

EVICITION DEFENSE || THE 100-YEAR WAR ON PALESTINE
NAWAL ARJINI KALEEM HAWA

THE Nation.

AUGUST 10/17, 2020



**Has a Real
Sexual
Harassment
Problem**

BRYCE COVERT

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Letters

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Demilitarize the Police

Re “How to Make ‘Defund the Police’ a Reality” [Bryce Covert, July 13/20]: We of course need to change American policing in light of its bloody, racist history, but we cannot stop there and must get to its centuries-old roots in empire. Let’s make it “demilitarize the police.” That opens the focus to include America’s deeper need: Defund the military and the CIA, our international “police” spending in the trillions, which benefits only the global war and weapons industry.

Audit the Pentagon. Cut the budgets for the Defense Department, the National Security Agency, the CIA, and other military-rooted unaccountable agencies that provide corporate welfare to the weapons cartels.

Opening that vault would mean we could expand and improve social services such as mental health and free or low-cost pre-K and college education and provide universal basic health care. There would be funds to improve our roads, bridges, renewable energy investments, and public services to benefit all Americans.

Imagine being able to replace America’s empty rhetoric of human rights with measurable change that demonstrates visible commitment to those values.

BOB SHEA
ROCHESTER, N.Y.

The Case for Public Banks

Destin Jenkins makes a vital proposal in “Just Investment” [July 13/20] that

we need “to leverage completely new financial mechanisms” for investment in our cities’ infrastructure. But he overlooks the most effective tool at hand. Many cities—like San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle—have taken steps toward establishing public banks, which are designed to lend for infrastructure at favorable rates. Cities and states need to borrow this model, which is successfully and widely used for infrastructure in Europe and Asia.

Jenkins makes the case well that the traditional use of bonds to borrow from Wall Street will only sink cities ever deeper into a debt trap. A bank founded by a city with its own long-range vision can help finance schools, road and rail, and affordable housing while building its capital base and keeping its money at home. It is a stable formula. Look to the example of the public Bank of North Dakota, which has built its capital over 100 years by prudently lending for its state’s development. Amazingly, it is the only public bank in use in the United States.

DENNIS J. ORTBLAD
Board Member, Public Banking Institute
SEATTLE

Wrestlemania

Re “Circus Maximus” by Patricia J. Williams, July 13/20: The analogy of Donald Trump as a pro-wrestling entertainer goes even further. World Wrestling Entertainment scripts rivalries between the performers,

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How to Move Biden Left

Can Joe Biden be moved to the left on the issues that matter most and are critical to the sort of mass mobilization of voters that might transform our politics and our governance? Yes. That's the best takeaway from the presumptive Democratic nominee's July 14 announcement of a climate and jobs plan that would

have him move immediately as president to invest \$2 trillion in developing clean energy infrastructure and a host of other responses to the climate crisis. "We're not just going to tinker around the edges," Biden declared. "We're going to make historic investments that will seize the opportunity and meet this moment in history."

That's a far cry from what Biden was saying during his bid for the Democratic presidential nomination earlier this year. Then, he pushed back against climate activists and dismissed an ambitious plan by his chief rival, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, to "launch the decade of the Green New Deal, a 10-year mobilization to avert climate catastrophe during which climate change, justice, and equity will be factored into virtually every area of policy, from immigration to trade to foreign policy and beyond." Asked about the Sanders plan in January, Biden claimed, falsely, that "not a single solitary scientist thinks it will work."

Now, Biden is talking about making a good deal of it work—borrowing ideas from Sanders and from Washington Governor Jay Inslee, who as a 2020 contender ripped the former vice president for failing to respond to the crisis with the urgency that it required. Sunrise Movement cofounder Varshini Prakash, who served on the Biden-Sanders climate unity task force that prodded Biden on the issue, summed up the reaction from activists who once objected to his approach. "It's no secret that we've been critical of [his] plans and commitments in the past," she said. "Today, he's responded to many of those criticisms: dramatically increasing the scale and urgency of investments, filling in details on how he'd achieve environmental justice and create good union jobs, and promising immediate action—on day 1, in his first 100 days, in his first term, in the next decade—not just some far off goals."

Julian Brave NoiseCat, the director of Green

New Deal Strategy for the research group Data for Progress, suggested that "Biden's clean energy and environmental justice plans are, in my view, a Green New Deal in all but name." Green Party presidential nominee Howie Hawkins disagreed, arguing that "Biden is nowhere close to the GND. Besides having a timeline for emissions more than 20 years slower, he leaves out the other half, which is an economic bill of rights—guaranteed jobs, single payer healthcare, housing, etc." There's still a good debate to be had about whether Biden is prepared to meet the challenges he'll face if elected. But *The Washington Post* noted that the Democrat's recent policy pronouncements on climate change and other issues represent "a significant move to the left from where Biden and his party were only recently."

That movement is what matters. Give Biden credit for breaking loose from some of the centrist dogmas that bogged Democrats down in 2016 and that are scorchingly out of touch with a pandemic moment that is witnessing mass unemployment. But give activists more credit for making him do so. Prakash was right when she said, "Our movement, alongside environmental justice communities and frontline workers, has taught Joe Biden to talk the talk." That's important in an election year when an action agenda is necessary and popular. She was also right when she said progressives must keep pushing Biden to be bolder—and better—in addressing the climate crisis, systemic racism, and the rot that extends from decades of deference to Wall Street and the military-industrial complex. The hopeful news is that Biden, in stark contrast to Trump, responds to pushing. "What we've shown," Prakash said, "is that when we organize, we can change the terrain of possible, and the common sense of society."

JOHN NICHOLS

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170%

Increase in the cost of policing in the US from 1977 to 2017

\$7.4B

Value of equipment that has flowed from the Pentagon to police departments since 1997

41%

Share of the Oakland, Calif., general fund dedicated to police expenditures

\$220M

Amount paid by New York City taxpayers to settle legal issues involving the NYPD in fiscal year 2019

809K

Number of police officers and detectives in the US in 2018

616K

Number of middle school teachers in the US in 2018

5¢

Amount that Chicago spends on its Department of Family and Support Services for every dollar earmarked for the police

—Daniel Fernandez

Eviction Resistance

Fighting for Black housing is fighting for Black lives.

“This is very lovely,” Imani Henry said, stepping out of the gate at 1214 Dean Street in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn. Though it was past midnight, a crowd of more than 30 people remained out of those who had gathered to defend the tenants of the building from an illegal eviction. “A typical part of our lives is illegal lockouts,” said Henry, the founder of Equality for Flatbush, the anti-gentrification and anti-police-brutality organization that initially sent out a call to action. That night, almost 100 people had assembled outside the house to ensure the tenants could stay. Even after a season of Covid-19 and a month of racial justice uprisings, this felt new—as one person at the blockade put it, like “the start of a long summer.”

During the Great Depression, neighborhood eviction defenses like this one were widespread and well organized. In the century since, blockades have occasionally popped up in cities across the country. The Los Angeles Tenants Union reversed a lockout in May. But with the looming expiration of the few protections that tenants have been given during the pandemic, as many as 23 million renters are at risk of eviction. In the weeks since the LATU blockade succeeded, millions of people took to the streets in anger over state racism. On July 7, frustration and desperation took form as a neighborhood turned its focus on a pair of white landlords and the mostly Black, mostly female, queer, and trans tenants they were trying to push out of their homes.

Xander Roos, a member of the Legal Aid Society’s housing unit, was one of the first people at 1214 Dean. He informed the landlord—Gennaro Brooks-Church, who owns the building with his ex-wife, Loretta Gendville—that it was illegal to evict anyone in New York state without due process. There were no marshals present, tenants had not been served, and the courts were closed to new eviction cases.

As the crowd grew, tenants told their stories of what happened that day. After months of harassment, Brooks-Church, Gendville, and their children showed up at the property unannounced, threatened them with eviction, and barged into their rooms. Gendville laid hands on the tenants, misgendered them, removed their Wi-Fi, and told her teenage daughter they were squatters. A U-Haul took a mattress away, and furniture was thrown onto the street.

The crowd relied on the directions of Danni Inman, a young local resident. (Inman uses “they” pronouns.) Like many others, they went to the blockade after seeing it on Instagram. “I just came out to show support,” they said. “They asked me to speak, then at some point, I was in charge.”

When the police showed up, the crowd redirected its anger. Chants emerged as officers went inside the build-

ing unmasked: “No landlords, no cops! All evictions have to stop!” Although the officers agreed the tenants had a right to stay, they wouldn’t make Brooks-Church, who had remained in the building since the morning, leave. “We’ve just been shown that police don’t protect us. They protect property,” Inman told the crowd. They directed the protesters to go inside as the police van left. People linked arms, forcing Brooks-Church out onto the porch. He eventually retreated to his SUV and drove off.

The mood was jubilant. Someone reminded the protesters that this was only the beginning, that it would be a wearying period of evictions and harassment, but the crowd seemed energized. A Crown Heights Tenant Union organizer was optimistic about the coming months, even as she acknowledged that larger landlords would be harder to fight. The blockade’s success restored the hope of protests from earlier in the summer. As Inman said, “Black homes matter.” Fighting for Black housing is fighting for Black lives.

Henry is 51 with long roots in local activism. “Police and landlords, developers have no shame, so just shame them,” he said. As he spoke, people behind him were texting their friends, posting on Twitter, and alerting their Instagram followers to the landlords’ other businesses.

For the protesters, police brutality and the behavior of the landlords were connected.

Inman left soon after midnight, citing exhaustion and the need to prepare for a job interview the next morning. (Like many people there, they had been laid off at the beginning of the pandemic.) Someone led one more chant: “We love you, Danni.” A couple left and returned with coffee. Henry mentioned wanting something sweet to drink. Within 15 minutes, someone arrived with a tote bag full of Gatorade. By 2 AM, dozens of people were spread over the sidewalk and stoop, quietly chatting and smoking.

Nobody from the landlords’ team returned the next day. The blockade turned into a mutual aid station and cafeteria, with tables in an empty parking spot loaded with food. There was a medical shelf with first aid supplies, masks, and hand sanitizer. The furniture the landlords had thrown on the street was repurposed, with a sofa propped by the building door for potential use as a barricade.

For the protesters, police brutality and the behavior of the landlords were intimately connected. State protection from displacement would never come fast enough to prevent it from happening. The crowd had asked, “Who keeps us safe? Who fights for us?” As the cops left and Brooks-Church returned home, the answer was clear: “We keep us safe. We fight for us.”

Relying on neighborhood assemblies to defend tenants from landlords and armed police seemed impossible a few months ago. But at 1214 Dean Street, a mass of angry people came together to do just that. As tenant unions begin to organize, blockades may become a common sight across the country. I asked Inman if they saw themselves becoming more active in community organizing. “Oh, absolutely,” they said. But first, “I’ll be here tomorrow and the next day and the next day if I have to.”

NAWAL ARJINI

Nawal Arjini is a contributing writer for The Nation.

Asking for a Friend



Liza Featherstone

A Big Fat Covid Wedding

Dear Liza,

My fiancé and I are doctors in medical specialties affected by the coronavirus in a midsize US city. Like so many in health care and in the world beyond, we've spent the past few months horrified by this disease and shocked that some people don't seem to be taking it seriously. Given that we regularly care for Covid-positive people at work, we recognize that we could be vectors, and we've been as vigilant as possible in our own lives.

My fiancé's sister is getting married this month. Despite our frequently voiced discomfort, the current plan is for a 95-person wedding—grandparents and all!—with absolutely no Covid-19 precautions in the groom's parents' backyard (outside, at least, but their home will be open to everyone). The engaged couple get their news from far more conservative sources than we do, don't know people who have been sick, and don't think it can happen to them. Ideally, we could talk this out and end up with a wedding that, though perhaps not exactly what we would do, would at least feel a little more responsible. Unfortunately, it appears that will not happen, and their only concession has been to say that they will understand if we decide not to attend.

It feels as if any decision we make is wrong. My fiancé desperately wants to be at his sister's wedding, but it is hard to imagine spending 36 hours in a series of situations that are risky and socially negligent. It's also hard to imagine not being there at all. Do we go? If we do go, do we wear masks and attempt to physically distance despite the fact that this will be completely out of place and seen as a political statement? If we don't go, how do we bow out gracefully while preserving what we can of our relationships?
—Believer in Science

Dear Believer,

I sympathize; decisions like this one are extremely stressful, especially when they involve people who don't interpret the pandemic in the way that we do. As painful as it will be for your fiancé to skip his sister's wedding, I don't think you should go. It would be too stressful to enjoy and would put you and many others at risk. I also suspect you'd resent it in the long run, since your fiancé's family has made no effort to meet you even partway. The only good news about their intransigence is that you now have nothing to feel guilty about. You and your boyfriend should send an especially nice gift and write the couple a heartfelt letter. In the letter, note that given your constant exposure

at work, you're worried about infecting family members and other wedding guests. Let the couple know you love them and that this has been a painful decision. Don't reproach them for their ignorance or for being jerks about this. It's their wedding, and you want a good relationship with the family in the long run. Emphasize that you'd love to take them to dinner or on a weekend away to celebrate their marriage when this is all over. Then don't torture yourself any longer! Let it go.

Dear Liza,

One of my BFFs has a \$3 million home in New York City and left it behind in March to ride out the pandemic with his family in a \$7,000 per month house in the country, where he can work from home and live the life. I'm feeling much class resentment toward this friend, as my family can barely afford to live in the city and I have to breathe Covid-19 air at work every day. Said friend has a Wall Street job, which, in my eyes, is a job with no purpose other than to generate money for the rich. All I keep thinking is that the \$7,000 a month could have been used to pay rent for three or four of the many needy families who now face eviction. But then I also think, "What if I had that kind of money? Maybe I would only think of myself and flee the city too." What should I do with my feelings about this?
—Essential Worker

Dear Essential,

You're right to feel resentful. It's enraging that people whose work exists solely to enrich their fellow one-percenters get to ride out the pandemic safely and luxuriously, while essential workers like you, for all the cheering and hero worship tossed your way, struggle, risk your lives, and even die. The situation reveals the appalling
(continued on page 8)

Questions?
Ask Liza at
TheNation
.com/article/
asking-for-a-
friend



Elie Mystal



Are We Ready to Be the Elders?

As legends like John Lewis pass away, it is up to us to tend the flame they lit.

My mother was born in 1950 in segregated Mississippi. The first time she met the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., she was at home after church in the late '50s when he visited my grandmother and her young family. My grandmother was a respected schoolteacher, and a lot of those civil rights leaders understood that getting in good with the teachers was a good way to connect with the young people.

My mother has a living memory of events I've only read about. Periodically, she will read my columns and tell me that I got something wrong about our history—not the facts of it but the sense of it. I write in faded tones about what she experienced in vibrant color.

My father was part of the committee that wrote the national platforms for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the late '60s. He started a Black-owned newspaper covering Harlem. Later he was the first Black person elected to the legislature in New York's Suffolk County. He died a couple of years ago.

The death of John Lewis on July 17 is a national example of what many Black people my age are experiencing personally or will experience soon: the death of living memory. The greatest Black generation, the generation of heroes and heroines who fought fascism and oppression here on American soil, is passing on. The loss of a national icon like Lewis is devastating, but every day we lose somebody—somebody who integrated a school or boycotted a bus line or broke down a barrier younger people don't even know existed.

As these elders die and become ancestors, I wonder if my generation is ready to become the new elders. I think of my Black generation in far more expansive ways than the terms "boomer," "Gen X," and "millennial," which speak primarily to white cultural moments. My generation is the one that benefited from but did not have to fight for the Civil Rights Act. We lived through the dismantling of legal discrimination but were also alive to witness the Reagan-era counterattack against such gains. My generation has had to spend just as much time defending rights that were won by our parents as it has fighting for an expansion of social justice for our children.

My generation will likely die in a less just world than the one we were born into. While I doubt our world will devolve into the full horrors of the pre-civil-rights days—Lewis's legacy is secure and victorious—on all of the big fights, from segregation to voting rights, people my age have seen more losses than gains.

And so I wonder if we are ready to tend the flames of justice and equality our parents lit. I wonder if we, who have spent so much time in a defensive crouch, can be good guides along the road to the mountaintop.

My panic at being handed the baton is tempered by looking at the community of Black excellence that is already here and more visible than ever. The next generation of Black leaders and thinkers and elders is with us, and it is leading. The Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II teaches a clinic on moral clarity every time he opens his mouth. Any-

time I wonder what James Baldwin would have said about a current issue, I need only look to what Nikole Hannah-Jones is saying right now. I don't need to pull out a Ouija board to ask Thurgood Marshall how to fight for legal equality, because Sherrilyn Ifill has an e-mail address. And while I have to share him with white people, Barack Hussein Obama is a Black elder 400 years in the making.

One area in which my generation has surpassed our parents is in recognizing women so that they can lead from the front. Black women have always been leaders in the civil rights movement, but they have not always been honored as such. My generation has done at least somewhat better than all the previous ones (a low bar) at not standing in their way. From Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi to Patrisse Cullors and so many others, women are defining the terms of social justice for this generation. The movement is finally removing impediments so that all available warriors can be their full selves in this fight.

Still, when it comes to visionary leadership and righteous impatience, my generation has nothing on the next group up. The violence and oppression of the Jim Crow era forged the greatest generation, and right now the brutality and bigotry of the Trump era are forging a whole generation of superheroes on our streets and in our classrooms.

Young people today have the energy and vitality my parents once did. They are unwilling to accept injustice, whether it comes from the police, the media, or the fossil fuel titans destroying the earth. They're building multiethnic, intersectional coalitions, and they will soon have the votes to reshape this country in whatever ways they deem necessary. They don't remember what the world was like in 1945—or even 1985—and thus are unencumbered by it. The future is theirs, and they have leaders who are ready to seize it.

My generation, most likely, is merely an interstitial one, existing between two great social justice movements. Our job is maybe not to coach the young people but to cut up some orange slices and cheer them on as they take the field. And maybe, when they ask us, we can do what all elders do: Tell stories. I do not have a lived experience of the civil rights era. But I have stayed up way past my bedtime listening to those who do. Other people collect recipes from their mothers; I collect stories. So I can't tell you how to make her potato salad, but I can tell you that *Brown v. Board of Education* didn't do squat to help a Black woman check out a book from a library in the South. It will be my job to tell her grandchildren about that when they learn about the case in school.

So much is lost when our heroes pass away. It is now on my generation to remember. ■



The death of John Lewis is a national example of what many Black people my age are experiencing: the death of living memory.

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WITH **BILL MILLER**

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He is the Principal of Miller and Associates International Media Consultants, which created the Global Connection Television concept.

Bill developed an interest in international issues and the UN when he served as a US Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic. In his first year he worked as a community developer in a remote rural area; his second year he was Professor of Social Work at the Madre y Maestra University in Santiago, the country's second largest city.



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logic of American-style capitalism.

To ease your resentment, you could demand that for every insensitive reference he makes to his garish lifestyle, whether on Instagram or in conversation, he must make a \$1,000 contribution to an organization fighting evictions or to a union strike fund. If you don't want to be so confrontational—for most Americans, class differences aren't fodder for comfortable banter, even among close friends—consider gently turning his wealth to your advantage. Perhaps your family can use his fancy NYC

home when he's not there. Some families are riding out the pandemic together in pods, or groups of people who spend time indoors only with one another. Can you pod with his family, at least for the summer? This would enable you to get out of the city and enjoy their lovely country rental on the weekends you don't need to be at work.

I love your effort to put yourself in his shoes, however, because it helps us get to the heart of the problem: Our system rewards selfishness. Now that he's made money, your friend should quit and use his privilege to contribute to society—or

at least give tons of money away. Suggesting that he do this might make you feel better, but in our present world, the risks and penalties for not being wealthy are so high (especially during a pandemic and an economic downturn) that it's unlikely he will sacrifice all that much. Besides, capitalist men often morally justify their work by feeling good about how well they are providing for their families. Try persuading him to join a socialist organization as a high-end donor. That way he can contribute to the eventual elimination of his own parasitical class. ■

1940-2020

Rest in Power, John Lewis

John Lewis made one of his last public appearances in a lifetime of struggle for racial, social, and economic justice on a Sunday morning in June. Though he was wrestling with the cancer that would take his life on Friday, July 17, at age 80, he wanted to see Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, D.C., where painters had just completed a giant mural covering a two-block stretch of 16th Street leading to the White House.

Near the spot where authorities had violently removed peaceful protesters so that President Donald Trump could do a ham-handed photo op in front of the parish house of historic St. John's Episcopal Church, Lewis celebrated the right to assemble and petition for the redress of grievances.

He hailed the mural spelling out "Black lives matter" as "a mighty, powerful, and strong message to the rest of the world that we will get there."

Tributes to Lewis have recalled a commitment to fighting injustice that began more than 60 years ago, when the young civil rights campaigner marched with Martin Luther King Jr., delivered the most militant address at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and was brutally beaten by police while helping to lead the "Bloody Sunday" march for voting rights on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala. But Lewis never stopped marching, speaking, and stirring up "good trouble"—as an appointee in the Jimmy Carter administration, an Atlanta City Council member, and since 1987, a member of Congress who used his prominence to amplify the messages of activists in the United States and abroad.

Lewis, a self-described "off-the-charts liberal," was a passionate critic of militarism, a determined advocate for economic justice, an early champion of LGBTQ rights, and the House of Representatives' great champion of voting rights. His history made him an iconic figure in the House. When Barack Obama was inaugurated in 2009 as the nation's first Black president, he handed Lewis a photo on which he had written, "Because of you, John." When Trump was inaugurated in 2017, Lewis announced that he would not attend, sparking a boycott of the ceremony.

Lewis could have rested on his laurels as the last surviving speaker at the March on Washington and a living connection to 20th century history. Yet he chose to keep making history in the

21st century. He understood the power of forging links between the past and the present. He understood that he could bring moral authority to new debates, and he spent the final months of his life doing just that.

A few days after the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, Lewis recalled the murder of Emmett Till, the Black child whose lynching—and the outcry that it sparked—underscored the urgency of the civil rights movement for Lewis and so many others. "Sixty-five years have passed, and I still remember the face of young Emmett Till. It was 1955. I was 15 years old—just a year older than him. What happened that summer in Money, Mississippi, and the months that followed—the recanted accusation, the sham trial, the dreaded verdict—shocked the country to its core. And it helped spur a series of non-violent events by everyday people who demanded better from our country," he wrote on May 30. "Despite real progress, I can't help but think of young

Emmett today as I watch video after video after video of unarmed Black Americans being killed, and falsely accused."

Praising the activists who took the Black Lives Matter protests to the streets, Lewis promised, "They're going to help redeem the soul of America." The congressman shared their frustration with the persistence of systemic racism. "To the rioters here in Atlanta and across the country: I see you, and I hear you. I know your pain, your rage, your sense of despair and hopelessness," he said. Yet Lewis, a former chair of the Student Nonviolent

Coordinating Committee, counseled, "History has proven time and again that non-violent, peaceful protest is the way to achieve the justice and equality that we all deserve."

No epitaph will be sufficient for John Lewis except, perhaps, that he never stopped making history or calling on others to do the same. Even as he neared the end of his seven-month battle with pancreatic cancer, there he was, framing the House debate before a vote to address police violence. "Today, young people are taking up the mantle in a movement that I know all too well," he said on June 25. "All over the world, communities are once again joining the call for racial equity and equality. While their feet march towards justice, their pain, their frustration, and petitions cannot—must not—be ignored. The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act provides us with an opportunity to practice what we preach. While we use our speech to advance American ideals such as freedom, liberty, and justice for all, we must use our hands to implement these values." ■

JOHN NICHOLS



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INEQUALITY

Taxing the Rich

A lot of people talk about inequality, but Make the Road New York wants Governor Andrew Cuomo and the state legislature to do something about it. An immigrant-led group whose storefront centers provide meals, meeting space, English classes, and youth programs, MRNY wants New York state's 119 resident billionaires to pay their share of the state's \$13 billion budget shortfall due to the economic collapse brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. As Americans for Tax Fairness points out, the net worth of New York's billionaires jumped by \$77.3 billion during just the first three months of the pandemic—when at least 2.5 million New Yorkers lost their jobs and more than 32,000 lost their lives.

The campaign has been spearheaded by Jessica Ramos, a state senator from Queens who recently introduced S8277, a bill to tax the unrealized capital gains of New York's wealthiest residents to create a "worker bailout fund" for people not eligible for federal stimulus funds or unemployment insurance. Although Cuomo has long taken pride in cutting taxes, MRNY argues that with already insufficient safety nets shredded by the pandemic, a change in direction is overdue. That's an argument endorsed by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who in a campaign video released this month tells the governor, "It's time to stop protecting billionaires, and it's time to start working for working families."

—D.D. Guttenplan



Katha Pollitt



An Unhappy Family

The president's niece dishes the dirt on her Uncle Donald.

The title of Mary Trump's book about her family, *Too Much and Never Enough*, expresses my feelings perfectly. I've read way too much about her uncle Donald and his awful relatives, to say nothing of his wives and girlfriends, but somehow it's never enough. I keep thinking I'm finally going to understand him as a thinking, feeling human being, but I never do. Or is it that I only pretend to want understanding, when what I really want is just more dirt?

There's plenty of both in this well-written tell-all by Mary Trump, the daughter of Donald's older brother, Fred Jr. A psychologist with a PhD, she offers a portrait of family dysfunction that rings grimly true: Fred Sr., the cruel, egotistical, tyrannical father—aided by his wife, the distant, sometimes sickly, and probably very miserable Mary Anne—destroyed in his five children much (or in Donald's case, all) of their capacity for empathy, curiosity, kindness, or independent action. Winning paternal approval was all that mattered, but only Donald managed to get a smattering of it. He did so by becoming a flashier version of his dad, whose deprecations as a builder and landlord in Brooklyn and Queens were so notorious that one of his tenants, Woody Guthrie, wrote a song about him.

Mary Trump may be out for revenge, but who wouldn't be? She blames the "sociopathy" of Fred Sr. for destroying her father. Fred Jr. was a happy-go-lucky guy who wasn't cut out for the family business and made a bid for freedom by trying to become an airline pilot before being claimed by alcoholism, which killed him at only 42. Fred Jr.'s downward slide is chilling to read about: He was all but ignored by his parents, who had grudgingly taken him in as an adult—at one point they made him sleep on a cot in the attic of their enormous mansion—but failed to get him the high-quality medical care to which they had ready access as major hospital donors. His siblings abandoned him as well, and he died alone while Donald and his sister Elizabeth went to the movies.

Years before, Fred Sr. had essentially arranged for Mary's mother, Linda, to be massively cheated in her divorce settlement, leaving her and her children—Fred Sr.'s grandchildren!—trapped in a drafty, rundown apartment in one of his Queens developments. To cap it off, Fred Sr. cut Mary

and her brother out of his will, and her aunts and uncles eventually forced her and her brother to accept a comparatively modest settlement. Years later, she took many boxes of legal papers to *The New York Times*, which in 2018—finally!—published a long, damning investigation of the Trump family's dubious tax dodging maneuvers.

There's a lot of psychiatric talk here about emotional child abuse and family dysfunction. In Mary Trump's view, Donald is still a "terrified little boy." There are lessons, too. For example, if you want kids only to perpetuate your empire, do the world a favor and stay childless. Prob-

ably some version of her diagnosis is correct. Something, after all, makes monsters out of sweet little babies. But if you just want to hate the president, there's no shortage of fresh material: His older sister Maryanne did his homework for him, and he paid someone to take his SATs. He and Ivana were cheapskates; they gave Mary and Linda regifted items for Christmas, including a handbag with

a used Kleenex inside and a food basket with a missing tin. (Could it have been caviar?) He reportedly helped Maryanne, a now-retired federal judge, get a position on the federal bench by summoning help from Roy Cohn. Fred Sr. floated one of Donald's failing Atlantic City casinos by buying millions of dollars' worth of chips and not gambling with them. There has to be some kind of Nobel Prize in hypocrisy, though, for Donald's treatment of his sister-in-law Linda. The book recounts him saying that it might have been better to cut her off from the relatively modest family support she got after the divorce and make her "stand on her own two feet." This is from a man whose family fortune was based on funding from government housing programs plus millions in tax finagling and whose entire career was bankrolled by his father.

Over the course of the book, Mary Trump has many ways of describing her uncle. He is "completely unqualified," "crass," "irresponsible," and "despicable." He is a "narcissist," afflicted with

and her brother out of his will, and her aunts and uncles eventually forced her and her brother to accept a comparatively modest settlement. Years later, she took many boxes of legal papers to *The New York Times*, which in 2018—finally!—published a long, damning investigation of the Trump family's dubious tax dodging maneuvers.



If you want kids only to perpetuate your empire, do the world a favor and stay childless.

what might be “antisocial personality disorder” or “dependent personality disorder.” He is perpetually “lying, spinning, and obfuscating,” telling the “lies, misrepresentations, and fabrications that are the sum total of who my uncle is.” He acts with both “cruelty” and “possibly criminal negligence.” He “understands nothing about history, constitutional principles, geopolitics, diplomacy (or anything else, really).” And that’s just the first 15 pages.

For his rise to the highest office in the land, she blames the media, which bought the myth of him as a brash, can-do, self-made man and sexual dynamo; the banks, which funded his dubious ventures; and his siblings, none of whom warned the public what a disaster he would be as president. Maryanne, who might have made a difference, Mary Trump thinks, as a respected public figure had she spoken up during the campaign, not only remained silent (“she had her own secrets to keep”) but

also voted for him out of “family loyalty.”

Mary Trump, who supported Hillary Clinton in 2016, worries about the upcoming election. “A large minority of people still confuse his arrogance for strength, his false bravado for accomplishment, and his superficial interest in them for charisma.” This is true. Amazingly, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic—which Trump has botched completely, with unemployment reaching highs not seen since the Great Depression and the specter of mass evictions on the horizon—Trump’s support hovers around 40 percent. That may not be enough to win the election, even with the disenfranchisement of many likely Joe Biden supporters and the wild card that is our disastrous Electoral College system. But when the election is over, we will still have to face the fact that four in 10 Americans took his side.

Will Mary Trump succeed in changing minds where so many others have failed? I wish. ■

Mary Trump, who supported Hillary in 2016, worries about the upcoming election.

SNAPSHOT / KATIE ORLINSKY

Monumental Joy

On July 4, a water balloon fight breaks out at the unofficially renamed Marcus-David Peters Circle, the site of a Robert E. Lee memorial in Richmond, Va. In recent weeks, a monument to the Confederacy has become a powerful place of protest, a vibrant space for expression, and a living, breathing work of art.

Calvin Trillin
Deadline Poet

WARTIME PRESIDENT

“Trump calls himself ‘wartime president’ over coronavirus pandemic.”
—CBS

“The Trump Administration is trying to block billions of dollars for states to conduct testing and contact tracing.”
—*The Washington Post*

This self-styled wartime president’s disposed
To mock all masks and states that keep bars closed.
A list of acts like these we should compile,
In case someday we hold a war crimes trial.





**Has a Real
Sexual
Harassment
Problem**

BRYCE COVERT

The Nation.

LOIS JONES STARTED AT MCDONALD'S WHEN SHE WAS IN HER 20S. IT WAS HER FIRST JOB. "I LOVED WORKING FOR MCDONALD'S," SHE SAID. "DON'T MAKE NO MISTAKES ABOUT IT. I CAN TAKE SOME FOOD AND TURN IT INTO A SUNDAY DINNER. AS LONG AS I'M IN THE KITCHEN, I'M HAPPY."

But two decades later, all that changed. A male coworker at her North Carolina location walked up behind her one day and started to rub his crotch against her. "It caught me by surprise," she said. "To be honest, I didn't even think people like that even existed.... It was just so freaky, nasty, and scary."

It was the start of her recurring sexual harassment. Nearly every time the coworker saw her, he made inappropriate comments like telling her she had a "big ass" and "You can't wait until I put my tongue in your ass," rubbed up against her, or grabbed her pants. One day as she was leaving the refrigerated room where meat and produce are stored, he tried to push her back in. When Jones fought back, he told her that she was "strong as hell" but that he could "pin me down in there," according to a legal complaint she filed. She was able to escape. Later that year, he pulled his penis out of his pants and pressed it against her back. The same day, he pressed his face against her buttocks. "I felt like I was raped with my clothes on," she told me.

Jones wasn't the only woman the man harassed. She saw him doing the same things to other female coworkers on multiple occasions. At first, she didn't say anything because she assumed her managers knew about his behavior and hadn't bothered to address it. But eventually she told her shift manager. She was brushed off. "I complained several times about him, and they just threw up their hands," she said. "They didn't care." Instead, her supervisors laughed and even implied she was lying. They also retaliated against her, she alleged; she stopped receiving overtime pay for extra hours, was treated more harshly, and had her requests for time off denied.

"Some days I didn't even want to go to work just because I knew I had to work with him," Jones said. At one point in our conversation, she had to stop talking because she started to cry. "I hate reliving it because it was so bad," she said through the tears. "It hurts me. It hurts."

Quitting wasn't an option. "At the end of the day, I had two kids I had to feed," she said. She stayed even after filing a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in early 2019. "It is hard for me to go to work because I still have to see my harasser," she wrote in the complaint. Eventually, she left for a job at a different restaurant. Her harasser was still employed at McDonald's. "After that, I don't even eat McDonald's no more," she said. "I don't feel like they deserve a dime from anybody. I just don't understand why they feel they're not accountable for what he did."

McDonald's is one of the country's most recognizable and popular brands. It is also one of the largest employers in the United States, with over 800,000 employees. Given this visibility and clout, it might be expected that McDonald's would exercise a certain measure of corporate responsibility and public accountability if its employees are put in harm's way. But that is not what has happened. Since 2015, scores of women have accused the company of fostering a workplace rife with sexual harassment and

of turning its back when they came forward to report their treatment. They have filed dozens of legal complaints and even staged a historic nationwide strike over the issue. And yet a full-scale reckoning has not come to pass.

"I felt like I was raped with my clothes on."

—Lois Jones, former McDonald's employee

On notice: In 2016 protesters called attention to a series of sexual harassment complaints against McDonald's outside one of its restaurants near Times Square.

THE AREA BEHIND THE COUNTER AT MCDONALD'S is cramped. It gets hot, especially in locations without air conditioning and particularly when employees are working the grills or making fries. The job can involve a lot of monotony, but the pace can turn on a dime. It's crushing during mealtime rush hours, and the high turnover rate typical of fast-food jobs often leaves restaurants short-staffed, putting more pressure on the remaining workers. "It can be very stressful, and then all of a sudden it's super calm and no one's there," said Emily Anibal, who worked at a location in Mason, Mich. "It comes in these waves."

Despite the fast pace and intense pressure, many of the women I spoke with initially enjoyed working at McDonald's. "It's not really a boring, sit-down job," said Delisha Rivers, who worked at a location in Kansas City, Mo. "You laugh and you talk with everyone that's at work." Katlyn Barber, who worked at Anibal's restaurant,



Bryce Covert is a contributing writer at The Nation and a contributing op-ed writer at The New York Times.

agreed. “When you’re working with the right people, obviously it can be fun.”

But for the women I spoke with, once the harassment started, their jobs became torture.

The sexual harassment these workers said they experienced was from many coworkers and managers at different locations in all parts of the country. The victims ranged from teenagers to women in their 40s. But their experiences have striking similarities, according to 24 legal complaints reviewed by *The Nation*. It’s not the case of one “bad apple general manager,” said Eve Cervantez, an attorney at Altshuler Berzon, a firm specializing in labor and employment law, who is representing the workers. “It’s a systemic problem.”

Most of the targeted workers experienced verbal abuse, in some cases starting on their very first day at work. Many were frequently told they were sexy; one woman’s manager kept calling her “*mami chula*” (hot mama). They were also subjected to overtly sexual come-ons—“I wonder what you taste like,” “Your boobs would look good when I’m screwing you,” “When are you going to let me get some?”—and descriptions of sex acts these men wanted to perform with them.

At one point, after a coworker at a McDonald’s in Sanford, Fla., asked Jamelia Fairley the age of her then-1-year-old daughter, he said, “How much would it be to fuck your daughter?” A male coworker who overheard the question laughed.

None of the women took these comments as compliments or jokes. Barbara Johnson, who worked at a location in St. Louis, is a rape survivor and found them “terrifying,” she said in a complaint filed with the EEOC.

For many, the verbal harassment escalated into physical assaults; for others, the harassment started with physical abuse. On her first shift working the grill at a McDonald’s in Gladwin, Mich., Jennifer Betz had her buttocks rubbed by a male coworker half a dozen times. Other women described similar experiences with coworkers who grabbed or pinched their buttocks; groped their breasts, hips, or groin; or touched their hair and shoulders. Numerous women described a male coworker coming up behind them and rubbing his groin against their buttocks or dry humping them. As Tanya Harrell, who worked at a McDonald’s in Gretna, La., described it in her charge, “I felt totally exposed, as if I did not have a skin or shell.”

While the space near the grills or behind the registers is tight, these women said, there was always enough room for workers to maneuver around one another without coming into physical contact. Instead, male coworkers used the cramped quarters as a pretext to abuse them.

Some of the incidents came dangerously close to rape. A male coworker forced Harrell into the men’s bathroom, pushed her into a stall, pinned her against a wall, dropped his pants, and took out his penis. She started to cry; he left only when a manager called for him. In Cincinnati, a male coworker followed Carole Stahle to her car after her shift, forced his way in, and began to kiss her and fondle her breasts, legs, and the rest of her body.

Some of the women were stalked. In her complaint, Ivelisse Rodriguez described how her shift manager in a Connecticut location texted her after work, sent her

flowers, and spread rumors that they were sleeping together. Then he started to call her, sometimes as often as 20 times a day, and show up during her shifts when he wasn’t working to buy a coffee and watch her.

Women weren’t the only ones who were targeted. One man was harassed “virtually immediately” after he started working at a McDonald’s in Nebraska, according to his complaint. A male coworker repeatedly squeezed his chest, grabbed his buttocks, and said things like “Give daddy a kiss” and “You know you love me.” Other male coworkers joined in. One grabbed his penis and told him, “You got a big dick.” Another told him he would get more hours if he performed sexual favors.

Employees were harassed not just by coworkers and managers. The abuse also came from customers, including men “older than my dad,” said Ashley Reddick, who worked at a McDonald’s in Sanford, Fla. She described one who would sit in the restaurant all day, make explicit comments to her, and try to get her number. Another man followed her as she walked home. A woman in Illinois was subjected to a 10-minute rant from a customer about his penis size and what he would do to her sexually. “I will wait for you after your shift,” he told her, prompting her to rush home after work, afraid that he would attack her.

Many of these women told me their experience at McDonald’s was their first brush with workplace harassment and they were unsure how to respond. Katlyn Barber worked nearly every shift with a fellow swing manager who would dry hump her from behind, grab her buttocks with tongs, and make suggestive comments, like saying he wanted to “get with her” or have a threesome with her and other women. “I came from a very, very small town, so I hadn’t had a lot of experience,” she said. “It was kind of unknown territory. It never had happened before.”

MANY WOMEN NOTICED MCDONALD’S DIDN’T appear to take sexual harassment as seriously as other workplace infractions. If Anibal wore black jeans to work instead of the approved work pants, she would get written up right away. One day she had her hair in a ponytail; her manager told her immediately that she had to put it in a braid. “It’s crazy to me they have so many rules about uniforms but they have almost no regulations about sexual harassment,” she said of her tenure there.

Preventive measures or even ones to ensure accountability when harassment took place have been “utterly lacking to an extent that just leaves me scratching my head,” said Gillian Thomas, a senior staff attorney at the ACLU Women’s Rights Project, which is also representing the plaintiffs—especially for “an employer with the limitless resources that McDonald’s has.”

In response to a request for comment, McDonald’s USA stated, “The McDonald’s System has a deep commitment to ensuring employees at corporate-owned and franchised restaurants have a safe and respectful work environment for everyone. We’ve demonstrated our continued commitment to this issue by consistently offering various Safe and Respectful Workplace Trainings.”

In response to pressure, last year the company announced a new sexual harassment training program that it



Tanya Harrell



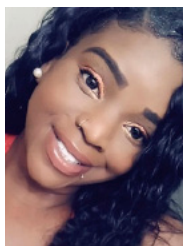
Brittany Hoyos



Jamelia Fairley



Emily Anibal



Ashley Reddick

would implement alongside workplace violence, bullying, and unconscious bias training in corporate-owned locations and that “is made available as a resource to franchisees,” according to a company spokesperson. It also said it has “enhanced” its policy on discrimination, harassment, and retaliation prevention and created a free hotline for employee concerns. But those changes are inadequate, advocates insisted. Thomas called the company’s recent changes “cosmetic.” Its new training videos, she and her cocounsel said, cover more than just sexual harassment—they also address topics like job safety and cleanliness—and aren’t tailored to the experience of harassment in a fast-food restaurant. Moreover, they’re required only at the corporate-owned locations; for McDonald’s many franchisees, they’re merely suggested for use. And, they noted, the workers have yet to be consulted in the process of crafting better policies.

“You don’t change behavior by putting a policy in a handbook and putting a poster on the wall and showing someone an hourlong video,” said Thomas. Cervantez said, “Every single step along the way needs to be improved, from the initial training and prevention to investigation and discipline and accountability.”

THE INADEQUACY OF THE EXISTING PROCEDURES for dealing with harassment was evident at the very start of their employment for these women. None of the ones I spoke with or who have filed complaints said they received training on what sexual harassment is or what to do when it happens.

A number of them were given a handbook to look at that had a section on sexual harassment, but some didn’t even get a copy to take home. While Anibal watched plenty of video and computer trainings about how to prepare food and keep it sanitary—how often to wash her hands, reminders to wear gloves—there was no such training about sexual harassment. She didn’t see any posters about it, either. So when it happened to her, she said, she had “no clue” what she should do about it.

Managers aren’t given training, either, according to Thomas and Cervantez. Barber was promoted from crew member to swing manager within a few months, and “there was no training not only on what to do if you are being sexually harassed but what to do if sexual harassment was reported to you,” she said. When she was harassed, she felt “clueless” about whether it was even harassment, let alone what to do about it. Fielding harassment complaints and responding to them appropriately is “just not considered part of the managers’ jobs,” Thomas said.

Accurate and useful training is particularly important, given the demographics of McDonald’s workers. Many are young; three of the women I spoke with were teenagers when they worked there. That’s typical for fast food. McDonald’s likes to call itself “America’s best first job.” An estimated one in eight workers in the United States have been employed there at some point, many while still in high school or just starting out in the workforce. But teenagers don’t necessarily know that sexual harassment is illegal or what to do about it. That can leave lasting scars as they move on to other jobs.



Stronger together:

Kimberly Lawson spoke out about her experiences at McDonald’s so other women wouldn’t feel alone. “I want to be that voice so that everyone knows... it’s not only you it’s happened to.”

“It’s crazy to me they have so many rules about uniforms but they have almost no regulations about sexual harassment.”

—Emily Anibal, former McDonald’s employee



Brittany Hoyos began working as a cashier at a McDonald’s near her home in Arizona when she was 16. It was her first job, allowing her to pitch in with household finances. Working part-time while going to high school and being a cheerleader was a lot to juggle: She would wake up at 4 AM to get to school, do cheerleading until 8 at night, and start her shift at 8:30, sometimes working until 2 in the morning. But sexual harassment made it all but impossible.

It started when her family’s car was repossessed and her parents couldn’t afford to get it back. At first Hoyos took Lyfts to work, but that became too expensive. So when an older manager started offering to give her rides home, she eventually accepted. They were on friendly terms in the beginning, but then he tried to kiss her, and “that’s when things had changed,” she told me.

The manager began making inappropriate comments—telling her he liked how she looked, asking about her boyfriend—touching her ponytail or neck, and purposely brushing up against her when he walked by. “It was intimidating,” she said. She had never experienced sexual harassment before. Struggling to put the experience into words, Hoyos said in a soft voice, “At first it felt like it was my fault.”

For Anibal, then 17, McDonald’s was a way to start saving up for college. She frequently worked the drive-through windows, which required her to wear a headset at all times to take orders and communicate with her coworkers. That made her a captive audience for one male coworker in particular, who unleashed a constant stream of sexual remarks about his coworkers, including teens like Anibal. “You can’t take [the headset] off, because [then] you can’t do your job. You’re forced to listen to whatever anybody is saying,” Anibal told me. He made comments like “Did you see [coworker’s] ass?” or described having sex with another employee. “Even when I was taking orders for my job, he would talk over them so I [couldn’t] even hear the person.” And everyone could hear what her coworker was saying, managers included.

“This [was] my first formal job, so I guess I [thought] this is how it is,” Anibal said. “Every-

one working there had gotten used to it, and it was just sort of normalized.”

Most McDonald’s jobs are low-paying; the average worker makes less than \$9 an hour. That leaves employees in a precarious financial position, making it harder for them to react to harassment in any way that might endanger their jobs. “Folks who are living paycheck to paycheck, on the margins, [don’t have] the wherewithal to stand up for themselves,” Thomas said. “Even if the wrongdoing is egregious, there is going to be a lot of fear about coming forward because the consequences will be so grave.”

There is usually also a high turnover rate. “These are especially dehumanizing places to work,” Thomas noted. “People are made to feel like they’re pretty replaceable. [Not] feeling entitled to speak up is a huge problem.”

At first Brittany Hoyos didn’t want to say anything. “I didn’t tell a manger because they already knew about it,” she said in her complaint. “I just wanted to keep quiet.” But eventually she told her parents, including her mother, Maribel Hoyos, who had started to work at the same restaurant. “I felt guilty,” Maribel Hoyos told me. “Like I had failed her.” She and her husband reported what was happening to their daughter to multiple managers at multiple levels, including the franchise manager, but received little response.

A number of the women I spoke with didn’t know how to report their coworkers’ behavior even if they wanted to. Rivers, the Kansas City employee, was able to track down a phone number for the franchise office and told her story to the franchise owner. When nothing changed, she attempted to find a number for the corporate headquarters in the break room, and when she couldn’t find one there, she googled it. “There was no harassment hotline, nothing like that,” she said. “I had to find the resources myself.” When she reached someone in the human resources department at the corporate headquarters, she was told to call a different number for the franchises in her district. That connected her to a different franchise from the one she worked for. She kept calling the headquarters, only to be redirected to numbers for the wrong regional divisions, where no one responded.

ALL THE WORKERS I SPOKE WITH OR WHOSE LEGAL filings I reviewed said that after they finally summoned the courage to speak up and report their harassment to their manager or to a franchise owner, no substantial measures were taken to protect them from further abuse. The lack of action and accountability when employees made reports was disturbingly typical, Thomas said, “to an extent that I don’t think I’ve seen anywhere else.” Some managers gave the harassers verbal warnings, but the behavior



Too close: Space behind the counter at McDonald’s is tight, and women said some male coworkers used the cramped quarters as a pretext to abuse them.

“People [at McDonald’s] are made to feel like they’re replaceable. [Not] feeling entitled to speak up is a huge problem.”

—Gillian Thomas, ACLU



continued anyway. Brittany Hoyos’s harasser was briefly moved to another location, then he returned to hers, and the harassment continued. Women were made to feel as if they hadn’t told the truth or the harassment hadn’t been a big deal. Some were even laughed at. Barber’s general manager tried “to make it like a joke,” she recalled. “I felt almost invalidated, like everything I was saying wasn’t true. So it almost made me think, ‘Am I doing something wrong?’”

Instead of the harassers facing discipline, punishment was often meted out to the victims. After her parents complained, Hoyos was assigned difficult or uncomfortable tasks—working the grill all day or being stuck at the drive-through window for an entire shift. She was also disciplined for minor infractions, had her hours cut, was demoted, and got suspended for two weeks. She was eventually fired.

Her mother suffered, too. Despite having committed “a lot of time and effort into moving up the ladder,” including management classes, Maribel Hoyos was pulled out of the classes and passed over for a promotion. She eventually decided to leave, which was a huge sacrifice. “You took your time away from your family, you took your time from doing other things to move up in the company,” she said. “Once you’ve done something for so many years and once you know how to do something... those are the skills you have and you’re comfortable with, [and] it’s hard to veer off of that.”

Such retaliation was not an isolated incident. Thirteen other workers whose harassment complaints *The Nation* reviewed said they experienced retaliation for reporting what happened to them. Many had their hours reduced. That meant a steep loss of income, leading to severe financial hardship. Fairley, the mother of the 1-year-old girl, was living in a rooming house and trying to save up for everything her daughter needed. “I didn’t have a car. I didn’t have anything,” she told me. So when her hours were cut, “it was like, how am I going to eat? How am I going to support my daughter?”

Difficult or undesirable work like the kind Brittany Hoyos was assigned was often given as punishment. Evelia Rico was tasked with taking pallets of food to the basement, leading to a lower back injury, and was stuck at the drive-through window, which employees called “the hole.” The stress gave her nightmares. “Every night I dream about feeling helpless and being yelled at and mistreated at work,” she said in her complaint.

For some of these women, things became so difficult that they decided they had to quit. After Rivers rejected her manager’s advances, his attitude toward her “completely changed,” she wrote in her charge, and he started threatening to write her up

every time they worked together for things as minor as not moving fast enough, not speaking loudly enough, or not wearing the right-color shirt. “I was trying to stick around, but it got to [the point that] I couldn’t handle the aggravation,” she told me. “So I just left.”

The word nearly every woman used to describe how the harassment made them feel was “uncomfortable.” But it went far beyond discomfort. It made Barber “feel scared [and] sad,” she said. She ended up with headaches and anxiety. Fairley still suffers from depression, so much so that sometimes she doesn’t want to eat. She asks her mother to watch her daughter “so I [can] just be alone and cry by myself.” Reddick said her attitude changed after the harassment. “I was mad about everything. I was always angry,” she said.

“I started hating work, not wanting to go to work,” Rivers said. “I couldn’t focus.”

A number of women described the same experience: being filled with dread at the very thought of going to their jobs and being exposed to more harassment. Barber would sit in her car “until the last second” on the days that her harasser was working, she said. “It was a dreadful feeling. I never wanted to go to work.”

To protect themselves when their managers didn’t help them, many took matters into their own hands, reducing their hours or rearranging their schedules. Fairley changed shifts so that she wouldn’t work at the same time as her harasser. Barber put the people she supervised in areas that damaged productivity but ensured her harasser wasn’t near her. “It affected my work performance, for sure,” she said. Reddick cut her own hours from 35 a week to 21 in order to avoid shifts with her harasser. She left early anytime she worked with him. “It pushed me back into a struggle,” she said of the lost hours. “Some days I wouldn’t even eat because I had to feed [my daughter].”

Many often contemplated quitting, but economic necessity kept them trapped with their harassers. “I wanted



“Things like this go way deeper than just a job, just that one person. This changes people’s lives permanently.”

—Maribel Hoyos, McDonald’s employee

On strike: In 2018, McDonald’s workers took part in the first nationwide strike against sexual harassment in the fast-food industry.

to quit multiple times,” Rivers said. But she had to pay her weekly fee to the motel where she lived, and if she quit, there was “no telling how long before I find another job.” Others fled their workplaces for jobs that paid less. Anibal took a position as a nanny that was much more demanding and paid her nearly \$2 an hour less. “But it was also really nice...to be at a job where I felt more comfortable,” she said.

Not everyone left out of anguish or was fired in retaliation. Fairley still works at McDonald’s. After admitting his behavior to a visiting corporate consultant, one of her harassers was eventually fired, and the other was transferred to another restaurant over a different matter. But both are still allowed to go to her restaurant and order food from her when she works the register. The remaining coworkers treat her coldly. “It’s an awkward thing, feeling like an outcast,” she said. And she is still gripped by the worry that she will be harassed again by a new hire and nothing will be done to protect her.

THE HARASSMENT CONTINUES TO HAUNT ANIBAL, who is now attending college full-time. While many of her fellow students are working in food service to make money, “I just can’t even bring myself to apply for those jobs, because it just makes me anxious thinking it would happen again,” she said.

Barber is similarly traumatized. Now she’s always on edge, waiting for the harassment to be repeated in a new work environment. “Especially when I start a new job, one of my first thoughts will be, ‘Wow, I really hope that doesn’t happen again,’” she said. “I’m really cautious as to how I say things, even, cautious of how people are moving and what they’re doing.”

Maribel Hoyos’s experience “tore our family apart,” she said. She and her husband are now separated. “It was like a chain reaction...that is going to leave hurt and pretty much destruction throughout our family for years



to come,” she said, her voice heavy with crying. “Things like this go way deeper than just a job, just that one person,” she added. “This changes people’s lives permanently.”

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS not unique to McDonald’s. In 2016, 40 percent of women in nonmanagerial fast-food jobs said they had experienced unwanted sexual behavior at work. But harassment at McDonald’s appears to be of a different degree. In a survey of 782 current and former nonmanagerial employees conducted this April, three-quarters said they had experienced sexual harassment at work, with the majority dealing with multiple forms at once. Half were subjected to sexual comments; a third were touched, groped, or fondled; and 12 percent were sexually assaulted or raped. Many experienced these things multiple times.

Maribel Hoyos worked at Little Caesars before joining McDonald’s full-time. “They did things very differently,” she said. At Little Caesars there was an anonymous hotline that employees could call with concerns. If someone made use of it, a human resources representative would respond the next day. There were also rules forbidding people at certain levels of authority to socialize with those below them outside work. “I was just surprised that McDonald’s, being a big company, wouldn’t have something like Little Caesars,” she said.

Harassment is not an unsolvable problem. “It’s not rocket science,” Thomas said. “But it does take a commitment in terms of dollars and personnel time, including time spent listening to workers.”

McDonald’s employees have been trying to make themselves heard. They filed a series of lawsuits starting in 2016, including 10 complaints with the EEOC in 2018 and 25 legal actions in 2019, as well as a class-action lawsuit in Michigan, now in discovery in federal court, that includes Barber and Anibal. In 10 cities at the end of 2018, they staged the country’s first-ever national strike against sexual harassment.

“McDonald’s is the biggest name in fast food,” Thomas noted. Its behavior will affect the entire sector. “If we can change McDonald’s, we can change the world,” said Cervantez.

But changing it won’t be easy. One challenge these legal complaints face is the company’s business model. Just 7 percent of McDonald’s global locations are owned by the company and thus are under its direct control; the rest are owned and operated by franchisees. McDonald’s has used this fact to shield itself from legal responsibility. But the lawyers representing these women argue that the corporate entity should be considered a joint employer, legally responsible for what happens in its franchised locations, because it exerts so much



Common cause:

McDonald’s has been facing pressure from its employees on a number of fronts. The Fight for \$15 has pushed for a pay hike to at least \$15 an hour and for union rights.

“You really don’t realize how many people are in the exact situation you’re going through, and then you meet them.”

—Delisha Rivers, former McDonald’s employee



MCDONALD’S HAS BEEN FACING PRESSURE from its employees on a number of fronts. The Fight for \$15, launched in 2012, has targeted the company in its push for a wage of at least \$15 an hour and workers’ ability to form a union. That campaign has since highlighted a disturbing pattern of violence at work, filing a lawsuit and a complaint with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration alleging that the company has failed to

control over them. “They really control every single piece of what an employee has to do on a day-to-day basis,” Cervantez said, like “how they fry their fries and what uniform they wear and what they say to somebody when they order.”

That legal argument is in contention. The Trump administration has waded into the fight, issuing rules at the Department of Labor and the National Labor Relations Board that severely restrict joint employer liability in cases of wage and overtime claims

and labor law violations. The EEOC is working on similar rules. In December the NLRB found in favor of McDonald’s in a lawsuit brought by striking workers that tried to hold the corporate entity responsible for franchisees who retaliated against them, ruling that the company isn’t a joint employer.

The lawyers argue that even if McDonald’s can’t be held liable as a joint employer, the franchise employees are still led to believe that they’re working for the company, not a small franchise owner, indicting the corporate entity under what is known as the apparent agency theory. “They wear McDonald’s uniforms, work in a McDonald’s store,” Cervantez observed. “If you ask them, ‘Who do you work for?’...they say, ‘McDonald’s.’”

The company’s recent changes haven’t gone nearly far enough, Cervantez and Thomas said. Fairley worked at a company-owned McDonald’s before, during, and after the supposed changes. She went through a two-hour training. But it covered more than sexual harassment, she said, and there was no information about what to do if you’re harassed or how to report it. “They could do more to prevent anyone else from being harassed,” she said. Indeed, in the recent survey of current and former workers, only about a third said they had seen the new training implemented in their restaurants.

Workers want the company to listen to them. “The first thing that all of our clients want is to be heard,” Cervantez said. From that should come much more substantial changes to address and prevent harassment, everything from more effective training and better investigations to stricter consequences for harassers. And workers want the company to track and audit its actions to make sure they’re reducing harassment in its restaurants.

protect its employees. Workers have also alleged racial discrimination: Ten filed a civil rights lawsuit in 2015 charging that Black and Hispanic employees were subjected to slurs and were fired because they “didn’t fit the profile.” In July, Black workers in Florida filed a civil rights lawsuit alleging a “racially hostile work environment.”

All of these fights are connected. Low pay and mistreatment result when a company sees its workers as replaceable and disposable. That problem has only been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic: McDonald’s employees have complained and staged more strikes, saying that the company hasn’t taken adequate steps to protect them. But fighting sexual harassment presents some unique challenges. The trauma that targeted workers experience makes many of them reluctant to come forward—and after they do, it is painful to have to keep talking about it.

Fairley called herself a “really quiet person,” someone who finds it hard to talk about herself with strangers to begin with. But this is worse. “It is traumatizing for me to keep speaking about it. Sometimes I just break down in tears,” she said. “Every time I talk about it, I feel like I’ve relived it.”

Reddick is also shy, and at first it was difficult for her to talk about what happened. “I used to cry and cry and cry,” she said. It’s gotten easier as she has seen other women standing up. “I know so many people are behind me, so many got my back. I’m more open about it because I’m not alone.”

Nearly all the women I spoke to felt sadness and anger but also strength in standing together. “Sometimes when I would work there, I felt a little crazy—like ‘This is crazy that he works here but everyone else thinks it’s normal,’” Anibal said. Seeing her story repeated in others’ experiences made her feel sane. It made Rivers feel less alone as well. “You really don’t realize how many people are in the exact

situation you’re going through, and then you meet them,” she said.

Kimberly Lawson decided to speak out about her experience at a McDonald’s in Kansas to give more women that feeling of recognition. “I just want anybody who’s ever been sexually harassed, sexually abused—I want to be that voice so that everyone knows... it’s not only you it’s happened to,” she said. Some of her family members faced sexual abuse, including her mother. But none of them spoke publicly about their experiences, she said, divulging their stories only to her. “The look on their faces, you could tell they still carry that pain with them,” Lawson said, choking back tears. She didn’t want to stay silent, too. “Wounds don’t heal when you don’t talk about it,” she said. She added that her mother is proud of what she’s doing. “She was proud of the fact that I could stand up for myself like she couldn’t.”

Lawson is also doing it for the next generation. “I don’t want my child to go through what I was going through,” she said.

Fairley has taken her now 3-year-old daughter to marches and protests. “She loves it,” she said. “She sees that her mom is standing up for herself and for her.”

Leaving McDonald’s meant a loss of income for Lois Jones’s family; her children’s father had to support the household. “He started turning gray,” she said. Things are better now, especially since she’s at a workplace where she feels safe. But she’s still climbing out of that financial hole. She’s been fighting to keep her house from being foreclosed on since she fell behind on her property taxes. “I’m moving slow to get where I was,” she said.

But Jones is determined to hold McDonald’s accountable. “If y’all not going to listen to me, somebody will,” she said. “Somebody needs to take action, and somebody needs to take responsibility for what happened to me.” ■

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WILL THE LEFT GET A SAY IN THE BIDEN DOCTRINE?

**Covid-19 creates an opportunity to shift foreign
policy away from the military.**

DAVID KLION



OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, A LOOSE COALITION OF ACTIVIST groups, think tanks, and policy-makers dedicated to ending the post-9/11 forever war has asserted itself in foreign policy debates. As recently as February, when Bernie Sanders appeared to be the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination, it seemed possible that US foreign policy was on the verge of turning toward a less militarized and interventionist approach. Sanders and the other major progressive candidate in the race, Elizabeth Warren, had foreign policy advisers who advocated slashing defense budgets and reinvesting in diplomacy to confront nonmilitary threats.

But Joe Biden's decisive victory over Sanders dealt a blow to those hopes. For decades, Biden has been a representative figure of the mainstream foreign policy establishment, the so-called Blob. He supported the Iraq War, is close with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and has premised his campaign on a restoration of the Obama era.

Biden appeared to secure the nomination just as the coronavirus pandemic began radically reshaping every aspect of policy-making, including international affairs. I wanted to take the temperature of leading foreign policy progressives in light of the primary race and the pandemic to get a sense of how they might attempt to influence a Biden administration and to explore what national security means in an age of deadly viruses that don't recognize national borders. On one key point, there was a broad consensus: Covid-19 vindicates what the left has been saying about foreign policy—that endless war has squandered resources without making Americans safer—and represents an opportunity to shift the debate in a more constructive direction. On the question of whether a Biden administration would be receptive to those urging such a shift, there was far less agreement.

David Klion is an editor at Jewish Currents and has written for The Nation, The New York Times, The New Republic, and other publications.

“The pandemic has starkly demonstrated a lot of Sanders’s arguments about how we have failed to invest in our own country.”

—Matt Duss, Bernie Sanders’s foreign policy adviser

IN EARLY APRIL, BEN Rhodes, a national security adviser for President Barack Obama, wrote in *The Atlantic* that “as COVID-19 has transformed the way that Americans live, and threatens to claim exponentially more lives than any terrorist has, it is time to finally end the chapter of our history that began on September 11, 2001.” That is certainly the hope of all my interviewees, but for now, America’s wars rage on.

“The forever war has clearly not ended,” said one leading progressive foreign policy adviser, who requested anonymity to speak candidly. “Just because we happen to be more focused on

the pandemic right now does not let us off the hook for ending wars.” But everyone I spoke to agreed on the urgency of doing so.

“On foreign policy, as on a range of other issues, the pandemic has starkly demonstrated a lot of Senator Sanders’s arguments about how we have failed to invest in our own country, people, and infrastructure,” said Matt Duss, Sanders’s foreign policy adviser. In response to the pandemic, Sanders and progressive allies in Congress recently proposed cutting the Pentagon’s budget by 10 percent, a plan since endorsed by Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer. “It shows very clearly that our security priorities and investments—

the obsessive focus on counterterrorism, the overuse of the military as the foreign policy instrument of first resort—have been not just wrong but wildly counterproductive,” Duss said.

Stephen Wertheim, a cofounder of the Quincy Institute, an anti-interventionist think tank that launched last year with funding from George Soros and Charles Koch, told me, “The pandemic illustrated a lot of what we’ve been saying for some time—that our main challenges from the perspective of US interests are planetary and transnational, not military threats from rival nation-states.”

Wertheim added, “What did our massive military apparatus and our national security state deliver for us against the biggest threat of our lifetime? Not much.”

By international standards, the United States has done an exceptionally poor job of containing the coronavirus. Failures at every level of government mean that Covid-19 continues to spread across the US, even as countries in Europe and Asia turn the corner. All of this suggests that American global leadership, already damaged by Donald Trump’s misgovernance, will have a hard time recovering from the pandemic. “Who would ever take that seriously after this?” said Duss. “This idea of America as this unparalleled and supremely competent global hegemon is over.”

C OVID-19 IS A PREVIEW NOT ONLY of future pandemics but also of climate change, the transnational security crisis that will define our lives. The rest of the century is likely to see more famines, droughts, flooding, other natural disasters, resource wars, and mass migrations, all of which hurt the poorest countries disproportionately while sparing no one. In the ideal scenario, nations would come together to create solutions to these borderless threats. But it’s at least as plausible that countries will retreat into the kind of right-wing nationalism that has dominated international politics over the past few years.

“Internationalism is not a luxury. It’s a necessity,” said David Adler, an informal Sanders foreign policy adviser and the general coordinator of the Progressive International, a recently launched organization dedicated to fostering ties among left-wing politicians and movements around the world. “All of humanity is thinking about the same crisis and confronting the same question of how you lock down a population while providing for basic resources. We are all consumed by a similar anxiety.”

“But that’s a fleeting moment,” he added. “Very quickly, the old inequalities are going to settle in.... We’re moving to a politics that’s very ripe for nationalism. It’s our plight, as progressives, to have to force our way between those two perspectives to say that [internationalism] didn’t work the way it was constructed for the past half century and also that the direction of the right populists is far too dangerous.”

Kate Kizer, the policy director of the anti-

interventionist advocacy group Win Without War, expressed similar fears. “I’m seeing two different paths ahead—either one of authoritarianism, driven by xenophobic nationalism, or an internationalist response that is rooted in cross-border solidarity and cooperation. It’s a little bit scary, because authoritarianism is a play-book that’s tried and true and has been well organized for a long time and building towards this moment.” She called the coronavirus crisis “an authoritarian’s dream” because it provides an excuse to declare emergency powers and suspend normal political processes and civil liberties, something already happening in countries like Hungary and Bolivia.

Covid-19 is also directly affecting the US military and its many theaters of operation. In April the Navy fired Brett Crozier as captain of an aircraft carrier after he raised the alarm about a coronavirus outbreak on his ship. In Yemen, a country mired in starvation and cholera due to an ongoing US-backed Saudi intervention in its civil war—opposition to which has been a central mission for progressive foreign policy activists—deaths from Covid-19 could exceed wartime fatalities in the internationally recognized capital of Aden. In just two weeks in May, the city recorded 950 deaths from the pandemic, roughly half of Aden’s war fatalities in all of 2015.

“The primary focus for us remains asserting congressional war powers to end US support for the war in Yemen

that continues to be the world’s worst humanitarian crisis,” said Erik Sperling, the executive director of the left-wing anti-war group Just Foreign Policy. “Covid in Yemen is just starting. They have an absolutely devastated health system. We’ve had Save the Children hospitals that have been bombed by the Saudi coalition.”

The virus has also had a disastrous effect on Iran, which suffers under economic sanctions that were lifted after the Obama administration’s 2015 nuclear deal and reinstated under Trump after he unilaterally withdrew the US from the agreement in 2018. In January of this year, the Trump administration assassinated Iran’s top general, Qassim Suleimani, nearly setting off a regional war. The White House had already imposed sanctions, denying Iranians access to food, prescription drugs, and medical devices. More than 13,000 Iranians have died from Covid-19 as the government struggles to obtain critical supplies. In late March 34 lawmakers—including Sanders, Warren, and Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ilhan Omar—sent a letter to the administration urging sanctions relief. The letter was endorsed by groups such as Just Foreign Policy, Win Without War, J Street, and the Ploughshares Fund.

On April 2 the Biden campaign released an equivocal statement criticizing Trump’s Iran policy and providing guidelines for humanitarian aid to work around sanctions, but it did not call for sanctions relief. More



Main man: Tony Blinken, a national security figure in the Obama administration, is Joe Biden’s primary foreign policy adviser.

“I’m seeing two different paths—either one of authoritarianism, driven by xenophobic nationalism, or an internationalist response.”

—Kate Kizer,
Win Without War

recently, Biden's main foreign policy adviser, Tony Blinken, said at an American Jewish Committee event that under a Biden administration, all sanctions on Iran would remain in place, including those introduced under Trump, unless Iran resumed full compliance with the nuclear deal—which it was doing before the US withdrawal, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

“It was good that [Biden] said something, but I think what he called for was the bare minimum and that he should go much further,” said Kizer. That summarizes how foreign policy progressives tend to appraise Biden. Should he win the presidency, he will be responsible for managing US military commitments in the Middle East and elsewhere, for pursuing a multilateral diplomatic strategy for threats like the pandemic, and for navigating America's increasingly fraught relationship with China. Foreign policy progressives are ready and willing to advise him on all of these issues—but will he listen?

THE FIGURE MOST LIKELY TO DETERMINE THE ANSWER is Blinken, a former Obama administration national security official who has been advising Biden on foreign policy since his days on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Blinken, 58, is a former contributor to *The New Republic*, a partner in a private equity firm (as *The American Prospect* reported, a number of top Biden foreign policy advisers have gotten rich in the private sector), and an outspoken humanitarian interventionist. Blinken had a hand in Obama's Afghanistan surge (which Biden, as several interviewees noted, opposed at the time) and intervention in Libya. In *New York Times* op-eds, Blinken has voiced support for Trump's air strikes on Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria and for providing military assistance to Ukraine. Blinken is visible in Pete Souza's famous photograph of the White House Situation Room during the assassination of Osama bin Laden. Blinken also played a role in shaping the Iran nuclear deal.

Asked whether a Biden administration would be receptive to foreign policy progressives and vocal opponents of the forever war, Blinken said in a statement, “Given the scope of the challenges the next president will face, we're actively soliciting input and advice from a wide range of experts, including many progressive leaders, to help us build out a foreign policy agenda that reflects Vice President Biden's long-held values, and will help restore America's leadership role in the world as we confront new threats



The Situation Room: Biden and Blinken were with Obama as US forces raided Osama bin Laden's compound in 2011.

“Biden's record is the record of a mainstream Democrat—which is to say, not very good.”

—Stephen Wertheim, Quincy Institute

All smiles: Biden and then-Senator Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) at a 2003 Senate Foreign Relations Committee meeting.



like the coronavirus” (emphasis added).

Multiple outlets have reported that progressives have been lobbying Blinken and others to commit to some of the foreign policy proposals embraced by Sanders and Warren, with limited success at best. Duss, the Sanders adviser, said he has had conversations with Blinken, bonding over a shared passion for the Beatles. “I have known him for quite some time,” said Duss. “I like him a lot. I have great respect for him.” Duss added that he has recommended a number of people from Sanders's foreign policy working group to work on the Biden campaign and that Biden's team has been in touch with them.

“The Biden campaign has welcomed supporters from not only the other progressive campaigns but from all of the other primary candidates with open arms,” said another progressive foreign policy adviser. “They have incorporated advisers into their working groups. They are proactively seeking to do what they can to unify the party.” But the adviser cautioned, “I think there is still an open question about whether that will result in any substantive changes in terms of policies and whether or not any of the more progressive voices in the party are appointed into positions of influence.”

The adviser also expressed concern that Biden has yet to commit to winding down wars in the Middle East or reducing the Pentagon budget. “Trump has increased it by hundreds of billions of dollars. It doesn't seem like too much of an ask to expect the Democratic nominee, at a minimum, to say that we're going to undo those increases, even if they're not willing to go further.”

Others were even more critical. “I don't understand why Tony Blinken would want to write, very recently, an op-ed with pro-Iraq War neocon Bob Kagan in *The Washington Post*,” said Wertheim, who noted that while he has not spoken with Blinken, there are people in Biden's orbit whose anti-interventionist views align with the Quincy Institute's. “Biden's



record is the record of a mainstream Democrat over many decades—which is to say, not very good.”

In March, Wertheim criticized an essay written by Biden—presumably with input from Blinken—in *Foreign Affairs* laying out his most comprehensive foreign policy vision. “It claimed to end the forever war,” Wertheim said. “And then in the next sentence, it explained that what that meant was that perhaps half of US ground troops in Afghanistan and the Middle East would be withdrawn. That’s not ending the forever war.”

Lara Friedman, who succeeded Duss as president of the nonprofit Foundation for Middle East Peace, which focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, was blunter. She excoriated Blinken for his statement during a webcast in May that “Joe Biden believes strongly in keeping your differences—to the greatest extent possible—between friends behind doors,” referring to how Biden would handle disagreements with Israel. The event was hosted by the Democratic Majority for Israel, a super PAC funded in part by people who have donated to Republicans and that has targeted progressive candidates, including Sanders, with negative ads.

“It’s quite striking,” said Friedman. “They didn’t put this out in August. They put this out in May, before the July 1 annexation date,” referring to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s pledge to annex parts of the occupied West Bank this summer, in violation of international law and against pre-Trump US policy. (As of this writing, the process had not formally commenced.) “He’s saying aid will never be used as leverage of any kind. He’s promising to protect Israel at the United Nations, which I have a hard time reading as anything other than a shot at Obama”—a reference to Obama’s decision not

China-bashing: Asian American groups criticized a Biden ad for exacerbating anti-Asian racism.

“How much political capital are you going to spend trying to unwind annexation?”

—Lara Friedman, Foundation for Middle East Peace

Old friends: Biden has kept his differences with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu largely behind closed doors.



to veto a UN resolution condemning Israeli settlements in the West Bank in December 2016.

Friedman was pessimistic about a Biden administration’s willingness to listen to pro-Palestine activists. “If they’ve already annexed by the time you come in, how much political capital are you going to spend trying to undo or unwind annexation?” she asked.

ONE ISSUE THAT CAME UP repeatedly in my interviews was the US-China relationship. The Covid-19 pandemic was first reported in the Chinese city of Wuhan; as a result and presumably to distract from their failure to contain the virus, the Trump administration, Republican hawks like Senator Tom Cotton, and right-wing media outlets have attempted to stoke xenophobic outrage against China. But so has the Biden campaign, which in May faced pushback from progressives and Asian American groups for releasing an ad that accused the president of having “rolled over for the Chinese.”

“Even before the [coronavirus] crisis, there was a growing narrative in Washington that the rise of China presented an existential threat to the United States,” said Kizer. “We saw this with Tom Cotton’s proposal to increase military spending for more weapons to be used potentially against China. If we continue down the path of demonizing China and the xenophobia and hate that goes along with it...we’re going to ultimately end up hurting our ability to address security challenges.”

There is also the issue of accountability for past US policies associated with the forever war. In June the Biden campaign announced that its foreign policy and national security transition team will be led by Avril Haines, who during the Obama administration served as deputy director of the CIA, a position in which she helped oversee redactions to the Senate’s torture report.

“Not only was Haines part of the torture infrastructure under [Gina] Haspel, she also actively supported Haspel, a known torturer, to lead the CIA,” said Maha Hilal, an anti-torture advocate with the organization Justice for Muslims Collective. Haspel became the CIA’s director in 2018. “Haines already played a direct role in absolving others of their crimes, so she will surely extend this to her work under a potential Biden presidency.” This might be the hardest aspect of a Biden administration for progressives to accept; given the personnel involved, there is likely to be little appetite for reckoning with the recent past.

THE PRESUMED OUTCOME OF THE PRIMARIES IS STILL A sore spot for everyone I spoke with. “It’s immeasurably sad,” said Adler. “Bernie’s campaign was the place where [progressive foreign policy] ideas were getting a fair hearing.” Daniel Bessner, a professor of American foreign policy at the University of Washington who advised the Sanders campaign, described himself as “pretty pessimistic about Joe Biden” and said he expected that a Biden administration would be very similar to the Obama administration and would rarely draw on the ideas developed working with Sanders.

But whether a Biden administration listens to foreign policy progressives will depend on not only personnel but also whether anti-war voices can organize and assert themselves. Here, at least, I found some optimism.

“There is a much more solid and continually growing and mobilized coalition around progressive foreign policy priorities that there simply was not toward the beginning of the Obama administration,” said Duss. “It came to fruition in support of the Iran nuclear agreement.”

He added that whereas the neoconservatives who have lobbied in favor of wars have long been well organized, with “a lot of donors and think tanks and letterheads and columnists,” the anti-war left’s main advantage is that its views now reflect a clear majority of Americans’. Meanwhile, in terms of infrastructure, progressives are catching up, thanks to new groups like Quincy with the budgets and connections to provide an alternative to the echo chamber in Washington.

Increasingly, elected officials are listening. After the Suleimani assassination in January, Democrats sprang into action to insist on Congress’s constitutional authority over wars, which Duss called “a positive shift” since the Obama administration—although Democrats may not be as eager to assert such authority against a Democratic president. Progressives both in and out of government are also rallying around the dovish Representative Joaquin Castro’s campaign to chair the House Foreign Affairs Committee, where he would replace New York’s recently primaried Representative Eliot Engel, a noted hawk. “Castro has shown a commitment toward various progressive causes,

especially ending the US’s unconstitutional war on Yemen,” said Shireen Al-Adeimi, an assistant professor at Michigan State University and a Just Foreign Policy board member.

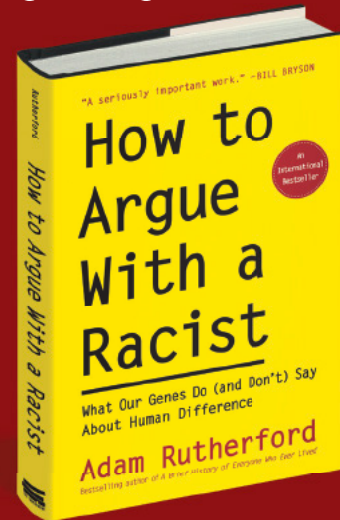
“I definitely agree that the outside movement is much more organized,” said Kizer. “And I think that’s going to be one of the critical things...for the Biden team to understand, that there is an active, progressive constituency who cares about national security and also that the changes that progressives are seeking on domestic policy are tightly intertwined with changes that are necessary on the international front.”

“Bernie’s campaign was where [progressive foreign policy] ideas were getting a fair hearing.”

—David Adler, Progressive International

This summer, mass demonstrations across the country have pushed policy-makers to implement long-overdue reforms aimed at ending racist police violence. Biden may not have been most progressives’ first choice, and he has some responsibility for the modern police state, but he and his advisers seem to understand how that debate has shifted. Should he win in November, perhaps progressive activists will force him to reevaluate the untenable foreign policy status quo in which he is similarly implicated. ■

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Letters

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(continued from page 2)

and fans follow them avidly, despite on some level knowing that they are fiction. So, too, does Trump play out his staged conflicts with TV personalities, journalists, and Democratic politicians.

JOSEPH BOYD

A Perverse Legacy

Re “Goodbye, Columbus?” by Katha Pollitt [July 13/20]: Let us not be confused about or sympathetic to the defense of Confederate memorials as the preservation of Southern heritage. That heritage is one that brought carnage and suffering to this nation and remains an affront to Americans whose ancestors were enslaved. Their argument is an equivocation of true intent, and within it lies a racism that Americans must confront and reject. Ours is not to judge the souls of Robert E. Lee, J.E.B. Stuart, and Jefferson Davis; that lies with their creator. But we have a profound responsibility to deny them tribute they do not deserve. KEVIN T. WILSON
ROLLING HILLS ESTATES, CALIF.

☛ Katha Pollitt in “Goodbye, Columbus?” rightfully highlights our perverse legacy of celebrating prominent offenders of democratic values. However, she doesn’t mention what arguably would be the most forcefully defended symbol of all: the District of Columbia.

But she deserves kudos for noting that “George Floyd didn’t die because Minneapolis lacked the right monuments”—emphasizing the intense, long-term centrality of the justice work ahead. JOAN DOWLING

Spinning Their Wheels

Elie Mystal’s skepticism in “The Outrage Must Not End” [June 29/July 6] is well placed. We will see this police brutal-

ity again and again. In 1967 and ’68, when I was a young social worker in Detroit, the city exploded with police brutality, aided by the Michigan National Guard and Army troops. The official count, I believe, was 34 people shot dead. My liberal friends said, “This shall not happen again.”

Reforming the police is not a solution to the problem. Reformers are spinning their wheels. Radical change is needed in our institutions. Let us be honest about this: The function of police is to effect the will of the government, not to protect the public from harm. That ubiquitous slogan “To protect and to serve” could not be more cynically misleading.

G.F. DOBBERTIN
PORTLAND, ORE.

Corrections

“A Driving Force” by Ed Morales in the July 13/20 issue misstated Reies López Tijerina’s name. It also incorrectly stated that Tijerina was a Nevada land rights activist and the leader of La Raza Unida. Tijerina focused on land rights in New Mexico and participated in La Raza Unida events but was not an official leader of the party.

“Coming Forward” by Stephen Kearse [July 27/ August 3] stated that *On the Record* went through multiple cuts as a result of Oprah Winfrey’s concerns regarding the filmmakers’ knowledge of hip-hop and Black history. Winfrey was uncertain whether the film “captured the nuances of hip-hop culture and the struggles of black women,” according to *The New York Times*, but it is not clear whether the film went through multiple cuts as a result.

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Books & the Arts



PRESENT ABSENCES

A century of struggle in Palestine

by KALEEM HAWA

Here's the script: Criminalize the boycotts, deport the human rights advocates, rebrand anti-Zionism as anti-Semitism, smear the leftist Jews, infiltrate the leftist organizations, defund the aid programs, torpedo the political campaigns, fire the high school teachers and speech pathologists and network commentators, and pink-wash the occupation. The tactics vary today, but the intent remains the same.

Kaleem Hawa writes on books and films and has contributed to The White Review and The Baffler, among other places.

For as long as I have been alive, the barriers in the West to advocating for Palestinian rights have deterred all but the most committed people.

Often, as a result, the responsibility has fallen on the shoulders of Palestinians. Rashid Khalidi, a professor at Columbia and a codirector of its Center for Palestine Studies, is one of the best known to have taken up this responsibility. An acclaimed historian and former adviser to the Palestine delegation during the Madrid talks in 1991, he has written about the origins of Arab nationalism, American Cold War policy

in the Middle East, the construction of Palestinian identity, and the history of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. He has also played an important role in representing Palestinians in Western media and in mentoring a growing generation of Palestinian writers and academics, including Noura Erakat and Lana Tàtour.

While Khalidi's research interests are wide-ranging, he has often examined the history of Palestine in the context of the larger Western imperial project, which has spanned many Middle Eastern nations and whose tool kit of military occupation has laid waste to millions

of Arab lives. The cyclical nature of this history is important. For example, on the topic of a single democratic state for all Palestinians and Israelis—an idea that has increasing purchase among young Palestinians and anti-Zionist Jews—he observes that it is not a radical departure but instead a return to a popular idea that has gestated since at least 1968 yet was marginalized by a now geriatric PLO leadership.

In Khalidi's latest book, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, history proves once again to be the key to understanding the present. He builds on his previous work, interspersing personal and family stories with political ones and tracing the lineage of violence that has engulfed a land that has been known by many different names. In doing so, Khalidi identifies many of the actors who have been instrumental to the Palestinian cause, the revolutionaries, women, and young people who helped build the fabric of Palestinian life within the shadow of endless war, displacement, and occupation.

The “war” in Khalidi's title is conceived as both singular and plural. It includes but also transcends the military conflicts most commonly used to narrate Palestinian history. He chooses to tell this story through six distinct periods, beginning with the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and moving on to the UN General Assembly's 1947 resolution on the partition of Palestine and the ensuing Arab-Israeli War and the Nakba. Charting Palestinian life after the Six-Day War in 1967, he considers Israel's de facto control over all the land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean and then turns to the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the first intifada of 1987, and finally the ceaseless bombings of Gaza and the expanding occupation of the West Bank today.

All of this can read like a chronicle of never-ending struggle. The question of Palestine has always been one of conditioning, of what we are willing to accept and willing to forget—and knowing this, the enemies of a Palestinian nation have pursued a relentless program of erasure. But Khalidi's book is also an act of historical recovery, an effort to pen, as he puts it, the “first general account of the conflict told from an explicitly Palestinian perspective.” As with the pioneering work of the Israeli historians Ilan Pappé and Avi Shlaim, *The Hundred Years' War* does not offer a unified theory of history but rather an account of the colonial structures on which the Israeli project depends and of the bridges that still connect the archipelago of Palestinian life.

The Hundred Years' War on Palestine

A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017

By Rashid Khalidi

Metropolitan Books. 336 pp. \$30

Khalidi resists the urge to start his book with the founding of Israel in 1948. Instead he starts three decades earlier, in 1917, the year of the Balfour Declaration. That statement, issued at the height of World War I by British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, was delivered in a letter to Lord Rothschild, a prominent leader of the Jewish community in Britain, and outlined the government's support for a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine, then a part of the Ottoman Empire. While some historians have argued that this decision was motivated by Western anti-Semitism, it was also no doubt a strategic choice, aimed at securing the support of American and European Jews for the war effort and potentially for British control of the Suez Canal, which would strengthen Britain's imperial route to India.

After the war, the British followed through on the declaration, facilitating Zionist claims to territory in Palestine through the League of Nations, which set up mandates for colonial governance in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Transjordan in the wake of the Ottoman Empire's collapse. The Palestinian mandate was unique, of course, in that a core tenet of British governance there included a vision for the settlement of the area by European Jews. Soon various Jewish organizations, including most prominently the Jewish Agency, offered housing, education, and other social services exclusively to the Jewish residents of Palestine and to Jews who moved there.

For Khalidi, the British mandate established two parallel realities in Palestine: an embryonic nation-building project for the Jewish minority and the continuation of colonial policy for the Arab majority, whose question of self-determination was left unaddressed. In describing this history, Khalidi lays out what would become the essential orientation of the Western powers toward the Middle East in the coming century, including an approach to Palestine's Arabs defined by that peculiar

combination of colonial paternalism and purposeful neglect.

This pattern continued into the next chapter of the Palestinian story: the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the Nakba, which saw the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes. Khalidi speeds through the head-spinning violence of those months (the history of the Irgun and the Haganah and of Plan Dalet, the massacre at Deir Yassin, the bombardment of Jaffa and Haifa, the depopulation of West Jerusalem) to arrive at the outcome. As he explains, 1948 transformed Palestine “from what it had been for well over a millennium—a majority Arab country—into a new state that had a substantial Jewish majority.”

The next two decades of Palestinian history were marked by a continuous struggle against this new reality, with the hostilities boiling over in 1967 and culminating in the Six-Day War between the Arab states and Israel. Despite Israel's insistence that it was the underdog in this war, the Arab states, Khalidi argues, didn't stand a chance: Israel enjoyed military supremacy from the outset and, as American intelligence noted internally, was a nuclear-armed Goliath.

The Israeli occupation that followed would change Palestine forever. After the war, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 242, on the “territories occupied” by Israel, in which the word “Palestinian” didn't appear once. (The people were referred to simply as “the refugee problem.”) In Khalidi's view, the resolution entrenched Israeli dominance in two ways. First, by conditioning Israel's withdrawal from the lands it had seized from Jordan on the establishment of secure frontiers, it provided Israel with an opportunity to run roughshod over the resolution's intent, enlarging its borders in perpetuity by claiming security as an excuse. Second, by outlining a negotiated settlement to come between Israel and “Arab” parties, the resolution allowed Israel to exploit its language and ignore the existence of the Palestinians, excluding them from the peace process even as its colonial project continued unabated, with only a wincing response from the international community.

The war had other reverberations as



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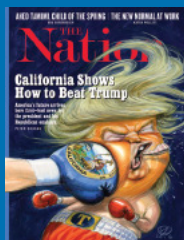
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well, cultural and political. The idea of Palestine surged anew after 1967, led in part by artists and writers like Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmoud Darwish, Emile Habibi, Fadwa Touqan, and Tawfiq Zayyad and by the emergence of competing resistance groups: the Movement of Arab Nationalists, led by George Habash and Wadi Haddad, which was a precursor of the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Fatah movement, led by Yasir Arafat. Together these standard-bearers marked a new era of Palestinian resistance and a strengthened Palestinian resolve. “A central paradox of 1967,” Rashid Khalidi notes, citing Ahmad Samih Khalidi, “is that

by defeating the Arabs, Israel resurrected the Palestinians.”

Of course, some of these names now read like a list of present absences. This is partly because of Israel’s aggressive program of assassination—or “liquidation,” to use Ariel Sharon’s term—often employing the familiar pretext of preempting terrorism, an excuse that Khalidi finds hollow, especially given the large number of writers, poets, and intellectuals whom Israel targeted. As Khalidi shows, this use of violence has deep roots: Ze’ev Jabotinsky, one of the founding fathers of Israel, described Zionism as “a colonizing venture, [which] stands or falls on the question of armed forces.”

The strategic use of violence caused many Palestinians to flee, and Khalidi’s remaining chapters map the expanding geography of violence as Israel pursued them to Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and back to the modern-day West Bank and Gaza.

At the center of Khalidi’s book is a question: How have the Palestinians lost so much and so often? To provide an answer, he explores the various strategies the Palestinians used to fight back as well as their strengths and limitations. On the reciprocal use of force, for example, he recalls the advice given by the Pakistani intellectual Eqbal Ahmad, a

For My Wife, Who Is Writing a Collection of Stories Called *Homescar*

Rocks are notched
with sea limpets, and the pockets

limpets leave once they’ve sealed
into the rock and know

themselves most inside it,
shell swelling,

softening the stone.
You can sketch

their home-scar
with your thumb, the X

the body can’t stop
returning to, little mollusk

driven by the seas then
sealing again to the same

known. My glorious wife and I joke
about home, grooves

in the rock we land in
again and again. I am from the soothing

of PF Chang’s,
the shoe stores in the mall, the lit waves

of others exchanging money
for calm. Before that, my people

are from fear: my great-
grandfather left,

hidden in a wagon of straw. He crossed
the ocean early, just before

he couldn’t. I am from fear.
I steer

clear of harm if I can, wear an extra
sweater and don’t let

my ankles buckle. Oh beloved, I will try
to be bold. The body longs

backward and forward, backward and forward.

friend who had worked with the National Liberation Front in Algeria and believed that Palestinian armed struggle would necessarily falter in the face of an Israeli state that emphasized, above all else, the security of the Jewish people.

While this might lead, Khalidi writes, to a strategy of nonviolent resistance—he favorably compares the demonstrations of the first intifada with the armed insurrection of the second—he also grimly delineates its susceptibility to co-optation (with Palestinian leaders laying claim to the first intifada from their exile in Tunis) and subversion (with Israel initially supporting the rise of Hamas in order to weaken the PLO).

Nor is he sanguine about the history of support from the Arab states. Quoting Egyptian officer Ahmed Aziz, Nasser wrote in his 1954 memoir, *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, “We were fighting in Palestine but our dreams were in Egypt,” and there is much to be said about the largely aesthetic commitment to Palestinian liberation from the rest of the Arab world. Nor were Palestinian leaders blameless in this, having squandered many opportunities to build enduring alliances with neighboring Arab countries. But Western powers have also played a role in dividing Arabs, including the strategy of pushing Israel to negotiate treaties with individual states as a way of sidelining the Palestinian cause, first with Egypt in 1979, then with Jordan in 1994. Israel’s flourishing contemporary relationship with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates can be seen in this context as a continuation of a longstanding practice, not a departure from it.

This leads Khalidi to note the farce of diplomacy over the past three decades. Having attended the Madrid conference in 1991 and the subsequent talks in Washington, initially led by Secretary of State James Baker, Khalidi sees the efforts by the United States and other Western powers to force a settlement on the Palestinians as emblematic of their one-sided position. Throughout these talks, Yitzhak Shamir’s government was able to dictate not only which Palestinians were permitted to negotiate (members of the diaspora and residents of Jerusalem were excluded) but also what topics were forbidden from the outset, including “Palestinian self-determination, sovereignty, the return of refugees, an end to occupation and colonization, the disposition of Jerusalem, the future of the Jewish settlements, and control of land and water rights.” The Americans went so far in those years as to refer to their role as “Israel’s lawyer.”

As Khalidi shows, the negotiations were often a series of carefully laid traps. As a condition of the supposedly good-faith discussions to come, Palestinian negotiators were asked to acquiesce to various terms designed to preemptively nullify their claims, with the later breakdown of talks inevitably blamed on their intransigent leadership. Khalidi’s pessimism extends to the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995, which he argues ought to have been rejected: “Occupation would have continued, as it has anyway, but without the veil of Palestinian self-government.”

For Khalidi, these failures of diplomacy have occurred in a context of Israeli legal overreach, with Israeli governments always preferring to reverse a decision unilaterally instead of asking for permission. For evangelists of the diplomatic approach, the artifice of success requires that negotiations not appear to be relitigating the same injustices over and over—and so the needle shifts ever so slightly, with the proposed solution always an attempt to suture a secondary, larger tear.

The most surprising chapter of *The Hundred Years’ War* does not take place in Palestine, Madrid, or Washington. Khalidi was in Beirut during Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon, a campaign led by Defense Minister Ariel Sharon and Prime Minister Menachem Begin, ostensibly to fight the PLO’s presence in the country. The war was green-lit by Ronald Reagan’s secretary of state, Alexander Haig, with the administration giving assurances that the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon would remain protected should the PLO withdraw. Of course, those promises were hollow, and Khalidi supplements his analysis with an unsettling first-person perspective, having watched with horror as the Israeli bombs rained down on Beirut:

Later I saw that the entire building was flattened, pancaked into a single mound of smoking rubble. The structure, which had been full of Palestinian refugees from Sabra and Shatila, had reportedly just been visited by Arafat. At least one hundred people, probably more, were killed—most of them women and children. Days later, my friend told me that immediately after the air attack, just as he got into his car, shaken but unhurt, a car bomb exploded nearby, presumably having been set to kill the rescuers who were

helping families trying to find their loved ones in the rubble. Such car bombs—a weapon of choice for the Israeli forces besieging Beirut, and one of their most terrifying instruments of death and destruction—were described by one Mossad officer as “killing for killing’s sake.”

The Lebanon experience showed that Palestinian social and political death is borderless: Whether in the refugee camps of Beirut, the streets of Gaza, or the American diaspora, Israel will pursue Palestinians wherever they exist. US complicity in this effort is also worth noting, with American munitions and American-made aircraft used in the shelling of Beirut, buttressed by the crucial support of Reagan’s special envoy, Philip Habib. It is stunning to read Khalidi’s postmortem on the war that destroyed what was known as the Paris of the Middle East and especially what became of its architects: “Shamir and Sharon, as well as [Benjamin] Netanyahu, went on to serve as Prime Ministers of Israel,” and Reagan, Haig, and Habib, all now dead, have “so far escaped judgment.”

It is not just the well-known ghosts that haunt *The Hundred Years’ War*. Like my own family, some members of Khalidi’s are from Jaffa, one of the most visible sites of ethnic cleansing in Israel. A photo of his grandfather’s house in Tal al-Rish adorns the book’s cover; the edifice has remained abandoned since 1948.

With more than 400 citations, *The Hundred Years’ War* is one of the best-researched general surveys of 20th and early 21st century Palestinian life, but it’s also a deeply personal work. To an outsider, Khalidi’s many references to his family’s experience may feel excessive, especially given that it was among the most prominent families in Palestine. But for a people whose history is all but criminalized, this act of retelling is itself a form of resistance, and to his credit, Khalidi takes pains to decry a patriarchal and centralized Palestinian leadership that persists to this day.

While capturing the social history, Khalidi is careful not to lose sight of the realpolitik of movement building, showing how the most successful moments of Palestinian resistance occurred at those junctures where Israel’s interests came into tension with core Western ones. The examples he cites include the dial-back in British support for Israel, prompted by fears that

Palestine's elevation to a pan-Islamic issue could pose "serious trouble" for Britain's presence in India, and Israel's increasingly strained relations with the United States as the war in Lebanon dragged on, with the US realizing—according to a passage in Reagan's diaries describing a conversation with Begin—that the "picture of a 7 month old baby with its arms blown off" in Beirut had the potential to affect America's standing on the world stage.

Some critics have taken issue with the range of Khalidi's discussion here. Scott Anderson, in his frankly embarrassing review for *The New York Times*, opines that the "weakness of this book, to my mind, can be distilled to a simple question: Where does it get you? Even if one fully accepts Khalidi's colonialist thesis, does that move us any closer to some kind of resolution?" It should not be surprising that Anderson, the author of the ironically Orientalist *Lawrence in Arabia*, is unable to read between Khalidi's lines. In describing the arguments made by Palestinians in favor of breaking with the empty rhetoric of the British and Americans; in outlining the foundational importance of the 1936–39 revolt, which was led by "young, urban middle-class" Palestinians;

and in highlighting the indispensable work of Hanan Ashrawi and others to advance the Palestinian cause on the world stage, Khalidi illustrates, among other things, the failures of diplomacy, the power of youthful activists, and the importance of women in Palestinian liberation. That he chooses to do all this implicitly while guiding the reader into an understanding of the depth of Palestinian frustration, rather than offer easily digestible bromides about peace in response to more than 50 years of occupation and over a century of dispossession, makes for good—what's the word?—history.

Even if *The Hundred Years' War* is primarily focused on the past, one can leave Khalidi's book with some sense of what comes next. After reviewing the various manifestations of Palestinian resistance over time, from the use of force to the use of diplomacy, from a reliance on various Arab states to going it alone, he concludes that boycotts—whether the general strike in 1936 or the modern boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement—have advanced the Palestinian cause more than anything done by Fatah or Hamas.

The Palestinians have long understood this, but so has the Israeli government. Its Ministry of Strategic Affairs, helmed by Gilad Erdan, now identifies two primary existential threats to Israel: Iran and the BDS movement. And there are other signs of possible change on the horizon. In February the UN human rights office released its list of 112 companies—among them Airbnb and Motorola—that are engaged in illegal Israeli settlements. Nearly 130 members of Parliament have called on the United Kingdom to impose economic sanctions on Israel in response to its program of de jure annexation. And South Africa has permanently recalled its ambassador to Israel, describing the treatment of the Palestinians as "apartheid."

Even so, one should not make the mistake of overestimating these developments. Ultimately, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine* is a pessimistic book, a catalog of a century of sad stories. While this outcome is partly a result of the failures of the Western media and its abetting of Palestinian erasure, it is also the logical result of an ossified power imbalance that will finally crack only under the pressure exerted by a popular campaign of moral condemnation and economic non-participation. There's your script. ■

HOSTED BY INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS **STEPHEN JANIS** AND **TAYA GRAHAM**

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IF IT WASN'T FOR YOU

Sally Rooney's teen romance

by ERIN SCHWARTZ

Teen romance stories are almost always about the feeling of a shift in power. They channel the thrill of turning a position of weakness into one of strength: the ugly, poor, or otherwise disadvantaged using their less apparent abilities—talent, wit, emotional acuity—to claim for themselves a better role in the social hierarchy. In teen romance, things tend to change all at once rather than gradually. A relationship's subtext shifts through strange, rare moments of shared perception, and then, in some

moment of truth—often a school dance or other public event—the subtext becomes explicit and replaces what came before. A received, social understanding is replaced with an interpersonal, emotional truth that levels all disparities.

Normal People, a novel by the Irish writer Sally Rooney recently adapted into a TV series on Hulu, is not a traditional teen romance, but it is a love story that begins when its protagonists, Marianne (Daisy Edgar-Jones) and Connell (Paul Mescal), are in the final year of secondary school. Connell is working-class, confident, and popular; Marianne is wealthy, standoffish, and almost universally disliked. Connell's mother works as a cleaner at Marianne's house, and the stilted, fumbling conver-

sations between the teens there lead to a romantic relationship that Connell insists on keeping secret. They fall out, then encounter each other months later at Trinity College Dublin, where Connell finds Marianne newly confident, surrounded by a group of intellectual, wealthy friends.

The show follows Connell and Marianne as they pick up and pause their relationship several more times, but the version that unfolded in secondary school feels to me like the template for the changes in their fortunes and their romantic status throughout the rest of the story. In Carriclea, the fictional town in County Sligo where they grew up, Connell enjoys a higher status among their peers, but in the wider world, Marianne has all the

Erin Schwartz is a contributing writer for The Nation and the managing editor of Study Hall. She writes frequently on television, popular culture, and books.

Little Pharma on Rooms

She thinks in a smaller hospital
 She would remember each face
 With some embarrassment
 She can remember all the rooms

1421
 From whose eaves pigeons tumble
 Its permanent winter of shit
 Where she would like to put a thin strip of suspended garden
 Something in love with guano like hay
 Some ruffling infancy of color

707
 Where a couple lay in bed, one sick
 The two now faceless in ozone hoods
 The room wore its stretch of curtain
 Tight and broad like a bandeau in June
 Unspeakable honeymoon
 Ringing for ginger ale all the time

1603
 With its own sitting room
 A surplus of telephones
 One almost expects a little home bar
 Silver shakers a cigarette tray

707
 Where a couple lay in bed
 —was the smaller one sick
 Is that just farm logic—
 Its stretch of green curtain
 Smooth and stiff like a banker's lamp
 Amortizing a fixed account

830
 She thinks somehow she belongs there
 Its shadows and somnolence appeal to her
 The clock runs behind

The television sometimes stuck on a Mass
 Just its own digestion
 Plasma and diode
 It is what she will ask for when sick

1118
 Snow falls to water
 The nurse's badge
 Clicks on the bed rail with a bell's tread
 The green fixtures spell nausea
 Like a lighthouse one sees the swing
 Begin before the beam's upon

516
 Surely the face here—
 It forms then jumps
 Pocket magnet startled
 By breathing
 She grasps it and it changes
 Faster than tadpoles
 She shoves it
 And it will not grimace
 Long enough to keep

LAURA KOLBE

advantages. Neither fully apprehended this as teenagers, although it contributed to the animus between Marianne and her classmates, and Connell happily manipulated his standing to create terms for their relationship that favored him. Then, when he encounters her at a party after a lonely first few months of college, both realize that the context of their relationship has changed dramatically and permanently. In Carriclea, other things mattered more than wealth, but at college in Dublin, class is a blatant and inescapable fact.

This tangle of desire and class is a common romantic setup—seen in everything from *Gossip Girl* to *Pride and Prejudice*—and the tension of love across class lines usually dissipates once the lovers get together (or the story simply ends). Rooney, a life-long Marxist, doesn't let the tension drop; it keeps coming up throughout *Normal People*, turning it into a provocation. Is it even worth trying, the story asks, to love someone when the scales will never be balanced? Marianne and Connell's relationship is idiosyncratic; treating it as the sum of sociopolitical contingencies would be a disservice. But it's often those contingencies—lost jobs, abusive families, a painful, inborn awareness of status—that drive them apart. How can people fall in love in a world structured by power?

When Connell encounters Marianne at Trinity, he's been invited to a party by Gareth, a foppish campus celebrity type engaged in a battle with student activists over his debate club's decision to invite a neo-Nazi to speak at the school. After awkward small talk in the packed, hazy lounge of Gareth's campus apartment—when Connell mentions that he's sharing a room, Gareth's brain appears to short-circuit as he mutters, "Oh, that's... brutal, man"—he leads Connell outside to meet his girlfriend. There in the purple-pink dusk is Marianne: She has a new haircut, her eyes are outlined in thick black eyeliner, and she's wearing a velvet blazer and smoking. Her initial surprise at seeing Connell quickly gives way to a sharp, dark amusement.

The two split off and find a corner to engage in a high-level emotional sparring match, in the course of which Marianne reveals a surprising level of scorn for Gareth. When Connell skewers him as a Holocaust denier, Marianne concedes that dating him is a failure of her "ideological purity." She then asks Connell if he's seeing someone, and he admits he's finding it difficult to

meet people at Trinity. "A bit different from home, I suppose," he adds. "Probably why I'm good at it," she replies.

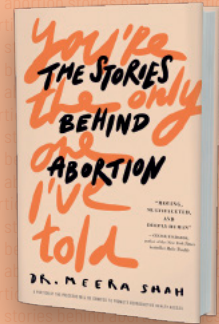
Although Marianne continues to privately voice disdain for her coterie of one-percenter friends, she is still unmistakably one of them. Even after Connell is welcomed into their circle, he remains on the margins. The summer after their first year in college, Connell and his roommate Niall backpack across Europe and meet Marianne and her new boyfriend, Jamie, at her family's vacation home in Italy. (In Rooney's novel, Jamie is introduced by the biographical detail that his father is "one of the people who had caused the financial crisis—not figuratively, one of the actual people involved.")

Jamie goes out of his way to make Connell and Niall feel unwelcome at a backyard dinner the evening after they arrive, using a dispute over the semantics of champagne coupes versus flutes to volley a series of escalating snipes at backpacking, hostels, tourists, and scholarship recipients. He begins directing these attacks at Marianne as well, culminating with him breaking a glass and pouring wine on the floor in an altercation inside the house.

Earlier that day, while grocery shopping in the quaint Italian town closest to the villa, Marianne acknowledges her position of economic privilege relative to Connell. "I am conscious of the fact that we got to know each other because your mother works for my family," she tells him, adding that she imagines her mother is a bad employer, something Connell confirms. "Why hasn't this come up before?" she asks. "Honestly, I think it's totally fair if you resent me."

"I don't resent you," Connell responds. "Why would I? I just don't think I'm processing the change all that well."

Rooney went to Trinity herself; one imagines that an observation through Connell's eyes that "all the guys in his class wear the same waxed hunting jackets and plum-colored chinos" is drawn from life. In a 2019 *New Yorker* profile, she described her experience meeting the children of the ruling elite for the first time in college. "What I wasn't prepared for was encountering the class of people who run the country," she said. "I had a feeling, on one hand, of being appalled, but on the other hand a real sense of wanting to prove myself to people, to prove I'm just as good as they are. I don't know why—it would have made a lot more sense



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—JESSICA VALENTI,

columnist and author of *Sex Object: A Memoir*

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to just let them be—but it’s a fascination that’s not purely revulsion.”

In the United States, there are some differences: In my experience, the same stratum of the elite understands the aesthetic and political benefit of cosplaying as working-class, dressing and performing accordingly. Still, despite differences in style, I recognize a familiar young one-percenter worldview in Marianne’s college circle and, to some extent, in Marianne. The specific strain of irritation it triggers made it difficult for me to evaluate *Normal People* purely on its merits when I first read the novel. As Marianne and Connell traded positions of relative power, it never felt to me like an even game. How could I sympathize with a character whose wealth shielded her from so many common hardships—hardships that her friends and loved ones had to face?

The answer, of course, is that it will never be an even game, despite the romance genre’s promise of a satisfying conclusion. *Normal People* is something else: a document of the sacrifices, gains, and adjustments it takes to keep a relationship intact. The night after the dinner party in Italy, Marianne sleeps in Connell’s room and attempts to tell him that, like Jamie, her brother is abusive, and his actions are enabled by the rest of her family. “Last time I was home, my brother said he wished I was dead,” she says into the dark room. Connell offers the wrong response—“What provoked it? Like, how did the argument start?”—and Marianne, sensing blame and disbelief, shuts down. He then asks a question that mirrors hers from earlier: “Why’d you never say any of this to me before?”

It’s this aspect of the novel that I appreciated seeing play out in the television show: how many attempts it takes for Marianne and Connell to understand what the other is saying. Moments like this, when they fall just short of understanding each other, accumulate until they get it right. Marianne splits with her family after she has a violent confrontation with her brother and her mother asks her to send back the keys to the family apartment where she’s been living in Dublin. It becomes clear that her family’s wealth was never simply a resource; it also kept her trapped in a family dynamic of endless, gendered violence. She spends Christmas with Connell’s family, and as she moves out of the apartment, she mentions that it never felt like home.

“I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for you,” Connell says as he helps her pack her things. “You’d be somewhere else entirely,” Marianne replies. “You’d be a different person.” ■



BOUNDLESS

Yves Tumor’s and Perfume Genius’s avant-garde pop

by JULYSSA LOPEZ

Mike Hadreas, who goes by the name Perfume Genius, starts his latest album, *Set My Heart on Fire Immediately*, with “Whole Life,” which opens with a naked, mournful line: “Half of my whole life is gone / Let it drift and wash away.” The sentiment is so full of lament, so gut-wrenchingly sad that it’s hard not to internalize it and think about one’s own youth leaking out by the second. The wistful specificity of the lyrics and Hadreas’s frail and unsteady voice make all this emotion palpable; it sounds as if he can barely get the words out over the sparse

arrangement. But then there’s a switch. A lush piano melody and strings swoop in like a burst of wind, propelling Hadreas toward a sweeping finale. “Shadows soften toward some tender light / In slow motion I leave them behind,” he belts out, now resilient over instrumentation that’s as sumptuous and frolicsome as daybreak. “Whole Life” becomes a triumph as he proudly shakes off his old life, making the song feel like a lavish bouquet laid on the grave of all the people he’s once been.

Hadreas’s knack for transforming insular emotions into stately pieces of music is uncanny. He’s done it over and over again, most recently on 2017’s *No Shape* and on 2014’s *Too Bright*. Amplifying quiet thoughts

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and feelings can come with a certain degree of melodrama, but even at its most theatrical, Hadreas's work retains a sense of privacy and precision, as if you're catching a person whispering a monologue intended only for himself. *Set My Heart on Fire Immediately* is the most instinctive of Hadreas's releases and sonically his most complex. Yet he's still wonderfully poised during the album's most intricate overtures, pulling off bare, intimate acts with the aplomb that he's acquired over the last decade.

"Describe" is one of the moments on the record that feel entirely effortless, despite originating from a deep and bruised place. Hadreas—whose music has excavated painful experiences like living with Crohn's disease; struggling with depression, addiction, and anxiety; and being bullied as a teenager for being gay—shared that he wanted to capture how it felt to be in "such a dark place that you don't even remember what goodness is or what anything feels like." He teamed up with his longtime producer Blake Mills, and the results speak for themselves. The sound Hadreas offers is weightless and elegant. His vocals are hushed and distant over silvery guitars that prickle with nostalgia. While the words might get buried in light blankets of distortion, they are evocative and affecting upon each listen. "His love, it felt like ribbons / An echo in the canyon / Can you just find him for me?" he sings, capturing bottomless yearning in one mellifluous sentence.

The record flips between flashes of brightness and a longing for times that disappeared in the blink of an eye. "On the Floor" is the bounciest the album gets, with Hadreas's chorus reinforced by a community of musicians, among them the singers Phoebe Bridgers and Ethan Gruska. "Nothing at All" crackles with intensity, partly the result of a propulsive drum machine and Hadreas's insistent vocals, which sound as if he's singing through gritted teeth: "I got what you want, babe / I got what you need, son / Nothing, nothing at all." Synth curlicues cut through the track, adding a playful touch to his urgency. They also give the song a shifting, mutating quality, as if it could explode at any second into a dance track, an unhinged rock experiment, or a weird flute solo.

The idea of genre-bending pop music has been invoked so liberally of late that it's lost much of its meaning. Like all things, the term has been cannibalized by the industry and twisted into a commercial strategy that pulls broad styles of rap, country, R&B, and electronic music into

a standardized pop formula tailored to appeal to as many ears as possible. Yet *Set My Heart on Fire Immediately* restores power to the term and reminds listeners that the beauty of such music often comes from artists—many of them queer or people of color—taking bits and pieces of the worlds they've roamed and constructing their own havens from the sounds. Hadreas has created his refuge tenderly and painstakingly, pushing past liminal spaces to land someplace new.

The work of Yves Tumor, the experimental artist who released *Heaven to a Tortured Mind* last month, is similar in this regard, although the approach is enthrallingly different. In Tumor's hands, sonic fluidity isn't exactly florid or pristine. Tumor, who uses "they" pronouns, seduces and warns listeners all at once; their jagged musical universe is entered at one's own risk. As interested as they might be in rock stardom with this album, they're a force that agitates pop music, slamming it into more interesting directions. Tumor comes across as someone who has gnashed pop between their teeth and spit it back out into something raw, warped, and avant-garde. So while this record has glimmers of more recognizable forms—glam rock and R&B in particular—Tumor's idiosyncratic and intimidating aesthetic choices (spurts of reverb, visuals that delight in otherworldliness and the grotesque) are precisely what gives the work its glowing modernity.

The ability to glide in and out of genres is deeply embedded in Tumor's identity as someone who wants to elude categorization, someone who has always been an amorphous or protean character. In 2015 they debuted a self-released album, *When Man Fails You*. The tracks were haunting, evasive experiments in trip-hop, house, noise, and ambient music, cloaked in mystery. The inscrutability was intentional; Tumor revealed little about their personal background, even as their albums *Serpent Music* (2016) and *Safe in the Hands of Love* (2018) garnered critical acclaim. Instead, Tumor twisted their story often, suggesting a prankster's instinct for messing with industry narratives. "Question mark, question mark, question mark—it's private," they said in an interview with *Pitchfork* after the reporter asked where their permanent home was. Some artists craft a careful story to leverage their profiles, and this enigmatic approach may be Tumor's strategy. But it succeeds in making

their work intriguing and provocative.

Trying to get a good look at Tumor occasionally feels like staring into the sun. In the cover art for *Heaven to a Tortured Mind*, two nude figures, both presumably Tumor, are interlocked and bathed in a bright, ice-white light. One realizes only after much squinting that the image is an optical illusion, too incandescent and abstract for easy interpretation. But in the music, Tumor demands to be heard. Crashing guitars vamp for a bit at the beginning of the brilliant opener, "Gospel for a New Century," preparing for a grand entrance. Then Tumor dives in, their intonations a mix of Prince's smooth flamboyance and TV on the Radio vocalist Tunde Adedimpe's low-pitched severity. The performance drips with cool insouciance as Tumor sings slack-jawed, but it's just one way they stretch their voice across the album.

On "Kerosene!" they honey up their sound, slipping into a decadent, come-hither power ballad with the vocalist Diana Gordon. There's a throwback quality to the type of sexiness that Tumor evokes; it's the soft-lit, neopsychedellic seduction of the 1980s, with lyrics reflecting a direct, old-school chasteness. ("I can be your real life sugar / I can live in your dreams / Will you be my fantasy little baby?" read the lyrics of "Kerosene.") All of the lust and emotion comes through primarily in Tumor's delivery: They play with tone and modulation, letting out aching whimpers on "Super Stars" or long, breathy whispers over the whining electric guitars on "A Greater Love." They hiss, they pant, they squeal, they thirst, and the performances are so convincing that Tumor, as fleeting and impenetrable as they can be, begins to morph into the yearning lothario at the center of these songs.

It would be easy to assume that the record is Tumor's clearest mission statement to date as well as the fullest self-declaration of an artist who comes alive in the music. But *Heaven to a Tortured Mind* seems like a case study in never-ending self-expression, and it's likely just one more glimpse into an unpredictable, boundless imagination. The strength of Tumor's work, like Hadreas's, lies in its reconstruction of genre, of masculinity, of artistic limits. But neither of them rests for long after striking new ground. Instead, they both keep moving in an ever-evolving whirl of creative continuity, unsatisfied with a static state of being. ■



THE REAL VOTER FRAUD

How to Steal an Election

TED RALL

JOURNALIST GREG PALAST HAS SPENT MUCH OF HIS CAREER INVESTIGATING HOW POWERFUL INTERESTS CONTROLLED BY WEALTHY INDIVIDUALS MANIPULATE THE SYSTEM FROM BEHIND THE SCENES IN ORDER TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO STEAL YOUR VOTE.



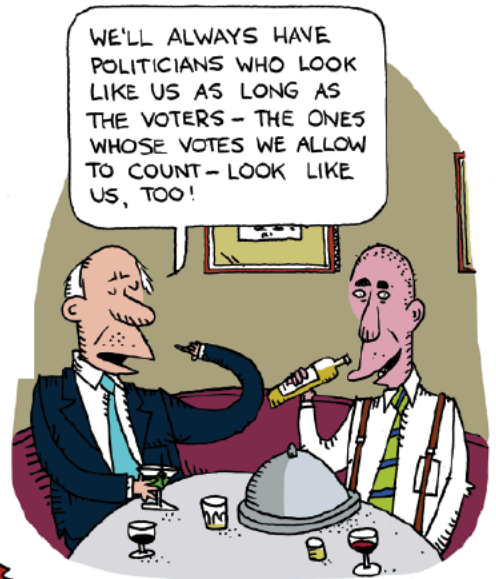
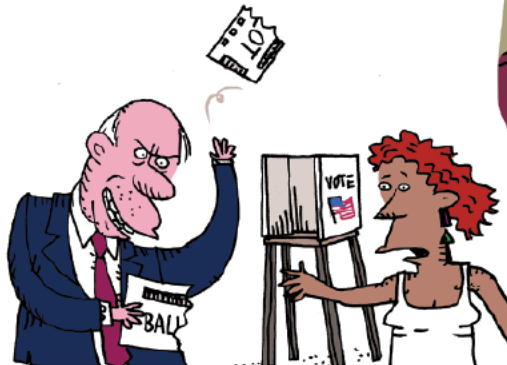
THERE ARE BASICALLY FOUR WAYS TO BLOCK PEOPLE FROM EXERCISING THEIR MOST FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT AS A CITIZEN.

FIRST, STOP THEM FROM REGISTERING TO VOTE.

SECOND, IF THEY REGISTER ANYWAY, CANCEL THEIR VOTER REGISTRATION.

THIRD, PREVENT THEM FROM GETTING TO THE POLLS TO CAST A BALLOT.

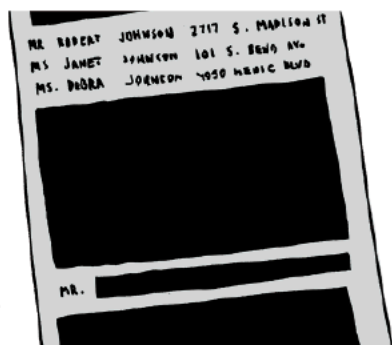
FOURTH, IF THAT FAILS, INVALIDATE THEIR VOTE.



AND THE OLD FART RULERS OF BOTH PARTIES BLOCK VOTES OF PEOPLE OF COLOR—AND THE YOUNG.

PURGING VOTERS WHO "MOVED"

CLEANING THE ROLLS SOUNDS REASONABLE. BUT REAL-WORLD EXECUTION OF "LIST MAINTENANCE" IS SQUALID. IN 2018, GEORGIA'S G.O.P. SECRETARY OF STATE PURGED HALF A MILLION BECAUSE THEY'D SUPPOSEDLY LEFT THE STATE... BUT THE PALAST TEAM WENT THROUGH EVERY NAME AND FOUND THAT 340,134 HAD NEVER MOVED... INCLUDING MARTIN LUTHER KING'S 92-YEAR-OLD COUSIN, WHO GOT TOSSED OUT OF THE POLLING STATION.

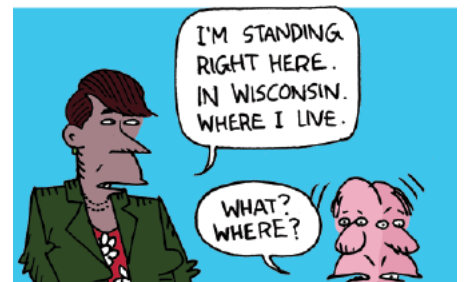


IN AN INCREASINGLY WIDESPREAD TACTIC, A 1995 OHIO LAW ORDERED COUNTY BOARDS OF ELECTIONS TO PURGE THE REGISTRATIONS OF "INACTIVE VOTERS" WHO HADN'T CAST A BALLOT FOR SIX YEARS AND WHO HAD NOT RESPONDED TO A MAILER TO UPDATE THEIR REGISTRATION. YET FEDERAL LAW SAYS YOU CAN'T LOSE YOUR VOTE FOR NOT VOTING.



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THE EXCUSE IN SOME REPUBLICAN STATES IS TO SAY THAT IF YOU MISSED TWO ELECTIONS AND DIDN'T RESPOND TO A JUNK-MAIL POSTCARD, OBVIOUSLY YOU'VE MOVED FAR AWAY, OUT OF YOUR COUNTY OR STATE.



THE PALAST TEAM WENT THROUGH EVERY NAME OF EVERY "MOVER" ABOUT TO BE PURGED IN WISCONSIN AND FOUND THAT 165,000 OF THOSE VOTERS HAD NOT MOVED FROM THEIR COUNTIES. THEY SAID SEQUANNA TAYLOR, A BLACK WOMAN, MOVED OUT OF MILWAUKEE, REALLY? SHE'S A MILWAUKEE COUNTY SUPERVISOR.

Comics by Ted Rall, from his 48-page comic book inside Greg Palast's *How Trump Stole 2020* (Seven Stories Press, 2020). Reprinted courtesy of Seven Stories Press.

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