THE **NEW YORKER** INSIDE THE POLITICS ISSUE

Hillary Clinton and the Populist Revolt

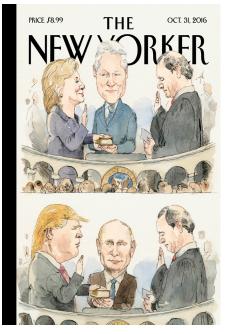
In the October 31, 2016, issue of *The New Yorker*, in "The Unconnected" (p. 48), **George Packer** sits down with Hillary Clinton and considers whether she can win back the American white working class—a group lost by Democrats and exploited by Republicans. Clinton tells Packer that "a vast group of Americans have economic anxiety, and if they think we are only talking about issues that they are not personally connected to, then it's understandable that they would say, 'There's nothing there for me.'" Having once suggested productivity and sturdiness, "working class" now means "downwardly mobile, poor, even pathological," Packer writes. People have "no foundation to stand on; they're unorganized, unheard, unspoken for . . . and no institution is guiltier of this abandonment than the political parties." According to Lawrence Summers, a former Secretary of the Treasury to Bill Clinton, the current Democratic Party is "a coalition of the cosmopolitan élite and diversity," while Republicans combine "social conservatism and an agenda of helping rich people." Neither party is in synch with the white working class: "All these regular people who thought they are kind of the soul of the country—they feel like there was nobody who seemed to be thinking a lot about them," he says. The political analyst Thomas Frank explains that party leaders "fight over sectors important for the national future—Wall Street, Big Pharma, energy, Silicon Valley. That is the contested terrain of American politics. What about the vast majority of people?" Packer writes, "It shouldn't have come as a complete surprise when millions of Americans were suddenly drawn to a crass strongman who tossed out fraudulent promises and gave institutions and élites the middle finger. The fact that so many informed, sophisticated Americans failed to see Donald Trump coming, and then kept writing him off, is itself a sign of a democracy in which no center holds."

Republican Party leaders should have anticipated Trump's rise—"he was created in their laboratory, before he broke free and began to smash everything in sight," Packer writes. Since the eighties, the Republican Party has been an unlikely coalition of downscale whites and business interests, united by a common dislike of the federal government. In 2008, in her proud ignorance, unrestrained narcissism, and contempt for the "establishment," Sarah Palin "was John the Baptist to the coming of Trump." Today, Trump's core voters are revealed by poll after poll to be members of the white working class. Large numbers of Republican voters aren't "constitutional originalists, libertarian free traders, members of the Federalist Society, or devout readers of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page"—they are people who "actually wanted government to do more things that benefitted *them* (as opposed to benefitting people they saw as undeserving)," Packer writes. When asked why so many downwardly mobile white Americans support Donald Trump, Clinton told Packer that voters needed a narrative for their lives, including someone to blame for what had gone wrong: "Donald Trump came up with a fairly simple, easily understood, and to some extent satisfying story. And I think we Democrats have not provided as clear a message about how we see the economy."

For Democrats, the politics of race and class are fraught. "If you focus insistently on class, as Bernie Sanders did at the start of the campaign, you risk seeming to be concerned only with whites. Focus insistently on race, and the Party risks being seen as a factional coalition without universal appeal," Packer writes. Clinton spoke of the limits of an "educationalist" mindset, which she called a "peculiar form of élitism." She continued, "We need to . . . go right after the denigration of jobs and skills that are not college-connected." A four-year degree isn't for everyone, she said; vocational education should be brought back to high schools. "This election has told us that many Americans feel their way of life is disappearing. . . . If nearly half of your compatriots feel deeply at odds with the drift of things, it's a matter of self-interest to try to understand why," Packer writes. Clinton—a lifelong institutionalist at a time of bitter distrust of institutions; a believer in gradual progress faced with violent impatience tells Packer, "When people feel that their government has failed them and the economy isn't working for them, they are ripe for the kind of populist nationalist appeals that we're hearing from Trump."

How the Alt-Right Spreads Fringe Ideas to the Mainstream

In "Trolls for Trump" (p. 42), **Andrew Marantz** reports on the rise of alt-right extremist commentators including Mike Cernovich, the author of the pro-Donald Trump blog Danger and Play, who has spread, among other fringe theories, the notion that Hillary Clinton has a grave neurological condition. Since the advent of the mass media, "professional journalists have been



a bulwark against seditious or far-fetched theories.... Newscasters told us that the world was more or less as we expected it to be, and we more or less believed them," Marantz writes. But today, "the media no longer has the ability to manufacture consent." While people have always expressed extreme views online, the rise of social networks has allowed a virus to "conquer the world in a day." Richard Dawkins, who coined the term "meme," in 1976, tells Marantz, "In the past, I would've been tempted to say, about the Internet, that although everybody has a megaphone, in many cases it's a quiet one.... Now, however ridiculous what you're saying is, if you make it memetically successful, something really bad can spread through the culture."

Marantz travels to California to see Cernovich—whose tweets were seen more than a hundred million times in September alone—at work. Cernovich calls himself an "American nationalist," telling Marantz, "I believe in strong borders, including keeping out Islamic terrorists. If people think that's inherently racist, fine—but I'm an American nationalist, not a white nationalist." Before the current election, Cernovich was known primarily as an Internet misogynist, but he was drawn to political commentary after recognizing a kindred spirit in Donald Trump. By supporting Trump, Marantz writes, Cernovich "could hurt a feminist's chances of becoming President, associate himself with the year's top story, and deploy brawler methods on behalf of someone who is even more ruthless online than he is." Cernovich tells Marantz, "There are a million things wrong with Hillary. . . . But I was looking at the conversation online. . . . I thought that the health stuff would be more visceral, more resonant from a persuasion standpoint, and so I pushed that." When Clinton fainted after attending a memorial service at Ground Zero on September 11th, Cernovich wrote a post called "Complete Timeline of Hillary's Health #HillarysHealth." It got two hundred and forty thousand page views, and #HillarysHealth became a national trending topic on Twitter. "When the goal is to seed social media with misinformation," Marantz writes, "online organizing can be shockingly effective."

Cernovich says that he is "way more influential than some punk blogger at Politico or *The Weekly Standard* who thinks of himself as part of the media élite. Objectively, I *am* the new media." One way to propel a story to prominence, according to Cernovich, is to get it linked by the Drudge Report: "If it's on Drudge, then it's on 'Hannity.' If it's on 'Hannity,' then Brian Stelter's talking about it on CNN." When asked if he'd heard of Cernovich, The Fox Business anchor Lou Dobbs told Marantz, "Absolutely! I follow him on Twitter. Seems very smart." Cernovich says, "The media still thinks of itself as speaking truth to power. What they don't realize is that someone like me is perceived as the new Fourth Estate. . . . It makes journalists crazy, because they used to be in control. They can't control people anymore. Everyone has a voice now."

What Would a Fiction Writer do with the Campaign of 2016?

In "Presumptive" (p. 36), **Thomas Mallon**, the author of novels about Watergate and the last years of Ronald Reagan's Presidency, writes, "My chief wish for the present political moment is to see it turn quickly into a forgotten past, but having already pondered the protagonist's point of view I find myself perversely, maybe even penitentially, thinking about all the considerations one would have to give to a novel about 2016." With comic wit, Mallon goes on to imagine how he would craft this work of historical fiction about the 2016 Presidential race—who would assume the principal point of view (Hillary Clinton, in the "dank gymnasium" of whose mind Mallon feels comfortable), which "minor characters" would earn roles (Debbie Wasserman Schultz and Reince Priebus, "both with names out of Dickens"), and where the novel would end (on Election Night, with Clinton's election-night phone call, "God help the Republic, to Sidney Blumenthal"). "Politics does transfiguring and terrible things to the people who practice it," Mallon writes. "Enough to provide any fiction writer with a career."

Plus: In Comment, *The New Yorker* editors examine the two nominees for President, and offer an official endorsement of Hillary Clinton (p. 31); in Shouts & Murmurs, **Ian Frazier** recounts the disturbing case of the dead witch at a house up the street (p. 43); in a Portfolio with photographs by **Katy Grannan**, fourteen American first-time voters—from red states, blue states, and battleground states—reveal which Presidential candidate they plan to vote for, and why (p. 63); **Kelefa Sanneh** reads several books on the immigration debate (p. 84); **Joan Acocella** reads a new book on the rise and fall of the language Esperanto (p. 90); **Alex Ross** looks ahead to performances featuring music by the composers Kaija Saariaho and Gérard Grisey, in New York City (p. 96); poetry by **Maria Nazos** (p. 38) and **Charles Rafferty** (p. 55); and new fiction by **Anne Carson** (p. 80).

Podcasts: Dorothy Wickenden speaks with **Thomas Mallon** about how he would depict the 2016 election in a work of historical fiction; in a conversation moderated by **Evan Osnos** from the 2016 New Yorker Festival, the political consultant and Goldwater conservative **Roger Stone**, the security analyst **Max Boot**, the historian **Sean Wilentz**, and *The New Yorker's* **Amy Davidson** discuss what would happen if Donald Trump were elected President.

Digital Extras: Additional photographs by Katy Grannan of first-time voters, with audio interviews featured on *The New Yorker's* Instagram account; poetry readings by Maria Nazos and Charles Rafferty; and Richard Brody comments on scenes from Eddie Murphy's "Harlem Nights," from 1989.

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