kentucky since 2014.

And McConnell is tethered to Trump, which is its own special hell. The senator looked decidedly uncomfortable during the Republican National Convention, appearing in a taped segment from a location identified only as "Kentucky." After praising the president and boasting, "I work beside him every day," McConnell segued into a litany of conspiratorial red meat. "They want to tell you what kind of car you can drive, what sources of information are credible, and even how many hamburgers you can eat." He tried to chuckle.

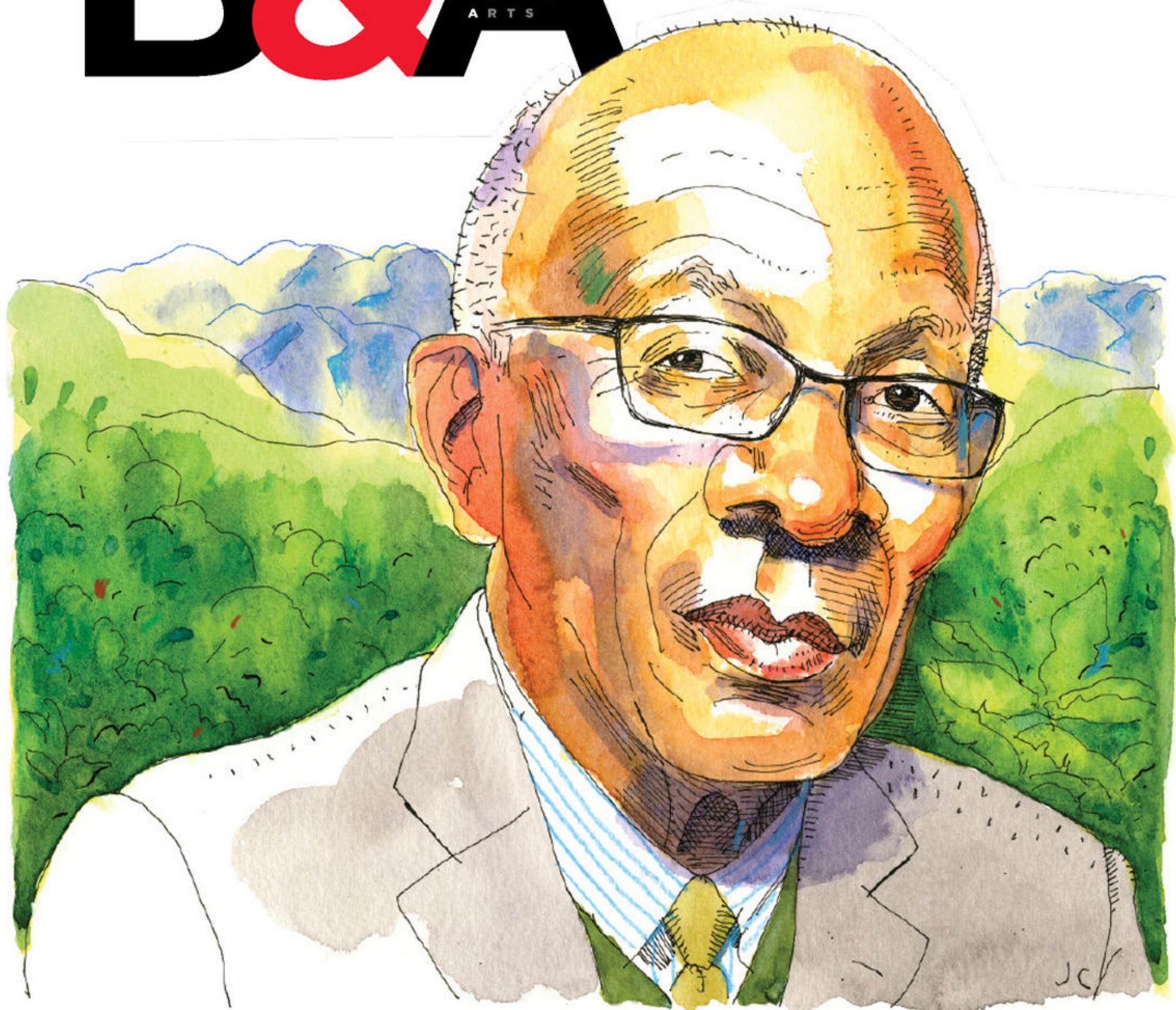
Still, there's no question that McGrath faces the longer odds. If Trump's popularity doesn't bottom out, she still has to persuade a lot of the president's Kentucky fans to switch sides on the second line of the ballot. At the same time, she has to convince Booker's fans that she's worth bothering to vote for. That would be a tough combination for even the nimblest of politicians. But one advantage to the fact that she's been in general-election mode since July of last year is that McGrath has had a lot of time to sharpen her message about McConnell.

Last summer, when I first interviewed her for almost an hour in her Lexington campaign office, McGrath was still figuring it all out. She still had awkward things to say about Trump and partisan boxes, and she meandered around policy questions. But whenever the talk turned to McConnell, she switched on. Suddenly she knew what she wanted to say, and she just said it. "I want guys like Mitch McConnell out because they're making the rest of America cynical. The dysfunction, Bob! We've got an entire generation of young Americans that don't know how a functioning government works. Because of him. He isn't in the swamp. He is the swamp."

"His narrative has always been, 'Look at me, I'm so powerful, I do so much for Kentucky.' Meanwhile, we have the highest cancer rate in the country. One in four Kentuckians have diabetes. We have the second-highest per capita spending for prescription drugs in the country. We have an opioid crisis, where we have two times the death rate in comparison to the national average. And we have a senator who over and over again wants to throw people off health care! We have a senator who does not want to do any work on getting drug prices down. He's bought off by Big Pharma." And when his party had all the power and the presidency, what did he do? "He passed a massive tax windfall for people like him, for millionaires like him. That's the only major piece of legislation that he did, Mr. Powerful Man."

This version of Amy McGrath just might get somewhere, I thought. It took a while, but McGrath—who after her near pratfall in June replaced her original campaign manager with a former organizer for Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton—has become a sharper and more comfortable candidate, less prone to grasp for anodyne talking points. In July, she was a guest on *The View* and smiled her way through one of Meghan McCain's characteristic attempts at a gotcha. Didn't she think, McCain asked, that the reason she almost lost her primary had something to do with the fact that 96 percent of her contributions came from out of state? Did she really have any connection to Kentucky at all? Was that her problem? "Mitch McConnell gets about 95 percent of his money from outside of Kentucky, too," McGrath snapped back. "My average donation is \$35. And when that vet from Iowa gives me \$25...he's not handing me draft legislation at the same time." The clip soon trended on Twitter, one year after the Kavanaugh mess. In a good way this time.

If Trump's popularity doesn't bottom out, McGrath still has to persuade a lot of the president's Kentucky fans to switch sides on the second line of the ballot.



The Promise of Freedom

Orlando Patterson's modern world

BY ADOM GETACHEW

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HEN THE SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT OF Michael Manley came to power in Jamaica in 1972, the charismatic new prime minister asked the up-and-coming Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson to become his special adviser for social policy and development. Only a decade after the country gained its independence from Britain, Jamaican voters elected Manley with a sweeping mandate to transform the colonial-era hierarchies of race and class that remained intact. Manley needed a team of trusted advisers to help implement his ambitious agenda, and Patterson was high on the list.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOE CIARDIELLO

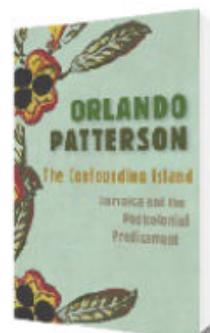
Over the course of the 1970s, Patterson split his time between Cambridge and Kingston, teaching sociology while researching and implementing development programs. From his perch within the prime minister's office, he advanced a policy of what he called "urban upgrading." Instead of slum clearance and the creation of housing, Patterson argued for rehabilitating existing structures to make them more livable. Rather than seeking to expand employment through industrialization, he argued that the new policy should support the existing economy of street hawkers and petty traders. In lieu of the large, complex bureaucracies that tend to come with an expansion of the welfare state, the program focused on using community centers to deliver social services like health and child care.

Patterson's approach reflected a wider revolution in third world approaches to development, marking a shift from the heyday of modernization in the 1950s and '60s to the basic-needs approach of the 1970s and '80s, which emphasized decentralization and overcoming extreme poverty. Modernization programs had envisioned the complete transformation of society, but their benefits reached few postcolonial citizens. Though on its face, urban upgrading appeared less ambitious, it promised to bring meaningful improvements to a larger group of citizens, and it did so by empowering local communities.

Patterson, who is currently the John Cowles professor of sociology at Harvard University, reflects on this era in his latest book, *The Confounding Island: Jamaica and the Postcolonial Predicament*. An exploration of politics, economic development, and popular culture in the nearly 60 years since the island's independence, the book seeks to understand what became of the promises of decolonization, including Manley's socialism. For Patterson, the postcolonial predicament is largely characterized by failure—of specific programs like his urban upgrading project and of the wider efforts at social and economic transformation. Two of the book's three sections are dedicated to assessing the disappointment of those unfulfilled aspirations. Yet it is not a melancholic work: In the ruins of postcolonial Jamaica, Patterson unearths a vibrant popular culture, centered in particular on dancehall music, that can provide new resources to address the postcolonial predicament.

Born in 1940 in Westmoreland Parish in Jamaica, Patterson was the son of a police detective and a seamstress. Thanks in great part to his mother's efforts and encouragement, he attended the prestigious Kingston College and was among the first

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The Confounding Island
Jamaica and the Postcolonial Predicament
By Orlando Patterson
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432 pp. \$35

cohort of undergraduates in the social sciences at the University College of the West Indies, then part of the University of London based in Kingston. His specialization in the social sciences rather than the humanities was not the path he had envisioned. When he arrived on campus in 1959, he was steeped in the emerging West Indian literature of the postwar period, attracted to the existentialism of Albert Camus, and committed to the study of history. He settled into economics and, later, sociology only after university officials rejected his application to major in history. The new nation needed social scientists more than it did humanists.

Despite some initial hesitation, Patterson embraced this calling, which soon brought him into contact with Manley, who was a decade and a half older but frequented the university. They remained in touch throughout the 1960s as Manley planned his entry into electoral politics and Patterson entered a sociology PhD program at the London School of Economics.

In fact, although they embarked on separate paths, their relationship grew stronger in these years, representing the marriage of politics and social science that characterized nation building in the decolonizing age. National independence was not just about the transfer of political power: It involved the formation of a national culture and state infrastructures, the

nurturing of a homegrown intelligentsia, and the organization of new social data. Third world intellectuals were needed to furnish the historical and empirical analyses that would inform the policies of economic development and social transformation. Social scientists were at the center of this work.

Jamaica proved to be a key site for these entwined processes. University College received its independent charter and became the University of the West Indies in 1962, the year of Jamaican independence. By then, the faculty and students of the social sciences department had founded the West Indian Society for the Study of Social Issues, which became part of the New World Group, an organization of political economists dedicated to the study of the plantation and its afterlives in the Caribbean and around the world. The group's journal, *New World Quarterly*, published from 1963 to 1972, not only covered the economies of the island states but also provided a venue for the region's emerging literary cultures, one that always situated the Caribbean as part of a wider third world.

Patterson played a key role in the society's founding and participated in its research activities and discussions. Alongside fellow students Norman Girvan, who would join Manley's government, and Walter Rodney, a Guyanese student who would soon become a radical historian of slavery and its legacies, Patterson was encouraged to pursue scholarly work and contribute to the nation's development. After completing their PhDs in London, Patterson, Girvan, and Rodney returned to Jamaica to take up this calling.

But the idea that the postcolonial university, housing scholars like these three, could play a supporting role in the country's political and economic development was soon decisively challenged. In 1968 the government of Hugh Shearer barred Rodney from reentering Jamaica, prompting an eruption of student protest. The state's repressive response made it difficult to sustain a vision of scholarship informing national transformation. Rodney took up a post at the University of Dar es Salaam, and a disillusioned Patterson departed for the United States.

In 1970, Patterson arrived in America for a six-month sabbatical. Soon that sabbatical turned permanent: In the following year, he would receive a tenured faculty position at

Harvard. While he settled into life as an academic in America, he continued to watch Jamaican politics closely, and his decision to go back as a special adviser to Manley's government just two years after his move to the United States demonstrated how much the island continued to play a central role in his scholarly and political commitments. For him, the position of special adviser brought with it the opportunity to fulfill his generation's calling. He could now apply the tools of the social scientist to the tasks of postcolonial transformation. As Patterson soon discovers, this calling came with new challenges: The independence of the intellectual proved difficult to square with popular politics. The short-term gratifications of charismatic action, a regular indulgence for a politician like Manley, did not agree with the intellectual Patterson's constitution.

At the end of Manley's second term in 1980, Patterson returned to full-time scholarship at Harvard. He never looked back. In the four decades since, he has published six highly regarded books on themes ranging from the sociology of slavery to the ordeal of racial integration in the United States.

Though most of his work did not directly address his Jamaican experiences, the island's history of slavery and emancipation and his involvement in postcolonial politics have continued to animate almost all of his thinking.

The *Confounding Island* brings us back to Jamaica and this period of Patterson's political activism and subsequent skepticism and ambivalence. As a retrospective on decolonization and its aftermath, it works through the tensions that have gripped Jamaica since the 1960s and '70s. The island now enjoys a vibrant democratic culture with free and fair elections and freedom of speech and of the press, but it is also one of the most violent societies in the world. Jamaica is a diverse multiracial country, yet it is marked by deep forms of economic hierarchy. It is a small island of just under 3 million people, but its musical forms and athletes have earned a dominant role in the global arena.

That Jamaica and its postcolonial quandaries are central to Patterson's thinking can be seen in the fact that none of these themes are new to his work: In the earliest stage of his career, he combined fiction and sociology to capture the riddle of Jamaica's postcolonial predicament. His first book, the 1964 novel *The Children of Sisyphus*, draws its title and themes from Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*. It follows the residents of the Dungle, a Kingston slum, who are outcasts in a new nation struggling to get by. At the center of the narrative are members of a Rastafarian group, led by Brother Solomon, who eagerly await a ship to take them to Ethiopia, and Dinah, a prostitute who struggles against all odds to escape her social conditions. By the end of the novel, Brother Sol-

omon reveals before killing himself that the anticipated ship was his fabrication, and Dinah finds herself firmly back at square one. Though their aspirations are thwarted, the Dungle's residents remain determined to find a way out. They maintain the hope of a future transformation of their circumstances, no matter how impossible this may appear.

Patterson's second novel, 1967's *An Absence of Ruins*, offers a biting portrait of

For Patterson, the modern idea of freedom was born in the reality of slavery.

the West Indian intellectual elite, the class that tasked itself with the making of the nation. The central character is Alexander Blackman, a young sociologist who returns to Jamaica after studying and working in London. The novel dramatizes the young man's conflicted psyche: He is tormented by indecision, an unwillingness to commit in his intellectual, political, or personal life. Fearing the responsibility and judgment inherent in taking action, he ends up going back to London to live in hiding. Published just as Patterson was contemplating his own return from London, the novel uses Blackman's internal crisis to explore the larger limits of the postcolonial intellectual's preoccupation with securing identity to a stable past. Unable to accept the absence of such a past and trapped by the search for essence, Blackman finds himself incapable of seizing the opportunities and confronting the challenges posed by his present existence. History remains, for him and the nationalist intellectuals he represents, an impossible salvation.

Beginning in the late '60s, Patterson turned more and more to history—and its futilities—in his scholarly work as well, employing historical sociology to examine how transatlantic slavery had irrevocably destroyed the collective past. This would be the thesis of his dissertation at the London School of Economics, which appeared in 1967 as *The Sociology of Slavery*. A sweeping exploration of Jamaica from the 17th to the mid-19th century, the book argued that the dynamics of colonization and enslavement had produced a distinctively disintegrated social order. Eighteenth century Jamaica was on "the brink of the Hobbesian state of nature...loosely integrated; so much so that one hesitates to call it a society." The masters and the enslaved constituted separate spheres, with the former consisting largely of absentee landlords who delegated their coercive authority to overseers. Under the violent plantation system, each enslaved person, Patterson argued, suffered from "a broken, trauma-ridden personality."

Written in the first decade of Jamaican independence, *The Sociology of Slavery* helped consolidate Patterson's thinking about the limits of Jamaican nationalism. As he recalled in a 2013 interview with the Jamaican anthropologist and political theorist David Scott, "I was very much involved in a criticism of that love fest of the 'Out of Many, One' idea" (which referred to Jamaica's national motto). The book contains two main elements from his career-long exploration of slavery. First, while a study of slavery in Jamaica, as its title suggests, it also presents sociology as a form of social criticism: Out of thick description comes generalizable argument. Second, it began to develop Patterson's view of slavery as an entirely destructive process that leaves behind it only social and cultural discontinuity. Slavery was more than just an economic institution; it was a state of social death, too.

In an early review, the Barbadian poet and historian Edward (later Kamau) Brathwaite critiqued both of these tendencies in Patterson's work. His account of disorder and disintegration, Brathwaite argued, ignored how enslaved people generated stable social formations over time. One element of social regeneration that Patterson deemphasized, Brathwaite noted, was the African cultural traditions that were retained and expanded by en-

slaved people. Patterson's thesis of discontinuity depended on "denying specific African survivals in Jamaica." Through this denial, Brathwaite said, Patterson elevated slavery's disintegrative effects into a general and unchanging condition in the New World.

Brathwaite's 1971 *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* countered this picture by tracing the creative reinvention of European and African traditions, which produced a majority Afro-Creole folk culture in the Black Atlantic. Without recognizing this social and cultural creativity, *The Sociology of Slavery* struggles, in Brathwaite's view, to explain a surprising feature of Jamaican slave society—that it had given rise to the most slave revolts in the Americas. Indeed, Patterson acknowledges this limit near the end of his book. "Sociological explanation can only partly explain the persistence of this spirit of rebellion," he writes.

As he did earlier, Patterson explored this spirit of rebellion in a novel before turning to the questions of emancipation and freedom in a sociological work. His last novel to date, *Die the Long Day* (1972), offers an early example of what we now call the neo-slave narrative. The novel's protagonist is Quasheba, a name that refers to the Jamaican version of Sambo, a feminine figure associated with submission and docility. Patterson turns this figure on its head, making her an agent of resistance. Seeking to protect her daughter, Polly, from the advances of a syphilitic master, Quasheba becomes a rebel, asserting, "Me is human too and is only one time they can kill me."

By conceiving the enslaved Jamaican as a character who announces a universal language of humanity, Patterson presents the Caribbean archipelago as the exemplary space of modernity. In this approach, he followed the Trinidadian Marxist C.L.R. James, who mentored Patterson during his London sojourn. In the final pages of the second edition of *The Black Jacobins*, James's classic history of the Haitian Revolution, he argues that the twin institutions of "the sugar plantation and Negro slavery...imposed...an original pattern" in the West Indies. Neither European nor African, both outside the "American main" and "not native in

Apocryphal

You made me crude
because you were afraid
and too easily in awe—

but I also loved that
about you, the sincerity
of your love, the centrality

of your worry.

Had I intervened
to privilege one

over the other,
it would have been all
you remembered.

All you thought about,
that entrance.
Even as it was,

you said I visited,
but those divas and reformers
weren't me—

they spoke for me
only in the literal sense
in which every radius

of a wheel is tempted
to believe that it,
in its rigidity,

alone was chosen
to support the whole
miracle of motion.

In fact, I cast no spells
and called no witnesses.
I let you find your own.

I let you discover that
those growing pains
are the thing you are.

CHRISTOPHER PHELPS

any conceivable sense of that word," the West Indies' culture and politics proved to be "sui generis, with no parallel anywhere else." As a result, West Indians "from the very start lived a life that was in its essence a modern life."

This powerful vision of Caribbean modernity percolates throughout Patterson's work. The small islands occasioned the grand questions of slavery and freedom, of self-making in the wake of violent deracination—questions for every people on every continent in the modern world. And even after Patterson had turned from Jamaica to a wider canvas, he drew his inspiration from the modernist landscape of the Caribbean. His career-defining books, *Slavery and Social Death* and *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*, which spanned the globe and the ancient and modern eras, carried the figure of Quasheba onto the stage of historical sociology.



irst published in 1982, *Slavery and Social Death* introduced Patterson's now-canonical definition of slavery as "the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons." Drawing on sources from 66 slave societies, ranging from ancient China to the New World, he moved from generalizing from one island's experience to documenting his arguments on a global scale. He dispensed with the legal categorization of enslaved people as property and the economic dimension of their exploitation, taking up slavery as primarily a social and political institution. What Patterson called the "social death" of the enslaved emerged from the fact that slavery was often a "conditional commutation" of a death sentence that denied them any connection to their ancestors and descendants.

The enslaved person was “a genealogical isolate.” As the example of Quasheba makes clear, social death did not mean she was without social relations; the problem was that they “were never recognized as legitimate and binding.” As a result, enslaved people were forced to become liminal figures, always dependent on their masters to mediate their relations with the wider social world.

Critics like the historian Vincent Brown have argued that invocations of social death obscure the rich practices through which enslaved people sought to preserve their ancestral ties. The concept of social death, Brown insisted, is an ideal type that “provides a neat cultural logic” but tends to obscure the specific experiences of slavery and the political struggles that transformed the institution. Patterson would not necessarily disagree: For him, sociology requires a necessary “schematism” that operates like “the essential heavy plow that must first clear the ground, turn the rough soil, and demarcate the boundaries.” He did not mean for this schematism to displace historical specificity but instead to illuminate recurring structures of domination. Yet as the concept of social death was taken up in American slavery studies, it increasingly came to name the singular experience of racialized chattel slavery. Patterson resisted this exceptionalism, rejecting the thesis that chattel slavery in the United States was a “peculiar institution.”

No matter the schematism, *Slavery and Social Death* certainly cleared important ground. It also helped reveal the intertwined roots of slavery and freedom. “The idea of freedom,” Patterson writes, “is born, not in the consciousness of the master, but in the reality of the slave’s condition.” This would be the thesis of *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*. Published in 1991, just as the self-declared free world was congratulating itself on a hard-fought victory against its communist foe, the book examines the birth of freedom as a concept and value in the Western world. Freedom, Patterson argues, is a quintessentially Western ideal. But despite this, his story of Western freedom situated its birth in the degradation and domination of slavery. If those heralding the West’s triumph in the Cold War assumed that the history of Western freedom somehow qualified it for global supremacy, they misunderstood the paradoxical conditions that gave rise to this ideal. An arresting passage signals the darker story Patterson wanted to tell:

Originally, the problem I had set out to explore was the sociohistorical significance of that taken-for-granted tradition of slavery in the West. Armed with the weapons of the historical sociologist, I had gone in a search of a man-killing wolf called slavery; to my dismay I kept finding the tracks of a lamb called freedom. A lamb that stared back at me, on our first furtive encounters in the foothills of the Western past, with strange, uninocent eyes. Was I to believe that slavery was a

inclusion. Finally, imperial expansion, fueled in part by slavery, sanctified this ideal of sovereignty. Sovereign autonomy had been limited to the elite, but now it could be claimed as a democratic principle, a right of all citizens within a society at the expense of those outside it.

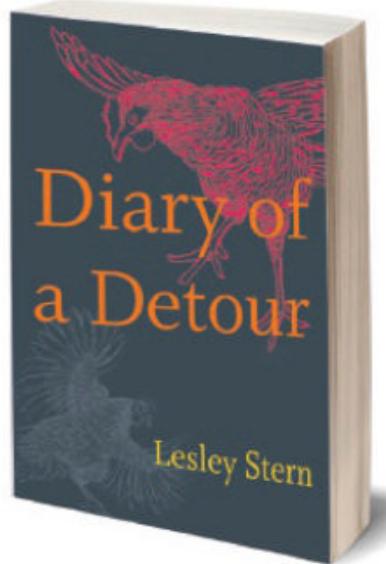


striking feature of Patterson’s *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* is that his indictment of freedom as an ideal “founded...not upon a rock of human virtue but upon the degraded time fill of man’s vilest inhumanity to man” is enunciated not from the position of an external critic but from the point of view of an insider, someone who strongly identifies with what he calls “our civilization’s preeminent ideal.” The ease with which Patterson claims Western civilization for himself and yet limns its paradoxes is itself a marker of the Caribbean’s *sui generis* modernity, one born from Atlantic slavery.

For Patterson, the Caribbean and the African diaspora in the Americas more broadly embody both the promise and the perils of modern freedom. The consequences of slavery’s disintegrative power left Black people in the Americas uniquely unburdened by the past and able to manifest the freedom of self-making. While Black nationalists have sought to remedy this absence of a past, suturing the wounds of deracination through a search for common origins, Patterson views it as a liberating condition. As he put it in a 1972 essay, Black people in the Americas should

abandon their search for a past [and] recognize that they lack all claim to a distinctive cultural heritage...[thus] accepting the epic challenge of their reality. Black Americans can be the first group in the history of mankind who transcend the confines and grip of a cultural heritage, and in so doing, they can become the most truly modern of all peoples—a people who feel no need for a nation, a past, or a particularistic culture.

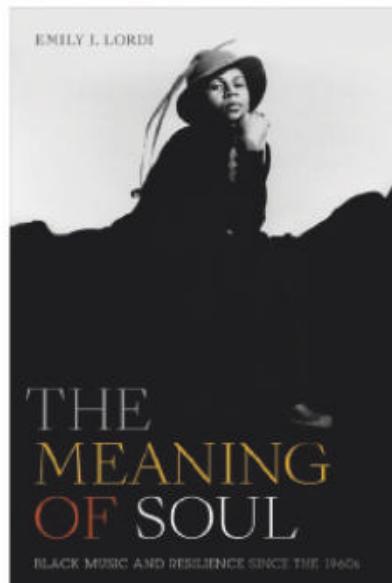
This is a mighty task to place on a single group, especially one subjected to the modern world’s original sin of chattel slavery, and some readers have imputed a conservatism to Patterson’s rejection of

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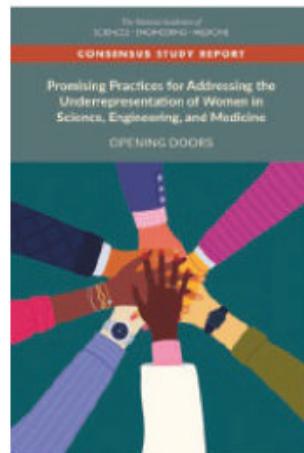
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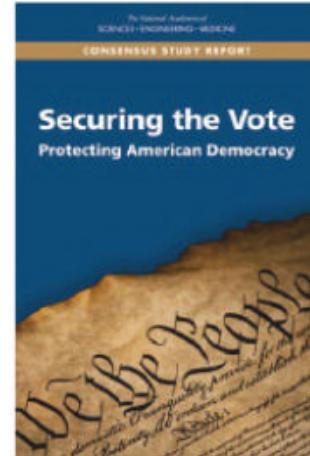
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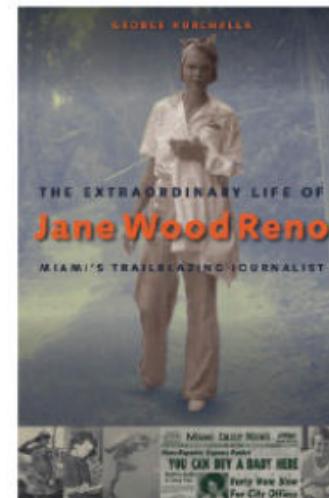
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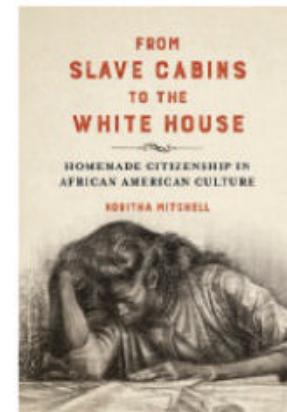
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Black particularism and cultural nationalism. Yet nothing signals the revolutionary like the desire to be freed from the shackles of the past, and one might note that there is in Patterson's declaration of "a future that has no past" a bold and radical vision of the Black diaspora as a vanguard, a universal class that ushers in a "new New World."

For many intellectuals and radicals born in countries rapidly breaking their imperial chains, the era of decolonization promised precisely this: to make the world anew. As Frantz Fanon, whom Patterson praised in an essay subtitled "My Hope and Hero," proclaimed, "We must turn over a new leaf...work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man." The postcolonial world birthed in the mid-20th century has fallen far short of that aspiration. But as Patterson witnessed, decolonization heralded a universalization of the Western ideal of freedom, especially in its democratic permutation. If the end of empire achieved nothing else, it forever de-legitimized the view that democratic self-rule was the exclusive purview of the West. Since then, democracy has become the world's lingua franca for political legitimacy. Yet the triumph of democracy remains ambiguous, not only because it has yet to become universal but also because where democracy and collective freedom have been institutionalized, a yawning gap between our expectations and our experiences of this ideal remains.

This gap is at the heart of Patterson's account of the postcolonial predicament in *The Confounding Island*. The book is a homecoming in two senses: Not only does it return to the place of his birth and intellectual formation; it also allows him to revisit the twinned projects of nation building and social scientific inquiry. This time, though, the postcolonial social scientist does

not play adviser to the democratic prince. Instead, he arrives at the scene of nationalism's failure in order to excavate and interpret its ruins. Seeking to develop a framework that can capture the processes from which the postcolonial predicament emerged—and not just by reference to a Euro-American yardstick—Patterson has created a layered account of these ruins, one that begins with the historical forces of colonialism and plantation slavery and works its way to the contradictions of political leadership embodied in the figure of Manley. As in his earlier work, Patterson's attention to his particular subject does not lead him to abandon the universal themes that have marked his career. Instead, he uses the "confounding island" as the site from which to understand the world.

His impulse to do so has some justification. For one thing, the postcolonial predicament characterizes most of the world: At the height of imperialism, over 80 percent of the planet's land was

subject to European conquest and control. Colonial rule and decolonization were thus a nearly universal experience. For another, the features that make Jamaica a confounding island, he insists, also reveal the wider dilemmas of modern democratic politics. Patterson's goal is to frame and pose the particulars of Jamaica to disclose a set of universals.

The roots of Jamaica's postcolonial democracy, like the origins of freedom, are, Patterson argues,

in slavery and colonization. Drawing on his work in *The Sociology of Slavery*, he begins with a question: Why did the various Caribbean societies where extractive plantations prevailed have different economic and political outcomes? Jamaica and Barbados, for example, have had divergent trajectories, such that by 2000, Barbados had a real per capita GDP of \$22,694, compared with Jamaica's \$5,819. While some point to the policy choices of Manley's socialist government, Patterson has a different answer: This divergence has its roots in colonialism. Though

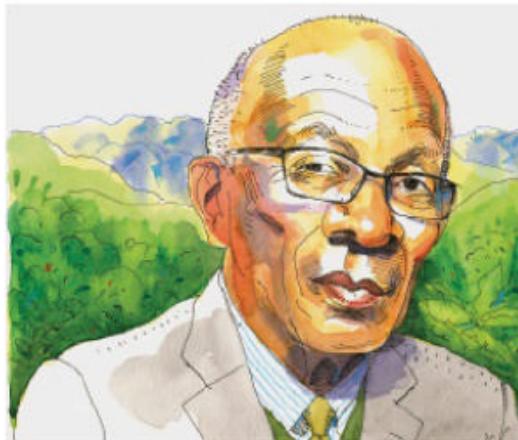
both were plantation economies, a greater planter presence and more women than men among the enslaved in Barbados created circumstances for stability and gradual social integration. Returning to his disagreement with Brathwaite, Patterson now argues that the conditions for creolization—the development of a distinctive New World society—existed there but remained minimal in Jamaica during colonization.

The two islands' divergence only widened, Patterson argues, after slavery's abolition. In 1866, just a year after the Morant Bay Rebellion, in which Black and brown Jamaicans demanded equal political and economic rights, the white-dominated House of Assembly abolished itself. The planter class decided to forgo self-rule rather than share political power with former slaves. Anxious that they might be enslaved to a Black majority, the Jamaican elite abdicated a key element of their sovereign freedom. In Barbados, on the other hand, a more stable planter class was politically secure enough to leave representative institutions intact.

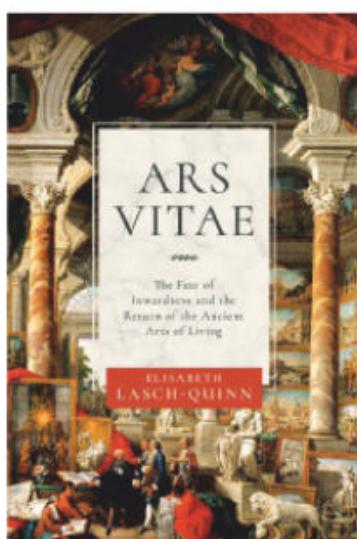
The persistence of local parliamentary institutions and the social integration of creolization in Barbadian culture did not mean that Black Barbadians experienced racial equality or greater freedom. The franchise, for instance, was limited to property owners. Moreover, the plantation system survived emancipation in Barbados relatively intact, whereas Jamaican peasants were able to enjoy greater personal freedom as a result of the struggles to protect peasants and to enable small-scale farming. Yet even if these forms of hierarchy and exploitation persisted in Barbados, Patterson argues that the institutions of representative government and the rule of law established post-emancipation bequeathed to its citizens a stronger and more independent state, one with the institutional capacity to create high levels of literacy and a per capita GDP that was in 1966, the year of Barbadian independence, 57 percent higher than Jamaica's when it gained independence in 1962.



While Jamaica has lagged Barbados on economic indicators since decolonization, it has successfully institutionalized a parliamentary democracy. Patterson moves from the legacy of the colonial past to the



"We must turn over a new leaf...work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man."



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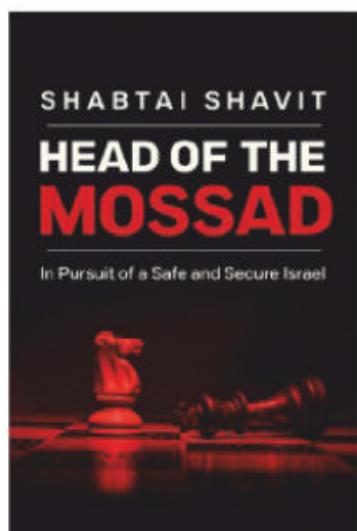
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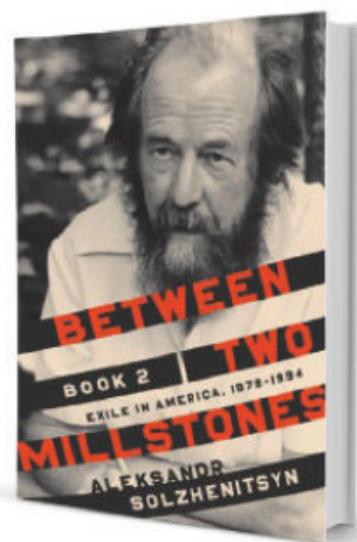
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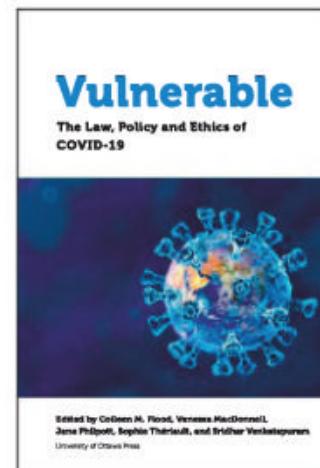
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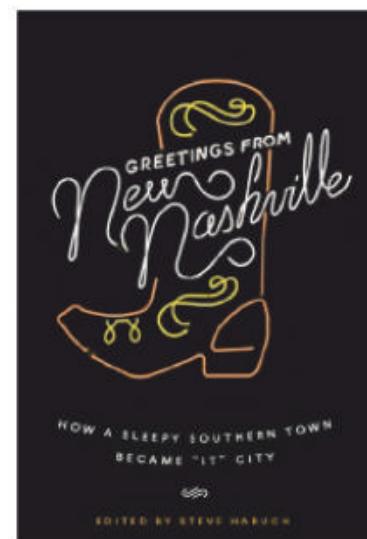
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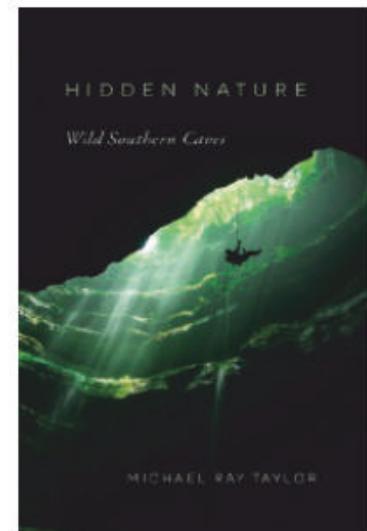
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Tea

I can't get away from it.

Felted-up reenactors shoving a great fake crate of it
into the Harbor and jeering.

After the tour group leaves, they fish it
back out and towel it off,
unbutton their waistcoats to smoke.

At the nearby counter-service place, there are two
jars next to the register, and dropping bills
into one or the other is how
we affirm our commitments—why should we ever
pay decently, unless it occurs
in this fever of rivalry that passes for fun?

What are our choices and might I suggest
LESS IS MORE against MORE IS MORE?

Or IT COULD HAPPEN ANY TIME against IT HAPPENS
ALL THE TIME? Or how about THIS VIOLENCE
FOREVER UNDOES A PERSON
against THAT CONTENTION CAN ONLY
BE ROOTED IN THE RETROGRADE
VIEW THAT A WOMAN IS EITHER INTACT OR SHE'S
NOT? I always thought I'd made
peace with THIS PLANET, and yet here I am
shoving all my cash in the jar
marked ANYPLACE ELSE. There isn't enough
money in the world.

NATALIE SHAPERO

postcolonial present in order to assess the experience of democracy there. On every indicator, from free and fair elections to robust protections for freedom of the press, Jamaica ranks highly. Yet as Patterson notes, democratization has coincided with extreme levels of violence. Jamaica's murder rate of 58 per 100,000 people in 2005 "made it the most homicidal nation in the world." While we tend to think the

ballot replaces the bullet, Patterson argues that in this instance the bullet followed the ballot.

This uptick in violence coincided with postcolonial state building and the consolidation of the country's two main political parties, the Jamaica Labor Party and the People's National Party, in the early 1940s. The proliferation of guns due to the global trade in illicit drugs not only centered on criminal activities; it also permeated partisan politics. The fact that jobs, houses, and other rewards were distributed and controlled by the victors of an election added to the stakes of party affiliation. For politicians, the dispen-

sation of patronage proved a powerful means of securing electoral support, and thus violence erupted around it. After all, for members of the various constituencies, ensuring that their candidate won was tied very directly to the material conditions of their lives. Under these circumstances, violence began to supplement the electoral process.

Patronage, however, is not the only way that "the democratic process both enables and is enabled by violence," Patterson argues. The forms of mobilization that large-scale democracies require tend to calcify political identities and exacerbate conflict. Jamaican politics is not marked by ethnic conflict—but even where racial and ethnic identities are not electorally salient, Patterson demonstrates how parties and elections inspire a solidarity and loyalty that ultimately entrench divisions and violence within a society. He calls this the "tribalism" of democracy.

It is tempting to view violence and tribalism as yet another sign of democracy's imperfect realization in the countries that decolonized after World War II. But as Patterson notes, these are features of democracy around the world. One need look no further than the electoral rise of authoritarian populism across the North Atlantic to see that even where democratic politics is most established, it is not immune to the recurring challenges of polarization, violence, and nativism. The sociological conditions of democracy in Jamaica are indeed distinct from those in Europe and the United States. But precisely by examining democracy in a variety of contexts, we can better grasp the features that have remained relatively submerged in North Atlantic countries.



lectoral mobilization is only one of modern democracy's paradoxes. Patterson examines another set of challenges through an analysis of his time in Manley's government. The policy of urban upgrading that Patterson pioneered in the Southside area of Kingston yielded mixed results. It successfully provided social services through community centers that offered child care, services for elders, and a health clinic, and the project staffers were able to institute a truce among rival gangs in the area. But one of its central goals, enticing landlords to rehabilitate their

properties through government-backed loans, was largely unsuccessful. Even as an expansive and egalitarian state project sought to meet the basic needs of citizens, those most in need of housing rehabilitation—the tenants of absentee landlords—were excluded from its benefits. Many of the public investments ended up being captured by better-off members of the community.

For Patterson, the unintended consequences of his urban programs offer a small window into a central conundrum faced by democratic states. For much of the history of Western political thought, democracy was feared as the rule of the poor multitudes. The advocates of decolonization half a century ago seized on this view, celebrating the self-rule of the oppressed masses. But as contemporary conditions around the world indicate, without measures to check economic inequality, democratic institutions can be captured by political and economic elites.

Yet Patterson argues that even as the poor are structurally excluded from meaningfully exercising rule, democratic politics, especially elections, tend to reward the theater of populist overtures. During his time as special adviser, Patterson watched in dismay as elected officials in Jamaica either undermined or dismissed his urban upgrading program, favoring instead a populist rhetoric backed up by the occasional construction of a housing project. Sweeping promises of new housing—as well as the patronage available from controlling access to the units that were built—became the preferred option for political elites seeking to ensure their reelection. While elite responsiveness to constituencies is seen as the quintessential feature of democratic politics, Patterson argues that there is an incongruity between meeting “the needs of the poor” and “maintaining the power of a political leader” that only widens the more democratic a society is.

For Patterson, Manley’s political career embodies these conundrums of democratic leadership, and in the last chapter he reckons with Manley’s government and its legacies. Patterson tried to write about Manley before this, but as Patterson notes, he had experienced a mental block until he was asked to write a foreword for Rachel

Manley’s memoir of her father. Even in *The Confounding Island*, he restricts his discussion to a pained and relatively brief treatment that attests to his continued difficulties when assessing his longtime friend, the political leader whose call he felt compelled to answer. But with many years’ distance, he is able to provide an intimate picture here of Manley’s rise and fall.

For Patterson, Manley was an enigmatic figure, one riven by contradictions. Born into the Creole elite—his father, Norman Manley, was Jamaica’s first premier, and his British-born mother, Edna

For Patterson, the unintended outcomes of his urban programs offer a window into a central conundrum faced by democratic states.

Manley, was a sculptor—Michael Manley became a man of the people. Though he was animated by the intellectual and personal challenge of democratic politics, he disdained its retail aspects and remained distant from his constituents, who were nonetheless enchanted by his charisma. In corruptible in public life, Patterson writes, Manley was “unscrupulous and dishonest in his intimate relations.” In Patterson’s view, these characteristics facilitated the ambition and daring with which Manley embarked on Jamaica’s project of democratic socialism, but they also fueled the vacillation and indecision that marked his first two terms as prime minister.

Manley came to power under the slogan “Better must come,” a promise to ameliorate the social and economic conditions of the majority of Jamaicans. His plans to redistribute land, expand social services, democratize the workplace, and harness a greater share of the profits from the bauxite industry were couched in an international commitment to third world politics. His close relationship with Fidel Castro and his advocacy for the New International Economic Order—the third world’s demand for an egalitarian global economy—infuriated the United States, which sought to isolate Cuba and undermine radical politics across the Americas.

Despite Manley’s bold domestic and global vision, he proved unable to hold together the leftists and moderates in his party. Nor was he prepared to deal with the capital flight that followed his announcement of democratic socialism and the emigration of the middle and professional classes in the wake of political violence and a shrinking economy. As was the case for many third world states in the 1970s, the oil crisis exacerbated Jamaica’s economic woes and sank the island further into debt. In 1977, with the economy in free fall, Manley accepted a structural adjustment program from the International Monetary Fund, deciding against an alternative plan put forward by his advisers.

While Manley’s democratic socialism ended tragically, his government, for Patterson, was not a complete failure. In the first five years it increased investment in education and health care, cut infant mortality rates, expanded labor’s share of income, and shielded peasant producers from the competition of imported food. Patterson notes that “the flight of the traditional white, Asian, and light-skinned elite unlocked their stranglehold of centuries on the nation’s wealth and opened entrepreneurial doors for the black businesspeople who stayed.”

Manley’s commitment to the working and popular classes helped unleash the “Afro-Jamaican culture of the masses.” As in the United States, the 1970s were the era of Black power in the Caribbean, which challenged the Creole elite and colonial cultures that dominated the region. Manley’s Jamaica would see the rise of reggae and later dancehall, musical genres that embody a democratized Jamaican culture and that now resonate globally.

The innovation and creativity of Jamaican popular culture, according to Patterson, offer us insight into a different path forward for postcolonial societies. In sharp contrast to an elite culture in which the Jamaican middle class imitates the consumptive practices and habits of its global counterparts, reggae and dancehall embrace the local and the vernacular. As Patterson writes, dancehall especially celebrated “the blackest, folksiest, and most lumpenproletarian aspects of Jamaican culture.”

Reggae’s and dancehall’s re-

jection of the Jamaican middle class reinforces his early critique of postcolonial nationalism, which empowered a nationalist bourgeoisie and left the country's working classes behind. It also returns him to the characters in *The Children of Sisyphus*. The novel anticipated, according to David Scott, the soundscape of the reggae generation. In the poetics and music of the Dungle, Patterson suggests, new cultural as well as political possibilities reside. He finds fault with the violence, misogyny, and homophobia of dancehall, but he sees it as a profound commentary on the postcolonial predicament as well. Dancehall, Patterson writes, "is a performative venue that incites the most aural and carnal assault on the traditional inequities of class, color, language, gender, and social mores in Jamaican society." Jamaican popular culture may not offer a straightforward alternative blueprint for the island, he concedes, but it embodies the modern condition.

For Patterson, dancehall dramatizes the rootlessness and alienation of modernity. The cacophonous orality of dancehall is not meant to be apprehended and made sense of by the ear; instead, it is absorbed by the body. He argues that this makes dancehall an immanently global form. Rooted in the particularities of the Jamaican condition—what Patterson calls an "aggressive localism"—dancehall nonetheless contains a universal appeal: Its sounds can be heard in nightclubs around the world, it has influenced American hip-hop, and it has spurred local iterations from Japan to South Africa. Dancehall thus embodies Patterson's method of disclosing the universal in and through Jamaica's postcolonial predicament.

Popular culture cannot resolve the dilemmas of postcolonial democracy. Nor does it complete the unfinished work of social and economic transformation. But in dancehall's rejection of dependency and submission, in its challenge to middle-class mimicry, and in its creative joining of the local and the global, Patterson finds a Jamaica striving toward its and its neighbors' historic role: to be a truly modern people, unburdened by the past and embarking on an adventure of democratic self-creation. Through it, Patterson reminds us, the challenge of building a "future that has no past" might yet be realized. **N**



The Creaky Old System

Is the real threat to American democracy one of its own institutions?

BY MICHAEL KAZIN



E AMERICANS LIVE IN A DEBASED VERSION OF DEMOCRACY in which basic parts of the federal government betray, by design, the principle of majority rule. Wyoming elects the same number of senators as California does, although Wyoming's entire population is not much larger than the city of Fresno's. When

voting as a bloc, five members of the Supreme Court can negate any act passed by Congress; barring an unlikely impeachment, every justice, once confirmed by the Senate, remains on the bench until she or he retires or dies. To alter the framework of the Supreme Court or the Senate would require a constitutional amendment that the legislatures of as few as 13 states could prevent from being ratified.

Yet neither is the greatest insult to popular sovereignty. That would be the fact that it takes just 270 electors—individuals whose names are virtually unknown to

the public—to formally decide who will be one of the most powerful human beings on earth. A candidate can win a plurality of the popular vote, as did Al Gore and Hillary Clinton, and yet the decision of who becomes president can still come down to a small set of electors in one or two states. And no minimum vote is required to win any state's electoral votes: If a horrendously massive earthquake killed most Californians this fall, Donald Trump could legally win all of that state's 55 electoral votes by edging out Joe Biden by a margin typical in a low-scoring baseball game.

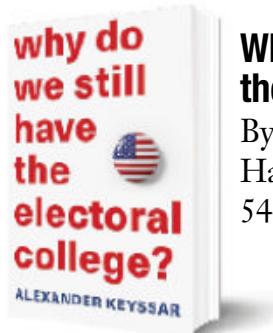
Unlike with the other venerable pillars of our less-than-democratic order, most Americans have seldom thought the Electoral College worth preserving. Surprisingly, the very men who drafted the Constitution also had their doubts. The ungainly apparatus got welded into the document as a compromise between those framers who wanted Congress to pick the president and those who wanted to leave it up to state governments. The system they came up with was nobody's first choice.

Over the past two centuries, Congress has repeatedly debated enacting major changes to the Electoral College or scrapping it; on a few occasions, lawmakers came agonizingly close to doing so. James Madison, the most influential figure in the drafting of the Constitution, was never fond of the Electoral College and sought to replace it with a national popular vote (which in his day, of course, would have been limited to white men). In nearly every opinion poll conducted from the 1940s to the present, majorities have favored switching to that simple and—ever since women and Black people got the right to vote—quite democratic alternative.

One of the chief virtues of Alexander Keyssar's remarkable new book *Why Do We Still Have the Electoral College?* is that it conclusively demonstrates the absurdity of preserving an institution that has been so contentious throughout US history and has not infrequently produced results that defied the popular will. No presidential contest has ended up in the House of Representatives since 1824, when that body chose John Quincy Adams after a multicandidate race in which his nearest competitor, Andrew Jackson, won a plurality of both the popular and the electoral vote. But on four other occasions, fewer ballots were cast for the winner than the loser, and in the exceedingly close elections of 1884 and 1916, the switch of a few thousand votes in a single state would have handed victory to the less popular nominee.

More galling, those anonymous electors have usually also had the liberty to defy the people's choice by voting for someone who did not carry their state or did not even run for the presidency at all. This is a prospect that a recent Supreme Court decision sought to correct, in a unanimous ruling that a state can compel electors to abide by the pledge they made to support their party's nominee. "The State instructs its electors that they have no ground for reversing the vote of millions of its citizens," wrote Justice Elena Kagan. "That direction accords with the Constitution—as well as with the trust of a Nation that here, We the People rule." Despite this ruling, 17 states, including ones that tend to swing, like Florida and Ohio, still allow electors to vote their conscience.

Michael Kazin teaches history at Georgetown University and is a coeditor of Dissent. He is currently writing a history of the Democratic Party.



Why Do We Still Have the Electoral College?

By Alexander Keyssar
Harvard University Press.
544 pp. \$35

The premise of Keyssar's book is an uncommon one for a historian to pursue. Few scholars spend their time seeking to explain something they wish had happened but never did. Even writers who probe the perennial question of why socialism never gained a mass following in the United States as it did in Europe still have a good deal to say about such topics as the popularity of Eugene V. Debs and the vital role played by Marxist radicals in the labor movement and the crusade for racial justice. But the centuries of fruitless effort inspired Keyssar to create a scholarly masterpiece. No other historian has so persuasively explained the utter failure to ditch or change a process that, as he puts it, "is ill understood by many Americans, bewildering to nearly everyone abroad, and [was] never imitated by another country or by any state of the United States. Many countries have struggled with the problem of electoral reform, but few, if any, have done so with such lack of success over so prolonged a period." This is clearly not a book for anyone who believes the moral arc of politics is long but always bends toward justice.

To tell his story, Keyssar has crafted an absorbing, if dispiriting, narrative about the durable obstacles to structural change in the United States. Running through this long history of failed reform schemes were the often intersecting realities of the

two-party system and a fear of the potential power that Black voters could wield after Emancipation. Many Republicans and Democrats admitted the inequity of awarding a state's entire electoral vote to whoever won a mere plurality of its ballots. But a filibuster-proof majority balked at endorsing any of the plans on offer that would have scrapped the state-based system of winner take all. They knew awarding electoral votes by congressional district or by the proportion each candidate won in a state could destroy an advantage precious to their party's chances to win the presidency.

Thus, Southern Democrats in the late 19th century asserted that any proportional division would trample on the right of states to control their own elections, which was enshrined in the Constitution. One group of Dixie congressmen, contradicting the name of their party, derided the idea of a popular vote to decide the presidency as embodying "the false assumption that our government was intended to represent the will of the majority of the whole people of the United States." In 1889 an overly sanguine Republican predicted that with proportional elections, "the solid South, that bugbear of our politics...would immediately disappear, together with many of the attending evils of sectional hatred and race prejudice." Yet by the early 20th century, when Southern legislatures had effectively disenfranchised most Black citizens, GOP politicians had found their own reason to oppose such reforms. If Democrats were going to sweep the South every four years, then the GOP needed to ensure that states like Massachusetts and Wisconsin would remain bastions of a solidly Republican North.

Only during those brief periods when partisanship waned did lawmakers from different regions come close to passing measures that would have brought an end to the Electoral College. The first near miss occurred in 1821. By then, the aristocratic Federalists first organized around Alexander Hamilton had all but disappeared, allowing politicians from the party that Madison and Thomas Jefferson had founded as the Democratic-Republicans to thoroughly dominate the so-called Era of Good Feelings. In 1820, after James Monroe was reelected as president without facing a challenger, the Senate approved, by more than the required two-thirds vote, an amendment mandating district elections. After months of delays and debates, the House favored

the idea, too—but with six fewer votes than were needed to send the amendment on to the states for ratification.

According to Keyssar, the lawmakers who resisted had a variety of motives. Some feared that future gerrymanderers could skew the shape of districts to favor one candidate or defeat another. Others were just accustomed to a system that had temporarily made their party the only one in the land. A congressman from South Carolina justified his nay vote by quoting *Hamlet*: “It is better...to bear those ills we have than to fly to others that we know not of.” Coming from a state where enslaved people were the majority, he probably never imagined that Black people would someday have a hand in making such decisions.

A century and a half later, the opportunity for overhauling the Electoral College returned. For much of 1968, George Wallace, the militant racist from Alabama who ran on a third-party ticket, was riding so high in the polls that it seemed entirely possible he could win enough states to force the House to choose the president. In the end, Richard Nixon won a clear majority of the electoral votes. But the fear that in a future contest, members of the lower chamber might have to negotiate with Wallace or another rogue independent mobilized support for a constitutional amendment that would replace the Electoral College with a national popular vote, supplemented by a runoff election if necessary. Leading figures in both parties jumped on board, and the amendment even found support in the pages of the conservative *National Review*. The editor of the major daily paper in Charlotte, N.C., happily reported that the “creaky old system has few defenders left.”

Alas, given the need for a super-majority, the old system ended up having just enough. In the fall of 1969 the House passed the amendment with ease; just 70 representatives voted against it. A Gallup poll at the time found that more than four-fifths of the public endorsed the change as well. But as so often in the past, Southern senators used delays and a filibuster to kill the opportunity to abolish a major obstacle to democratic rule. Leading the opposition was Sam Ervin from North Carolina, a longtime champion of segregation and other right-wing causes. Three years later, liberals would applaud him for heading the select com-

mittee that helped uncover the slimy facts of the Watergate scandal. Ironically, a top official of the NAACP withheld support from the effort, too: He did not want to abandon the potential power Black people had to swing the vote in big Northern states and insisted that, so soon after the enactment of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which was up for renewal in 1970, guaranteeing the franchise to African Americans in the South should come first.

For the remainder of the 20th century, the cause of reforming the way presidents get elected fell prey to the apathy of most politicians, who found no reason to keep flogging a losing cause. “It is a waste of time to talk about changing the Electoral College,” said Jimmy Carter in 2001. The former chief executive predicted the institution would last for another 200 years. The Nebraska legislature did decide in 1991 to award its electoral votes to the

page, recently defended the Electoral College as “one of the two load-bearing walls on which the Constitution is built.” His column mentioned none of the faithless electors in 2016. Hewitt’s students might ask their professor why he did not consider the judgment of Madison, the chief architect of that 230-year-old textual edifice, before writing those foolish words.

In contrast, Keyssar reveals throughout his book how complex historical wisdom can be. Rarely does he offer just a single explanation for why the various efforts to reform the Electoral College or do away with it have failed to gain the necessary votes in Congress or why, for years at a stretch, their proponents saw little point in trying. The impression he leaves is of a polity in which incremental moves that enhance democracy, like the Voting Rights Act, are possible, while efforts to cure the fundamental infirmities of the system keep coming up against such barriers as the “balance of power between the states and the national government”—which are encrusted with centuries of jurisprudence and defended by politicians whose power might be threatened by change. “The history recounted here has a Sisyphean air,” Keyssar admits near the end of his book.

Fortunately, eternal frustration has not always been the fate of the right to vote, the subject of his book published in 2000. In it Keyssar described, with just as profound a knowledge of his subject, how mass movements of white workers, women, African Americans, and their legislative allies gradually expanded the franchise until, by the late 1960s, it was available to all adult citizens, save the incarcerated and most felons who had served their time.

But because there has never been an insurgency to demand a national popular vote, the Americans who keep straining to push that rock up the steep constitutional hill are nearly all politicians, academics, and journalists. Few ordinary voters care enough about how the president gets elected to organize around the issue; they just prefer a candidate who shares their beliefs and promises to serve their interests and perhaps will make them feel good about their government and their country. “The nation has become more democratic since 1787 and more committed to political equality, but the Electoral College has not,” Keyssar concludes. And so we endure with the most ridiculous system for producing our head of state and government on earth.

The struggle to reform our electoral system has long had “a Sisyphean air.”

winner of each congressional district in the state. And in 1992 the fear that Ross Perot’s strong third-party run would prevent any of the presidential candidates from achieving an electoral vote majority spurred the Senate to hold a major hearing about altering the system that made such a contingency possible. “It is nonsense,” declared Mitch McConnell, then just an ordinary Republican senator, “to have the House of Representatives choose the president.” But after the Texas billionaire’s 19 percent of the popular vote won him not a single state, the embers of concern turned cold.

During this century, opinion on the merits of a national popular vote, as on nearly every issue that matters, has broken down along partisan lines that grow sharper with each presidential tweet. That George W. Bush in 2000 and Trump in 2016 made it to the White House despite winning fewer votes than their Democratic rivals has turned most Republicans into big fans of the Electoral College. Hugh Hewitt, who teaches constitutional law when he’s not writing hymns of praise to his authoritarian leader on *The Washington Post*’s op-ed



Letters

Neoliberalism Isn't Working

Re “The 7,383-Seat Strategy Is Working” by Joan Walsh [September 7/14]: There is not one word in this article about why the Democrats lost nearly 1,000 state races during Barack Obama’s presidency. Mainly it was because of the party’s neoliberal policies, which work against its traditional constituencies of the working and middle classes. Bill Clinton and Barack Obama were both proponents of these policies, and the effects at the state level were disastrous for the party.

Democrats are picking up seats now because of Donald Trump’s unpopularity and his incompetent handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. But as long as the Democratic establishment shuns its progressive base (as dramatically illustrated by its choice of speakers at the party’s national convention), this up-tick will be temporary and may be followed in the long term by renewed Republican gains. The neoliberals represent only a tiny sliver of the electorate and are kept in power solely by big money and media influence.

CALEB MELAMED

The Real Norma Rae

Re “There Is Power Without a Union” by P.E. Moskowitz [September 7/14]: The iconic full-page photo in your article shows Sally Field as Norma Rae, standing on a work table holding high a hand-drawn sign that simply says “Union.” In *The Nation*’s version, however, “Union” is crossed out and replaced by “Workers United.” This is a hoax on many levels. The white working-class Southern woman who took this courageous stand at a J.P.

Stevens textile plant in Roanoke Rapids, N.C., wrote “Union” for a reason. For workers, there is power in the union. That’s why, in response, all the workers in that department shut down their machines.

For at least the last 25 years of her life, I was among the closest friends of Crystal Lee Sutton, the real Norma Rae. Despite a bureaucratic union leadership often collaborating with bosses and selling out the workers, Crystal maintained over the decades until the day she died that “even a piece of a union is better than no union at all.” She knew the union was her vehicle to full human dignity—and the film on her life was excellent on the woman question as well as the labor question.

Moskowitz’s “hero,” Adam Ryan, makes some valid criticisms of current labor leadership and points to Occupy Wall Street and the wildcat teacher strikes in 2018 as positive influences on him. The marvelous wildcat strikes, however, were launched by organized union teachers—one of several instances in which Moskowitz unwittingly demonstrates that even a piece of a union is better than no union at all.

Moskowitz alleges that “many Americans simply do not want to join unions” as an argument against workers’ organizing them. Let’s remember that many Americans simply do not want to wear masks, either. Moskowitz should stop toying with the working class.

RICHARD KORITZ
Solidarity Representative
American Postal Workers Union
 GREENSBORO, N.C.

Comment drawn from our website
letters@thenation.com
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ELECTION DAY
AND EVERY DAY

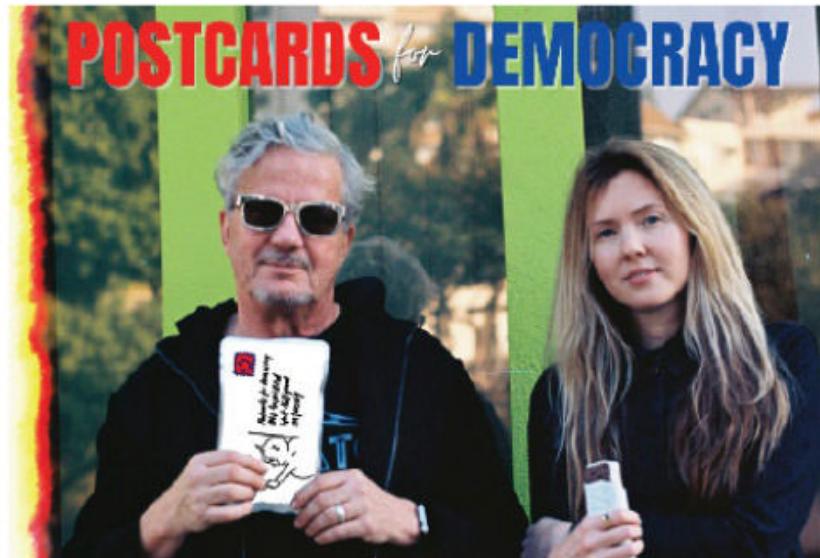
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Postcards for Democracy is a collective art project to support the 225-year-old United States Postal Service and the right to vote. In light of the threat to our beloved (yet neglected) Postal Service—at a time that could jeopardize our democracy—the two of us have joined forces for this artful demonstration. The aim of this campaign is to encourage as many people as possible to support the USPS (at this critical time), our right to vote,

and democracy as a whole via the power of art. We're asking you to buy USPS stamps, make your own postcard, and mail it to 8760 W Sunset Boulevard, West Hollywood, CA 90069. The postcards will then become part of a collective art piece presented in both a physical gallery and a virtual space—art directed by the two of us. To join this collective art demonstration, go to postartfordemocracy.com or #postcardsfordemocracy.

—Mark Mothersbaugh and Beatie Wolfe



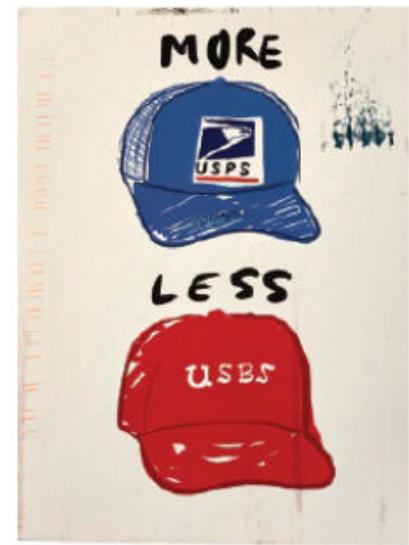
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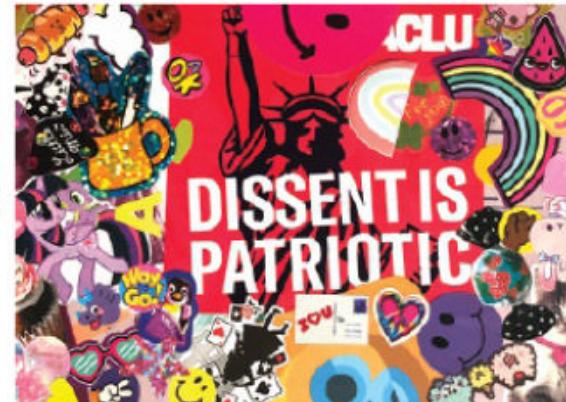
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Mark Mothersbaugh is a conceptual/visual artist, film composer, and cofounder of Devo.

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