# NEW YORKER

## IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

#### The Conservative Intellectuals Smitten with Trump

In the January 9, 2017, issue of *The New Yorker*, in "Secret Admirers" (p. 24) **Kelefa Sanneh** reports on the band of pro-Trump intellectuals who suspect that Donald Trump may prove to be a popular and consequential President, defying his critics—many of them conservative. "We have grown accustomed to hearing stories about the liberal bubble, but the real story of this year's election was about the conservative bubble: the results showed how sharply the priorities of the movement's leaders differed from those of their putative followers," Sanneh writes. Sanneh sits down with the writer known only by his pseudonym, Publius Decius Mus, who, in September, published an essay, "The Flight 93 Election," that likened the country to a hijacked airplane, and argued that voting for Trump was like charging the cockpit: the consequences were possibly dire, but the consequences of inaction were surely so. Now that Trump is the President-elect, plenty of prominent conservatives are hoping that he will govern as a reliably conservative Republican; Decius, on the other hand, is hoping that Trump's Presidency will mark the dawn of a new kind of conservative movement. He and other pro-Trump intellectuals have been laboring to establish an ideological foundation for the political tendency sometimes known as Trumpism. In their argument, Trump's unpredictable remarks and seemingly disparate proposals conceal a relatively coherent theory of governance, rooted in conservative political thought, which could provide an antidote to a Republican Party grown rigid and ineffective. Decius thinks that Trump's occasional crudeness—and more than occasional intemperance—are inseparable from his "larger-than-life personality," which was what allowed him to challenge conservative orthodoxy in the first place. "Let's say we get to define what Trumpism is, and hypothesize a perfect candidate who goes out with scripted speeches and policy papers and campaign staff," Decius said. "Would he get the same traction as this guy? The answer, in my opinio

What many Trumpists share is a disdain for what Charles Kesler, editor of the *Claremont Review of Books*, which published Decius's essay, calls "moralistic conservatives," who, he believes, are too concerned with propriety to see that our decaying political system needs a leader like Trump, and has therefore produced one. Mark Bauerlein, an admirer of Decius and a supporter of Trump, tells Sanneh that his hope, however far-fetched, is that Trump, by demolishing traditional Party ideologies, might somehow help people move beyond hardened partisan positions. Sanneh writes, "There is a profoundly asymmetrical relationship between Trump and the Trumpist intellectuals, who must formulate their doctrine without much assistance from its namesake; Trump's political brand is based on his being the kind of guy who would never feel the need to explain himself to a bunch of scholars, no matter how supportive they were."

### A High School Is Experimenting with Technology to Make Football Safer

In "Can Football Be Saved?" (p. 38), **Nicholas Schmidle** reports from St. Thomas Aquinas—a prestigious high school in Fort Lauderdale which has produced more professional football players than any other high school in the country—whose administration has embarked on a potentially radical experiment to reduce concussions and put St. Thomas at the vanguard of football safety. In spite of new regulations, from the professional level on down, which are intended to reduce the number of collisions on the field, football players frequently suffer from concussions, making them more likely to develop some form of dementia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, A.L.S., or chronic traumatic encephalopathy (C.T.E.). Wanting to reduce the risk to his players, St. Thomas's head football coach, Roger Harriott, started using a pair of motorized human-size robots, wrapped in foam, which players could tackle, saving their teammates from unnecessary hits. The robots were designed by Dartmouth engineering students, in collaboration with Buddy Teevens, the college's football coach. Teevens, who, in 2010, outlawed tackling

during Dartmouth practices, told Schmidle, "If we don't change the way we coach the game, we won't have a game to coach." Harriott instituted other changes, including limiting practices to ninety minutes, banning tackling at practice, and using Riddell SpeedFlex helmets, which flex upon impact. During the 2015 season, St. Thomas players did not suffer a single concussion.

In August, Schmidle attended St. Thomas's first regular-season game against Booker T. Washington, a public high school in Miami. Booker T.'s head coach, Tim Harris, still ran tackling sessions, but only once a week, for thirty minutes. Booker T. couldn't afford Riddell SpeedFlex helmets, though Harris was trying to raise funds. And robots? "We wish," he told Schmidle. Michael Irvin, a former Dallas Cowboys wide receiver and a St. Thomas alum, tells Schmidle that football critics failed to appreciate the sport's importance to low-income students: "When we start talking about 'Will parents stop letting their kids play?,' well, some parents will have that opportunity. But many will not. They will say, 'Son, this is your best chance.'" Harris told Schmidle that he regarded football as "one of the best dropout-prevention programs in the world."

Since Harriott revised the practice regimen, there had been no serious injuries outside of games. But when the junior-varsity season ended, Harriott invited a few J.V. players to attend varsity practices—and a call-up collided helmet-to-helmet with Kaleb McCarty, a junior, who suffered a concussion. Harriott said, "This was our first concussion all year. We're doing something right." McCarty told Schmidle that he once dreamed of going to the N.F.L., but now he just wanted to get into a good school: "Football is a vehicle for me to get an education," he said. "I want to try to



### Growing Crops in the City, Without Soil or Natural Light

In "High-Rise Greens" (p. 52), Ian Frazier reports from AeroFarms, a new indoor-agriculture company in Newark, which is on track to ship more than a thousand tons of greens annually—thereby reducing pollution, conserving water, and streamlining distribution. Aero-Farms fills nearly seventy thousand square feet of floor space with a vertical farm, which grows crops—kale, bok choi, arugula, and other salad greens—without soil or natural light, in beds stacked vertically inside a controlled environment. Agricultural runoff is a main cause of pollution in the oceans; vertical farms produce no runoff. Outdoor farming consumes seventy per cent of the planet's freshwater; a vertical farm uses only a small amount of water compared with a regular farm. Today, vertical farms of various designs and sizes exist in Seattle, Detroit, Houston, Brooklyn, Queens, and near Chicago. AeroFarms is one of the largest.

David Rosenberg, AeroFarms' C.E.O., and his co-founder, Marc Oshima, were researching indoor agricultural technology when they learned about the work of Ed Harwood. Harwood, now the company's chief science officer, had first become interested in growing crops indoors in the two-thousand-aughts, and patented an artificial fabric, made of fibres from recycled plastic water bottles, which holds seeds as they germinate, then keeps plants upright as they mature. In 2010, Harwood sold a mini-farm to Philip's Academy Charter School in Newark—the original prototype still produces crops six or seven times every school year. Harwood recalls when Rosenberg and Oshima first approached him about joining forces: "They said they wanted their first farm and their world headquarters to be in Newark, and I told them, Tve got a grow tower in a school cafeteria in Newark!" That's when I knew this was going to work out."

Today, AeroFarms supplies greens to the dining rooms at the *Times*, Goldman Sachs, and several other corporate accounts in New York. The greens can be purchased retail at two local supermarkets, but the company plans to have its greens on shelves soon at other stores in the area. "Greens that come from California ride in trucks for days. The driving time from AeroFarms' farm to the Newark ShopRite is about eleven minutes," Frazier writes. The company plans to put vertical farms in metro areas all over the country and eventually around the world, so that its distribution will always be local, thereby saving transportation costs and fuel and riding the enthusiasm for the locally grown. A few weeks before the vertical farm in Newark was to harvest its first official crop, Frazier walked through the building with Rosenberg. "We are so far above everybody else in this technology," Rosenberg said. "It will take years for the rest of the world to catch up to where we already are now."

### Mike Mills's Anti-Hollywood Family Films

In "California Dreamin" (p. 32), **Tad Friend** profiles the writer-director Mike Mills, whose latest film, "20th Century Women," reimagines his complex relationship with his mother, the kind of deeply personal theme that imbues his other work. A former competitive skate-boarder and punk artist, Mills made his name designing T-shirts and album covers. He transitioned to shooting commercials and then, in the early aughts, to films. "Beginners," released in 2011, featured a character based on Mills, and one based on his father, an art historian who, after becoming a widower in his seventies, came out as gay, bloomed briefly, then died. In "20th Century Women," Mills recasts his mother as a Salem-smoking architectural draftsman named Dorothea, who lives with her teen-age son, Jamie—another Mills stand-in—in Santa Barbara in the late seventies. Dorothea adores Jamie, but her Depression-era rigor precludes her saying so. Annette Bening, who portrays Dorothea, observes, "Female characters in film are judged harshly, so we have to love her." Late in the film, Jamie dances with Dorothea, just as, late in "Beginners," father and son dance. "To have reconstituted my parents as movie stars, and to dance with them on film, is, psychologically, moving in the right direction," Mills tells Friend.

Mills rejects the customary reliance on an eventful plot—his interest is in people and their trajectories. In "20th Century Women," the five main characters periodically narrate their own and one another's biographies. "He may cast the pretty faces and get the biggest stars he can get, which to me is sort of ad-y—he can sell a feeling," Miranda July, the writer and filmmaker and Mills's wife, tells Friend. "But I'm agog at how little he cares about storytelling conventions, like suspense and reveals. He's ultimately more experimental than I am." Yet with a seven-million-dollar budget, "20th Century Women" has commercial responsibilities. "I'd guess if we made twelve to fifteen million in box-office I'm still in the game, and if I'm up in the twenties that would be huge," Mills says. He notes, though, that "every dollar you spend on a movie is a dollar further away from art and deeper into commerce." Meanwhile, as much as July loves her husband's work, she remains mystified by the gap between his actual childhood and these glowing portraits onscreen. "It's almost what you would do in some spiritual practice," she says. "A devotion to an absence."

Plus: In Comment, Jelani Cobb examines the history of civil disobedience in the U.S. and considers what kind of resistance the Trump era will bring (p. 19); in the Financial page, James Surowiecki notes a new kind of corporate boycott, one driven by politics rather than corporate practices (p. 23); in Shouts & Murmurs, Jena Friedman shares an old family recipe: "Preheat the planet to record temperatures to accelerate climate change, and trigger a global refugee crisis" (p. 31); Joan Accella reads the German writer Gregor Hens's memoir, "Nicotine" (p. 66); Jerome Groopman reads Charles Fernyhough's "The Voices Within" (p. 70); Alex Ross listens to the Russian pianist Daniil Trifonov (p. 74); poetry by Ellen Bass (p. 26) and John Kinsella (p. 58); and new fiction by Yiyun Li (p. 60).

**Digital Extras:** watch **Jorge Colombo** draw this week's cover; see additional photographs of the St. Thomas Aquinas football team and facilities; and listen to **Ellen Bass** and **John Kinsella** read their poems.

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