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IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

A Black Panther's Long Road to Freedom

In the January 16, 2017, issue of *The New Yorker*, in “Surviving Solitary” (p. 54), **Rachel Aviv** profiles Albert Woodfox, a member of the Black Panther Party who was held in solitary confinement for more than forty years—longer than any prisoner in American history—until his release in February, 2016. In 1969, following an arrest for robbery, Woodfox arrived at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, in Angola, the largest maximum-security prison in the country. Soon after, he and two other inmates requested permission from the Panthers’ Central Committee to establish a chapter of the Party at Angola—the only recognized chapter founded on prison grounds. In April, 1972, a white guard at Angola was stabbed thirty-two times in an all-black dorm. Woodfox and Herman Wallace, who had co-founded the chapter of the Party, were found guilty of the murder and sentenced to life without parole—even though there was an abundance of physical evidence at the crime scene, none of which linked them to the killing. They were sent to Closed Cell Restricted—an extended lockdown unit—and for more than five years, they never went outside. Woodfox and Wallace soon became close with another Panther, Robert King, who was also in C.C.R. and had been convicted of killing an inmate. They believed that he, too, had been framed because of his connection to the Party. Woodfox, Wallace, and King became known as the Angola 3.

By 1982, the Party had collapsed. Yet the three men continued identifying as Panthers. Prisoners in C.C.R. who had killed inmates were eventually released—but Woodfox, Wallace, and King remained. In 2001, King’s conviction was overturned. “King was real reluctant to leave us,” Woodfox told Aviv. “It was the comradeship, the love between us. He felt he would leave us shorthanded.” In 2008, Woodfox and Wallace were transferred to new prisons, at opposite ends of the state, where they remained in solitary confinement. When the psychologist Craig Haney visited the two men at their new prisons, he was shocked to see how much they had aged. “The separation was devastating,” Haney told Aviv. In 2013, Wallace received a diagnosis of liver cancer. He was released in September and died three days later.

In 2015, Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry offered to end the prosecution if Woodfox pleaded no-contest to manslaughter. Woodfox took the plea deal and on February 19, 2016, his sixty-ninth birthday, he was released. But he feels ashamed that he pleaded guilty to anything, telling Aviv, “I still regret it. I don’t care how you look at it: I was not standing for what I believed in.” Two months after Woodfox’s release, he and King settled a civil suit with the state; the agreement requires that Louisiana’s Department of Corrections review its system for placing inmates in solitary confinement, and consider the status of segregated prisoners in a more meaningful way. Woodfox has spoken at panels about prisoners’ rights across the country. “I feel an obligation, because when I was in the position of the guys in prison I used to wonder why nobody spoke for us,” he told Aviv. In October, Woodfox flew to Oakland for the fiftieth reunion of the Black Panther Party, where he said, “We have to protect Black Lives Matter like we didn’t protect the Black Panther Party.” Later, he told Aviv, “I can’t tell you how proud I am of them.” The greatest disappointment of freedom, he said, was realizing how little had changed. “It’s the same old America.”

Why Would a Zoo Shoot a Giraffe?

In “The Culling” (p. 42), **Ian Parker** reports from Denmark on the practice of culling zoo animals—euthanizing them for reasons of population control—and considers how facilities in Europe and America handle the practice. In 2014, staff members at the Copenhagen Zoo shot and killed a healthy young giraffe known as Marius, dissected it in public, and fed its remains to lions. The animal’s death, which the Danes defended as necessary to preserve a genetically varied stock of species, “became a social-media sensation, created panic in the international zoo business, and revealed a proud Danish unfussiness about animal mortality,” Parker writes. Bengt Holst, the Copenhagen Zoo’s scientific director and the public face of the zoo’s euthanization and dissection policies, aims to avoid what he calls the “Disneyfication” of nature: “This is not a fairy tale, where everything gets born but never dies.” According to Holst, the only zoos likely to exist in a few decades will be those working to insure that their captive-animal populations are genetically and demographically equipped to survive for many generations. This requires killing animals, he says.

The Copenhagen Zoo faced international criticism in response to the culling, including pleas to reconsider and offers to rehouse Marius. As the zoo industry saw it, the public-relations crisis caused by Marius’s death threatened to undermine its crucial role in conservation. Terry Maple, a former director of Zoo Atlanta, says, “When you begin to see how it moves the people who support you—when they’re in tears, and they just can’t believe this—it starts to under-



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mine the credibility of zoos, which have to be justified, have to be supported by the public.” But while American zoos were keen to distance themselves from Copenhagen, they struggled to find the right ethical objection. American zoos do cull, though the preferred term is “humane euthanization.” “I would have never done it, most of my colleagues in the United States would have never done it,” Maple tells Parker. “But when you get below the example of a charismatic mega-vertebrate and go to animals that are a little less special, there are cases of killing.”

How Kirk Franklin Is Pushing the Boundaries of Gospel

In “Making God Famous” (p. 26), **Vinson Cunningham** profiles Kirk Franklin, the most successful contemporary gospel artist of his generation, who has collaborated with artists including Bono, Mary J. Blige, R. Kelly, and Kanye West, and whose 2015 album, “Losing My Religion,” was recently nominated for a Grammy. Franklin’s first album was the first gospel debut to go platinum, in 1993. Since then, he has sold millions of records and won scores of awards for a brand of gospel which blends secular sounds with an uplifting devotional message. Cunningham, who first heard Franklin’s music in the mid-nineties, at a church in Harlem, travels to Franklin’s home in Fort Worth, Texas. He sees Franklin perform live at the Kings Theatre, in Brooklyn (a stop along his latest tour, “20 Years in One Night”), and at the Main Street Armory, in Rochester. Franklin tells Cunningham, “I wanna give you Jesus, but I wanna give you Jesus with an 808. I wanna give you Jesus with some strings.” He spoke of the constraints he feels as a gospel artist: “If I’m writing and doing music celebrating the Creator, who is the most creative being in the world—I mean when you look at nature and when you look at all of the beautiful created things—why should I be limited in expressing myself? He’s creative, so why shouldn’t my music be creative, too? But everyone in my community, and especially the consumers, they don’t see it that way.”

Many artists—such as Sam Cooke, Solomon Burke, and Aretha Franklin—moved from gospel prominence to mainstream stardom, shedding their music’s religious content. But Franklin has held on to the gospel message while moving his sound, and his presentation, in the direction of hip-hop and contemporary R.&B. Franklin talks about the change in his work directionally: he had started out writing “vertically,” man to God, but now he writes “horizontally,” person to person, hoping that the particulars of his life strike a universal chord in both believers and unbelievers. He tells Cunningham, “I want to write about the God that I live with, not just the God that I love. Because the God that I live with sees me having doubts with him, and being afraid of him, and being mad at him, and saying sorry, and making up.”

What Happened When the Feds Went After a Hedge-Fund Legend

In “Total Return” (p. 34), **Sheelah Kolhatkar** chronicles the crackdown on insider trading, which reached its peak in 2013, when the feds went after hedge-fund legend Steven A. Cohen’s fourteen-billion-dollar fund, S.A.C. Capital Advisors. After bringing insider-trading charges against some S.A.C. employees, Preet Bharara, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, had to decide if his office was going to bring criminal charges against Cohen. In an effort to find some piece of evidence that would prove that Cohen knew information he had been given by his traders was dirty before he traded on it, the government subpoenaed his e-mails, phone records, and instant-message logs, and prosecutors and F.B.I. agents studied his communications patterns and his trades in detail—but they still did not have enough evidence to be assured of a victory. Bharara took a different tack and in July, 2013, he brought three sets of charges against Cohen’s company as a whole, rather than against Cohen himself; four months later, S.A.C. agreed to plead guilty and pay \$1.8 billion. Cohen, meanwhile, still had close to ten billion dollars to invest, and his daily life seemed little changed. In 2016, he reached an agreement with the S.E.C. that will allow him to return to the hedge-fund business in 2018. “The result of the government’s nearly ten-year battle against Cohen’s empire was looking increasingly like a momentary setback,” Kolhatkar writes.

Plus: In Comment, **Jelani Cobb** reflects on the resistance, after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., to recognize his birthday as a national holiday, and considers the disconnect between King’s principles and a Donald Trump Presidency (p. 21); in Shouts & Murmurs, **Calvin Trillin** shares the dark thoughts that disturb him while tossing and turning about the election (p. 33); **David Denby** reads Molly Haskell’s new book, “Steven Spielberg: A Life in Films” (p. 78); **Adam Gopnik** reads a new biography of Michel de Montaigne, by Philippe Desan (p. 81); **Anthony Lane** watches John Lee Hancock’s “The Founder” and Robin Pront’s “The Ardennes” (p. 86); poetry by **Tom Sleigh** (p. 30) and **Corey Van Landingham** (p. 56); and new fiction by **Thomas Pierce** (p. 68).

Multimedia: **Tom Sleigh** reads his poem, and additional images of Albert Woodfox.

Podcasts: **David Remnick** speaks with Newt Gingrich and Congressman Patrick Kennedy about Advocates for Opioid Recovery, a nonprofit that promotes government action on the opioid epidemic through bipartisan support; **Jon Lee Anderson** joins **Dorothy Wickenden** to discuss the battle in Aleppo, and the challenges the Trump Administration will face in the region; **Thomas Pierce** reads his short story “Chairman Spaceman.”

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