

N

EST. 1865

THE

Nation.

MARCH 22/29, 2021

SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

Parenting as a Radical Act of Love

Because all our children's lives depend on it.



Including:

Chesa Boudin

Sylvia A. Harvey

Carvell Wallace

Imani Perry

Courtney E. Martin

Jamilah Lemieux



Minari's Rural America

Kristen Yoonsoo Kim

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT

This Women's History Month, join EMILY's List in celebrating the historic inauguration of Kamala Harris as the first woman, first Black American, and first South Asian American to hold our nation's second highest office.

Learn more and help elect more qualified, history-making, groundbreaking women like her at www.emilyslist.org



Paid for by EMILY's List, www.emilyslist.org, and not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee.

EMILY'S
LIST



Climb any mountain: Residents of the remote Turkish village of Güneyyamaç watch the arrival of a medical team in February, part of Turkey's ambitious Covid vaccination program.

SPECIAL PARENTING SECTION

- 13 Introduction**
Emily Douglas
- 14 Across Prison Walls...**
Chesa Boudin
- 17 Coming of Age**
Carvell Wallace
- 18 Diversity Is Not Enough**
Jamilah Lemieux
- 22 Making Integration Real**
Courtney E. Martin
- 25 Reclaiming Indigenous Birthways**
Jenni Monet
- 29 Parenting in Prison: A Love Story**
Sylvia A. Harvey
- 32 The Goals Should Lead the Way**
David M. Perry
- 35 Care Interrupted**
Nefertiti Austin
- 37 Radical Parenting Is a Matter of Time**
Kathryn Jezer-Morton
- 40 Unfinished Reunions**
Maritza L. Félix
- 43 In Sickness, in Health**
Imani Perry
- 45 The Radical Kids...**
Angely Mercado
- 47 Having Babies Like White People**
Andre M. Perry

- 4 EDITORIAL**
American Book of the Dead
MIKE DAVIS
 - 5 COMMENT**
Perverting the Fifth
The Supreme Court takes aim at public access.
NATHAN NEWMAN
 - 6 DEADLINE POET**
Simple Electoral Strategy
CALVIN TRILLIN
- C O L U M N S**
- 7 No Offense**
Will the Democrats sign on with the war party again?
DAVID BROMWICH



- 8 The Front Burner**
We must protect the Squad from right-wing terror threats.
KALI HOLLOWAY



- 11 IN MEMORIAM**
Karen Lewis
JOHN NICHOLS
- 12 THE ARGUMENT**
Abolish guardianship and preserve the rights of disabled people
SARA LUTERMAN
- 61 Letters**
- 62 Q&A**
Dr. Abdul El-Sayed
NATALIE SHURE



- 48 We All Move**
The science and politics of migration.
DANIEL IMMERWAHR
- 50 The Notes** (poem)
VICTORIA CHANG
- 52 Beyond Domination**
The future and past of decolonization.
ARJUN APPADURAI
- 55 Elegy** (poem)
STEPHEN TUTTLE
- 58 Incidental Details**
The comic power and familial intimacy of Lee Isaac Chung's *Minari*.
KRISTEN YOONSOO KIM



Cover illustration:
LOUISA BERTMAN

“ Trump will never face a Nuremberg moment for these crimes. No American president ever has.” < 4

EDITORIAL / MIKE DAVIS FOR THE NATION

American Book of the Dead

BEWARE THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE COVID-19 TUNNEL. EVOLUTION IS PLAYING nasty riffs on the coronavirus, and falling infection rates could be reversed if the more transmissible and virulent British and South African variants become fully naturalized—or if a dangerous California strain, awkwardly known as B.1.427/B.1.429, spreads to the rest of the country. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington recently warned that the national Covid death toll could rise as high as 654,000 by May Day.

Other estimates are rosier, but we must remember that current mortality is more than twice as high as what was modeled last spring as a worst-case scenario. By the end of next summer, the viral book of the dead will almost certainly have as many or more entries as the number of Americans who died in battle between 1775 and 2019 (651,031) or perished in the flu pandemic of 1918 to 1919 (675,000).

Was any of this carnage avoidable? Certainly many American wars should never have been waged, but the Spanish flu's lost souls predated the discovery of the influenza virus (1933), and the desperate campaign against its spread was largely fought in the dark. Not so with our current plague. According to a recent, widely publicized report in *The Lancet*, about 40 percent of our Covid-19 mortality "could have been averted had the US death rate mirrored the weighted average of the other G7 nations."

The Lancet's commission, set up in 2017 to monitor the Trump administration's health policy impacts, found that "instead of galvanizing the US populace to fight the pandemic, President Trump publicly dismissed its threat (despite privately acknowledging it), discouraged action as infection spread, and eschewed international cooperation."

This is a welcome judgment, but misleading in some respects. Trump not only sabotaged and discredited the efforts of public health officials, but did so with an obvious political purpose: to expand a right-wing base already built on the foundations of climate denialism, religious superstition, and the perception that most scientists are the servants of secretive elites.

This initially seemed like completely dumb politics, choosing to play to a fanatic fandom rather than to the anxious majority of Americans threatened by illness and unemployment. The Democrats should have immediately tied the knot between health and income, promoting a national pandemic strategy as the only path to save the economy. But for the most part, they didn't.

Having abdicated frontline leadership to the poorly resourced states, the White House was then able to turn the tables by making war on Democratic governors' efforts to enforce mask mandates and school and workplace closures. The Save Our Country Coalition launched mob attacks on state capitols, while red-state

crowds rejoiced at unmasked Trump rallies.

The Lancet seems willing to charge only negligent manslaughter when second-degree murder would be more appropriate. The 200,000 preventable deaths estimated by the British medical journal were the victims of an election strategy designed to play off jobs against pandemic prevention. In the event, 74 million voters drank the Kool-Aid.

But Trump will never face a Nuremberg moment for these crimes. No American president ever has. Preparing the articles of impeachment against Richard Nixon in 1973, nine Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee joined the Republicans to reject John Conyers's proposal to make Nixon's secret and illegal air war on Cambodia one of the charges.

Indict the burglar, they decided, not the bomber.

Although Merrick Garland has signaled his commitment to continue the investigation of the January 6 putsch, I'm unaware that any Democrat has proposed a *criminal* investigation of

the White House's role in Covid-19's spread. Nor have the families of US Covid victims yet banded together, as they have in Britain, to demand an inquest with real teeth and political consequence.

In the meantime, Republican majorities in statehouses are escalating their campaigns against mask mandates and school closures while going to the courts to strip governors of their emergency powers. The American Legislative Exchange Council is helping to write the legislation, Tea Partiers provide the protesters, and Astroturf think tanks like FreedomWorks continue to link ersatz populism to billionaire super PACs.

Where is the countermovement? **N**

Democrats should have promoted a national pandemic strategy as the only path to save the economy.

COMMENT / NATHAN NEWMAN

Perverting the Fifth

A case before the Supreme Court could overturn decades of precedent and roll back many regulatory and civil rights laws.

FOLLOWING AMY CONEY BARRETT'S ASCENSION to the Supreme Court, the Federalist Society finally has a case before the court that could roll back large swaths of the regulatory state and civil rights laws.

On March 22, the Supreme Court will hear oral arguments on an appeal from a corporate farm seeking to void California regulations giving union organizers access to its property to talk to farmworkers. The farm owners argue in *Cedar Point Nursery v. Hassid* that the regulations violate their Fifth Amendment right to exclude unwanted visitors.

Both the California Supreme Court and the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit have ruled that the state's regulations are constitutional. So if the US Supreme Court is bothering to take the case, there's a reasonable likelihood that, with Barrett, there are now five justices ready to overturn the lower courts and move forward with the most radical economic goals of the legal conservative movement.

The court majority may try to sell striking down California's labor regulations as just a small extension of existing doctrine, but it would in fact be overturning bedrock precedents that uphold the New Deal and the civil-rights-era economic order.

The Fifth Amendment argument being made in this case is little different from that made by Barry Goldwater and others who denounced the 1964 Civil Rights Act as violating the right of businesses to exclude whomever they wished from their property. The Supreme Court rebuked that viewpoint in its 1964 *Heart of Atlanta Motel* decision, ruling that a company "has no 'right' to select its guests as it sees fit, free from governmental regulation."

As an alternative, the legal conservatives' ongoing holy grail has been for the courts to insist that the government compensate corporations when its regulations encroach on their property; this is what conservative legal scholars call unconstitutional "regulatory takings." But despite the Supreme Court's rightward move over the decades, it has largely refused to roll back major consumer, environmental, or employment legislation using the regulatory takings argument.

With an expanded conservative majority on the court, *Cedar Point Nursery* is a chance for right-wing legal activists to take another bite of the apple. The plaintiff has invoked the key area where the court has found Fifth Amendment violations, namely where government policy mandates permanent physical changes or access to private property, such as installing cable equipment, extraction wells, bike lanes, or beach access paths. The goal is to have even "temporary physical invasions"—such as the limited periods when union organizers are permitted access

to nonwork areas to talk to farmworkers—declared unconstitutional takings as well. Given how pervasive the rules are granting periodic access to private property, from government inspections to rent regulations, this seemingly subtle shift—from the words "permanent physical invasion" to "temporary physical invasion"—would convert the Fifth Amendment into a wrecking ball to use in declaring large areas of current public policy unconstitutional.

Dozens of corporate associations and right-wing legal think tanks have filed in support of Cedar Point Nursery's case, sensing its potential to rock our nation's legal doctrine to its core. A brief by the Institute for Justice, a conservative litigation outfit, points to classes of policy similar to the California regulations that should also be declared unconstitutional "temporary physical invasions," including laws requiring hospitals to admit indigent patients, rules requiring hotels to accept licensed cabs on their property, or basically any regulation regarding which contractors a company may use on its property.

From there, it's a slippery slope to striking down much of the federal labor law that prevents employers from excluding (i.e., firing) pro-union employees from their property. Similar logic could be used to strike down laws requiring landlords to accept "invasions" (i.e., rentals) by Section 8 tenants or charter schools to accept "invasions" (i.e., enrollment) by disabled students, or pretty much any rule requiring businesses to provide service to clients or customers they would prefer not to serve.

The big question is whether the new court majority is willing to take a chain saw to precedent—something that conservative justices have not been shy about doing, particularly in regard to labor law. Most pertinent is the court's 1980 *PruneYard Shopping Center* decision, which held that in protecting a labor union's right to leaflet inside a private mall, California law did not violate the Fifth Amendment. As William Rehnquist—soon to be Ronald Reagan's pick for chief justice—wrote for the majority, "It does not violate the United States Constitution for the State Supreme Court to conclude that access to appellants' property in the manner required here is necessary to the promotion of state-protected rights of free speech and petition."

Notably, federal labor law has granted nonemployee union organizers access to mining and logging camps and other nonpublic locations without running afoul of the Fifth Amendment. A 1992 case, *Lechmere Inc. v. NLRB*, limited where the National Labor Relations Board could

Farm owners claim that allowing union organizers on their property violates their Fifth Amendment rights.

ignore state property law in granting unions access to employer property—a case that Cedar Point Nursery’s allies make much of. But this was a statutory interpretation of the National Labor Relations Act and didn’t even mention the Fifth Amendment.

As well, the NLRB and the courts have continued to grant union organizers access to employer property wherever state law says that unions have a right to it. In fact, two years after *Lechmere*, in a case highlighting the right of federal inspectors and non-employee union representatives to enter a coal company’s property, the court would largely dismiss any Fifth Amendment challenges to such access, arguing that such claims “misconstrue *Lechmere*,” since the right to exclude union organizers derives from state property law, which can be redefined by those states. And at the federal level, “Congress’ interest in regulating the mining industry may justify limiting the private property interests of mine operators.”

Now, despite the extensive precedents justifying California’s farmworker union regulations, there’s nothing to stop the current court majority from overriding them all and opening the door to a torrent of radical new decisions. Advocates should refuse to let the court pretend that such a decision is merely a minor change in doctrine; they should instead trumpet that it is an extreme move by a court far to the right of its predecessors, including the Rehnquist court.

We need to create a public drumbeat on the importance of *Cedar Point Nursery*—and if the court rules against the farmworkers, to highlight how unmoored from precedent its new right-wing majority really is. In the end, if nothing else, this should stiffen the spines of Democratic leaders to expand the Supreme Court as soon as the political opportunity arises. **N**

Nathan Newman is a writer and professor who teaches criminal justice and sociology at CUNY.



SNAPSHOT

Alejandra Rajal

Mexico’s Budding Economy

After decades of harsh drug laws, Mexico’s Congress could soon pass a bill that would create a legal marijuana industry. But many of the country’s cannabis proponents are dissatisfied, saying the proposed law expressly favors corporations. The advocates want to see a different version of the bill, one that benefits small businesses and family farmers.

—Maya Averbuch



CALVIN TRILLIN
DeadlinePoet



6

Simple Electoral Strategy

“Republicans in state legislatures nationwide are mounting extraordinary efforts to change the rules of voting and representation.”
—*The New York Times*

Their chances of winning on issues remote, Suppression’s what’s keeping their party afloat. Their strategy’s sung on a singular note: You can’t vote against them unless you can vote.

No Offense David Bromwich



Armed Doctrine

Will the Democrats renew their membership in the war party?

WHY DOES THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY WANT THE Cold War back? Senator Mark Warner and Representative Adam Schiff tell us that Russia is the destroyer of democracy at home and abroad. Vladimir Putin, in their view, is seeking more than reasonable elbow room in Eastern Europe. He aims to subvert and conquer America. In a podcast conversation with Nancy Pelosi after the January 6 Capitol riot, Hillary Clinton said she would “love to see” Trump’s phone records from that day to find out if he was consulting with Putin. This fantastical supposition was greeted by Pelosi with instant credulity: “All roads lead to Putin.”

Where would they be without an enemy? These Democrats have already formed an implicit alliance with Republicans Liz Cheney, Tom Cotton, and Nikki Haley, as well as assorted media friends of the war party dating back to Iraq, such as Max Boot and Jennifer Rubin. There are reasons to hope that Joe Biden’s foreign policy team will have a sounder balance, but the dramatis personae thus far leave an uneasy impression. Susan Rice, a careerist of the foreign policy elite who stopped just short of the highest rung under Barack Obama—having been denied promotion to secretary of state, owing to her association with the Benghazi disaster—has been put in charge of domestic policy. Yet she is hardly likely to stay away from the discussions that interest her more. Antony Blinken at the State Department, Jake Sullivan at the National Security Council, and Samantha Power as head of the US Agency for International Development will administer democracy-promotion initiatives that in the past have been known to include shipments of “armed doctrine.”

None of these people ever recognized that the eastward expansion of NATO after the collapse of the Soviet empire—whose existence alone justified NATO—was a provocation felt by many Russians besides Putin. Further signs of a lesson not learned may be found in the first volume of Obama’s presidential memoir, which deplores (in passing) the weak Russia policy of his predecessors, George W. Bush and Dick Cheney: “Beyond suspending diplomatic contacts, the Bush administration had done next to nothing to punish Russia for its aggression.” By “aggression,” he means the Russian retaliation against Georgia after Georgia’s attack on South

Ossetia. Throughout Obama’s two terms in office, his attitude toward Putin was all in the same vein: lofty, cool, and swanking.

Of their first meeting, in 2009, Obama now says that Putin “did remind me of the sorts of men who had once run the Chicago machine or Tammany Hall—tough, street-smart, unsentimental characters who knew what they knew, who never moved outside their narrow experiences.” Obama canceled a second meeting in 2013 over Russia’s granting of asylum to Edward Snowden. But that is an episode that plays more than one way. Obama indicted Snowden under the Espionage Act of 1917, which potentially carries the death penalty. Snowden had followed too faithfully the hint of Obama’s antisurveillance stance in the 2008 primaries and disclosed abuses of civil liberties by the National Security Agency. It was Russia, of all places, and Putin, of all people, who offered Snowden asylum. Who is the small man in this picture?

Allowing exceptions for the Iran nuclear deal and the short-lived rapprochement with Cuba, US foreign policy since 9/11 has meant a unified government under the war party. The Trump presidency was a kind of interregnum. The most immoral and personally vicious of American presidents was, strange to say, not particularly fond of wars, and Trump (unlike his five predecessors) found no new war to fight. He may have had no higher motive than that wars are bad for the hotel business. Nevertheless, the lack of a significant enemy on the horizon has been a deep disappointment to the war party.

Historically, the Democrats have been obedient to instruction by the masters of war. Schiff voted for the Iraq War. Warner voted against ending it. Chuck Schumer did them one better and followed his vote to bomb, invade, and occupy Iraq with a vote against the Iran nuclear deal. In late February, we were told the Biden administration was preparing fresh sanctions to penalize Russia for the two-and-a-half-year jail sentence of Aleksei Navalny. But sanctions, whether the target is Russia or Iran, hurt people more than governments. Nor do they lead people to love the country that inflicts the pain. The left-liberal side in America is now preoccupied with race, but in the 21st century, our most shocking acts of racism have been committed abroad, in places like Waziristan, Sanaa, and Gaza City, where US weapons were deployed, even if US soldiers were not.

Apart from the Iran nuclear deal and a brief thaw with Cuba, US foreign policy since 9/11 has been run by the war party.

It would be interesting to learn how the racially enlightened *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, CNN, PBS, and MSNBC align their rigorous reporting on the sufferings of nonwhite US residents at the hands of police with their largely uncritical treatment of US wars of aggression, which since 2001 have killed not thousands but hundreds of thousands of nameless foreigners. The two pictures hardly seem compatible, unless, guided by corporate pledges to diversify, we are meant to assume the contradiction will be overcome and the relevant suffering at an end when Black people constitute 13 percent of the corporate

US security and intelligence chiefs want Assange's head. And how can the Democrats say no?

boards of DynCorp, General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin, and Raytheon.

Meanwhile, the Democrats' understanding of militarism—always the friend of censorship—is being tested on another front. On February

11, the Biden Justice Department followed William Barr's precedent and refiled an appeal to extradite Julian Assange from Britain to stand trial in the United States. The order was submitted by the acting attorney general, but it is doubtful he would have done so without consulting Biden's attorney general nominee, Merrick Garland. The British judge who initially rejected the US request did so on the ground that Assange was unlikely to survive in a US prison.

Publishers are afforded protection by the First Amendment, while sources are not. Perversely, Assange is being treated as a source, but it is not clear that he broke any laws that are not regularly broken by the leading US newspapers, networks, cable stations, and online news outlets. As with Snowden eight years ago, the reason for the indictment is that US security and intelligence chiefs want Assange's head. And how can the Democrats say no? Their indifference to such abuse signals their alliance with the unaccountable bureaus and agencies in question, while the corporate liberal media looks on approvingly. **N**

The Front Burner Kali Holloway



Protect the Squad!

As soon as they arrived, the Black and brown leftists of Congress became targets of right-wing terror groups.

W

HAT'S BEING DONE TO ENSURE MEMBERS OF THE SQUAD are protected from future attacks by violent white terrorists? No, really—I'm asking. This group of Black and brown congresswomen has long been the target of right-wing terror. In 2019, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib received so many death threats that they asked to be informed only if they were "credible and imminent."

In the immediate aftermath of the Capitol coup attempt, one of the MAGA insurrectionists issued a call on social media for fellow terrorists to "assassinate" Ocasio-Cortez. Questions still remain about whether the panic buttons in Pressley's office—which her staffers discovered had been torn out—were removed under sinister circumstances or as an egregious error that could have proved fatal. Threats against Ilhan Omar have been so prolific that during the failed putsch, she was taken to a secure location for senior leaders of Congress because of the uniquely high risk posed to her life.

While the white terrorists have left the Capitol, the Republican members who rub shoulders with them remain. There's Matt Gaetz, who defends, poses with, and pals around with Proud Boys; Lauren Boebert, who says "I am the militia" and is connected to paramilitary groups like the Three Percenters; and Paul Gosar, who reportedly told members of the Oath Keepers that an American civil war has already begun but "we just haven't started shooting at each other yet." Along with Donald Trump's apparent Marjorie Taylor Greene, who infamously cosigned the murder of her Democratic colleagues, these are just some of the GOP's most vocal and visible rising stars in the House.

They are also, as Ocasio-Cortez has not so obliquely noted, among the key players in a faction of Republicans who maintain "fealty to white supremacist organizations" not just "as a political tool" but because they themselves are "legitimate white supremacist sympathizers." And the threats these congressional *anti-anti-fascists* pose to the Squad are real. Boebert, who had previously tweeted, "I WILL carry my Glock to Congress," refused to let Capitol police search her bag after setting off metal detectors installed after the insurrection she encouraged. Greene once stalked Tlaib and Omar, who are Muslim, around the Capitol to demand that they retake their oaths on the Bible, while Congresswoman Cori Bush described being verbally accosted by a maskless Greene in January. The Black freshman representative said it was the reason she will be "moving my office away from hers for my team's safety." Greene, who recently

ADVANCED DIGITAL HEARING AID TECHNOLOGY

Now Rechargeable!

BUY 1 GET 1 FREE Reg: ~~\$599.98~~
Only \$299⁹⁹
Each When You Buy a Pair – **LIMITED TIME ONLY!**

How can a rechargeable hearing aid that costs only \$299⁹⁹ be every bit as good as one that sells for \$2,400 or more?

The answer: Although tremendous strides have been made in Advanced Digital Hearing Aid Technology, those cost reductions have not been passed on to you. Until now...

The MDHearingAid® VOLT+ uses the same kind of Advanced Digital **RECHARGEABLE** Hearing Aid Technology incorporated into hearing aids that cost thousands more at a small fraction of the price.

Over 600,000 satisfied MDHearingAid customers agree: High-quality, digital, FDA-registered **rechargeable** hearing aids don't have to cost a fortune. The fact is, you don't need to spend thousands for a hearing aid. MDHearingAid is a medical-grade, digital, rechargeable hearing aid offering sophistication and high performance, and works right out of the box with no time-consuming "adjustment" appointments. You can contact a licensed hearing specialist conveniently online or by phone — even after your purchase at no cost. No other company provides such extensive support. Now that you know...why pay more?

MDHearingAid® >>>
DOCTOR DESIGNED | AUDIOLOGIST TESTED | FDA REGISTERED



"I was amazed! Sounds I hadn't heard in years came back to me!"

— Don W., Sherman, TX

CHARGE AT NIGHT **AND GO** ALL DAY

NOW WATER RESISTANT



Charging Case

30-Hour Battery Life



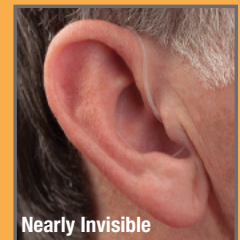
Water Resistant to 3 Feet

45-DAY RISK-FREE TRIAL!

If you are not completely satisfied with your MDHearingAids, return them within 45 days for a **FULL REFUND!**

For the Lowest Price Call 1-800-946-2785

www.MDVolt.com



Nearly Invisible

Use Code **KM58**
and get **FREE Shipping**

SHOP AT HOME!
Skip the Clinic with Remote Care



Proudly assembled in America!

wore a mask reading “*Molon labe*” (a Greek phrase favored by gun nuts meaning “Come and take them”), had also posted an image of herself holding an assault rifle next to the faces of Ocasio-Cortez, Omar, and Tlaib, whom she had labeled “hate America leftists.”

“Posting a photo with an assault rifle next to the faces of three women of color is not advertising. It’s incitement,” Omar wrote at the time, sharing that Greene’s post had prompted death threats to come rolling in. Those threats only added to the racist and misogynistic abuse that members of the Squad were already receiving. Tlaib reportedly got her first death threat before she’d been sworn in to Congress in 2019, while Pressley’s staffers mounted mugshots on her office walls of people who’d made threats against her, until the sheer number required that they be filed in binders. Members of law enforcement have repeatedly targeted Ocasio-Cortez: Two New Orleans police officers were fired for suggesting she should be shot, and a Facebook group for Border Patrol officers featured sexually violent memes of her.

There’s a particularly vicious and violent hatred white right-wingers have for Black and brown women who they believe do not know their place, which they imagine is nowhere near the House of Representatives. Within months

There’s a particularly vicious and violent hatred right-wingers have for Black and brown women who they believe do not know their place.

of the Squad’s election to Congress, Trump, an outspoken white supremacist elected by his base to forestall the diminishment of white male power, expressed and exploited these sentiments. Trump’s harassment campaign pulled out every racist greatest hit, demanding the four “go back” to where they came from, debasing them as “savages,” and accusing them of being “not very smart”—meaning innately, genetically unqualified.

Those attacks encouraged Trump supporters to aim their hatred at a group of Black, brown, and Muslim women who were easy scapegoats for their fears of white irrelevance. There’s no need to rehash the endless security failures leading to the coup attempt, but video evidence documents how dangerously close the mobs got to Capitol legislators and staffers. These Trumpian terrorists killed a cop and trampled one of their own to death. If they had gotten their hands and zip ties on members of the Squad, the murder toll would unquestionably have been higher. Trump acolytes like Greene, whose racist ideas about the illegitimacy of Black votes are part of her sustained assault on Bush and Omar, continue to gin up potential violence.

“We still don’t yet feel safe around other members of Congress,” Ocasio-Cortez admitted in late January, after Congressman Andy Harris was caught trying to bring a gun into the House chambers, where they’re banned.

And yet, despite the dangers posed both inside and outside the Capitol’s walls, the Squad continues to push a necessary progressive agenda. They have vowed to center racial justice, voting rights, education access, climate change, and health care for all in the current Congress. The fundamental importance of their presence, far beyond issues of representation or being “firsts,” is in the politics they support and the leftward push they continue to exert on a stubbornly centrist Democratic Party. It is not surprising that, as on the front lines of every progressive movement, women of color are leading—and taking racist blowback in the process. This is the undue burden carried when, as Pressley has stated, “your very existence is resistance.”

OPPART/PETER KUPER



“Look--we’ll whistle when it’s \$15 an hour.”

N

IN MEMORIAM

Karen Lewis (1953–2021)

*The former president of the Chicago Teachers Union
fiercely championed education as a civil right.*

KAREN G.J. LEWIS MAINTAINED A RADICAL FAITH that fully funded public schools could prepare children to meet every social, economic, and democratic challenge of the 21st century. With it, she taught a generation of activists how to fight for the future of public education. As president of the Chicago Teachers Union from 2010 to 2018, Lewis preached that “great schools with great teachers [are] the most important civil right of our generation.” She inspired teachers to carry their ideals onto the picket lines and into the political arena. They embraced the cause so passionately that, although Lewis has died at 67 after a long battle with brain cancer, the militant Red for Ed movement she championed is sure to live on.

“Karen had three questions that guided her leadership: ‘Does it unite us, does it build our power and does it make us stronger?’ Before her, there was no sea of red—a sea that now stretches across our nation,” declared the CTU after her death.

Lewis built that movement on a foundation of solidarity. Whenever teachers and their allies were organizing, marching, and rallying on behalf of strong unions and great schools, she was at their side. When she showed up, people lit up—with excitement at the prospect that the neoliberal hucksters really could be beat.

Lewis, with whom I shared platforms and podiums over the years, would have been a leader at any time and in any struggle. A student of film and music, a pianist and an opera buff who spoke Latin, French, and Italian, a convert to Judaism who was well regarded for her commentaries on the Torah, she could take a conversation anywhere it needed to go. But her greatest passion was for education.

Lewis’s father and mother were teachers. Educated in the Chicago public schools, she was the only Black woman in the Dartmouth College class of 1974. With her Ivy League degree in hand, she returned to Chicago and taught chemistry for 22 years. Like many teachers, she was frustrated with the “experts” and politicians who were constantly proposing grand “reforms” that invariably added up to more standardized testing and less focus on actual learning.

The pushback started in Chicago, where Lewis and her fellow activists with the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators reorganized the CTU into a powerful force in the fight against school privatization, closures, cuts, and the gimmickry that too often passes for education policy.

“This newly energized CTU is often in opposition with the status quo—those who are in power, many of whom have never stepped foot in a classroom and inhabit editorial boards or make millions on the top levels of corporate-owned skyscrapers or promulgate in the halls of our legislative bodies,” Lewis remarked in a much-noted speech to the City Club of Chicago after her 2013 reelection as head of the 25,000-member union.

Lewis recognized, as did the radical reformers of a century ago, that advocacy for quality education was part of a broader fight for economic and social justice. And she did not shy away from asking the toughest questions about the whole of that struggle. “When will we address the fact that rich white people think they know what’s in the best interest of children of African Americans and Latinos—no matter what the parent’s income or education level?” she asked with regard to the elite proponents of privatization.

Chicagoans got the point of her economic, social, and racial justice advocacy. When CTU members struck in 2012, surveys found broad support among parents for the teachers and their union—support that would strengthen the CTU’s hand as it engaged in struggles on the picket lines and at the

polls over the ensuing years.

Beyond Chicago, Lewis became a hero among the growing community of union members and education activists who recognized that what was needed—instead of more “experiments” or more high-stakes testing—was a deeper commitment to teachers, students, parents, and communities. She upended the education debate, teaching us all that there was nothing innovative about so-called reforms that placed new burdens on teachers, justified school closures, or shifted funds away from public education. She explained in 2013, “Bold thinking says, ‘No schools will close.’ We will not balance our budget on the backs of children.”

John Nichols



➤ **Radical faith:** Karen Lewis inspired teachers and allies in their fight for a just educational system.



THE ARGUMENT

Abolish guardianship and preserve the rights of disabled people.

SARA LUTERMAN

GUARDIANSHIP ONLY MAKES THE NEWS when something goes terribly wrong. Take Rebecca Fierle-Santoian: Acting as a professional guardian, she placed a do-not-resuscitate order on an elderly man who said that he wanted to live. He died. Fierle-Santoian served as the guardian for some 450 people, and it was later discovered that many of them were placed under DNRs or denied life-sustaining medical care without their input or permission or that of family members or the courts.

Or consider the case of William Dean, who was placed under state guardianship after his mother's death. Maine's Department of Health and Human Services sold his home for below market value, got rid of his beloved musical instruments, and euthanized his cat, Caterpillar. Most famously of all, there is Britney Spears and the ongoing battle over who should control the pop star's life and sizable estate.

These cases make it obvious that guardianship needs reform. But the problem is not a few individuals abusing their power; it is guardianship itself. Stripping a person of their legal rights is inherently dangerous and dehumanizing. Guardianship is built on the patronizing assumption that people with certain disabilities are incapable of being full citizens and need a nondisabled person to act as their proxy in all things. While I do not discourage reform, what we ultimately need is abolition.

According to AARP, about 1.3 million Americans are currently under guardianship. It is hard to say exactly how many because the record-keeping is poor and there are no national standards or federal oversight. As a system, guardianship relies on the assumption that guardians are benevolent and always want the best for their wards. And this is probably true for most guardians: They want to protect their elderly parents or disabled children from financial exploitation and worse. But unfortunately, no system that depends on the individual benevolence of someone with absolute power can be relied on. People under guardianship still have their own opinions and feelings, and they deserve the respect that everyone else is afforded.

Significant disability is real. Some people struggle to make decisions or understand the world around them. In calling for an end to guardianship, I am not being Pollyannaish about the individuals whom it is usually imposed upon. There will always be some need for proxy decision-making. But guardianship should be the nuclear

option: It strips every legal right a person has, and once entered, it is extremely difficult to end. Disabled children in schools are legally entitled to the "least restrictive environment" under federal law. This means that children who receive special education are entitled to spend as much time as possible in non-special-education classes, making the same choices as their nondisabled peers. Their educational plans are regularly reevaluated, as people's needs are rarely static. The same standard is not applied, however, to disabled adults. If a person has difficulty managing money, why should they lose their right to vote or to marry? Instead of stripping them of all legal rights, as is the case with guardianship, courts should consider where a person is vulnerable and what that person needs, just as schools are supposed to do. While schools aren't always successful in determining the least restrictive environment, at least this standard is something to aspire to. No such standard exists with guardianship.

When it comes to serving disabled adults, there are alternatives to guardianship that attempt to preserve as many of their rights as possible. Supported decision-making is a system in which trusted advisers—usually family members, friends, or care workers—explain complex choices to help a disabled person make their own decisions. Such choices can involve something as simple as what color to paint a bedroom wall or as complicated as whether to get surgery. While supported decision-making is increasing as a legal alternative across the United States, it is still rarely considered as a first option for vulnerable people. It is also generally used only for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities. The support needs of a young person with an intellectual disability and an older person with dementia aren't too dissimilar, but they exist in different legal universes.

Supported decision-making is not without its own limitations. Depending on the degree of disability, supporters still exert some measure of control over the person they're assisting. If a person needs help leaving the house, they must rely on someone else's good will, regardless of the legal rights involved. These practical difficulties, however, are still an improvement over that person having no legal rights at all. **N**

The problem with guardianship is not a few individuals abusing their power; it is guardianship itself.

Sara Luterman is a freelance journalist and commentator. She writes about disability politics, research, and culture.

EVEN BEFORE THE PANDEMIC HIT, THE FEELING WAS PERVERSIVE: WHEN we're raising children in America, we're going it alone. Demands for more support are growing, but the persistent lack of interest by our government in the essential work of child-rearing has fueled the sense that launching children safely into the world is something we have to figure out on our own. We were struggling—some much more than others—even before Covid-19 roared into our lives. But the pandemic has fully exposed the brutal logic of modern parenting. Too many families entered the crisis with too little. With schools shuttered, many of these children lost access to meals, counseling, and clean clothes. Suddenly without child care, thousands of mothers were pushed out of the workforce. Shut inside our homes, cut off from family and friends, robbed of the solidarity forged at the playground, we battle an isolation that feels more acute than ever.

That isolation may seem inevitable, even natural. But it isn't, say the contributors to this issue—*The Nation's* first ever special issue on parenting, guest-edited by Dani McClain, author of *We Live for the We: The Political Power of Black Motherhood*. In the following pages, we consider the ways in which parenthood can push us to recognize our interdependence and spur us to fight harder for justice and equality. Jamilah Lemieux and Courtney E. Martin write about how choosing a school can be an act of resistance. David M. Perry shows that rejecting ableism requires us to rethink the way society responds to human needs. Jenni Monet profiles an Indigenous midwife fighting the maternal health crisis in the Native community. Kathryn Jezer-Morton considers what really mattered about the commune life she grew up in. Andre M. Perry demonstrates that even the struggle to become a parent can be an exercise in resisting racism.

Our contributors encourage us to recognize the radical acts of love parents com-

mit in the face of hardship and oppression. Chesa Boudin and Sylvia A. Harvey share stories of parental love strong enough to scale prison walls. Maritza L. Félix writes about immigrant parents who take enormous risks on behalf of their children. Nefertiti Austin highlights the importance of continuity for children in foster care. Imani Perry considers the way the essential power of love becomes clearer when illness comes into our lives. Carvell Wallace illuminates the truth that children are not ours to make in our own image. And Angely Mercado reports on parents supporting their children's fight to save the world.

These stories bring us the joy, resilience, and power that comes from reliance on community and embracing collective action. They teach us that showing up for our children can be an act of resistance and fierce dignity. They bring us to the radical heart of parenting.

Emily Douglas

LOUISA BERTMAN

Parenting

as a

Radical

Act of

Love

SPECIAL
DOUBLE
ISSUE

Because all our children's lives depend on it.



Across Prison Walls

I Felt My Parents' Love

BY CHESA BOUDIN

Reunited, for a moment: The author with his parents circa 1982, in a jail visiting room after the family was allowed contact visits.

For Chesa Boudin, his mother and father were radical not for their politics but for the extraordinary lengths they took to parent him while incarcerated.

TOWARD THE END OF A WEEKEND TRAILER VISIT TO MY INCARCERATED FATHER in New York State in 1992, when I was 12, I had an emotional meltdown—and not for the first time. Trailer visits are occasional overnight accommodations provided to family members of people serving long sentences who've kept a good disciplinary record. On that particular weekend, I'd brought a stack of homework that I had to complete before school on Monday. We'd had a couple of happy days together, cooking epic meals of fresh vegetables, tofu, and brown rice, playing chess and cards, watching movies—even as I refused his advice to do my homework the whole time. (Sound familiar?) On the second and last night, I had a temper tantrum: I didn't want to do my homework, or at least that was the trigger for a lot of pent-up emotion. The joy of every prison visit was punctured by the grim realization that I was going to have to leave, and that my dad would not be coming with me. In a fit, I threw all my homework out the window into the dark, windy yard. In that otherwise banal act of rebellion, I created a terrible dilemma for my father. He could leave the trailer to chase down my papers in the dark before they blew away, violating a prison rule and risking a discipline violation, or "ticket," which would not only tarnish his perfect record but also forfeit future visits with me. Or he could protect himself and our access to the trailer visits by doing nothing, sending me home the next day without my schoolwork. He put me first.

WHEN I WAS 14 MONTHS OLD, MY PARENTS, DAVID GILBERT AND Kathy Boudin, dropped me off with a babysitter. They never came back. That day, while I was playing, my parents drove a van used as a switch car in a bungled armed robbery. Though neither of my parents was armed or intended for anyone to get hurt, two police officers and a security guard were killed. My parents were arrested and charged with felony murder—an anachronistic legal doctrine that allows prosecutors to punish almost any participant in a serious crime resulting in death, no matter their role, with murder. In one of the countless capricious outcomes of the criminal justice system, my mother ended up serving 22 years while my father received a minimum 75-year sentence. Though they played nearly identical roles in the crime itself, my father refused legal representation and went to trial, ultimately getting

convicted of all the charges and receiving the maximum possible sentence. By contrast, my mother had excellent lawyers and, on the eve of her trial, pleaded guilty for a negotiated sentence. After 39 years, my father remains incarcerated. Absent a change in law or a grant of clemency from New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, he will not be eligible for parole until he is 112 years old.

I don't remember that tragic day, of course—getting picked up by my grandparents or, weeks later, being taken into a new family that already had two young children, who were now my older brothers and would become, in time, my loving defenders and greatest supporters. But I do remember, from my earliest days, waiting in lines to get through metal detectors, steel gates, and

pat searches just to see my parents, just to give them a hug. I did not understand that my parents' crime had been organized by the Black Liberation Army, and that they were in it not for money but because of a misguided vision of radical racial solidarity. Yet, even as a small child, I noticed that the lines at the prison gates were mostly made up of Black and brown women and children. Those kids and I had all paid a price for our parents' mistakes, and for our country's retributive obsession with prisons.

My parents' arrest in New York in 1981 came just as the addiction to incarceration was ramping up. Today, the United States leads the world in locking people up: With less than 5 percent of the world's population, we have approximately 25 percent of the world's prisoners—2.3 million people behind bars on any given day. What's more, the majority of people in prisons are parents, and there are far more children with an incarcerated parent than there are prisoners. Because of the constant churn of people in and out of incarceration, one in 12 American children will experience parental incarceration.

Parents and children fighting to overcome the distance created by incarceration must be determined, courageous, creative, and more. My father and mother were relentless in their effort to develop into the parents I needed, even as they negotiated the complex landscape of incarceration. Shortly after their arrest, while still in county jail awaiting trial, they were denied any contact visits. Not willing to accept a relationship with their toddler son through plexiglass, my parents filed a lawsuit in federal court. To be sure, most incarcerated families confront demoralizing obstacles like denial of visits or limits on phone calls, and far too few have the resources or social capital to effectively push back. We were luckier than most. In ordering the warden to allow us contact visits, a federal judge wrote, "The importance of contact visits to the detainees, their family and to the institution cannot be understated," and cited a renowned psychiatrist in explaining that "contact visits not only restore decency and humanity to the penal sys-

When a parent commits a crime, the system largely prioritizes punishment over the rights of the children left behind.

Chesa Boudin is the district attorney of San Francisco.

tem, but also perform the critical function of reestablishing the prisoner's connection with the world existing outside the prison walls."

Over subsequent decades of prison visits, I learned that not all contact visits are created equal. After sentencing, my mother spent the rest of her sentence in New York State's only maximum-security prison for women: Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. Thanks in large part to a saintly Roman Catholic nun, the late Sister Elaine Roulet, Bedford Hills was a model of what a family-centered approach to visitation should look like, even if it happened inside miles of razor wire and steel gates. Bedford Hills is located just 40 miles from New York City and is accessible via public transportation. Geography matters, because while more than 60 percent of inmates in New York State prisons come from the New York City metropolitan area, most of the state prisons are located much farther away. Cuomo recently signed into law long-overdue legislation that will direct the state's Department of Corrections to place incarcerated parents in facilities closer to their minor children; the law is a critical part of recognizing the multifaceted identities of the people we incarcerate, most of whom are parents.

Sister Elaine established a parenting center at Bedford Hills that helps mothers arrange visits and maintain contact with their children. The prison has a large visiting room, part of which is dedicated to the Children's Center, designated exclusively for mothers and children. I have fond memories there of making piñatas, building with blocks, painting at easels, playing with a teddy bear my mom had sewn for me, and listening to her read *The Count of Monte Cristo* to me. Sister Elaine also spearheaded a summer program in which children from New York City visit every day for a week and engage in a range of group activities. During one precious week each summer, my mom and I played volleyball and had water fights on the visiting-room patio.

Maintaining bonds: The author with his parents, Kathy Boudin and David Gilbert (right), and his wife, Valerie Block, in November 2019 at the Wende Correctional Facility in upstate New York, where his father is being held.



These visiting opportunities are not available in most prisons, and many states have nothing comparable. Far more common is what I experienced each time I made a normal day visit to one of my father's prisons: wall-to-wall tables with incarcerated people on one side and visitors on the other. No privacy. No carpets. No outdoor space. Limited contact, allowed only at the beginning and end of the visit. No space to move around or do much of anything other than sit there and talk until a correctional officer announces visiting hours are over. Until 2020, at least one state, New Hampshire, prohibited toys in the visiting room. Until 2013, Utah prohibited any language other than English from being spoken on visits. As my friend Emani Davis, who grew up visiting her father in Virginia prisons, put it, "We're told prison visiting rooms are set up for security and control; to kids, they feel designed to kill the human spirit and deter us from coming back."

My father has now served nearly 40 years, divided unevenly among six different prisons in upstate New York. Luckily for us, however, New York is one of just a handful of states that offer overnight visitation. For 48 hours, twice a year or so, I've gotten a taste of living with my dad—albeit under the shadow of razor wire, punctuated by regular prison counts. The two-bedroom trailer homes inside the prisons have a mostly functioning kitchen and, during daylight hours only, access to a tiny fenced-in yard. I usually made the long trip to upstate New York by flying on my own, and then a family

friend or a local volunteer would take me grocery shopping and drop me off at the prison gates. It was these visits, more than anything else, that gave David a chance to be a father—my father.

Beyond homework and home-cooked meals, the trailer visits were a space for difficult conversations. Sure, we talked about the things sons talk about with their fathers, but more than that, we talked on every visit about how and why he was fathering from prison. There is no right way to tell your son that you participated in an armed robbery that resulted in three murders. My father consistently expressed deep remorse, took responsibility, and met me where I was emotionally—whether angry or sad or confused. In explaining the irreparable harm the crime caused, he told me that the men who were murdered had wives and children; some of those

children were around the same age as I was and would never know their fathers because of the crime he'd participated in. Even though, as a child, I fixated on my father's limited role as an unarmed driver, I never made it easy for him. I insisted that he repeatedly tell me what happened and what he did. I wasn't interested in gore—my dad wasn't even present at the robbery—but I had questions: Why would you do something so dangerous? Didn't you worry that people might get hurt? And one question no words could ever answer: Why would you risk losing me?

GIVEN HOW RARE AND EXPENSIVE prison visits tend to be, what happens between those visits is critical. For my entire life, my parents have called me at least once a week—a luxury most families can't afford, no matter how determined the incarcerated parent is to maintain contact. As a child, I'd sometimes get off the phone and cry to myself, "If only I could have talked on the day of the robbery, I'd have told them not to go." But mostly, my parents managed to make the calls fun. For several years straight, my dad would tell me adventure stories. Each call was a new chapter in an ongoing saga starring me and my friends on escapades around the world and beyond. I relished the story time, and in those recorded collect calls, my dad found small ways to act out his love.

Though he couldn't always get access to the phone, my dad sent me letters nearly every day. Sometimes it would be nothing more than a piece of colored construction paper with a big heart on one side. Other letters included photos meticulously torn out of *National Geographic*. Even before I could read, those letters were a critical

"We're told prison visiting rooms are set up for security; to kids, they feel designed to deter us from coming back."

—Emani Davis

part of maintaining and building a bond beyond the bars. Writing letters is an often unattainable luxury for many incarcerated parents because of both the cost of postage and widespread literacy challenges: 40 percent of the people in prison never completed high school. Each stamp my father bought in the commissary cost more than an hour's worth of wages from his prison jobs—mopping floors and facilitating anti-violence trainings for other inmates—but he kept writing his love and regrets a million different ways.

Today, my father is 76 years old. He is one of the oldest and longest-serving people incarcerated in New York State's prisons. He is likely the only person who has been in that long without a single disciplinary violation on his record—even though he found a way to make sure I completed my homework on time. At my age, and his, I'm supposed to be taking care of him. Instead, in the midst of the pandemic, I have not been able to visit once in over a year, even as more than 100 people in his prison have tested positive for Covid-19. Yet every Saturday afternoon, when he calls, instead of complaining, he does what he has always done for me since that tragic day in 1981: parent. Even while confined to a cage, year after year, decade after decade, he has parented through letters and calls and help with homework. Most of all, my dad, David Gilbert—inmate number 83A6158—has parented by living a life grounded in principle, in accountability, and in love.

PRISONS AND JAILS DO NOT PROMOTE parenting; they seriously impede it. When a parent commits a crime, the system largely overlooks their parental obligations—and the rights of the children left behind—in favor of punishment. Virtually every jurisdiction in the country requires sentencing judges to consider victim impact statements, but children of defendants are not considered victims, so the impact on them is systematically ignored. So-called family values are jettisoned in favor of draconian responses to all manner of crimes. While some prisons have marginally more child-friendly policies, none of that could ever make prisons appropriate places for parenting. Indeed, the reductionist labels of “felon” or “inmate” or “83A6158” can easily dwarf the nuanced identities of “mommy” or “daddy.”

After more than two decades of mothering from prison, my mom was released in 2003. More than 17 years later, my father is still living in a cage. Some call my parents radicals because of things they did before I was born or because of their involvement in the tragic armed robbery when I was a baby. In my lifetime, in my experience, the most radical thing about my mom or my dad is their unwavering dedication to being loving parents. **N**

Eventually, our kids realize they're free to become who they are. Our job is to let them.

BY **CARVELL WALLACE**

Coming of Age



We recently received an e-mail from our 17-year-old son's school warning us that he is in danger of not graduating. This is not the first time the alarm has been sounded; in fact, it's been a steady mantra from his teachers and counselors for the better part of three years. “An intelligent kid,” they say, “whose insights and contributions to class discussions are valuable, who we all like, but who does not do the work.”

As always, we gathered for a family meeting. This is serious, we told him. He was not receptive. Not quite resistant, but in no way enthusiastic about taking grades or school or any of the systems we find ourselves in the awkward position of shilling for seriously.

When I was growing up, no issue was taken more seriously in the home than academic performance. The adults in my life were preparing me for a world in which good grades, good schools, and prestigious diplomas were to be the currency I'd use to buy my way into comfort, safety, and maybe even some version of relief from racism and oppression. They therefore guided me with the fervor and insistence of someone guiding a loved one to the light of freedom.

It is hard to say whether or not they were right. At 46, I know that my education has helped me pay the rent and save money, but it is unclear whether or not it has brought me freedom. This is, of course, what my son sees. “What is the point of these systems?” he seems to ask. “What will be here in 30 years? What do good grades matter?”

I don't have an answer for him.

The stress my son causes me is, on the one hand, as old as humanity itself. Even the Bible opens with a story about a

parent (God) whose kids (Adam and Eve) won't follow directions. But on the other hand, my son represents the uncertainty of our time. What, exactly, are we preparing him for? And what do grades have to do with it? Our daughter, with her near-perfect GPA, her internships and jobs, at least does us the kindness of letting us believe that the systems will hold and that the old ways of navigating them will prove useful. But our son confronts us with the void, the unknown, the uncontrollable. He confronts us with fear—fear for his future, fear for ours. How will he pay the bills? How will he find employment? What will be asked of us as he enters adulthood? What will the world ask of him?

The truth is that we don't know the

answers to these questions, and we simply won't until we do. One parenting concept says that we impose our will on our children, raise them up to be as we want them to be. But what if you simply lack the will, the force, to make your child do what you want? What if your child is not a robot that you can program but a sentient, headstrong being who will ultimately do what he feels like doing? It occurs to me that when you make all your plans about what kind of parent you're going to be, the one thing you forget to take into account is the actual child. How do you lead your child to freedom when your child doesn't want to follow?

Maybe that's not the right question. The longer I do this parenting thing, the more I realize that the area over which I have some control is, in fact, very narrow. I can be present with my son when he shows up. I can listen to him. I can remind myself every day that he learned to crawl on his own, walk on his own. That he learned to eat and talk and communicate, that he learned to understand the world, and that he has made countless mistakes—more than I will probably ever know about—and survived them, grown from them, adjusted his worldview to accommodate the information he learned from them. I can push past my own ego in order to see who he really is. I can appreciate him: both the parts of him that are going the way I want and the parts that are not.

I am pleased that he talks to me about jobs, relationships, friendships, politics, the arts. I am pleased that he asks me about my life, about what the world was like when I was growing up. I am pleased that I still get to hug him, all 6-foot-1 of him, pretty much whenever the mood strikes me. I am pleased that he and I are stiff competition for each other in *Mario Kart 8*. I am pleased that when he comes across a movie or TV show he likes, he bugs me until I've sat down and watched it with him, pausing to discuss the shots, the scriptwriting, the color correction. I am pleased that he feels more confident about himself than I did at his age. I am pleased that he doesn't feel a need to violate his own beliefs to please others—not his teachers or counselors, and definitely not his parents.

He's right about that, of course. The world we are preparing him for is uncertain, unsafe, and unclear. Whatever comes of it will require his fullest humanity, his fullest love, his fullest sense of self. I cannot give him that, but I can damn sure not stand in the way. Maybe that's all there is to it. Maybe the more complicated things are, the simpler the task of parenting truly is. **N**

Carvell Wallace is a New York Times best-selling author, memoirist, and podcaster.

Diversity Is Not E



Being in the racial majority at school can make all the difference for Black children.

Enough



PAUL MORIGI/GETTY IMAGES

BY **JAMILAH LEMIEUX**

I AM A PROUD PRODUCT OF THE CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS, which is to say that despite the controversy and corruption that have plagued the nation's third-largest school district throughout its history, I think I fared pretty well within its halls. I was privileged to attend what were then high-performing magnet institutions from first through 12th grade. My elementary school had a nearly 100 percent Black student population, and the majority of the teachers, staff, and administrators reflected that. In high school, my Black classmates and I were about 60 percent of the student body; today, my alma mater has the same Black woman principal who had to call my mom when I smoked an herbal cigarette inside a school building just a few weeks after she'd written a recommendation for me to attend Howard University. I never had to be the only Black kid anywhere growing up, and as an adult I created a life in which I am rarely the only Black person in any situation that I might have to endure for more than a few hours.

Long before I became a mother myself, in 2013, I'd decided that I wanted to send my own children to schools much like the ones I'd attended: ideally, "good Black schools." For me, a good Black school is one that centers the experiences and culture of Black children and is staffed primarily by Black teachers and administrators who are both invested in the education of Black children *and* have the skills to teach them effectively. If they aren't exclusively Black, they need to be largely Black and concerned with the education of Black children as a unique population. The tales of bullying, confusion, self-loathing, and isolation that I've heard from Black people who've been in the racial minority at school have made the idea of subjecting my own child to such a thing seem impossible in all but the most dire of circumstances.

A good Black school, for me, may not be at the top of the local school rankings. Some routinely send kids to elite high schools and colleges, while others measure success simply by being able to get students prepared to graduate in the first place. But Black children enrolled at a good Black school are learning while being affirmed, nurtured, and loved; other children who attend this sort of school receive the same treatment, while also being educated about the histories of Black people in ways they may not ever experience again. Administrators, teachers, and staff are committed to helping the kids improve or even flourish academically. Their efforts may never be enough for most of these schools to outrank

The advantages of "top" schools don't necessarily speak to their ability to make Black kids feel happy, healthy, and whole within their walls.

Jamilah Lemieux is a cultural critic and writer.



Joy at school: The author's daughter before her first day in a program for 3-year-olds at Little Sun People in Brooklyn.

other institutions with better financial resources, and I am OK with that. Parents entrust schools with the minds, bodies, and souls of our children for extended stretches of time. Disparities in academic achievement and discipline suggest that the vast majority of non-Black educators in this country lack an understanding of Black history, Black identity, and Black culture that is comprehensive enough to serve our children well.

We were very fortunate that my Brooklyn-born daughter's academic life began gloriously at Little Sun People, an "African centered" day care that provides a quality preschool experience rooted in exploring and celebrating students' cultural identities. Here, Black people were the center of our own universe, not a subplot in someone else's. The pictures on the walls, the books and toys on the shelves, all reflected us. Naima learned how to make collard greens, dressed up as Billie Holiday for a

school play, took African dance and drum classes, and jumped around to '90s hip-hop at school dances. We didn't have to go back and update the history she was learning to include us, nor did we have to correct mythologies that too easily capture the imaginations of Black children with the notion that they are somehow inferior to white and other non-Black children. At Little Sun People, the teachers looked and felt like the people at home, as did the other kids and their parents. We never wanted to leave.

When pre-K graduation loomed, I was forced to confront how privileged I'd been as a student and how fortunate Naima had been thus far. I thought back to my college classmates, who'd had few, if any, Black teachers before Howard and were in an educational environment designed with Black students in mind for the first time. According to recent data from the Department of Education, the nation's public school teaching force is 79 percent white and over 75 percent female. "The man," a once popular colloquialism

among African Americans referring to the unseen force that is white supremacy, reflects how white men have largely been the face of anti-Blackness in this country. But we can't ignore the ways in which white women, too, uphold the nation's racial caste system. When we talk about who is neglecting Black children in class and penalizing them unjustly, we are talking largely about white women.

Many of my own experiences with white female teachers were starkly different from those I'd had with Black women and non-Black women of color. My kindergarten teacher had won acclaim for her research and writing about early childhood education, but upon learning that I could already read, she could only think to sit me off to the side with a math workbook during literacy lessons. She wasn't enthusiastic

about my skills; instead, she seemed annoyed that they required her to deviate from her lesson plan. I transferred to a new school the following year, but my loathing for math stayed with me. When Naima moved on to kindergarten at a good Black school where many Little Sun People graduates had enrolled and I learned that her first teacher was a white woman, I had her switched—partly because all of her friends from day care were in the Spanish-immersion classroom with a Latinx homeroom teacher next door, but also in part because of my own traumatic experiences with a white teacher when I had just started elementary school.

Finding a school when we relocated to Los Angeles would be trickier, especially considering that my daughter's two households would no longer be in the same neighborhood. But there were two strong options on the table: one a Black school with a magnet program, the other a charter school with a small Black population and a stated focus on social justice and diversity. Naima's younger brother would attend the latter, while her dad and stepmom accepted my strong desire to keep her in a Black school.

We were mostly pleased with the decision. Naima had a great relationship with her homeroom teacher, a white woman who took great care in her approach to teaching Black students. However, the switch to virtual learning in March of last year would highlight the resource disparities between her school and her brother's, which was better prepared to handle the change. Her father encouraged me to consider allowing Naima to transfer there for the 2020-21 school year, and after a lot of soul-searching, I agreed.

One of my biggest fears came to fruition on day one, when Naima was the only Black student

Disparities in academic achievement and discipline suggest that the vast majority of non-Black educators are not serving our children well.

in her virtual classroom. Days passed before we learned that there were four Black students in the second grade: Naima and another girl, who didn't attend the first week of classes, in one homeroom, and two boys in the other. By the time I spoke with the principal about how Naima had ended up on her own, I'd learned that she still had a spot at her old school, so we decided to make the switch back.

Things could have turned out differently if a teacher or administrator at the charter school had considered that the four Black kids might fare better together in one class, as opposed to serving as a dash of diversity for their non-Black classmates. Perhaps that's what will happen the next time the school faces this situation. When we finally spoke, the principal seemed to acknowledge that there should have been more consideration given to what it would mean to be one of just two Black kids in the class. But for us, it was too late.

THE EVENTS OF LAST SUMMER, MUCH like the events of the past 400 summers, were among the many reasons that I gave up on this integrated-ish school so quickly, even if it was better prepared to handle remote learning. Now, more than ever, I am convinced that my child—*my child*—is safest in the hands of people who know that she is a human being, who did not have to learn later in life that she is a human being, who were raised by people who look like her to love and understand people who look like her.

When I think about the relative protection that Black spaces offer, I remember the day when George Zimmerman was acquitted for the killing of Trayvon Martin. The next morning, like the rest of my friends who were grieving and angry yet unsurprised, I had to get up and go to work. Unlike most of them, I went to the nearly all-Black office where I worked at the time, where I would never once have to explain why something like this was an outrage. That Black space was far from perfect, but in moments like this, it was as safe as any space could be. In the midst of racial uprisings and the increasing visibility of white supremacists, I have no desire to put Naima in a situation in which she may have to sit next to kids who do not believe her Black life matters.

Of course, no Black school is a utopia. It is virtually impossible for me to protect my child from the sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, and colorism that exist even in good Black schools. But I can contextualize and correct that much more easily than if I had to address those issues *and* her racial identity being unfamiliar or undesirable in the eyes of non-Black classmates, teachers, and administrators.

I acknowledge that my politics regarding racial solidarity and uplift are not everyone else's; there are plenty of Black folks who view integra-

tion as some sort of ascension into something grander or greater than what is inherently theirs. Even having to make this choice is heartbreaking. The advantages that majority non-Black schools have, in terms of technology, extracurricular activities, human resources, and parental involvement, often come down to the difference between having money or not, an unfairness in public education that too often goes unchallenged. But none of those factors speak to the ability to make sure that Black kids feel happy, healthy, and whole within their walls.

I recognize that as college-educated, middle-class-adjacent parents, we have access to resources to fill in some of the gaps. I would never disparage parents who might require interventions and support that they were unable to find at a Black public school. And when it comes to choosing a high school, we are likely to find ourselves in a situation where a diverse school may be the best, or even the only available, option. Los Angeles has fewer than half as many Black residents as Chicago, despite having a larger overall population. But by then, with three years of preschool and eight years of elementary education in Black spaces and all of the work we've done at home, I think I'll feel confident about my daughter's ability to navigate the high school experience without feeling lost or, worse, losing herself.

As for the present, when I look at who Naima is as a person and as a student at nearly 8 years old, I feel like we've been making the right choices. A few months ago, I overheard her pose a "Would you rather" question to one of her friends during a Zoom call: "Would you rather go to a Black school where everyone is Black but there's homework or a not-Black school where you're the only Black kid but there's no homework?" When I asked Naima later how she'd answered, she said, "Well, I hate homework—a lot." She paused for a second: "But, girl, I ain't trying to be the only Black girl, OK?"

I firmly believe that this child is right where she needs to be. At no point has my little girl ever indicated that she thought white people to be more beautiful, more intelligent, more capable, or more moral than Black people. In spite of how much she knows about the ways that our people are harmed because of our race, Naima is quite convinced that to be a Black girl is to be *glorious*. It is, and she is, and it is my duty to protect her and that feeling so long as I draw breath.

In non-majority-Black schools, Black kids too often end up serving as a dash of diversity for their non-Black classmates.

Finding strength: After tragedies like George Floyd's killing, Black spaces are as safe as any space could be, writes the author.





Akai Gurley,
Jonathan Perrel,
Michael Brown,
Vondell Allen,
Atriana Jefferson,
Treyvon Martin,
Michael Brown, Ahmad Arbery,
Alan Sterling, Bellwether Jean, George Floyd, Kaitie Smith, Darrien Hunt,
Arthur Arakale, Eric Harris, Brandon Brown Jr., Malissa Williams,
William Chapman, Wiley Scott, Kimberly Graham,
Kendric McDade, Tamir Rice, Sunam Orshan,
Eric Garner, Daniel Logan Jr., John Crawford,
Timothy Russell, Stephen Watts, Rickia Lopez,
Ezell Ford, Cory Taylor Jr., Gary Hubler, Emmett Till,
Sandra Blain, Shonda Fortale, Aiana Torres, Sybilie Smith,
Redney King, Monica Miller, Cyandra Barlow, Samir,
Mike Brown, Eleanor Bumpers, Izan Compton,
Miriam Carey, Chavis Gable, Shanel Davis, Brandon Sheppard,
Johathan Brown, Paul Jay, Sheronda Fennell, Scott Brown, Jamarley,
Eugene, Whitney Young, Vilan, Christine Zerkow, Jamarley,
Vivian, Shenna, Alicia Thomas, Henry Smith, Jamarley,
Kedene Powell, Travis Miller, Brian, Melissa, Jamarley,
The Louisa, Levar, Terrell, Ayana, Terrell, Jamarley.

**BLACK
LIVES
MATTER**



Making Integration Real

A family matter:
Kids participate in a
Black Lives Matter
protest in Washington,
D.C., in June.

How we get beyond raising anti-racist kids to being an anti-racist family—here and now.

BY COURTNEY E. MARTIN

COULDN'T PERSUADE MY 6-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER TO CHANGE OUT OF HER FLANNEL footie pajamas even though it was the height of summer, but at least I got her to put her mask on. We threw the other kid, 3, on the cargo bike alongside her stubborn, sweating sister, taped on our homemade Black Lives Matter sign, and headed to the high school down the street. Our kids looked at us, bewildered, as we got closer. Their wide eyes essentially asked: Why are we deliberately heading into a crowd of thousands after avoiding even our closest neighbors for months?

Because it matters this much, we told them. Because we have to be willing to risk something if we want the country to be different when you grow up.

We also promised them Popsicles if they didn't whine the whole time.

Last summer, so many white families took to the streets to express our outrage over the murder of George Floyd (and so many before him) at the hands of police. For many, it was a first: first time protesting, first time explaining racism in any kind of detail to their white kids, first time posting about police violence on Facebook or Instagram. The significance of this widening circle of white Americans willing to take physical and emotional risks against racism—in the midst of a pandemic, no less—is worth celebrating. *The New York Times* posited, based on the turnout, that Black Lives Matter had become the largest protest movement in US history.

But more than half a year later, it's critical that we look soberly at that widening circle of white families.

It's not unexpected that the level of participation we saw this past summer would wane. All movements have ebbs and flows. But that doesn't mean that white families who woke up to their personal responsibility to condemn and take action against racism can rest. On the contrary, we need to invigorate our commitment by thinking creatively about all the places in our lives where neglect exists. The bad news: The insidiousness of racism seeps in everywhere. The good news: There are so many ways to pursue its end.

Anti-racism, as so many white families have come to understand, is both inner and outer work. The inner work can feel more approachable, particularly the way many

white folks do it—at an academic distance. Just look at the *New York Times* best-seller list, filled with titles on anti-racism. Webinars with best-selling writers like Resmaa Menakem, author of *My Grandmother's Hands*, are seeing unprecedented turnout.

There's another kind of inner work that threatens to rearrange your life—what the diversity, equity, and inclusion trainer and playwright Esther Armah calls “intimate reckoning.” This is the kind of inner work that shows up not just on your bookshelf but in your marriage, your therapist's office, your journal, your dreams. You start seeing white supremacy even in the most intimate of settings, even when there isn't a person of color in sight. Most of us aren't there just yet.

The outer work—which requires actually doing things differently than we have done them before, not just reading or talking about reading—is a bigger leap for most white families. Too often, white

parents think they can exorcise racism from their kids by saying all the right things, without making the necessary choices to create less segregated lives.

Case in point: where we send our kids to school. In many districts, parents have just finished up an anxious season of online touring, spreadsheet sharing, and strategizing about how to rank their school choices in order to ensure getting their already privileged kids into the best possible public schools (read: the whitest and wealthiest). Too many white families still think of this moment only in its most personal dimensions: What is best for my particular kid and our particular family? In fact, the choice of where you send your kid to school has a powerful political dimension as well.

Take Oakland, Calif., where we are raising our family. Though the city is 36 percent white, the school district is only 10 percent white. Many white families, faced with a district that has a well-earned reputation for dysfunction and even corruption, choose private schools. The pandemic has made this route even more desirable; while public school kids continue to languish online at home, private school kids are back in person, learning outside under big redwoods and well-appointed tents. Added bonus: The private schools do a prodigious job of marketing just how much they will train your kid to be an anti-racist systems thinker, soothing the progressive conscience. All the while, your family drains the public school system, and its predominantly Black and brown students, of much-needed resources.

In Oakland, as in most American cities, the white families who stay in the public school system jockey their way into just a handful of schools where the PTA fundraising and other forms of privilege accrue. The Center for American Progress found that in the 2013-14 fiscal year alone, the nation's 50 richest PTAs raised and spent \$43 million for the most affluent schools. In this way, you can technically be part of the public school system, but your kid gets more attention from teachers, diverse curricular and experiential learning opportunities, and better facilities via private dollars than those at schools

White people have to see our impact with clear eyes. In the aggregate, our choices make the public school system what it is.

Courtney E. Martin is the author of the forthcoming Learning in Public: Lessons for a Racially Divided America From My Daughter's Schools.

We can't expect our kids to grow up in a different nation if we don't do some initially uncomfortable work to seed it now.

Home away from home: The author's daughter outside her elementary school in Oakland.

with less wealthy PTAs.

We tried something different with our white kid. We didn't strategize or labor over a spreadsheet. Instead, we chose our neighborhood school, where the majority of kids are Black or brown and qualify for a free or reduced-price lunch. GreatSchools.org rates it a two out of 10. It wasn't an easy choice. At the time we made it (in 2016), it felt like a risk. Within our existing social circle—rich with progressive

friends—only one other family made this choice for their kid.

We worried, but we read the research, the most comprehensive of which comes from Rucker C. Johnson, professor of public policy at the University of California, Berkeley. White kids who go to integrated schools thrive academically and develop the mental and emotional muscles for long-term interracial friendships. And the earlier and longer that Black and brown kids are in integrated schools, the better their educational outcomes, the more they earn over their lifetime, and the longer they live. Or as Johnson puts it, "The medicine called integration works."

NOW THAT WE'VE LIVED OUR CHOICE FOR THREE YEARS, it's hard to remember how it ever could have felt so radical. Our kid is thriving, even during the drag of distance learning. She loves her school and her friends. And my husband and I are learning how to show up in a multiracial community. The most important value isn't what you can provide for the annual PTA fundraiser; it's how well you can love all the kids, which means both nurturing them and demanding excellence from them. Our school site council, the representative body that helps the school leadership set priorities for the budget, is now working on defining success for our kids. We talk about our collective dreams—that they have multiracial friendships, a lifelong love of learning, and critical thinking skills—in Zoom meetings and then try to figure out what metrics we can use to assess them. It's been an education in democracy for our whole family, grown-ups included.

We're still full of contradictions when it comes to our own anti-racist identities. When does building a relationship with our kid's teacher drift into hogging all of her attention? How much money should we donate to our own kid's school versus the other Title I schools in the district? What do we do with the jealousy we feel when we see that pickup line at the private school down the block, while our kid grumbles before every Zoom meeting and then participates while doing a headstand?

We're not going to get it perfect, but we can't expect our kids to grow up in a different nation if we don't do some initially uncomfortable work to seed it now. Or as Courtney Everts Mykytyn, the late founder of Integrated Schools, a national organization supporting white and/or privileged parents who are voluntarily integrating schools, put it, "Choosing an integrating school is not so much a sacrifice as it is a reprioritizing what matters in building a world we want our children to be adults in."



WHITE AMERICA HAS SOME MASSIVE reprioritization to do in the years ahead. And let's be clear: I'm not just talking to the families nostalgically clinging to their MAGA hats. In one study of the most and least progressive districts in America, researchers found that Black and brown kids actually get a better education (scoring 15 and 13 percentage points higher in math and reading) in what we might reflexively assume are more racist cities. In other words, if you'd like to leave elementary school literate, you're better off being a Black child in Oklahoma City than in San Francisco.

That Black Lives Matter sign our daughter made to get out of nap time on that inspiring day in June didn't do a whole lot to change the lives of Black and brown kids. It mattered symbolically, but it wasn't instrumental. The money that the state sends to her historically underenrolled school because she's on the roster, that might actually make a difference. The art supplies I got donated for distribution to all the kids because I have a generous artist friend (for the nerds: social capital), that might actually make a difference.

Part of the work ahead is right-sizing whiteness, it seems to me. Sure, we bring resources to our kid's school, but there is nothing magical about her presence, or ours. On the contrary, sometimes the most important thing we can do is shut up, listen to what Black and brown families want and need, and stop monopolizing the attention and time of our teachers, principals, and district leaders.

White people have to see our impact with clear eyes. We can't throw up our hands and say, "The public school system is so broken, our individual choices aren't all that important." Our choices do matter. In the aggregate, they make the system what it is. But we must also rid ourselves of the idea that our choice is going to "save" anyone or anything, that our presence in the school is somehow special, that it earns us some kind of immunity to racism.

This is generational work. Which means that showing up at protest marches and posting on our social media are meaningful but not nearly enough. We must employ what Martin Luther King Jr. called "creative maladjustment": doing what our parents and friends think is maybe a little too extreme and very much unexpected. We must take what can feel like risks on behalf of our white families—where we invest our money, where and how we live, where we send our kids to school—but which often turn out to feel more like grace. It's what Ta-Nehisi Coates called "a dilemma of inheritance" in his congressional testimony on reparations. Sometimes it feels awfully liberating to shed something that was too much all along.

Reclaiming Indigenous Birthways

BY JENNI MONET

Native American ancestral birthing practices offer a model for reproductive health reform.



Honoring Native women: Nicole Gonzales of the Changing Woman Initiative checks the blood pressure of a patient, Kaylynn Begaye.



IT WAS A CHILLY WEDNESDAY IN JANUARY WHEN KAYLYNN BEGAYE, six months pregnant, walked into the lobby of the Changing Woman Initiative, her mother, Christine, by her side. Begaye, 33, found herself in this clinic in Santa Fe, N.M., after one too many doctor visits in nearby Albuquerque had left her stressed out. Since giving birth to a son eight years ago, followed by a daughter five years later, Begaye, who is Diné (Navajo), said the treatment she endured during both of those deliveries left her dreading having to go through it all over again: getting separated from her newborns at birth without her consent, being rushed out of her hospital room while still in postpartum recovery, seeing her family treated poorly by a mostly white staff. The birth of her third baby would be different, she vowed. This time, it would be on her own terms.

The hostility that Begaye says she encountered from health



Ancient wisdom: Nicolle Gonzales, left, inspects earth medicines and tinctures at the Changing Woman Initiative with her office manager and sister, Kansas Begaye.

workers is a common complaint among Indigenous women, although one that's only beginning to be taken seriously. Those complaints align with stories that surfaced after news reports revealed the country's disproportionate maternal mortality rate among Black women. According to one study, nearly a quarter of Native patients reported experiencing racial discrimination while visiting a doctor or health clinic, and 15 percent of those surveyed also said they avoided seeking health care altogether because they feared mistreatment. It's easy, then, to understand why expectant Native mothers like Begaye are more likely to receive late or no prenatal care in New Mexico than non-Hispanic white mothers, a trend that matches national averages. But the data isn't often interpreted this way.

"If you look at the data and you don't know us, you make assumptions that we just don't care, that we don't go to appointments," said Nicolle Gonzales, a Diné certified nurse-midwife and the founder of the Changing Woman Initiative, a birth center explicitly intended to serve the Indigenous community. "There are all these other issues. That's why the data looks the way it does."

There are many systemic factors that hinder Native American maternal health—problems arising from a legacy of neglect regarding Indigenous life. Today, many pregnant Native women lack insurance or struggle to find transportation to their medical appointments. Others face hurdles finding affordable housing or dealing with abusive partners and domestic violence.

Since 2015, Gonzales has been increasing the reach of her nonprofit health care collective, in part to respond to a broken health care system that has marginalized Native women. Although the Indian Health Service provides perinatal care at many of its 24 hospitals and 51 health centers across the country, a majority of these chronically underfunded facilities are overcrowded with patients, understaffed with medical experts,

and, in the case of one facility last summer, unreliable. In August, dozens of Native mothers suddenly found themselves without health care when the Phoenix Indian Medical Center announced that it was closing. The obstetrics unit was being shuttered because of staffing problems, the IHS said. Some women were mere weeks away from giving birth. The center has since reopened, but only partially. The delivery ward remains closed, meaning expectant mothers are transferred to other facilities across Phoenix between their 32nd and 34th weeks of pregnancy. In response to this disservice, patients have mounted peaceful demonstrations, holding signs that read

"Honor Native women." They want answers from the IHS, but more than anything, they just want their treaty-protected health care back.

Begaye, who is insured through Medicaid, struggled to find a new physician without a referral. "I felt like I had nowhere else to go," she said. "I didn't know any other doctor." She didn't want to rely on the IHS; it would require months of waiting for an appointment, she thought. The health care center where she had delivered before, the Lovelace Women's Hospital in Albuquerque, was only slightly better, in her view. It was where she had given birth to her daughter two years earlier, but Begaye and her mother are still haunted by their harrowing experience. Immediately after delivery, Begaye's newborn daughter was taken to the neonatal ICU, where she stayed for about 10 days; at one point the medical staff tried to administer a feeding tube, and Begaye intervened just in time. Both the separation and the attempted intubation were done without her consent. They told her her baby suffered from low blood sugar due to Begaye's inability to produce enough breast milk. "Some of the comments they made were very rude," she recalled. "Basically saying to me that if I breastfed my baby better, she would be out of the NICU by now." She felt that she had done something wrong, and she believes that if she'd had more time to recover in the hospital, her lower stress levels might have improved her lactation.

There were other reasons to be concerned about Lovelace. Over the summer, reports surfaced about other Native mothers being separated from their newborns without their consent. In these cases, it had been part of the hospital's Covid-19 policy, which had not been disclosed to patients. The mothers felt they had been targeted because of reports about the high

According to one study, nearly a quarter of Native patients reported experiencing racial discrimination while visiting a doctor or health clinic.

Jenni Monet is an investigative journalist and founder of the weekly newsletter Indigenously: Decolonizing Your Newsfeed (indigenously.org). She is a tribal citizen of the Pueblo of Laguna in New Mexico.

rates of Native Americans testing positive for the coronavirus.

By her 19th week, the Diné mother said, she had struggled through six appointments with two new obstetricians for prenatal care; each time, she grew more unsettled. She booked her next appointment with Gonzales.

TUCKED AMID A MAZE OF PINK adobe-style medical offices, the Changing Woman Initiative doesn't look or feel like a standard health clinic. The lobby's plush couches flank a bookshelf featuring texts about reclaiming Indigenous motherhood. In the exam room, renderings of traditional birthing rites hang on the wall in soft natural light. At one point, Gonzales invited Begaye's mother into the room to hear her grandchild's healthy heartbeat. Resting back on the table, Begaye focused her gaze on her exposed belly. She looked calm. Later, she told me she felt more relaxed with Gonzales than she had with any of her doctors.

Begaye's mother, Christine, was the one who recommended Gonzales to her daughter. Sitting in the lobby, she shared how her forced boarding school education, along with the indoctrination of Mennonite beliefs, had robbed her of some Indigenous practices imparted by her great-grandparents, who were traditional-medicine healers. Decades later, the most obvious symbol of such cultural disruption was the modest black bonnet tidily tacked atop her head.

Gonzales's reassuring nature put both mother and daughter at ease. She arranged for the next appointment to be a visit at their home, where Begaye ultimately wants to give birth. As the pandemic continues

to restrict families and loved ones from entering hospitals, another worry for Begaye is the thought of not having her mother and sisters by her side. "My team," she called them.

GONZALES IS ONE OF A SMALL but committed group of Indigenous midwives trained to provide modern, professional pregnancy and childbirth-related care in any setting. The added twist is that they also want to incorporate traditional knowledge into their practice, in the way of their ancestors. About 20 Indigenous midwives are believed to be practicing

in the United States today, including Rhonda Lee Grantham (Cowlitz), Margaret David (Koyukon Athabaskan), and Autumn Cavender-Wilson (Wahpetuwan Dakota). In 2019, a small delegation convened in Washington, D.C., for a congressional briefing about Native Americans and maternal health. The Changing Woman Initiative was among those submitting testimony.

When Gonzales launched the initiative nearly six years ago, her vision was simple: to create the first Indigenous traditional birthing center in the United States. Then as now, she draws much of her inspiration from Canada, where Indigenous midwifery is returning to communities where birthing rituals have been lost to cultural genocide. There, midwives are training an Indigenous midwifery workforce while convincing tribal communities that such culturally centered health care is critical.

Access to ancestral midwifery care is not always covered by Medicaid or other health insurance plans, an issue that Gonzales and her team are striving to correct. Meanwhile, as a nonprofit with a national board of directors, the Changing Woman Initiative secures grant funding year after year to assist mothers with little to no health care—a common obstacle for many Native Americans, despite access to the Indian Health Service. "We have a policy where we don't turn any woman away," Gonzales told me.

Historically, Black and brown women were forced to rely on midwives simply because the barriers to health care were so great. "The communities that had the traditional midwives were the ones that were the most oppressed," said Marinah Farrell, the Changing Woman Initiative's executive director. By the 1930s, midwifery had declined significantly under pressure from the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology, which pitted midwives against obstetricians. Soon thereafter, many states declared lay midwifery illegal.

As recently as 1940, traditional Navajo birthways were still commonplace, as chronicled in a rare report conducted by a Harvard anthropologist. The researchers documented the Navajo red rope birth, which performed an upright delivery, the "no sleep" songs sung

during labor as a ceremony, and many other sacred practices culturally relevant to Diné beliefs, such as applying ashes in the birth space to frighten evil spirits away and spreading pollens to invite the baby into the world.

By the 1950s, midwifery was slowly being introduced in US medical institutions, and when the interest in it surged two decades later, the patients and providers involved generally didn't include the Black or Indigenous practitioners who are credited with keeping midwifery alive. "The natural-birth movement of the '70s was largely a white feminist movement," said Farrell, who is Chicana/Indigenous Mexican and a certified professional midwife.

Further damaging the relationship between Indigenous women and health care providers was the shameful practice of forced sterilization. Beginning in 1970, physicians working in the Indian Health Service carried out this permanent procedure to prevent pregnancies, an agenda initiated by an act of Congress. Over a six-year period, as many as a quarter of Native mothers were sterilized without their

Native Americans are more than twice as likely as other women to die of pregnancy-related causes.



Diné pride: A poster on the wall of the Changing Woman Initiative in Santa Fe, N.M.

“This isn’t just a career; it’s not just a job for me. I see my role as a midwife in my community as a spiritual calling.”

—Nicolle Gonzales

consent. Evidence suggests that this figure is probably an undercount.

Decades later, concerns about poor maternal health outcomes, especially among women of color, has finally reached Congress. On February 8, the founders of the Black Maternal Health Caucus reintroduced the Momnibus Act, which is focused on addressing the maternal health crisis among women of color. The package is a compilation of maternal health bills aimed at improving care,

from perinatal access to investing in a workforce that is less white. Fewer than 10 percent of today’s certified nurse-midwives are practitioners of color. That figure is dramatically less for Indigenous midwives—by Gonzales’s account, as little as 1 percent.

IN THE RICHEST NATION ON EARTH, MOTHERS ARE DYING AT the highest rate in the developed world—and that rate is rising. Native Americans are more than twice as likely as other women to die from pregnancy-related causes. Gonzales had a harrowing experience with her Albuquerque delivery 20 years ago, when she nearly passed out. Diagnosed with preeclampsia, a hypertension disorder accounting for roughly 8 percent of maternal mortality deaths nationwide, she pushed out her firstborn amid extreme hemorrhaging and under duress. Doctors, she said, never let on how serious her postpartum injuries were: third-degree lacerations. Few family members attending the birth understood her suffering. In her pain, she said, she lost sight of preserving her placenta; she had planned to bury the birth organ in the traditional Diné way. Instead, the hospital staff tossed it aside as biowaste. These traumas forever changed her.

“I had no clue about birthing or traditional teachings at the time,” Gonzales said, and she quickly realized that few other Native women did. But like her, they were hungry for such knowledge. Remembering how it felt to be a young mother and be blamed for her delivery complications has influenced Gonzales in her counseling of other Indigenous women like Begaye. More than anything, she wants them to know that they are at the center of their birthing experience. “This isn’t just a career; it’s not just a job for me,” Gonzales said. “I see my role as a midwife in my community as a spiritual calling.”

Gonzales, now 41, grew up in the Four Corners region, in Waterflow, N.M., on the northeastern edge of the vast Navajo Nation. As we talked, we were standing in a room before a wall of glass jars filled with earth medicines like skullcap, marshmallow root, and alfalfa, herbs that relieve tensions and stressors unique to the mothering experience. Thinking of Begaye, I asked which one would be good for emotional healing. “It depends,” Gonzales replied. “If it’s for you, I’d advise you to check with your pueblo.” She was referencing my ties to nearby Laguna, the tribal community where I was raised. Gonzales is more likely than traditional midwives to turn to her patients for suggestions about cultural birth knowledge. She says it’s what differentiates this practice from the larger health care system—the intentional shift to provide services that more reflect the needs of Indigenous mothers. This philosophy keeps her grounded in the Changing Woman Initiative’s mission: to reclaim Indigenous motherhood in a way that her ancestors would approve of. “I do have elders I’m accountable to,” she said, by which she meant the medicine men and women who have been educating her.

There’s an added tension, she continued, in confronting an organized health care system that has steadily worked to erase these traditional birthways. In a recent essay, she referred to that system, which is so disruptive to traditional birthing practices and yet continues to regulate them, as a “public health irony—or cruel joke,”

depending on one’s perspective. “Those of us who walk that path are constantly engaging tension on all fronts of reproductive and women’s health,” Gonzales said. “We experience the racism.” She then rattled off a series of the most common societal doubts she’s faced: Are we good enough? Are we smart enough? Do we know what we’re doing? Gonzales argues that the licensing process for midwives doesn’t consider culture, class, race, or access to the profession. Turning to tribal communities, she said that Indigenous midwifery also comes with a different set of questions. The toughest: “Are we so colonized that we can’t identify with our people anymore?” She added, “Having to work through that all the time to just try and provide care and services from a place of trust and respect—that’s a really hard thing.”

AS BEGAYE AND HER MOTHER MADE their way to the clinic door, they chatted with Gonzales. It turned out their families know each other, an unsurprising discovery in a vibrant kinship society like the Diné. The elder Begaye spoke mostly about the line of children whom Gonzales may have known as a girl—nearly a dozen sons and daughters who today span the ages of 14 to 40. Gonzales remembered a classmate, one of Christine Begaye’s eldest daughters. Both families had lived in Kirtland, N.M. Gonzales recalled how the old post office off Highway 64 had been converted into the Begayes’ home. The memory drew happy laughter that filled the room. For Gonzales, knowing this kind of familial backstory is an asset. Non-Indigenous midwives might not recognize how significant a loss it is when these family links are diminished.

Gonzales believes that bringing back birthing ceremonies could lead to a shift in how Native women are valued—women who today are victims of some of the highest rates of violent crime in the United States. “Some of our traditional teachings talk about women being the ‘fire keepers’ of their home,” Gonzales said. “In this way, maternal health is intersectional with Indigenous feminism. It isn’t just about birth and pregnancy. It’s our life. It’s our breath. It’s who we are in our community.” She added, “When we don’t support and protect women and remind them that they’re valuable, they’re important, that their life means something, this is where we run into these issues—us dying. Reclaiming birth is part of that process.”



Parenting in Prison

A love story.

BY SYLVIA A. HARVEY



WILLIAM ANDERSON, then 64, breathes a tiny sigh of relief when he sees his youngest son, Naeem, sitting across the table from him. His son looks back with the same wide brown eyes he's always remembered. At 23, Naeem (a pseudonym, as are all the names of the family members in this article) still has a baby face, more pronounced now that he's clean-shaven, his coiled locks no longer sprouting wildly from his head. Unlike the many times before, however, he isn't visiting his father in prison; this day, he's housed in the same facility. William and Naeem have only this one face-to-face visit

ILLUSTRATION BY LOUISA BERTMAN

to connect in real time before Naeem embarks on his own long sentence. William hopes to mentally and emotionally prepare his son for “the life inside.”

People will tell you that parenting is hard. Incarcerated parents trying to maintain relationships with their children often face insurmountable challenges, which are magnified by prison rules and regulations. William has always found a way to stay in touch with his boy—he’s used collect phone calls, handwritten letters, cards on special occasions, and the coveted in-person visits where eye contact and a brief embrace seal the love in for a bit.

WHEN WILLIAM AND HIS WIFE, RUTH, MET AS TEENAGERS, IT WAS LOVE at first sight. From the day he spied her billowing fire-red Afro at a movie theater in Jackson, Miss., he knew she was “the one.” It was the early 1970s when they became smitten with each other and decided to get married soon after.

In the early ’80s, their lives completely unraveled when William was pulled over during a traffic stop and found to be in possession of a gun that was linked to a murder the year before. He was convicted of homicide and sentenced to life in prison. William insists to this day that he’s not guilty of the murder. At the time, he and Ruth had an 8-year-old son, and she was pregnant again. For the next 40 years, Ruth raised their three Black sons alone on the outside, while William did the best he could from behind bars.

The young couple was able to maintain and later expand their family by participating in Mississippi’s Extended Family Visitation program, the most liberal in the country. It allowed unsupervised visits between immediate family members and their incarcerated loved ones that lasted three to five days and took place on the facility grounds, in small apartments. They also had conjugal visits where, as a married couple, they could spend one private hour together once a week.

In 1995, Ruth gave birth to Naeem. A week later, she bundled him in blankets and drove him to meet his father. Shortly after, she took him on his first extended family visit. William was able to feed Naeem and rock him to sleep as a newborn. Naeem slept between Ruth and William in the bed they shared. “He was a little ol’ bitty baby,” William recalls. “I used to hear people roll over on babies; I ain’t never rolled over on him.”

Ruth continued to take Naeem on regular visits every two weeks, which allowed the Andersons to forge a bond despite William’s confinement. They provided him the opportunity to take an active, physical part in raising his sons, especially Naeem, the one he considered the most impressionable. Naeem’s brothers were already teenagers by the time he was born, and William worried that the age gap might cause Naeem to form friendships with boys who might lead him astray—which is eventually what happened. These regular visits served as a space in which William and Naeem could traverse the range of emotions and experiences as father and son. William likened the access to something similar to a father working out of state or overseas.

Over the years, William talked to Naeem about doing well

in school, listening to his mother, staying out of trouble, being respectful to girls, and more. He played basketball with him, barbecued, and even taught him how to fish. When Naeem got older and eventually became serious with a young lady, Brooke, he let her speak to his dad on the phone and eventually took the leap of giving her an application to fill out so she could be approved to visit. “He’d never brought a girl to meet me,” William says. “I’d been telling them how to get along over the phone for a while, but that visit was real important.” It was more than just a phone call, more than a letter or picture. “You could see that she cared a lot about him.” William approved and thought, “She’s good for him.”

Naeem and William were as close as possible given the circumstances, which is why William was surprised that Naeem didn’t come to him or his mother when he was struggling financially. Ruth has worked as a registered nurse for over 30 years, and William has worked at various jobs for the entire duration of his imprisonment. It

was a work ethic that Naeem picked up: After his first job in high school, he made it a point to stay employed. For him, providing for himself was the one thing he could do to alleviate the burden he believed his mother was carrying.

Yet for all the terrain Naeem covered with his father, he didn’t tell William when he lost his seasonal job at Walmart. Frantic at the thought of joblessness and not being able to cover his bills, he agreed to rob a restaurant where his friend worked—after hours and using a BB gun. “I had a little money, but Christmas was coming up and my car note was due,” Naeem says. “So I was kind of desperate, and he came up with the idea that we would rob Ruby Tuesday.” Since his friend worked there and stayed until closing, he knew the routine. It was going to be easy, they thought. They would use a fake gun, no one would get hurt, and they’d make off with some quick cash to carry them through the holidays.

But things didn’t go as planned: The two were arrested, and Naeem found his life up-ended. His attorney managed to get the charge reduced from armed to simple robbery, which carried a sentence of zero to 15 years in prison and a fine of up to \$10,000. Naeem had no prior convictions; no one had been harmed during the robbery; he didn’t use a weapon that could hurt anyone; and he’d been gainfully employed for most of his young life. His lawyer presented those facts and asked the judge to show leniency. Instead, the judge sentenced Naeem to 15 years—the maximum penalty for his crime.



“I’m worried about him, and his mama is worried about him. I like for him to call home and let his mama know how he’s doing. If he’s having some trouble, don’t hold back, let her know, and she gonna let me know.”

—William Anderson

Sylvia A. Harvey reports on race, class, policy, and incarceration. She is the author of The Shadow System: Mass Incarceration and the American Family.

Once arrested, Black people are far more likely to be convicted and far more likely to receive harsh sentences than white people. Today, they are locked up at nearly five times the rate for whites in state and federal prisons. William knew the statistics were not in favor of men who looked like him or his son, but even he was stunned by the sentence. “He’s just a racist judge,” William fumes through the phone. “I could see if he was truly a troublemaker out in the street, truly wreaking havoc on the public—if he was a troubled kid, got into something all the time, if he was robbing folks all the time. But you know, it’s not the case. It’s the case that you have a chance to be lenient, let a young boy correct a mistake that he made. But you give him the maximum?”

Eventually, William had to move on from “why?” and “how?” and start considering the next steps for his son. Unable to afford bail, Naeem had already spent 20 months in jail before he was sentenced, so he had some familiarity with “the life inside” by the time he had the visit with his father. When William learned Naeem would be transferred to his facility, he figured he could look after him, at least guide him to some degree. But Naeem was housed in a unit away from William’s, one where drugs, violence, and illegal activity proliferated, William says. He didn’t want his son sucked into that viciousness, and if he was ever transferred to another prison, he wanted him to be equipped. During their visit, he talked to Naeem about knowing whom to trust, what to be skeptical of, how to keep to himself without offending people—how to survive. William knew that prison was a tough place for a young man, especially if he hadn’t already been hardened by the streets. “People prey on young people. They use young people in institutions,” he says.

“A lot of people in the world don’t really understand the seriousness inside the penitentiary,” William adds. In recent years, several news reports have documented the deplorable and dangerous conditions inside Mississippi prisons—everything from black mold, leaking pipes, mice infestations, and no running water to abusive guards, gang violence that has left prisoners beaten and burned, and a spike in unexplained prisoner deaths. “It’s not a good place when you first come in, because a lot of the guys are just coming out of jail,” he explains. “They got all that foolishness on their mind, and then you got the gangs just coming off the street, and they still got that mentality.” Naeem had to be prepared, because he could be transferred away from his father at any time.

SHORTLY AFTER THEIR VISIT, NAEEM PUT IN FOR A TRANSFER and was moved to another, more peaceful facility, where he is still following his dad’s advice. He’s keeping his head down, has a job working in the kitchen, and is pursuing his GED. William is proud of his son for transferring prisons and glad that he listened to his advice. “He’s a smart kid,” he says. “He listened. Some people get to the point where they think they know everything. But mine, he listen, ‘cause he know one thing: I ain’t gonna tell him nothing wrong.”

“I’m worried about him, and his mama is worried about him,” William admits. Since they’re no longer in the same prison, he and Naeem have to work even harder to stay connected. They can’t have phone calls or visits; instead, Ruth has to carry messages between the two. Naeem has nearly a decade left to his sentence, so William is resolved to stay hopeful and trust that his son will do the best he can. “I like for him to call home and let his mama know how he’s doing. If he’s having some trouble, don’t hold back, let her know, and she gonna let me know. And I know who he can call for some relief.”

Beyond that, there is not much either man can do until at least one of them is free.

CORNEL WEST & TRICIA ROSE ON

THE TIGHT ROPE

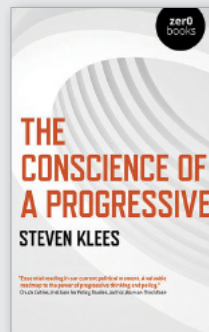
theREALnews network



Join Cornel West and Tricia Rose on *The Tight Rope*: a fresh intellectual podcast powered by joy and justice, available now on The Real News Network.

youtube.com/therealnews • youtube.com/thetightropepod

A PERFECT HOLIDAY GIFT!



Professor Klees draws on 45 years of work around the world as an economist and international educator to paint a detailed picture of conservative, liberal, and progressive views on a wide range of current social issues. He takes an in-depth look at his specializations: education, economics, poverty and inequality, international development, and capitalism. But he also examines health care, the environment, and war and violence and considers intersections with struggles concerning gender, race and ethnicity, LGBTQ rights, and disability.

“The Conscience of a Progressive is...essential reading in our current political moment...A valuable roadmap to the power of progressive thinking and policy.”
—CHUCK COLLINS, Institute for Policy Studies

“In these very troubling times Klees’ book avoids merely cataloging crimes to smartly critique conservative and liberal perspectives and reflect on...positive contributions of progressives on many critical issues.”
—MICHAEL ALBERT, co-founder Z Magazine and South End Press

“Exceptionally well written, reasoned, reported, organized and presented.”
—MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW

<https://www.johnhuntpublishing.com/zero-books/our-books/conscience-progressive>

<https://www.amazon.com/Conscience-Progressive-Education-Economics-Inequality/dp/1789044960>

The Goals

I shouldn't have to
dehumanize my son
with Down syndrome
to get him support.

Should Lead the Way



BY DAVID M. PERRY

IT'S THE SECOND DAY OF MY SON'S LIFE, AND I'M CRYING BECAUSE OUR FOUR BEST friends won't stop congratulating us. We're in a hospital room, and our son is upstairs receiving extra oxygen, although everyone says there's nothing to worry about. He was diagnosed with Down syndrome about five minutes after his birth, and medical professionals have been pouring out a lifetime of risk factors as a kind of ex post facto informed consent. Nothing's going wrong at present, but the doctors want to tell us about everything that might go wrong eventually. We're feeling numb and isolated. I'd posted a birth announcement on LiveJournal (the social media of the time) but disabled comments. I didn't want to hear from anyone.

Then our best friends, two couples, arrived at the hospital bearing cards and flowers, chocolate and champagne (for everyone but my wife, which seemed a bit unfair). Fortunately, in this age of information, they were able to go online and find out what to do when someone's child is diagnosed with Down syndrome. They'd internalized the core message: Congratulate your friends on the birth just as you would with anyone else. They just wouldn't stop treating the occasion of my son's

birth as a cause for celebration, which is good, because we had so much to celebrate once we broke through our own ableism and ignorance. I cried then. I'm crying now as I type this.

Fatherly love:

David M. Perry leans in to get a kiss on the cheek from his son.

MY SON IS 2, AND A LOVELY GROUP OF WOMEN ARE LEAVING THE house after his two-year evaluation. Thanks to Part C of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, disabled children can access quite astounding levels of support if they qualify, and one of the benefits of our son's Down syndrome (as opposed to other disabilities) is that no one has ever questioned whether he qualified. So therapists come to our apartment in suburban Chicago and work with him on his gross and fine motor skills, speech, and overall development. We pay nothing. There's money in the program for medical expenses that our health care plan doesn't cover, and the state will even pay for durable medical equipment—braces for his ankles, a speech device that will say words when he presses an icon, the rental of a

mini-treadmill to help him learn to walk. And all we have to do is to sit there, annually, while these kind therapists write out how far behind our son has fallen from “normal” developmental milestones. They've been praising him for so long, telling us what good parents we are and how great he's doing. But the team leader, a social worker, explains that the piece of paper has to be a record of delay and struggle; otherwise we'll receive less help. When they leave, my wife and I are

quiet for a long time and don't really talk about it until late at night, when we cry.

AT THE END OF SECOND GRADE, WE GET AN E-MAIL FROM HIS CLASSROOM teacher—my son has a special education instructor and is “included” in a mainstream classroom with its own teacher. The class is going to end the year doing reader's theater, in which students in groups will act out various books they've read. I scan the columns listing book titles and students, and I can't find my son's name, so I e-mail the teacher. He “will get to participate as an audience member” is the eventual reply.

By now the wound of seeing our child described solely in terms of deficits in official paperwork has long since scarred over.

David M. Perry is a journalist and historian living in the Twin Cities.

As with early intervention, a whole team of educators gets together at least once a year to craft an Individualized Education Plan, or IEP, for my son. What a dream to have a child's needs so carefully considered and then supported, rather than the one-size-fits-all model of American education that serves so many children so badly. By now, the wound of seeing our child described solely in terms of deficits in official paperwork has long since scarred over, but this e-mail cuts anew. I know this teacher means well. I know she is a good person, a hard-working educator, a part of the team, and she doesn't mean to exclude my son. But it's also clear that she doesn't really see him as her student.

IT'S OUR SECOND YEAR IN MINNESOTA, and two county social workers are sitting at the table with me, playing a game I have come to call acronym tennis. They throw jargon back and forth at each other as I stare in bewilderment, frustration, and rising anger. We moved back to Minnesota at least in part to obtain better support for people with developmental disabilities (especially into adulthood). Nearly 24 months into our time here, we've accessed none of those resources. The first social worker came over to assess our son, and we cheerfully talked about how great he was, then later were told we qualified for very little. Yet every other parent and teacher kept talking about “waivers” that we should qualify for—but a waiver from what? What service or requirement was getting waived? We struggled through form after form, lost in the bureaucratic hurdles that stood between us and help.

Eventually we found out that a social worker had used “mild” for my son's developmental disability on his first assessment, so we had to argue with the state that, in fact, his disabilities were not mild. Someone at a local nonprofit advised us to create a spreadsheet that detailed every minute of every day that we had to do something for him that we might not have to do for a typical kid. I tried for 15 minutes, characterizing difference as struggle, then deleted the spreadsheet. I didn't like the way it was



It's a family affair: Perry poses for a photo with his wife and two children in 2010.

making me look at my son. I went to a mandatory training from the county at a local library, where a well-intentioned employee advised us to describe our “child’s worst day” in our application. We gritted our teeth. We argued for “severe” instead of “mild.” We dehumanized our son in the paperwork but got support.

DISABILITY SYSTEMS RELY ON ARTIFICIAL ECONOMIES of scarcity. Programs are underfunded, so caregivers, teachers, social workers, and disabled people themselves are all pushed to project their needs as necessary and virtuous. But it doesn’t have to work that way. Instead of focusing on challenges, we could emphasize goals. Julia Bascom, the executive director of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, tells me that “the alternative would be a system where, first, we identified what someone’s goals are and then identified the supports to get them there. So we might identify that a student wants to participate in a science class, and then that they need a notetaker, someone to help with self-regulation, a communication device, etc., in order to do that.” The goal leads the way. What’s more, every child would benefit from having their goals prioritized as we allocate supports, not just disabled children. Bascom tells me that experiences like ours

“When policies are inclusive of the disability community, it’s better for everyone overall.”

—Rebecca Cokley,
disability rights activist

happen because disability service systems are never designed to support people with disabilities but are “about managing access to scarce resources. We start with the assumption that these resources are limited, so you have to prove over and over again that you need them more than anyone else. If we as a society invested more resources in supporting people with disabilities, we could redesign our systems accordingly.”

The problem of false scarcity isn’t lost on providers, but until it’s addressed, it can’t be fixed. “Right now,” Bascom says, “there

are some localities and providers that try to come from that positive, goal-oriented approach, but then you wind up with person-centered planning meetings where people have great plans based on their goals, but no services can be provided because the resources aren’t there. We have to fix both problems to really change things.”

Rebecca Cokley, one of America’s leading disability rights activists, formerly at the Center for American Progress and the National Council on Disability, tells me that we need to revamp the basic framework for how we support disabled people and their families. “We need a universal design for the social safety net,” she says. Universal design is a core concept in the disability world. Initially developed in the 1970s with the goal of designing objects and spaces to

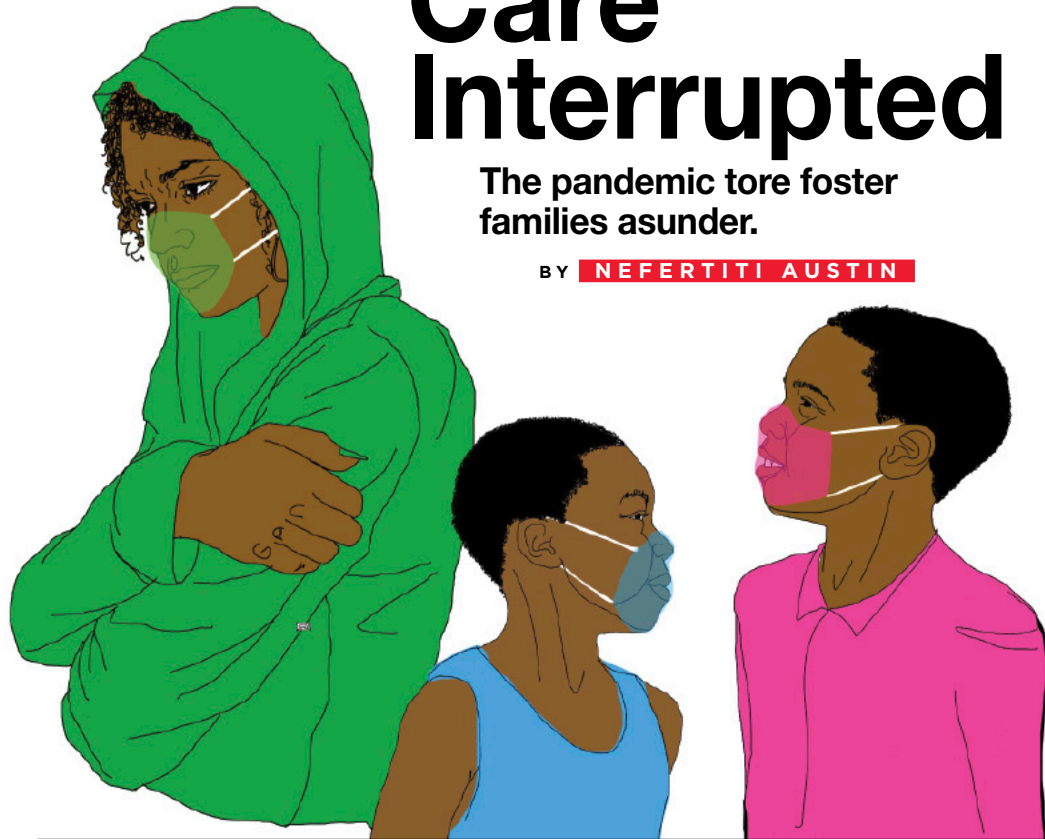
maximize utility for the broadest possible set of needs, the principles of universal design are now routinely applied to education, websites, and other fields. When it’s implemented, not only do disabled people benefit, but there are positive knock-on effects. One classic example is the curb cut, which makes sidewalks accessible for people in wheelchairs or with a wide variety of other movement-related disabilities. But they are also great for kids on bikes and parents pushing strollers.

Yet on a programmatic basis, disability policy and other social programs remain enmeshed, even at their best, in accommodation models, where specific proven needs or deficits generate specific individualized responses. What might it look like to shift our framing of the social safety net to a universal model? Cokley says we’re a long way from being able to answer that, though we do have a few hints. “We’re seeing it somewhat in schools around the creation of universal learning plans, clearly modeled after the IEP, that lay out how all students learn best.” Cokley hopes to map out the true cost of being disabled in America—what she and others call the “crip-tax”—and link it to other categories of identity like race, class, and gender. With the “pandemic, recession, civil unrest, if there was ever a time for us to be bold,” she says, “that time is really now. When policies are inclusive of the disability community from the beginning, it’s better for everyone overall.” She adds that “long Covid”—the chronic effects of the disease that have been reported by some—will likely lead to the “biggest boom in the disability population since AIDS/HIV in the ’80s and polio in the ’50s. I do think that nobody’s talking about how we make the social safety net stretch for the long-haulers.”

IT'S THE SECOND WEEK OF NOVEMBER, and my son has been sent home from school because someone in his classroom has Covid-19. We have no support in our home. The Minnesota Department of Human Services says you can't use Medicaid money for school. The state's Department of Education says that a school district may hire an aide through a third party and send them into the home, but it isn't required to do so, and our district says it won't for nebulous "pay and qualifications" reasons. (When I've asked repeatedly in meetings, the school district has refused to clarify what this means.) We hire a lawyer, and she tells us to log my son's struggles, so one morning, instead of helping him, I open a document and write that he can't type his password, can't click on his e-mail, can't open Google Meet, can't click the "join" button, can't mute or unmute his microphone, can't join a breakout room, gets frustrated when he says no 20 or 30 times about the class's song choices, gestures at a screen in ways his teachers can't see, dances out of view of the camera so his teachers don't know he's participating. On and on the list of "can't"s goes, and again I'm crying. And even with the documentation that distance learning is failing, the school district doesn't seem to care.

We're living a good life. Our kids are amazing. Minnesota is just the place we want to call home. The state—and notice how we're tangled in local, county, state, and federal systems, often in conflict with one another—should help every family with education, child care, developmental equipment, and all the other things. Every time the system works well and a team of educators meets in a room to decide how best to support my son, I think that every child could use that level of individualized care, if only we decided that our collective responsibility extended from the "worthy disabled" to all. The same can be said for my son's publicly subsidized health care, therapy, and other benefits.

But we need to rebuild the systems that support him and could support so many others around enabling strengths rather than projecting helplessness, around justice rather than false economies of scarcity. Because otherwise there are too many tears. Too many struggles. It doesn't have to be so hard. **N**



Care Interrupted

The pandemic tore foster families asunder.

BY NEFERTITI AUSTIN

My proverbial backyard was the best place to begin my journey to motherhood through adoption. In Los Angeles County, where I live, 20 percent of the 20,876 children in foster care are Black. Black children here, and in the rest of the country, are overrepresented in the system, and that is the reason I signed up to become a foster/adoptive parent in 2006. I wanted to make a difference in the life of a Black child—a baby boy, to be specific. Black male infants are the least likely to be adopted, because of false assumptions about who they are—aggressive, incorrigible—and who they will become: gangbangers, violent. I was confident I could help change that narrative, because I easily saw beyond that cruel stereotype. Years later, I would add a Black princess to my lot, also through adoption, making my motherhood mission complete.

All foster children are forced to cope with transitional situations and not knowing what the future may hold. The Covid-19 pandemic took these uncertainties to new extremes. Thankfully, my children's journeys through the foster care system were relatively brief. My daughter's case sailed to the finish line without incident. She was assigned two social workers and then an adoption worker. Thirteen months after the process began, we went to dependency court, where before a judge I swore to love her as my own. I have photos of that moment with my family and the judges who declared us forever bonded. My son faced more bumps in the road. Over the course of two years, he had nine social workers. Some were experienced, others were not, but all were juggling too many cases. Large and complex, his case was passed from one social

worker to the next. On multiple occasions, I had to educate successive workers on where we were with the permanency plans. This was unexpected, but being knowledgeable about my son's status made me a more organized foster mother and the monthly visits from social workers more tolerable.

The story is very different for current foster children whose plans for reunification or permanency got derailed by the pandemic. Immediate safety protocols went into effect to stop the spread of the disease. Covid mandates delayed reunifications, movement between foster homes, and adoption finalizations; the whole system came to a screeching halt. Child dependency courts went dark last March, exacerbating the logjam of existing cases until they reopened virtually at various times in different states.

Covid mandates delayed reunifications and adoption finalizations; the whole process came to a screeching halt.

Foster children were stuck in temporary placements within individual homes or in overcrowded group homes, with pending placements on hold.

It often takes two years for the reunification process to conclude. During this window, biological parents are given chances to resolve the issues that led to their child's detainment. If the issue was homelessness, parents have to find housing. If the parents had addiction issues, they have to get clean and

stable. In California, approximately every six months, the parents' progress is reviewed. If all stipulations are met, the child is reunified with them; if not, the case is extended for six additional months. Because neither of my children's biological parents had satisfied the requirements for reunification after these time periods, their cases moved to the concurrent planning stage, which began after the birth-parent rights were terminated and included preparing their kids for permanency with a foster/adoptive family. In both situations, I had the honor of becoming their child's new parent.

For others on the road to reunification, the pandemic completely derailed this process. Not only was the foster care system interrupted, but birth parents hoping to start or complete reunification plans experienced major setbacks. As housing instability and job insecurity deepen, families are increasingly unable to access the services they need to reunite with their children, because rehabilitative and support services have closed or waiting lists have lengthened. Pre-Covid, as of 2018, more than 32,000 children had been stuck in supposedly temporary care for three years or more. Post-Covid, this timeline could be even longer. Meanwhile, the reunification clock, which starts the day children are detained by child welfare services, will run out; biological parents' rights will be forever terminated; and families will be irreparably broken. The solution rests in HR 7976. Introduced last summer by Milwaukee Representative Gwen Moore, the bill proposes to "suspend the timeline, not parental rights." In other words, because the pandemic created a public health crisis, states will have flexibility in halting the reunification clock, giving biological parents time to reconnect and, one hopes, reunify with their kids.

Until that bill becomes law, foster kids all over the nation will continue to feel lonely, depressed, and disconnected from loved ones. In fact, 52 percent of young adults currently or formerly in foster care reported that Covid negatively affected their health or mental health care. LGBTQ foster youth in particular face housing and job insecurity, as well as placements in homes where they might be misgendered, leading to violence, depression, and suicidal ideations. For the lucky few whose reunifications or adoptions were made final during the pandemic, there were no happy photos with family or a judge. Instead, there were screenshots of judicial hearings held via teleconference.

Foster youth were not the only group directly impacted by the pandemic. Foster parents, who are an integral piece of the foster care system, worried about contracting the virus from children moving in and out of their homes. Those with preexisting conditions—diabetes, asthma, compromised immune systems, etc.—were reluctant to facilitate visits with their foster children's biological family members or to take in additional kids. Expanding their bubble put the entire household at risk for anything from mild symptoms to death. Because children move around a lot, their chances of picking up the virus were high. This led to the question of where they would quarantine. Alternatively, if a foster parent became infected, she would need to quarantine, further shrinking the pool of available foster homes. In one fell swoop, the pandemic left foster parents in precarious health legitimately nervous about fulfilling their obligations.

Before Covid, foster parents supported the reunification process by taking kids to visit their biological relatives, to children's court, to doctor's appointments, and so on. I remember leaving work early to pick up my 10-month-old from day care to take him

30 minutes in the opposite direction to meet his social worker so he could spend one hour with his biological mother. I did the same for my daughter. These visits were stressful and time-consuming, and there was no guarantee that their biological mothers would arrive on time, if at all. On more than one occasion, the social worker called at the last moment to reschedule or cancel a visit. By then, I was already en route and irritated that I had juggled my schedule to accommodate a no-show. As frustrated as I was, I reminded myself that the lives my children led before me were important.

Looking back, my issues were minor, as I was able to complete the foster care/adoption journey. Though I am not required to, I have made sure that my kids maintain ties with their biological siblings. We see them a few times a year for birthday parties, special church programs, or riding scooters at the park. All of this stopped last March, though, when the pandemic shut the whole world down. And for the first time in seven years, my children did not see or touch their biological brother or sister in person. I tried to look on the bright side: My kids had each other. Such is not the case for thousands of foster children, separated from their siblings, kin, and birth parents. Though foster parents are responsible for maintaining family ties, social workers are on the front line. They monitor visits, transport kids from foster home to foster home or dependency court in their personal vehicles, and spend hours of face time with foster children. Their reports, which determine reunification or concurrent planning, are based on their firsthand observations. Some workers worry

about being deployed during the pandemic. One social worker, who wished to remain anonymous, said, "My husband has asthma. I would be devastated if I became infected and he got sick." Those invisible first responders are as vulnerable as the children they serve, because according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, "Some jurisdictions do not have adequate gloves, masks or hand sanitizer to keep caseworkers safe during investigations and home visits."

It's been more than one year since the first case of Covid-19 was reported, and scientists have developed a vaccine for it. Their research allows movie theaters, summer camps, and schools to reopen, paving the way for the foster care system to reopen too. But amid the jubilation over lifted restrictions, let us remember the foster children who have lost precious moments with loved ones, time they will never get back. **N**



Nefertiti Austin is a memoirist and the author of Motherhood So White: A Memoir of Race, Gender, and Parenting in America. She lives with her two children in Los Angeles.

WHEN I WAS IN FIFTH GRADE, ALL I WANTED IN THE WORLD was a pair of shiny Umbro soccer shorts. I didn't play soccer; I just wanted to wear the shorts so I could be like all the other kids in my class. My parents did not buy me the shorts.

It wasn't a question of money or ideological objection. My parents didn't buy me the shorts because they didn't know where they were sold and weren't interested in finding out. They were not adept consumers. Buying new things was of so little interest to my parents—my dad especially—that most consumer behaviors were foreign to them. Requiring my dad to navigate a shopping mall would have been like asking him to speak a language he didn't know.

And other lessons I learned growing up on a commune.

BY **KATHRYN JEZER-MORTON**



Radical Parenting

Is a Matter of Time

Got milk? The author, her father, and the commune cow.



Founding parents: Communards of Total Loss Farm, circa 1968. The author's dad, Marty Jezer, is in the center holding a newspaper.

I don't blame him; he had other interests. My dad had helped found the Total Loss Farm commune in Vermont in the 1960s, and that's where I spent part of my childhood. Total Loss Farm was home to activists, artists, and writers who were involved in many of the political movements of the late '60s and early '70s. It produced theater, books, newspapers, gardens, and many, many parties. But unlike many doomed back-to-the-land projects, Total Loss Farm endured—it celebrated its 50th anniversary a few years ago.

Within the community he'd helped build, my dad was a person of trusted and much-sought-after expertise. Over the course of his adult life, he taught himself about the natural world, about construction (he and his friends, all self-taught carpenters, built the house we lived in), and about politics and flows of power. But to my parents and their fellow commune dwellers, being a skillful consumer was not a recognized form of competence.

Today I have a son in fifth grade. My awareness of the brands and devices coveted by him and his friends is possibly even more nuanced than their own. I know all the best places to buy everything they want, and I take a pathetic kind of pride in my expertise. I exchange this information with friends, and we praise each other for being savvy. We don't see each

other very much—we're all very busy with work, of course—so a lot of this shared praise happens over text messages. We text often and see each other seldom, during the pandemic as it was before.

FEEL ASHAMED AT HOW DUTIFUL A CONSUMER I HAVE BECOME. But that shame doesn't last long; even radical politics, in 2021, has been commodified. I try to shop locally, to the extent that most well-intentioned bourgeois urbanites do. But to be honest, this behavior barely registers as political to me anymore.

I didn't know what was radical about my upbringing until I became an adult. When I was a kid, being raised on a com-

mune meant getting teased for the lunches I brought to school, not knowing the words to the hit songs on the radio, not having the soccer shorts. Ideologically, though, I was so immersed in the world of the commune that I couldn't see outside it.

One pivotal experience finally showed me what the commune meant in the world. When my father died in 2005, he was 64—among the first of his community to go. It was a shock; his memorial service overflowed. At his burial, in the Jewish cemetery in the Vermont town where he lived, dozens of friends stood by as we lowered his casket, handmade by a friend, into the ground.

An earth mover was parked discreetly at the graveyard's edge, waiting to bury the casket once we left.

There was a shovel on hand, and just as we were about to disperse from the grave, a friend began burying the casket by hand. No one spoke, but we understood that a machine would not be used to cover my father's body in dirt. Taking turns, we buried the casket ourselves. It took about half an hour. We tamped down the earth with our feet when we had finally finished.

I count this as one of the most important experiences of my life. I remember it often; sometimes the very thought still brings me to tears. We do it together, we do it for each other, and we don't pay someone else to do the things that matter. That was what the commune meant, and it was the most profound lesson of my upbringing.

How did my parents demonstrate what they believed in? With nothing less than the very hours of their days. They were constantly engaged in group endeavors, whether political activism, or putting in a garden, or cooking dinner for a handful of dirty-faced children—the majority of whom were not their own. Daily life didn't push them to their energetic limit the way it seems to for me and my peers.

You might argue that it was a boomer's privilege to be a relaxed, self-actualized parent, and there's truth to that: Life was cheaper in the '80s and early '90s. My parents made less money than I do, and yet they had more time—it's heartbreaking math. But when we lean too heavily on "OK, Boomer," we sell ourselves short. Don't we deserve to live our lives and be parents too? Can't we imagine this being fun?

Daily life didn't push my parents to their energetic limit the way it seems to do for me and my peers.

Kathryn Jezer-Morton is a writer based in Montreal.

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC HAS pushed the nuclear family to the breaking point, as many social critics have pointed out. But none of my friends—all of whom live in nuclear families—would likely choose to live cooperatively. Neither, for that matter, do I. I believe this is due mostly to a failure of imagination, an inability to envision an appealing life beyond the limits of privacy, partner, and kids. Contrary to every joke I've ever heard about growing up on a commune, polyamory is not mandatory. Nor are chore charts and endless house meetings.

I've always wanted my own space more than I've wanted to share. I'm a fair-weather friend to commune living—I want the good parts (community interdependence) without the bad parts (the community never goes home). My parents ultimately made the same choice; they both left the commune before I became a teenager. If you're ready to commit to the life, I commend you, and I counsel you to invest in the biggest dishwasher your money can buy. (I'll help you research it online!) But whether or not you're living on a commune, community interdependence requires us to give up our stubborn belief in the myth that we have complete autonomy over how we spend our time.

Neoliberal family life has turned the very idea of accountability to others into a dreadful burden. We associate having to check in or do favors for others as a kind of systems failure. If you're looking to optimize your schedule for maximum efficiency, having to pause and account for someone else's pace and needs—someone who isn't even related to you!—throws a spanner in the works. At a certain point, though, we owe it to ourselves to ask what rewards we're reaping from having optimized our nuclear families. For what?

Everyone's life is everyone else's business on a commune, and while that can be a huge pain in the ass, it also means that there is usually someone close by to help out with cooking, or cleaning, or child care, or with a ride in to work or a hug. The casual ongoing negotiation of interdependence that happens on a commune normalized sharing my time and attention while I was a kid. It meant I was comfort-

able being cared for by people who were not my parents, and I didn't expect to do exactly what I wanted exactly when I wanted to do it. These are qualities that I desperately try to cultivate in my own children, but it's very hard to do that when no one else ever cares for them, and we rarely commit to do anything that isn't in the entire family's immediate best interest.

Still, I push back against it. It's not second nature to give of my time and energy, as it was for my parents in the golden age of the commune, but I am determined to get better at it. My parents taught me that doing stuff together—building things, throwing parties, mobilizing for change—is the way to care for each other. Today, our work lives have spread, moldlike, throughout our days, and we guard a few precious hours for our social lives and so-called self-care. “Work-life balance” always presumes that work is pushing life into the margins and we must fight to reclaim it.

Inviting our friends into a larger part of our lives means reclaiming more of our time from the isolation of work and daily survival. Our social lives and our survival become the same thing. Entertaining each other at dinner parties will always be fun, but what about sharing child care or joining community organizations together? When it comes to working for my employer, a strict boundary is essential. But when it comes to hanging out with my friends, why should I be so rigid? Why not allow my social life to overtake my errand running and my chores? Why must we try to “entertain” each other when our relationships would become much deeper

We do it together, we do it for one another, and we don't pay someone else to do the things that matter—that was what the commune meant.

An awkward age:
Father and daughter
in an undated
photograph.



and more interesting if we did things together other than nibble hors d'oeuvres and drink wine?

A few years ago, when my local government decided to ban face coverings like the niqab on public transportation, a group of my mom friends hastily put together a rush-hour protest. Nothing solidifies friendship like trying to get something done together. (The ban stayed in place, but I doubt it will last in the wake of a pandemic during which we've all been mandated to cover our faces.)

My parents made a life like this seem normal. The world has since changed, and it takes so much more effort for me to model interdependence on my community to my children. I want them to think of their time as something that must be shared—a gift to give away continuously, forever.

If I die tomorrow, will my friends feel compelled to bury me by hand? I'll wonder this pointlessly until, well, I get my answer. I will try to give them reason to take up a shovel instead of letting the bulldozer do it. It's not the least I can do, and it's not the most, but it's a start. **N**

Unfinished Reunions

For families separated at the border, the trauma remains.



Caged: People taken into custody upon entry into the United States sit in a detention center in McAllen, Tex.

BY MARITZA L. FÉLIX



ANA BRUSHES HER HAIR IN FRONT OF THE MIRROR WITH A HAUNTED LOOK in her eyes. Minutes pass; her hair is still wet. She feels cold and realizes she was lost in her own thoughts again. In a rush, she puts her hair in a ponytail and leaves her small bedroom. Her head is spinning. *I have to take the children to school, clean the house, go to the supermarket, worry about money... and lunch! Will my husband find work today?*

The pandemic hit Ana's family hard. Her husband, Isaí, goes weeks without picking up work. Sometimes they have to borrow money and stretch supplies to cover household expenses. *God will provide*, she likes to think. They are healthy, and for now, that is enough. She smiles, as she always does. But it's a smile that hides pain.

Ana lives with her husband and their two children in a mobile home in Selmer, a remote area of Tennessee about two hours from Memphis. Cell phone coverage is poor, and there are no Hispanic supermarkets nearby. Her trailer is small, but it has the feeling of home. They don't have a lot: two sofas and an armchair in the living room, a small dining room, a rug and curtains with flowers. But the patio is large, and Isaí mows the grass regularly while Ana rolls handmade tortillas in the backyard over an open fire. It's different from her place in Guatemala. It's quieter, and it's missing a lot of family. It's been almost three years since they left everything behind in their home country.

In June 2018, Isaí and Envil, their son, left Guatemala, crossed Mexico, and arrived at the Arizona border to seek asylum in the United States.

"We had to flee the country because of things that were happening there, violence. We were being extorted," Ana explains. "First my husband and my son came.... We were hopeful. We did not expect what happened to them."

Under the Trump administration's zero tolerance policy, migrants—including asylum seekers—who attempted to cross the border without authorization were detained and criminally

prosecuted. The policy, preceded by a 1997 court ruling, was intended to discourage unauthorized border crossings into the United States and reduce the burden of processing asylum claims. Almost 3,000 minors were separated from their parents in less than two months; Isaí and Envil were part of that group.

Envil was 9 years old when he got to the border with his dad. They were placed in a detention center in Arizona. "It was cold, dirty, and packed. I remember a lot of kids cry-

ing," Envil says. He was separated from his father. Envil says the agents—he doesn't know if they were from Customs and Border Protection or Immigration and Customs Enforcement—beat him. Isaí remained in Arizona, and Envil ended up in a shelter in New York. Ana was still in their hometown of Santa Rosa.

"They told me that I would never see [Envil] again, asked why I had brought him, told me that it was my fault," Isaí recalls. "I did not know how to tell [Ana] that they took our son from me, how to explain to her that I had lost him." Almost three years later, Isaí is crying, something he rarely did before the separation.

Remembering is painful. Usually, they try to forget, to change the subject and move on.

"I remember the afternoon when I received a call, and they asked me if I was the mother of my son.... I was still in Guatemala, and I didn't know what had happened," Ana says. "I answered yes, and they told me that they were calling on behalf of immigration. They had my son, and he had been separated from my husband. That news destroyed me."

Isaí was not the only father separated from his child that day. "The parents from whom the children had been taken cried together in the detention center—we hugged each other, asking God, on our knees, 'My God, please, bring our children back,'" Isaí recalls.

After more than 40 days apart, Envil and Isaí were reunited in Arizona. When the children arrived on buses, Isaí saw that they were dirty, with lice and pimples. He noticed bruises. The immigration guards told the children to point out who their parents were, saying they had to recognize them. "The children were crying, and some of them said to their parents, 'I don't love you anymore. Why did you leave me?'" Isaí says. But Envil ran to him instantly.

"They told me that my dad didn't love me, that he had abandoned me, that he would never come back," Envil says. Isaí noticed the difference in his firstborn immediately. Before the separation, Envil was a curious, friendly child with an easy laugh. Now, the little boy with brown skin and expressive eyes looked gray, thin, and haggard, as if something had escaped his body. "He had a color that I don't know how to explain, like the color of sadness," Isaí remembers. "But I told him, 'Now you're here, *mijo*. We're together now.'"

They were released a couple of days later and moved to Tennessee, where Isaí's uncle lived, to start over. But just two weeks after they got to Selmer, the uncle was arrested for driving without a license and deported. They were left on their own.

Within weeks, Ana and her 5-year-old daughter, Herlin, set out on the same journey. They got to the Texas

Almost 3,000 minors were separated from their parents in less than two months; Isaí and Envil were part of that group.

Maritza Lizeth Félix is a freelance journalist, producer, and writer in Arizona.

border a couple of weeks after a federal judge, in June 2018, ordered a halt to family separations under the zero tolerance policy. Ana and Herlin applied for asylum and remained in the custody of immigration authorities for more than 20 days, though they were kept together the entire time. At the end of the summer, they were able to join Isaí and Envil in Tennessee.

When Ana saw her son, she barely recognized him, she says. For some time Envil sought out his parents, snuggled with them, and hugged his dad tightly, afraid they'd be separated again, as kept happening in his dreams. Envil would tell them, "Hold me—I'm afraid to wake up and see that you are not here again. Don't leave me again, please."

Ana's husband wasn't the same either. Isaí cried regularly and apologized constantly. They rarely talked about what had hap-

pened. "The trauma is so profound that they lose affection and start hating us for what happened," Isaí says. "As parents, that is so difficult to accept."

In many Latino families, it is considered impolite to talk about money, sex, or other difficult subjects at the dinner table. Those topics are to be discussed in private, among adults. But family separation is a reality that can't be ignored.

Two years after the separation, 12-year-old Envil and 7-year-old Herlin are still afraid and angry. "If only Trump could feel what it is like to be separated from someone you love so much," Envil says. "He needs to pay for what he did to me,

to other children." Envil blames Donald Trump for the almost hypothermic nights in "the coolers," the lice, the weight loss, the worms in his belly, the salty tears that dried night after night on his dusty cheeks. He doesn't forget or forgive his time in the custody of the US government.

"I don't think he will close this wound. He has been strong, but this hurt him so much," Isaí says. "I tell him to put this trauma aside, and he tells me, 'Daddy, I can't.' Neither can I."

Envil's adolescence arrived before his immigration court date. He, who just two years earlier was still a child, is becoming a teen. His voice is changing, and his features and eyes have hardened. There are days when his parents don't understand

what is happening to him. Sometimes he doesn't even understand himself.

"He changed a lot. I feel he is desperate at times. I see him as angry and full of fear, very different," Ana says.

She has changed too. "After everything I went through, I've gotten sick often," she says. "Sometimes I have bad dreams. I relive the same thing, and I wake up and I try to convince myself that it is just a nightmare, that we are together and it won't happen again."

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN HAS BEGUN TO reverse Trump's family separation policy, which tore at least 5,500 children from their parents between July 2017 and June 2018. He has also announced a task force to reunite the hundreds of migrant children still separated from their parents.

"Trump administration policy was on enforcement and removal," says Hugo Larios, an immigration attorney based in Arizona. He believes that Biden is returning to "the traditional way of keeping families together." Larios hopes that the administration will adopt a policy, "if the children come by themselves, to locate a family member or someone in the United States so that child can go to a family member instead of being detained at an immigration detention center."

But for hundreds of families, the separation crisis is not over. "It's one thing to say that you want to reunite all these kids," says Julie Schwietert Collazo, cofounder of Immigrant Families Together, a foundation dedicated to reuniting and supporting families separated at the US-Mexico border. "I think it's another to really look squarely in the face of 'What resources do you have to actually do that?' You know, what documentation exists that will reconnect these parents [or] guardians with their children?"

And for families like Ana and Isaí's, the harm to their mental and physical health still reverberates, though the federal government has done little to address it. Ana and her daughter have not received psychological help after the trauma of crossing the border; Envil and his dad started sporadic sessions in December. The family was referred to a specialist by an association that works with immigrants. But they don't know if therapy will help. "The truth is that we are not very well aware how it works," Ana explains. She says she's seen no progress in her family's emotional healing. "My child does not speak much."

Ana and Isaí also have fears about their legal status. While Envil and his little sister already have Social Security numbers, their parents do not have official identification or work permits. Without documents, they are still vulnerable to being deported. The federal government has not

"If only Trump could feel what it is like to be separated from someone you love so much," Envil says. "He needs to pay for what he did to me."

Held captive: Demonstrators rally outside a detention facility for migrants to protest Trump's immigration policies.



offered help. “They tell us that we have to wait until our court date in 2023, because our lawyer told us it couldn’t be done before,” Ana says.

The immigration courts still have more than a million pending cases. The Covid-19 pandemic has made it worse. “The problem is that there are not enough judges to accommodate all these claims. I mean, that’s why it takes forever,” says Larios, the immigration attorney. According to him, we should expect asylum seekers to be allowed to apply for work permits after 150 days, as they did before the Trump administration. “It doesn’t help anyone, even the US government...to not allow them to work if they’re already here anyway,” he says. He also emphasizes the urgency of DACA reform with a path for citizenship, “so that DACA-eligible individuals can apply for actual legal permanent residency, if not...a full comprehensive reform in the next two years, before the midterm elections.”

Thus far, Biden has not included most of these provisions in his immigration plans. Some advocates also demand financial restitution for the harms done. Others just want these families to have the opportunity to live safely and legally in the United States. “The priority is to really bring these cases before an immigration judge to resolve their asylum cases,” says Schwietert Collazo.

Ana and Isaí have to rely on the help of others to make ends meet. Isaí works as a gardener and takes whatever gigs he can get, but he gets paid under the table. He says that he tries to be a good, law-abiding citizen, but a mistake, no matter how small, could get him deported.

The family cannot imagine going back to Guatemala. Despite the nervousness they feel when they see a police car or an ICE agent or hear Trump on television, they feel safe in the United States. They have not forgotten Spanish, but they feel more comfortable speaking English. The two siblings joke, talk, and fight in a language they did not know before stepping onto American soil. They love their school, and their teachers tell Ana they are great students.

“We work hard to prove that we deserve to be here,” Isaí says. But that is not enough to heal and thrive.

“We need to get asylum,” Ana says.

(continued on page 44)

In Sickness, in Health

The pandemic has blurred the line between parenting

and teaching, opening up new possibilities even as it shuts down so many others.

BY IMANI PERRY



When I was diagnosed with systemic lupus back in 1996, I experienced it as a shrinking and a rising all at once. My ability narrowed: My joints creaked, my skin erupted, my muscles ached, my lungs screamed. I couldn’t physically do all the things I once did, like hard weight-lifting sessions or dancing all night. But as the disease progressed, my spirit seemed to lift; I began to witness myself as existing in ways much more significant than performance. Over the following years, I learned to take care of a body that announced every imbalance.

There was a trigger early in the pandemic that returned me to my first days of living with lupus, when it was at its most terrifying and debilitating. But this time, it wasn’t a solitary experience. We were all shrunken—me, my family, my friends, my students. Removed from our ability to connect physically, so many of us skulked away from one another. Students of mine who had been active participants in class grew quiet in our virtual communities. My children were stunned into silence. I’ve been a college professor for 18 years, but it was hard for me to “profess” to any of them. I just didn’t know.

I slept an absurd amount. Then I grew sleepless. I wavered between wanting to ensure

meaningful intellectual engagement and personal growth for all the young people around me—my children and students alike—and wanting to make space for all of us to worry and grieve without concern for metrics and outcomes. In a residential college, the student services are the in loco parentis branch, but as a female faculty member of color, that line

We don't want this replicated. So our failures must become the source of our children's political possibilities.

Imani Perry is a professor of African American studies at Princeton University. Her most recent book is Breathe: A Letter to My Sons.

often blurs. Students entrust us with their feelings, sometimes because of shared identities, sometimes because of shared vulnerabilities, sometimes because we are the ones who teach about power and difference. Late adolescence is a time of reckoning with one's place in the world.

Blurring has deepened in the pandemic. The ages of my children and my students are converging—my oldest child is one year younger than many of the people I teach. My students' rooms,

which I can now see, look like rooms in my home; their references are the ones shared here—to music, to history, to politics, to TikTok videos. I am distant from them and closer than I've ever been. I witness a generation on-screen and in my home at once. The sadness in those myriad twin eyes breaks my heart.

I imagine the same is true for the teachers who teach my children. They deal with an even more turbulent stage of adolescence, many with children of their own as well, and they are managing minutiae and oceans of grief. And teachers in underserved districts even more, where logging on to virtual school has been impossible for a large number of their students. We all were and are layered in our caring, teaching, and fragility and responsible for this incessant, inconvenient task of evaluating one another in what is, collectively, our weakest moment. I admit, I have always disliked the idea of grading,

although it is part of my job. I would much rather assess what skills have been gained, what growth took place, than rank people. But in the pandemic, where nothing is fair, where death and hunger and houselessness are ever more unfairly distributed, I have felt that grading is a masquerade, and I am a guilty participant. Meanwhile, I witness growing hunger, illness, and crisis outside, via screens, behind a locked front door.

A student sends an e-mail about a delayed assignment because someone they love has died of Covid-19, and a dam breaks. I wouldn't have thought, after so many months of crying, I had so many tears left.

One way of looking at the pandemic is that it lays bare all the ways injustice in our society is refracted through public health, labor, and our eviscerated welfare state. It is a cruel lesson about the history of fend-for-yourself neoliberal politics, but one that we as educators and parents must teach as we are living it. We don't want this replicated. So our failures must become the source of our children's political possibilities.

Another way of looking at the pandemic is that it exposes the greatest human virtue: the capacity to love. This is the longest I have been separated from my mother, and the longest I have gone without crossing the threshold of my family home in Birmingham, Ala. I feel a terrible ache in my chest, an unmooring. The past year also marks the most time I have been able to spend with my children since they were small. That is an extraordinary bounty; that expands my heart. People I know keep dying; people I love keep having their hearts broken. The preciousness of love is undeniable when we are so vulnerable.

I am brought back to my awakening to lupus, when I began to understand that physical vulnerability was no weakness when it came to my emotional landscape. Love is in sharp relief now, as it was then. We are all brought to the very core of what it means to be human. There is no evasion of tragedy, and yet there is enormous capacity. I think we can use it. I think we can attach our hearts to human history. I think we can learn to care deeply about every imbalance, including those far beyond our immediate surroundings. In fact, I know it.

(continued from page 43)

ANA STILL HAS MIXED FEELINGS ABOUT her family's decision to come to the United States. She and her husband talked with their children before leaving Guatemala. They explained the situation—the violence and intimidation they were experiencing—and how leaving their homeland was the only option. They dreamed together about what life would be like in the United States. She still gets excited thinking about freedom and opportunity. But then her thoughts turn to family separation, immigration uncertainty, a lack of job opportunities, and the challenges of being a migrant in the United States.

"I start to think about my children's lives, what will become of them, how they will grow up, and immediately I get a headache," Ana says.


Psychologist Enjolie Lafaurie, an expert on emotional stress and multicultural counseling, says that internal conflict is to be expected. "These parents are making incredibly difficult individual decisions in a system that's not supportive of them, that does not take their experience into account," she says. "It's like making a decision with your arms tied behind your back and your feet shackled."

"A lot of the families have said to us, 'We wouldn't have come here if we could have made a life for ourselves in our country of origin,'" says Schwietert Collazo. "We need to understand the reasons that people came here. They want to be your neighbors. They want to contribute here, and in many ways they're already doing that. They want to be safe."

Ana knows that she needs help too. She still cries when she remembers what happened: the family they left behind in Guatemala, the uncertainty of their future in the United States, the fear of being separated at one of their immigration check-ins. But for Ana, there is no better therapist than God. "He is so great that he has not abandoned us," she says. "He has put good people in our lives, who help us, even here, in this small town, where there are almost no Hispanic people." Faith is what has kept them together in times of uncertainty, especially when Trump was president.

"I get very worried because I know that we are in a country that may send us back," Ana says, "and my children, they are already adapting to life here." To stay legally in the United States, they need asylum. To keep going, they need faith. To stay together, they need to forgive. The United States has closed its doors to many, but some still got in. Maybe a window will open, and they'll find a way to come out of the shadows—to be free and no longer afraid. Maybe.





Next gen rising:
Greta Thunberg, the teenager who helped mobilize not only a generation of young people but also their parents.

The Radical Kids

Behind Radical Parents

Across the country and the world, children are waking their parents to the urgent need to take climate action.

BY ANGELY MERCADO

WHAT IS NOW KNOWN AS THE YOUTH CLIMATE MOVEMENT BURST ONTO THE INTERNATIONAL stage when Greta Thunberg, a Swedish teenager and climate activist, began to skip school in the fall of 2018. Every Friday, Greta, then 15, would sit outside the Swedish parliament with a sign that read *Skolstrejk för Klimatet*, or “School Strike for Climate.” She was often photographed alone.

But standing just off to the side, supporting her activism as it grew from weekly strikes to frequent interviews to far-reaching speeches and a trip across the Atlantic Ocean, was her father, the Swedish actor Svante Thunberg. He made her quest to wake the world’s grown-ups possible—even as he himself was woken by it.

In a 2019 interview with the BBC, Svante explained that he’d initially been uncomfortable with his daughter’s visibility as a young climate activist. But after he saw how dedicated she was to the movement and how fulfilling she found it—how it lifted the depression that had weighed her down after she learned of the crisis—he supported her efforts and put parts of his own career on hold to travel with her.

“We thought it was a bad idea—putting yourself out there with all the hate,” Svante said. But, he added, “I can see Greta is very happy from doing this.... She’s in a very good place.”

The Thunbergs’ story is unusual, but in its fundamental contours, it’s not unique. While Greta’s crusade has been playing out in front of a global audience, more intimate versions are unfolding in other households where teens reside. Across the United States, and the world more broadly, young people have been joining the climate movement. They have been forming organizations, agitating to change local policies, and taking to the streets. And as they have, many have been pulling their parents along with them. In a reversal of age-old norms, the younger generation has been leading the older. And the older generation has taken notice. Parents have been learning from their children and even supporting them.

The young generation is “where the energy and the innovation is,” said Frederick Tutman, the riverkeeper of Maryland’s Patuxent

and a longtime conservationist, who has observed how youth climate activists are transforming the movement and their elders. “Action”—I hear that term a lot with young people,” he said.

Ananya Guruprasad, a high school junior in Minneapolis, is one of those young people who have embraced action. She joined Earth Uprising as an organizer a few months ago and has been busy raising awareness on local climate issues, like the replacement of the controversial Line 3 oil pipeline, and setting up Q&As with elected officials. Earth Uprising, which was founded by the New York City-based climate activist Alexandria Villaseñor in 2019, is a youth-led coalition in 20 countries that supports other climate organizations.

Ananya’s concerns about climate change grew out of personal experience. She saw how bad her grandfather’s cough was when she went to visit him in Bangalore—likely the result, she learned, of the extreme air pollution in many Indian cities. She saw her own sister break out in hives from the pollution when they visited relatives there. And she watched in horror last year as millions of acres burned across Australia,

Angely Mercado, a freelance environmental justice writer and researcher, has written for The Nation, The New York Times, Grist, and more.

While Greta's crusade has been playing out in front of a global audience, more intimate versions are unfolding in other teens' households.

Kids at the helm: Greta Thunberg, then 16, and her father, Svante, arrive in the US after a 15-day journey across the Atlantic in 2019.

is “led by youth and supported by adults,” and that mantra has proved accurate in Ananya's own life. Her parents saw her become invested in organizing with other young people as she began to spend hours coordinating potential actions with them. And as they watched, they too became invested.

“My initial reaction was that this was just another passing phase as a teen, and that she would eventually move on to other things,” said Guruprasad Basavaraj, Ananya's father, in an e-mail to *The Nation*. “As she started expressing more interest and looking for avenues to contribute, I realized that this was something that she was really interested in and serious about.”

Through his daughter's organizing efforts, Basavaraj continued, he learned about climate tipping points, including the need to drastically lower carbon emissions within the next 10 years, before the damage becomes irreversible. The family is looking at different ways to cut its own carbon footprint. Basavaraj also discovered, somewhat to his surprise, the reluctance of political leaders and large corporations to address the climate crisis. “I have become more aware of the political and societal side of the environment,” he noted, “and I pay more attention to the happenings around climate change than I normally would have.”

EMILY JOHNSON HAS ALSO PUSHED HER family to learn more about local environmental policy. Like Ananya, she's a high school student in the Midwest. In 2019, Emily started a local chapter of Fridays for Future, the group behind the youth climate strike movement, in Wausau, a small city in central Wisconsin. She's helped organize rallies and connected with farmers about the challenges they face because of the crisis, inviting one to speak about his transition to sustainable farming methods. “He spoke at that rally about how he is personally being affected by climate change and what he has done to combat it,” Emily said. “Because of warming temperatures, a lot more pests and parasites are starting to grow.”

Thanks to Emily's activism, her mother, Sally, said that she too has been learning about local farming laws and the failure of current policy to address the needs of small farmers, whose crops and livestock are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis. Both described the political ideology in their area as conservative, and Sally said she has found herself speaking up against climate denial. She has also begun to defend climate policies like the Paris Agreement to community members.

“I know some people that are so totally against it, they're thinking extreme,” she said. They worry that “we're going to get rid of all cows, we're going to get rid of all planes, and it's not [true].” Her daughter, she added, motivated her to speak up against those climate conspiracy theories.”

For Adèle Giovanniello and her mother, Kristen, local climate organizing has always been a shared interest. The teenager started the Eco Freakos Club at Aliso Niguel High School in Aliso Viejo, Calif. She credited her mother's support and

uncertain if other members of her extended family would be exposed to the blaze. Soon after, she began to research how to become a part of the global climate movement.

“I saw the impact of youth-led movements...especially during the school shootings” in 2018, Ananya said. “That kind of just made me realize that...we do have the power to make an impact.”

The “About” page on Earth Up-rising's website states that the group

the efforts of other club members for its success in convincing the school to add water stations and raising the \$12,000 to install them.

Aliso Niguel has thousands of students but few places to refill water bottles. Students were constantly buying water in plastic bottles, so the club began to recycle them for money. “We petitioned for water stations at the school to reduce plastic consumption,” Adèle said.

When they first decided on the campaign, Adèle and the club weren't sure exactly where to start. “I said, ‘Why don't you write to the PTA?’” Kristen recalled. “So in September, she got on the PTA agenda, and the PTA was super supportive,” agreeing to provide some of the funding if the club could come up with the rest. Kristen encouraged her daughter and the other club members to attend a town meeting and learn more about potential grants. At the meeting, they met the mayor and learned there was indeed a grant that could help fund the water stations. In order to secure it, the club had to present slideshows on how the stations would be beneficial for the staff and student body.

“My husband and I did some slides. They took a first crack at it, and we kept tweaking,” Kristen said. “My husband and I kind of became... de facto sponsors of this Eco Freakos club.”

And Adèle's local climate activism has seeped into her family's life in other ways. While they have always cared about reducing waste, they've begun to try to live more sustainably, boosting their efforts to compost and to shop for local and organic products.

Meanwhile, Kristen has encouraged other parents who may be on the fence about their teens getting involved in the climate movement—especially if it means increased visibility—to give them

the space to explore and connect with their peers about organizing. “I think, as parents, we often try to push our mistakes or things we wish we had done differently onto our kids,” she said. Instead, she advised, “Listen a little more to your kids, because they know what's right for them. Do whatever you can to kind of support them.”

Basavaraj agrees. He wishes he'd been more supportive of Ananya's activism at the beginning. Now he's grateful to see how many students are willing to make an effort to educate their communities and to hold local officials accountable. The climate crisis “is not an issue that they started, but one that they might face the consequences of,” Basavaraj said. “So seeing youth advocate for the solution of something that they did not cause—especially since it's still something many adults tend to avoid—is quite inspiring.”



Having Babies Like White People

BY ANDRE M. PERRY

“Push, push, push, Mama; push,” my wife, Joia Crear-Perry, implored. Quiana, angled upright on the birthing bed, replied with grunts of effort. Quiana’s husband, Dooley, offered his support from where he stood at the head of the bed. I stood on the opposite side. It was my first time seeing my wife in action as a gowned and gloved ob-gyn.

“He’s almost here—push, Mama.” Joia sat on a rolling stool between Quiana’s legs, which were hoisted in stirrups. The attending physician stood behind Joia, who repeated the same exhortation to push that was nearly a chant: “Push, push, push, Mama; push.”

I couldn’t see the particulars because of the gown, but I watched in amazement as Quiana birthed Robeson Perry, my biological son with Joia. My wife had assisted in the birthing of her own son by Quiana, our surrogate or “gestational carrier.” After years of fertility treatments and thousands of dollars, our last frozen embryo, of 13, had finally arrived.

I shared the story with my family of how Joia and I had hired a surrogate and were having a baby in December. After my family let out *oohs* and *aahs*, the room became silent. Then one of my cousins shouted, “Andre has made it! They’re having babies like white people now.” Laughter erupted. I thought to myself, “She’s kind of right.”

Instead of restricting women’s basic rights or limiting conversations on reproductive justice to abortion, the focus of federal policy should be on creating conditions that enable Black women to expand the ways they choose to make a family. Understanding racial birthing disparities requires us to examine structural racism.

Every person, regardless of race or class, should have the opportunity to have and raise a child. The American Society for Reproductive Medicine says creating a family is a basic human right. The United States and other countries should codify that right in their public policy and health care systems. In Britain, for example, three rounds of in vitro fertilization are available to those under 40 through the National Health Service. However, in the United States, only New York state covers infertility medications through Medicaid, the country’s income-restricted public insurance program for people of reproductive age. No state Medicaid program offers other critical fertility services like artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, and egg freezing. Hiring a surrogate is only available to people with the means and networks to do so—“like white people.”

Only about half of employer-sponsored insurance plans cover infertility evaluation, and only a quarter offer infertility treatment, leaving Black, Hispanic, and Native American women, who are less likely to have employer coverage, with significantly fewer options. Less than half (47 percent) of working-age Black Americans were covered by employer plans in 2019, compared with 66 percent of whites, 42 percent of Hispanics, 65 percent of Asian Americans, and 36 percent of Native Americans, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Fertility treatments should not just be a luxury for a privileged class; people who don’t receive those benefits are burdened by health care and other systems that are supposed to protect us.

The United States is the only industrialized nation with a rising maternal mortality rate; from 2000 to 2014, there was a 26 percent

increase in maternal mortality, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and research published in *Obstetrics and Gynecology*. However, Black women are three to four times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related complication than non-Hispanic white women. And most maternal deaths are preventable (60 percent).

Underlying these differences isn’t the individual behaviors of Black women or economic status. It’s racism. We are inundated with insulting and infantilizing research and commentary about how Black people cause their own poverty by not getting married or by having too many children. For those writers, family planning strictly means that low-income women must figure out how to not have children. In 1970, President Richard Nixon codified these attitudes in policy. His anti-poverty strategy included placing family planning clinics in urban communities. This is a reason why so much focus on Black women’s reproductive health is on abortion and contraception.

UCLA professors of public health Gilbert Gee and Chandra Ford define structural racism as the “macro-level systems, social forces, institutions, ideologies, and processes that interact with one another to generate and reinforce inequities among racial and ethnic groups.” People living in regions with racial disparities in housing, education, criminal justice, and health care have worse birthing outcomes. Results from a 2014 study in *Social Science & Medicine* “indicated that Blacks living in states with high levels of structural racism were generally more likely to report past-year myocardial infarction than Blacks living in low-structural racism states.”

We must dismantle the architecture of inequality that generates worse birthing outcomes for Black women.

Among his first acts as president, Joe Biden signed an executive order to advance racial equity, declaring that the nation must take “a systematic approach to embedding fairness in decision-making processes.” The heart of this order calls for the Office of Management and Budget to measure the effects of racism. However, we already know that Black women can’t buy or educate their way to better outcomes. When it comes to improving birthing outcomes, Biden should seek to require states—through congressional action, while his party controls the House and Senate—to cover infertility evaluation and treatment as an essential benefit of the Medicaid program. And he should dedicate an office in the White House to facilitate this process.

As memorable as experiencing the birth of my son was, looking back, I see how the pain from multiple miscarriages, financial loss, and the risks to my wife could have been mitigated through equitable policy. Roby is a healthy, smart, handsome 10-year-old who has brought nothing but joy to our lives. More of us can experience the joy of childbirth if our society and government learn to reckon with Black women’s pain, not generate it. **N**

Parenting
as a
Radical
Act of
Love



Andre M. Perry is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. This article is adapted from his book *Know Your Price: Valuing Black Lives and Property in America’s Black Cities*.



We All Move

The science and politics of migration

BY DANIEL IMMERWAHR

“TO THE MEMORY OF CHRISTOPHER Columbus,” reads the inscription to the large Columbus Fountain in Washington, D.C., “whose high faith and indomitable courage gave to mankind a New World.” The monument was erected in 1912, and one cringes reading those words now. Columbus did not give mankind a New World. As the statue of the Native American man kneeling by Columbus’s side suggests, that world was already fully possessed by humanity.

Nearly everywhere European “discoverers” sailed, in fact, they met people who had discovered those lands long before them. The Americas had already been

discovered; so had Australia and New Zealand and the Arctic North. Even seemingly remote Pacific islands were inhabited by the time Europeans arrived. It's bracing to realize just how few truly empty places European sailors found—"islands and ice, mostly," according to the Yale cartographer Bill Rankin. Not counting the frozen continental land at the poles, Rankin calculates that the uninhabited areas discovered by seafaring Europeans amounted to only 0.14 percent of the world's land.

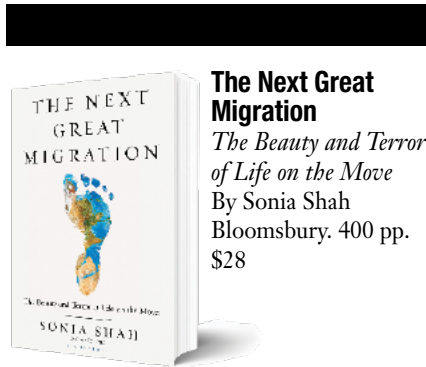
How did humans get to all those places? This question tormented European thinkers for centuries. For Carl Linnaeus, the Swedish botanist who established the system we use today to classify species, God must have done the work. After creating the Garden of Eden, God then dispersed humans across the planet, and there they stayed, awaiting European discovery.

Linnaeus's theory offered a neat solution but not a durable one. Later scientists leaned toward the theory that humans must have wandered aimlessly to all these far-flung locales. How they managed this in the case of Polynesia was hard to imagine, given the distance of some of its islands from any large landmass. The prominent 20th-century anthropologist Ralph Linton insisted that the first Polynesians must have arrived "as a result of accidental drifts"—seafarers from the east, blown far off course, who had somehow fortuitously hit land. The Norwegian ethnographer Thor Heyerdahl offered a weirder variant on this theory: A "race of white gods" originally from Eurasia had drifted west to Polynesia from the Americas. In 1947, to show this could be done, he built a balsa raft named *Kon-Tiki*, equipped it with a radio, and allowed the wind and current to carry him 4,300 miles from Peru until he ran aground on a coral reef in French Polynesia.

What Linton and Heyerdahl couldn't believe was the story that the people of the Pacific themselves told: that they had sailed the wide ocean on purpose. To prove it, in 1976 a Micronesian navigator named Mau Piailug set out in an 18th-century-style vessel from Hawaii. He took neither charts nor modern instruments. Instead, he used wayfinding, a traditional form of navigation relying on the position of the stars, the feel of ocean swells, other natural observations, and prodigious feats of memory. Piailug reached Tahiti in 34 days. In the next three decades or so, his ship completed nine more voyages, hitting far-off targets with pinpoint accuracy.

The mystery of Polynesian origins no longer baffles anthropologists. We have ample evidence to confirm that Piailug was right: Polynesians came first from Asia, and not by accident. Yet the mindset that obscured this truth for so

Daniel Immerwahr is a professor of history at Northwestern University and the author of How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States.



The Next Great Migration

The Beauty and Terror of Life on the Move
By Sonia Shah
Bloomsbury. 400 pp.
\$28

long persists. We find it easy to imagine migrations as one-off accidents: canoes set adrift, Siberian hunters taking a drastically wrong turn at the Bering Strait. We find it far harder to imagine people moving intentionally, regularly, and as part of the natural course of things.

This prejudice against motion is the subject of *The Next Great Migration: The Beauty and Terror of Life on the Move*, by the science journalist Sonia Shah, and it's one she has had occasion to contemplate for decades. As a New York-born Australian citizen descended from Gujaratis, Shah has lived with "an acute feeling of being somehow out of place." Perhaps that's why she has made a career studying insects, parasites, and bacteria crossing borders, including in her prescient 2016 book *Pandemic: Tracking Contagions, From Cholera to Ebola and Beyond*. Now, in *The Next Great Migration*, Shah scales up. It's not just microbes that move, she notes, it's everything: birds, rodents, trees, continents, and, importantly, humans. Accepting that means learning to see motion as normal rather than exceptional. And it prepares us to meet the future that climate change will bring—in which people will have to migrate as never before—with equanimity and humanity.

The book's title points toward this future, but Shah is mainly concerned with showing how common human and animal motion were in the past. Looking backward is important because, in her view, we have yet to fully dispel what she calls "the myth of a sedentary world." Again and again, scientists have taken fixity as normal and have been surprised to discover that, in fact, things move. Undergirding this bias toward stability, Shah argues, is a widely felt sense that plants, animals, and people have proper places to which they belong. That's what we're feeling when we say things are "out of place." According to Shah, that sense of belonging often leads us awry.

Take lemmings. If you know one thing about them, it's that they are suicidal, marching maniacally over cliffs into the unforgiving sea. It is, on the face of it, curious behavior, but in 1924 the British *Journal of Experimental Biology* explained it as a population-culling mechanism. Lemmings reproduce, overgraze, and then, facing starvation, choose death before dishonor, "ecstatically throwing themselves over the ends of railway bridges." The 1958 Disney documentary *White Wilderness* seared the notion of mass suicide into many tender minds with its footage of dozens of lemmings tumbling into the Arctic, with only a "small handful" of their more cautious compatriots surviving.

But *White Wilderness* was staged, as Shah points out. Those lemmings didn't jump; they were pushed. And the reason is that lemmings are not suicidal. What they are is exuberantly migratory, capable of adventurously seeking out new locales—even crossing small bodies of water—in response to population pressures. It is typical of a "nonmigratory, closed-border world," Shah writes, that most people assume lemmings on the move are seeking death when they are actually seeking new lives.

To be fair, there are many reasons scientists have had such difficulty comprehending migration. It's hard to track, say, a monarch butterfly from Ontario to Michoacán—borders intercede. Before the 19th century, it was anyone's guess where birds went in the off-season. The first

English-language treatise on the topic, written by a leading 17th-century physicist, concluded that they went to the moon. It wasn't until 1822, when a stork turned up in a German village with a Central African spear sticking through its neck, that ornithologists truly grasped the nature and range of these migratory routes. And throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, the precise routes of many species remained elusive.

But Shah sees more than just ignorance afoot. Darker motives peek out from under respectable scientific theories. Because Linnaeus believed in a stable biological world, he found it easier to imagine that birds hibernated in the winter—vanishing to unknown hiding spots—than that they crossed ecological zones. He also found it easier to believe, therefore, that humanity was divided into five racial subspecies, each with its own proper climate and continent.

Racism goes hand in hand, Shah shows,

with belief in a sedentary world. In the 20th century, Madison Grant, a founder of the Bronx Zoo, believed animals to be hemmed in by their habitats. The alarming exception, for Grant, was the human, the “most cosmopolitan of animals.” Human mobility wasn't a good thing, in his view. As he warned in his best-selling treatise of 1916, *The Passing of the Great Race*, the migration of peoples away from their customary climates would lead to intermarriage and the enfeeblement of the white race.

Grant's theories resonated in the United States of the early 20th century, heavily invested in both racial segregation and empire. Former president Theodore Roosevelt counted Grant as a close friend, traded notes with him about various racial groups' skull shapes, and told him that “all Americans should be sincerely grateful to you” for writing *The Passing of the Great Race*. Grant's work eventually helped inspire a US immigration law in 1924 to

heavily restrict migration from countries outside Western and Northern Europe.

Grant also met with the acclaim of the Nazis, who published *The Passing of the Great Race* in German. Adolf Hitler read it with enthusiasm, calling it his “bible” in a letter to Grant. The Nazis obsessed over biological stability in all realms. They sought, Shah writes, to “banish ‘foreign’ plants from their gardens,” such as the seemingly innocuous small balsam, which they deemed a “Mongolian invader.” Meanwhile, they protected “native” species and made killing an eagle punishable by death.

Ultimately, Shah argues, how you view plants and animals relates to how you view people, and for her this reveals the larger political and ethical quandaries created by the myth of a sedentary world. You see the small balsam as an invader, and maybe you feel the same way about the Poles. You see migrating lemmings as senseless hordes that don't value their own lives, and you're all the more ready to say the same of Syrian refugees crossing the Mediterranean.

Luckily, there's never been a better time for lemming revisionism. Two technologies in particular, Shah notes, have recently transformed our understanding of migration. The first is the Global Positioning System tracker. The second is the extraction of DNA from the human petrous bone, found near the ear. Taking their lessons together, she argues, should explode the myth of a sedentary world and show how ill-conceived today's closed border politics are.

The US Department of Defense began launching GPS satellites in the 1970s and had a full complement of them in orbit by 1993. Yet civilian scientists using the system could only calculate position roughly, because the Pentagon intentionally degraded its publicly available signal to confound America's adversaries. Shortly after midnight on May 1, 2000, it stopped doing that, essentially upgrading every GPS user in the world to a premium account. The subsequent boom in GPS technologies yielded lightweight, solar-powered tags that scientists could affix to migrating animals.

Nineteenth-century scientists depended on freak events like storks impaled with African spears to glimpse migration's mysteries. Now they can spear any stork they

The Notes

I stay in bed and
listen for any music.
Today is cheerful,
it has overshot itself
and is tomorrow.
I'm left behind, waiting for
the birds to return.
They've moved on. I now know that
being birdless doesn't hurt.

VICTORIA CHANG

wish and get spear-cam updates every five seconds. The results have been “stunning,” Shah writes. The Arctic tern, despite its name, flies annually from the northern reaches of the planet to Antarctica, a nearly 60,000-mile journey. Those “native” German eagles the Nazis were so intent on protecting? You can find some in Zambia in the winter. Migratory animals move a lot, it turns out, often in clever, complex, and profoundly weird ways.

Humans do, too. The old idea was that ancient humans had wandered out of Africa across land bridges and stumbled onto unlikely habitats, spinning off from the rest of humanity and founding new populations. But that was before 2015, when the anthropologist Ron Pinhasi and his colleagues showed that the unusually dense petrous bone could yield a trove of DNA from archaeological specimens. With improved extraction and DNA sequencing techniques, the petrous bone has allowed a much clearer view into the distant past. We no longer think ancient migrants accidentally reached new locales on onetime, one-way journeys. Rather, it now appears, they crossed back and forth, migrating in multiple and many-directional streams. The image of humanity as a tree with diverging branches, Shah writes, makes sense only if we imagine those branches frequently curling back and fusing with one another.

“Populations today almost never descend directly from the populations that existed in the same place even 10,000 years ago,” the paleogeneticist David Reich explained. That’s because people mix and move relentlessly. “I think that’s a very profound insight,” he added. “It should change the way we see our world.”

Migration has always been the rule and remaining stationary the exception.

It should, but will it? Shah points out a painful irony: Just as Reich’s fellow scientists were getting the hang of grinding up petrous bones to reveal how often humans moved in the past, politicians started frantically erecting fences and walls with the hopes of getting them to stop doing it today. The year 2015—the same year as the Pinhasi group’s paper—saw “an unprecedented surge in construction of new border walls,” Shah writes. Barriers shot up on the European side of the Mediterranean to block refugees from the Middle East. The new barricades have cut down on border crossings, though at the cost of making the already hazardous journey far more so. In 2015, one migrant in 270 died trying to reach Europe by sea; by 2018, it was one in 52.

Impermeable borders kill, and they also impoverish. Consider Haiti, once one of the most profitable patches of land on the planet but now one of the world’s poorest countries. It has suffered tremendously at the hands of such powerful nations as France and the United States, to the point where economic fixes are hard to come by.

Yet there is one strategy that has helped: letting people leave. The New York University economist Bill Easterly pointed out that 82 percent of Haitian escapes from poverty can be credited to migration to the United States. Unfortunately, the United States has grown less hospitable to this and has recently

aggressively deported Haitians, in effect throwing them off the economic ladder. “Why do we need more Haitians?” Donald Trump reportedly once asked legislators. “Take them out.”

The typical response to nativists like Trump by pro-migration advocates is to plead exigency. Haitians have good reason to claim status as political or economic refugees, essentially arguing that they need a new country because theirs is broken. Shah sympathizes, but her book makes a different argument. *The Next Great Migration* softly rejects the idea that anyone “belongs” anywhere—that anyone has a country in the first place. By its terms, Haitians should not have to plead that “their” country is unviable to enter another. To do so would be to give too much credence to the myth of a sedentary world, where migration is an exceptional act born of desperation.

For Shah, migration has always been the rule rather than the exception, but it will become even more common as the planet warms. The low-lying country of Bangladesh has a population of more than 150 million. If the seas rise three feet—quite likely to happen this century—a fifth of its land, on which some 30 million people live, will be submerged. Those 30 million will be forced to move, and when they do, it will matter how they’re regarded. As “Bangladeshis” perpetually

out of place, they will likely struggle to find safe berth. It would be better, Shah suggests, to drop the labels, recognize human beings as a migratory species, and build institutions around that fact.

This is a far-reaching argument, yet when it comes to specifying what those institutions might look like, Shah has disappointingly little to say. The sole policy she endorses in her book is the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, a nonbinding pact that the vast majority of countries voted for in 2018. (The United States voted no.) The compact enjoins governments to ease migrants’ lives by doing things like providing them with identity documents and vocational training. But it does not abolish borders or establish anyone’s right to cross them. To the contrary, it affirms “the sovereign right of States” to “govern migration within their jurisdiction,” including “preventing irregular migration.” It’s hard to see how such an approach could suffice in an age of climate change or how it could free us from the myth of the sedentary world.

There are also deeper questions raised by the history Shah explores that go unaddressed. Racism doesn’t manifest only in border controls, which Shah discusses at length, but also in colonial conquest, removal, gentrification, and dispossession, which she says much less about. In these cases, the forces of racism combine with those of mobility, feeding off the people-don’t-belong-to-places view that Shah defends. If there is no connection between societies and land, then what can be said about English travelers founding a new society on Indigenous land in the Chesapeake Bay? Or Jewish settlers from the Soviet Union seeking a home in Palestine? Shah defends her view with gentle metaphors drawn from nature: Butterflies cross borders, so people should be allowed to do so as well. But she says less about the tendency of animals, including humans, to violently dislodge rivals upon entering new areas.

If *The Next Great Migration* does not resolve such issues, that is because its aim is more to trigger a conceptual shift. The world isn’t fixed in place, Shah rightly argues. People, plants, and animals move, and they do so regularly. The coming years will see more migrants than ever, and we should not see that in itself as a crisis. Migration is normal. The lemmings are all right.



Beyond Domination

The future and past of decolonization

BY ARJUN APPADURAI

THERE IS A WELL-ESTABLISHED TRADITION OF SCHOLARLY writing that treats geographical areas of the world as natural, preformed backgrounds against which historical events unfold. This perspective, with roots in Enlightenment thinkers like Montesquieu, lives on in the work of conservative political theorists like Samuel Huntington, for whom civilizations were built on permanent geo-ethnic blocs, as well as in the work of Marxist scholars like Immanuel Wallerstein, for whom center and periphery were products of long-term geographical imbalances.

This approach can at times have its uses, but it would also benefit from an understanding of the world that tracked the formation of regions in reverse: Instead of viewing these geographical areas as preordained physical realities, we view them as the contingent results of human actors, movements, and projects. Land and water may exist prior

to human history, but regions and civilizations are products of human action. In this sense, history produces geography, not the other way around.

Two new books—*On Decoloniality*, by Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, and *Out of the Dark Night*, by Achille Mbembe—help remind us of the history behind our geographies, setting the history of regions and continents back into the context of colonialism and em-

pire. To do so, both books consider the different paths out of decolonization, only to find that neither the kind of nation-state that emerged out of decolonization nor the recent version of globalized capitalism that has come to define these nation-states has truly fulfilled the liberatory promises of decolonization. The strongest part of both books is their grounding in the areas from which they emerge—Latin America and Africa, respectively—and their common recognition that the heaviest price extracted by colonizers on the colonized in the past 500 years was not in the currency of labor and resource extraction but in the realm of knowledge, where colonial subjects were classified as the other in Europe's empire of reason. Both books also represent a radical critique of European domination over the rest of the world through the various ages of empire,



Explore *The Nation* Online

Make the most of your subscription

Activate your online access on your phone or computer to get all that *The Nation* has to offer:

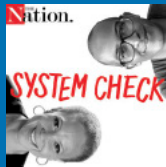
Go to [TheNation.com/register](https://www.thenation.com/register) or scan the QR code ▶



Subscribe to our newsletters



Listen to our podcasts



Over 150 years of truth-telling journalism



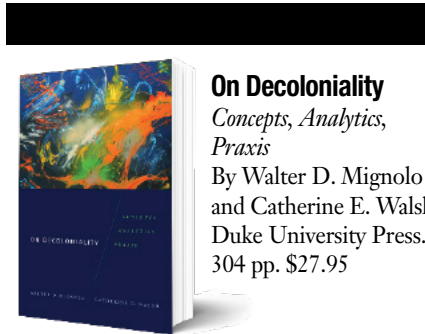
and both agree that materialist analyses of this dominion—by Marxists, dependency theorists, and world-systems theorists—have misunderstood both colonialism and the decolonization that followed.

But the authors also offer us very different arguments about the entanglement of Europe with the colonies. Mignolo and Walsh see a radical opposition, indeed a chasm, between decolonial thought and European ideas of modernity, progress, and freedom, with Latin American Indigenist movements as their model for where freedom is to be found. Mbembe, on the other hand, offers a much more dialectical, relational, and entangled picture of the relations between colonizer and colonized. He sees the future of Africa, and the world that Africa reveals and exemplifies, as lying in a renewed—and joint—effort by Europe and its erstwhile colonies to enact a more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable vision of reason and humanity than was globally normalized in the past five centuries.

On *Decoloniality* is a collaborative work in which each author takes up a connected and complementary set of arguments in one of the book's halves, the first by Walsh and the second by Mignolo. Their joint goal is to make the case for decoloniality, the idea that a different form of decolonization or anti-colonialism was and continues to be possible in the Global South—one that does not rest on Western forms of knowledge but instead on Indigenous epistemological styles and claims.

In making this argument for a politics of decoloniality, Walsh and Mignolo acknowledge that their biggest debt is to the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, whose idea of decoloniality they use to develop their central object of criticism, what they call “the colonial matrix of power.” For them, colonialism and empire in South and Central America proved to be a unique mode of domination that rested primarily on the marginalization, subordination, and elimination of not just Indigenous populations but also Indigenous epistemologies and cultures. Replacing not just native populations but also their ways of knowing the world was at the center of European conquest in the New World; their local traditions of reproducing natural systems and placing humans within a larger cosmology were gradually replaced by Western ideas of nature, culture, and progress, all seen as Christian, European, and white monopolies. It is this knowledge matrix that Walsh and Mignolo argue remained even when the colonizers left, and it is what they also argue a more fully emancipatory decolonization would replace.

Walsh is North American but has spent many years teaching and organizing political networks in Latin America, and she sees herself as more of an activist than an academic. In her



On Decoloniality

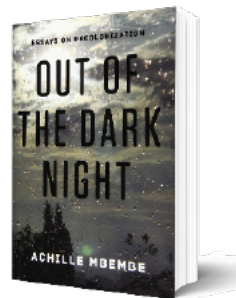
Concepts, Analytics, Praxis

By Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh
Duke University Press.
304 pp. \$27.95

Out of the Dark Night

Essays on Decolonization

By Achille Mbembe
Columbia University Press.
280 pp. \$30



chapters, she argues for political praxis as the critical site of theory, suggesting that any serious critical theory is a form of practice and, as such, has to arise out of concrete political movements against the colonial matrix of power. Her inspiration is a series of grassroots movements in Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Brazil, and elsewhere in Latin America that have sought to combine feminist, environmentalist, and anti-capitalist modes of thought to combat the ways of knowing that became dominant in the course of the European invasion of the Americas. To characterize this sort of resistance to the European epistemological order, Walsh uses the words *marronage* and *cimarronaje*, both terms that refer to the escape of slave populations in the Caribbean and elsewhere in Latin America. Walsh's style of writing, her examples and models, and her approach to resistance are especially inspired by Black and feminist activists in the Andean countries and Indigenous

political movements from across Latin America. Her main point of convergence with Mignolo is their shared journey over three decades from a theoretical approach to colonial modernity to a radical identification with the Indigenous movements that have sought to transcend Western ways of understanding nature, race, and progress.

Mignolo, on the other hand, is Argentine and has lived and taught in the United States for several decades. His part of the book is anchored in relationality (*vincularidad*), a way of thinking that opposes such binaries as nature and culture, man and woman, science and religion, civilization and barbarism. Decolonization, in his argument, is a specific and flawed reaction to European domination, especially in the new nations of the post-World War II period that threw off the shackles of colonial political rule but, he argues, failed to “decolonize their minds,” to use Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's phrase. Instead, they fell into the European epistemological traps of modernization and development. In Mignolo's earlier work, colonialism is inextricably bound with what he views as the Western fiction of modernity. The main agents of this fiction and of the colonialism and empires that promoted it were those Europeans, especially in the Americas, who imposed their own highly local versions of it onto societies and communities with very different views of these things. The fable of modernity was the unifying arc of this aggressive universalism, and Mignolo's principal argument is that any variety of Marxist argument that focuses primarily on capitalism, class, and material exploitation misses the forms of power that came through this cultural and epistemological domination. To resist and replace it with another epistemological worldview, Walsh and Mignolo recommend decoloniality, an outlook that embraces Indigenous modes of thinking and rejects those Western expressions of modernity imposed on much of the world through colonialism and empire.

Both Walsh and Mignolo are strongly committed to the difference between decoloniality and decolonization. For

Arjun Appadurai lives in Berlin and teaches at New York University and the Bard Graduate Center, where he has been appointed the Max Weber Global Professor.

them, decoloniality is not a successor to colonialism and coloniality, as the Western nation-states that emerged in Latin America have proved to be. Instead, decoloniality offers an alternative, one that is rooted in Indigenous thought and practice about nature, community, and solidarity. In this way, decoloniality, unlike decolonization, escapes the twin traps of nation-statism and corporate globalization. For both Walsh and Mignolo, their idea of decoloniality stems from their insights into the history of Latin America, but it also serves as a model for the rest of the world—a model of politics that seeks to replace extraction from nature with harmony with nature, and hierarchy among humans with conviviality. This vision is seductive, and it is hard to disagree with their notions of harmony and conviviality, but it also rests on a reversal of the historical impact of capitalism and colonialism. It seeks to return us to an earlier period of precolonial splendor, when what we need to imagine, as Mbembe argues, is an alternative future.



Out of the Dark Night is also concerned with how the European imperial project has devalued and displaced other, more emancipatory ways of thinking. Mbembe's focus is on Africa, and his conclusions do not endorse the virtues of a precapitalist or precolonial world; instead, he seeks to imagine a future based on our less-than-ideal present. This future requires us to refashion the structures of race, power, and technology into a more liberated relationship.

Mbembe focuses on a shorter time span than Mignolo and Walsh do, covering the period from the late 19th century to the present, and unlike them, he is as much concerned with European rule in the many colonies into which Africa was divided and the anti-colonial struggles that led to the birth of today's nation-states as he is with both the periods of colonization that preceded them and the decolonization that followed.

Likewise, Mbembe offers a different path out of the contemporary impasse of nation-state politics and globalized capitalist economics. For him, the truly decolonized future is one that sees contemporary Africa as the site of a radical rethinking of the relationship between master and slave, one that is grounded

Elegy

Sundays, my brother returns as a trapezoid of light inching across the fading rug, showing me again that windows need cleaning. He returns each time a breeze brings the unpleasantness of rabbits in a half-shingled hutch, their timid ears pinned in place. Once, hiking through scrub oak, he pulled at a stalk of stubborn cheatgrass which sliced his palm open and his fist dripped blood all the way home. I ask if he remembers that or the forts we built of bedsheets. We secured each corner with volumes on the spider, the mummy, the solar system, and then used box fans for roof raising. How long was it, I ask, before the wind was too much? When did we grow bored? I sometimes forget that my brother's bones are now ash and the rest of him a cloud. The fact is, my only memory of learning to read is pretending I couldn't so he would do it for me. A book of illustrated Bible stories more often than not, its spine broken, pages missing, each figure on each page nothing more than hazy pastel. I ask if he remembers that book, if he knows where it is. He says, How should I know? I'm not even here.

STEPHEN TUTTLE

ATHENA PHEROMONES™ INCREASE AFFECTION

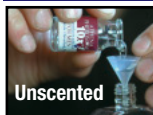


Created by
Winnifred Cutler,
Ph.D. in biology from
U. of Penn, post-doc
Stanford. Co-
discovered human
pheromones in 1986

Author of 8 books on
wellness and 50+
scientific papers.

6-Pak: **Special Offer**

PROVEN EFFECTIVE IN 3 DOUBLE-BLIND STUDIES



ATHENA PHEROMONES™
increase your attractiveness.

Athena 10X™ For Men \$99.50
10:13™ For Women \$98.50
Cosmetics **Free U.S. Shipping**

♥ **Julie (CAN)** "I tried the 10:13 for the first time last night. My husband professed his love for me 4 times in 30 minutes! Let's just say that this result is way above the baseline, shall we?"

♥ **Joseph (MI)** "Fabulous product. I was shocked at how well 10X works. I am married and am with my wife only. Well within 5 days it was amazing. The affection level went up 20 fold."

Not in stores  610-827-2200

Athenainstitute.com

Athena Institute, Braefield Rd., Chester Spgs, PA 19425 NTN

THE Nation. Advertising Opportunities



Special packages available for small businesses, authors, and nonprofit organizations. Options for website banner advertising and e-Newsletters with modest budgets.

More information at
TheNation.com/advertise

in the African experience of diaspora and mobility. For Mbembe, it is these processes of mixture, flow, and interaction that help Africa define a path toward decolonization that does not rest heavily on the platform of Indigeneity. These experiences, he insists, open the path to Afropolitanism, a politics that uses the history and present of Africa to think about global emancipation.

This vision of emancipation also has global implications. In this way, we encounter arguably one of the closest things we have today to an avatar of Frantz Fanon. Mbembe's arguments stand out for the force of their claims, the combination of critical and visionary statements, their disciplinary range, and his distinctively contemporary voice. Mbembe has been known to Anglophone readers at least since the publication in 2001 of *On the Postcolony*, which introduced a worldwide readership to his arguments about race, "necropolitics," and sedition in Africa since decolonization. Since the publication of *On the Postcolony*, he has produced a steady stream of books (both in French and in English) that engage with African aesthetics, the geographical production of the cartography of Africa, the racialized capitalism that exists there, and the histories of slavery, political satire, and national liberation.

A key element of Mbembe's way of thinking, and one central to *Out of the Dark Night*, concerns his view of religion. Mbembe's underlying intuition as a close but not orthodox reader of Marx and Foucault is that the modern marginalization of religion and the European amnesia about colonization are entwined in an unusual and surprising set of ways. Because the colonizers regarded African cosmologies as primitive obstacles to modernity, they were able to mask colonialism in the garb of a civilizing and secularizing process—one that brought modern knowledge to far-flung parts of the world, even as the Europeans bringing it rapaciously extracted the wealth of the colonies and dominated its peoples. For Mbembe, the disenchantment they left in Africa also ties it to the rest of the

globe—a world that is now increasingly defined by a borderless capitalism.

For this reason, the reenchantment of politics is also a rejection of the violence that came with colonial disenchantment, and Mbembe's work, as a result, is suffused with the vocabulary of repentance, sacrifice, redemption, and renewal. The religious provenance of these terms is surely traceable to his own Catholic background in Cameroon, but it also leads him to an outlook that differs from Mignolo's, which tends to represent Indigenous thought systems, movements, and practices as exemplars of a pristine

**For Mbembe, we
need an alternative
modernity, not a return
to a more desirable past.**

and desirable model for decolonial thinking and European religious ones as alien and oppressive. Mbembe has little patience for any cultification of the Indigenous, since this would mean a denial of the relational history of colonizer and colonized in Africa, which he regards as also being the ground of new forms of African creativity, conviviality, and social innovation.

In *Out of the Dark Night*, Mbembe weaves these two themes—the disenchantment and colonialism of the past and the creativity and capitalist corporatization of the present—together through a set of interconnected essays that explore Africa's experiences of colonization and its history. Colonialism and empire, he argues, were forms of racism, insofar as racism is a war between Europeans and what they saw as other species. But Mbembe resists arguments that depict Africa as the destitute victim of European colonialism or as an aggregation of corrupt or failed states that have wrecked their own chances for a healthy postcolonial future. Instead, he argues that Africa is a continent rich in resources, epistemologies, and new modes of political association and that, in its openness to the global circulation of ideas, people, cultures, and goods, we can find an alternate modernity to the one we live in now. For Mbembe, what is at stake are not only the flaws of decolonization as it took place but also the possible paths to a sustainable planetary future that Africa exemplifies.

Mbembe has a deep interest in capitalism, but less in its economic centers than in its edges and extremities, where the bodies of enslaved people, the extractive

potentials of the colony, and the excesses of bodily mutilation converge. In his view, the history of plantations and transatlantic slavery were not anomalies in our current globalized capitalist order but were integral to its formation, creating a racialized system of labor and exchange that afflicted all European empires from the 1500s on. From the edges and extremities comes a new center.

The reluctance of Europe and the West in general to recognize the horrors of this history, in Mbembe's view, can best be seen in France, where he studied as a graduate student and where the claim to the universal values of reason, equality, and freedom doesn't extend to its own Black and brown citizens even today. In Mbembe's view, it is in Africa that this hypocrisy can be addressed, by harnessing those ideas of nature, humanity, and emancipation that were born out of the encounters between colonizer and colonized and in the worlds that decolonization created. Mbembe's Africa is where the newest technologies (digital, mediatic, and fiscal), in concert with its new forms of language, art, and philosophy, are being experimented with and innovated upon in ways that prepare this emerging Africa to be a model for the decolonization of the planet, without having to abandon or forget the colonial encounter.

Mbembe's argument about a liberatory future that might emerge out of decolonization has the great appeal of not requiring the wholesale abandonment of the complexities of modernity. But he does not fully reconcile his optimism about African political and technological futures with his devastating observations about its racialized, nationalist, and statist present. Mbembe produces an antinomy between African histories and African futures that he cannot fully resolve. Mignolo and Walsh, rejecting the violence and brutality of the present and less interested in the future, don't have to resolve this tension, since they seek to promote a return to the precolonial past. But their book also raises some considerable questions about the idea of decoloniality. The market is a mostly ghostly presence in their arguments, and we hear very little about the maritime explorations, oceanic trade, and slave-generated profits from plantation economies built on coffee, sugarcane, and

cocaine that came to shape not just the region they are concerned with but the world as we know it. Giving primacy to epistemology and not political economy in defining the deep structure of colonial and Western modernity, Mignolo and Walsh also miss how contemporary capitalism, as much as (or arguably more than) modern Western epistemologies, has damaged the planet, deepened social inequality, and expanded the power of financial markets.

So where does this leave us? One book points us to a more desirable past, another to the future—but what about today? Mbembe does not have a gospel, whether about colonialism, power, or modernity, and in his flexibility, we do also find the beginnings of the future he imagines for us. One of the most striking features of Mbembe's thought is its focus on the relational. In his accounts of the colonizer and the colonized, the state and its weaker subjects, the tyrant and the victim, the master and the slave, the executioner and the doomed prisoner, he is most concerned about the space in which relations emerge at the very extremes of society. Thus, the European West, and France in particular, in Mbembe's view, have engaged in a massive effort to place their colonial subjects outside the space where solidarity, humanity, and conviviality properly belong. This politics of extremity that colonial projects and subjects find themselves in, however, has created new sites for invention and imagination, producing zones of *créolité*, in which the civilizing projects of the colonial master inadvertently produce new spaces of dialogue and creativity. According to Mbembe, it is our task to help fully realize them.

The emergence of a vast world of rich ideas, thought forms, linguistic styles, and technologies of the self in Francophone Africa is, for Mbembe, thus a paradoxical fruit of colonialism and the zones of *créolité* it produced. Decoloniality for Mbembe is both impossible and undesirable, since we can't move back to a precolonial period—nor, he insists, should we want to. What we need in a global order is an alternative form of global modernity. We haven't yet realized this goal, Mbembe recognizes, but that doesn't mean we can't try. Like Mbembe, I prefer to remember and revisit the colony, both because we cannot escape its persistence and because it contains the seeds of its own defeat. **N**

Join the conversation,
every Thursday,
on the **Start Making
Sense** podcast.



))) **Subscribe** wherever you get your podcasts or go to **TheNation.com/StartMakingSense** to listen today.

→ **STACEY ABRAMS**

MARGARET ATWOOD CHARLES M. BLOW SHERROD BROWN NOAM CHOMSKY GAIL COLLINS MIKE DAVIS ELIZABETH DREW BARBARA EHRENREICH DANIEL ELLSBERG FRANCES FITZGERALD ERIC FONER THOMAS FRANK HENRY LOUIS GATES JR. MICHELLE GOLDBERG AMY GOODMAN CHRIS HAYES MARGO JEFFERSON DAVID CAY JOHNSTON NAOMI KLEIN RACHEL KUSHNER VIET THANH NGUYEN NORMAN LEAR GREIL MARCUS JANE MAYER BILL MCKIBBEN WALTER MOSLEY JOHN NICHOLS LAWRENCE O'DONNELL LAURA POITRAS KATHA POLLITT ROBERT REICH JOY REID FRANK RICH ARUNDHATI ROY BERNIE SANDERS ANNA DEAVERE SMITH EDWARD SNOWDEN REBECCA SOLNIT MARGARET TALBOT CALVIN TRILLIN KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL YANIS VAROUFAKIS JOAN WALSH AMY WILENTZ GARY YOUNGE —Hosted by **Jon Wiener**



Incidental Details

The comic power and familial intimacy of Lee Isaac Chung's Minari

BY KRISTEN YOONSOO KIM

MINARI'S POWER IS ANCHORED IN ITS INCIDENTAL DETAILS, the most substantial of which are unveiled upon the arrival of the film's comic relief and catalyst: the grandmother, Soonja (Youn Yuh-jung). Visiting the remote trailer home of the Yis, the family at the center of Lee Isaac Chung's semiautobiographical immigrant drama set in 1980s Arkansas, Soonja comes bearing gifts that struck me with the kind of ritualistic familiarity so few films do.

First she pulls out *gochugaru* (Korean chili pepper flakes) from her suitcase, followed by anchovies, an essential ingredient that's the base of so many Korean dishes. Her daughter Monica (Han Yeri), the Yi family matriarch, begins to cry; these ingredients are clearly hard to find in the Yis' new home. "Because of anchovies?" Soonja teases, though both know the significance of the gesture.

My own mother, who lives just outside Seoul, has long held the belief that one cannot find authentic *gochugaru* in the United States, including in Brooklyn, where I live, and every time we visit each other on opposite ends of the world, she makes sure I have plenty of chili flakes to take home, along with bags of anchovies for soup stock. Anyone can recognize the universality of a mother's love in Chung's

scene, but to see it mirroring my own so precisely is invaluable.

There's another thing Soonja brings from Korea: the seeds of minari, the titular herb native to East Asia that is used in many Korean dishes. The beauty of minari is that, once planted, it can thrive even in foreign, unfamiliar places. The metaphor as it relates to the Yis' own uprooted lives will be made clear as the story progresses, but Chung avoids hitting us over the head with it.

As Soonja unpacks her life to stay with the Yis, David (Alan S. Kim), the youngest child and Chung's fictional surrogate, remarks, "Grandma smells like Korea." The statement is equal parts rude and amusing, but it resonates for how much it evokes a visceral memory. The olfactory is known to activate recollection best

Words Matter

“Shortly after I came from Europe to the US, a close friend gifted me a subscription to *The Nation*. I’ve been a faithful reader and, when I was able to, supporter of the magazine. We need *The Nation* now more than ever; its voice needs to be heard. I like to think I’ll help keep it up for the future. It still reminds me of my old friend.”

—Claudia Sole, Calif.



A few words can mean so much.

With just a few words in your will naming *The Nation* in your estate plan, you can care for your loved ones now and **support our mission to remain a fierce voice for truth and resistance for years to come.**

Such gifts are easy to arrange, simple to modify, and adaptable to your needs, so it’s easy to understand why **bequests are the most popular planned gift.** There are many types of bequests—let’s discuss the one that best fits your needs.



Visit legacy.thenation.com to get started.

among the senses, but merely hearing that line became a piercing reminder of my own grandmother's scent: a mixture of soybeans, herbs, and perfumed makeup. There's something toasty in there too, like the chestnut Soonja peels for David.

"Grandma smells like Korea" is less abstract than it sounds and also works to strengthen the film's figurative meditation. Soonja doesn't mold to the American ideal of a grandmother (the kind who bakes cookies), and at 7 years old, David already grapples with the dissonance between his identities. Soonja also proves to be something of a minari herself, withstanding her distrustful grandson's hostility and pranks with valiant glee and adjusting to a town and country completely unfamiliar to her.

In *Minari*, each facet of this immigrant Korean family's life can be felt with all the senses. You can smell not just Grandma's personal scent but also the musty stench of dried urine from David's recurring bed-time accidents. You can taste the bitter herbs Soonja makes him drink. You can hear it in the way the children speak English among themselves when their parents speak Korean. For the patriarch, Jacob (Steven Yeun), the experience is mainly tactile: His conviction lies in the very dirt their mobile home stands upon. He grasps at the soil with his bare hands, promising his skeptical wife that this is the American dream—or, rather, that it's the foundation from which to harvest that dream. It's the best dirt in America, Jacob insists, and he plans to farm Korean vegetables on this abundant soil. The sheer visual splendor that *Minari*'s setting provides shouldn't go ignored either: Cinematographer Lachlan Milne (*Hunt for the Wilderpeople*) captures the lush greenery of the Ozarks with painterly style.

The film almost immediately confronts the sacrifices and consequences of Jacob's ambition. Monica, who longs for Korean community, doesn't conceal her disappointment in their new surroundings. Later, she brings up an even more legitimate concern: The nearest hospital is an hour away, a possibly fatal oversight because David suffers from a heart condition. "You chose the farm over our family," a frustrated Monica tells Jacob during a climactic fight.

But Chung's writing and directing so skillfully map the nuances and complexities of this family that his characters never come off as one-dimensional. Jacob is no villain here; he is a strict yet tender father and husband. He also bears the responsibility of being the eldest son in his own family; this is a pressure so overwhelming that Korean

women are customarily warned against marrying first-born men. Knowing that may help viewers better understand how Jacob became so tunnel-visioned in his need for self-sufficiency. Monica, who has always supported her husband's endeavors but who has also grown weary of her social isolation and lack of personal agency, is the true beating heart of the film.

The cast's harmonious chemistry enhances Chung's vision beautifully. Yeun, who ditches the American-infused Korean he used in Lee Chang-dong's *Burning* for a Korean-inflected English here (to a mixed but generally impressive degree), fully embodies the immigrant father desperate to make something of himself in uncharted territory. Han does wonders with the barely perceptible movements of her face, especially when Monica has little to say amid the family's more vigorous gestures and movements. Kim is a newcomer to behold, as is Noel Kate Cho, who plays David's more understated older sister, Anne. But it's Youn who steals the spotlight; even as she leans toward caricature, her Soonja brings much-needed humor and vitality to a drama that otherwise could have sunk easily into the dour. As Youn elevates the film, Chung saves her character in the final act from being just the silly grandmother.

Portraits of Korean American immigrant life are already hard to come by on film, but *Minari* takes a road even less traveled by focusing on Korean immigrants in rural America. This choice was inspired, in part, by the director's own life. Chung's family moved to Arkansas in the '80s for the agricultural opportunities. My own family moved from Korea to Los Angeles in the early '90s, but the film's

narrative and emotional similarities are, unsurprisingly, still resonant. Like the Yis, we lived in cramped quarters. We found community in a Korean church and also attended a too-white church. We encountered racial prejudice that we swept under the rug. We drank a lot of Coca-Cola because we believed American products were unquestionably good—just like the Yis consume Mountain Dew because they believe it is "water from the mountains" that has health benefits. Our patience was tested, our faith shaken; to this day, I think my mother wonders if the move was the right choice.

Filled with such specifics, which will feel deeply personal to any Korean American viewer, *Minari* is another landmark entry in Asian American cinema, following the likes of Lulu Wang's *The Farewell*. Though big strides have been made in the past few years with Asian representation in Hollywood, these kinds of bilingual, bicultural stories—neither rags-to-riches narratives nor harrowing

cautionary tales—are still very rare in American cinema.

In late December, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association caught flak after announcing that *Minari* would not qualify for a best picture nomination at the Golden Globes due to its mostly Korean dialogue, relegating it instead to the best foreign-language

film category, even though it is an American-produced movie about American life, by an American director (Chung was born in Denver). A year earlier, it should be noted, *The Farewell* suffered the same fate. People were quick to point out that films like *Inglourious Basterds* and *Babel*, which also heavily incorporated multiple languages, qualified for best picture, most likely due to casts featuring white A-listers. It's a bit of a life-imitates-art moment, recalling the racial microaggressions the Yis endured to assimilate into their new setting. But categories be damned: *Minari*, remember, will grow and flourish just about anywhere. **N**

Kristen Yoonsoo Kim is a film critic and culture writer whose work has appeared in The New York Times, The Village Voice, GQ, and elsewhere.



Letters

THE
Nation.

Time to Choose Again

Re “End Notes,” by Daniel Luban [Feb. 8/15]: My long-held belief is that the system itself matters less than the values and history that underpin it and animate it. For example, Russia was never going to be a free and fair society under any system without overcoming its dark medieval past of serfdom and czars. And it hasn’t yet, despite radical attempts to do so in the early 20th century.

The story was different in the United States. The Great Depression forced a reckoning, and that resulted in a reaction that manifested variously around the globe. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal saved capitalism by counterintuitively taming its wilder impulses and instead federalizing the respect and support of ordinary people. This legacy remained even as the ’80s began a repudiation of the common good again in favor of naive assumptions about the benevolence of capitalism.

Who are we Americans? It is time to choose again. It doesn’t matter what system we choose. It is what we choose, what we insist on valuing.

JANE GUNDLACH

The Rule of Lawbreakers

David Bromwich’s “Passion Will Be Our Enemy” [Feb. 8/15] is yet another one-sided tribute to the rule of law. We read about mob rule and the vandalism that accompanied some of the Black Lives Matter protests sparked by the police killing of George Floyd. What we don’t hear about is the chronic lawbreaking by government and law enforcement, the supposed upholders of the law.

DOUGLAS NEISS

Hitchens and Faith

Re “Let a Thousand Biographies Bloom,” by David Nasaw [Feb. 8/15]: The conclusions in my book *The Faith of Christopher Hitchens: The Restless Soul of the World’s Most Notorious Atheist* were not, as Mr. Nasaw writes, “without any real evidence.” No, as reviewers at *The Times* of London, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Christianity Today*, and others noted, they were based on Christopher’s own writings and public statements. Never mind reading my book—which Mr. Nasaw clearly did not—did my critics bother to read his?

This charge, which Mr. Nasaw unwittingly perpetuates, was part of an effort to discredit my book, similar to the one described by Elizabeth Harris in *The New York Times* to derail Stephen Phillips’s proposed biography. The attack was multipronged: that I was not really Christopher’s friend (a charge Christopher himself anticipated and refuted); that I was simply out to make money, which can be said of any author—even Christopher Hitchens; that I had claimed Christopher had converted on his deathbed. If only it were so. David Frum peddled this fantasy in an article and tweets about a book that bears scant resemblance to the one I wrote. Indeed, I wrote the last chapter in anticipation of such an accusation.

At the request of Peter Hitchens, I never returned fire. But Mr. Nasaw’s article has provoked me. To see Carol Blue-Hitchens doing this again to another author is too much.

LARRY ALEX TAUNTON
BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

Comment drawn from our website
letters@thenation.com
Please do not send attachments

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR & PUBLISHER: Katrina vanden Heuvel

EDITOR: D.D. Guttenplan **PRESIDENT:** Erin O’Mara

EXECUTIVE DIGITAL EDITOR: Anna Hiatt

LITERARY EDITOR: David Marcus

MANAGING EDITOR: Rose D’Amora

SENIOR EDITORS: Roane Carey, Emily Douglas, Shuja Haider, Lizzy Ratner, Christopher Shay

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Robert Best

RESEARCH DIRECTOR: Miguel Salazar

COPY EDITOR: Rick Szykowny

MULTIMEDIA EDITOR: Francis Reynolds

ENGAGEMENT EDITOR: Annie Shields

ASSOCIATE LITERARY EDITOR: Kevin Lozano

ASSISTANT COPY EDITORS: Lisa Vandepaer, Haesun Kim

WEB COPY EDITOR/PRODUCER: Sandy McCroskey

ASSISTANT TO THE EDITOR: Ricky D’Ambrose

INTERNS: Chalay Chalermkraivuth, Shreya Chattopadhyay, Julian Epp, María Jesús Mora, Jared Olson • Grace Chan (*Design*), Josefina Costa (*Design*), Elana Hausknecht (*Business*)

NATIONAL AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENTS: Jeet Heer, John Nichols, Joan Walsh

JUSTICE CORRESPONDENT: Elie Mystal

COLUMNISTS: David Bromwich, Alexis Grenell, Kali Holloway, Katha Pollitt

DEPARTMENTS: *Art*, Barry Schwabsky; *Civil Rights*, Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II; *Defense*, Michael T. Klare; *Environment*, Mark Hertsgaard; *Films*, Stuart Klawans; *Legal Affairs*, David Cole; *Music*, David Hajdu, Bijan Stephen; *Poetry*, Kaveh Akbar; *Sex*, JoAnn Wypijewski; *Sports*, Dave Zirin; *Strikes*, Jane McAlevey; *United Nations*, Barbara Crossette; *Deadline Poet*, Calvin Trillin

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS: Robert L. Borosage, Mike Davis, Bob Dreyfuss, Susan Faludi, Thomas Ferguson, Melissa Harris-Perry, Doug Henwood, Naomi Klein, Sarah Leonard, Maria Margaronis, Michael Moore, Eyal Press, Joel Rogers, Karen Rothmyer, Robert Scheer, Herman Schwartz, Bruce Shapiro, Edward Sorel, Jon Wiener, Amy Wilentz

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS: Eric Alterman, James Carden, Zoë Carpenter, Wilfred Chan, Michelle Chen, Bryce Covert, Liza Featherstone, Laura Flanders, Julianne Hing, Joshua Holland, Greg Kaufmann, Stephen Kearse, Richard Kreitner, Julyssa Lopez, Dani McClain, Marcus J. Moore, Ismail Muhammad, Erin Schwartz, Scott Sherman, Mychal Denzel Smith, Jennifer Wilson

EDITORIAL BOARD: Emily Bell, Deepak Bhargava, Kai Bird, Barbara Ehrenreich, Frances FitzGerald, Eric Foner, Greg Grandin, Lani Guinier, Richard Kim, Tony Kushner, Elinor Langer, Malia Laz, Richard Lingeman, Deborah W. Meier, Walter Mosley, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Victor Navasky, Pedro Antonio Noguera, Richard Parker, Elizabeth Pochoda, Rinku Sen, Waleed Shahid, Zephyr Teachout, Dorian T. Warren, Gary Younge

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER, SPECIAL PROJECTS: Peter Rothberg

VICE PRESIDENT, COMMUNICATIONS: Caitlin Graf

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER, CONSUMER MARKETING: Katelyn Belyus

CONSUMER MARKETING MANAGER: Olga Nasalskaya

CIRCULATION FULFILLMENT MANAGER: Vivian Gómez-Morillo

E-MAIL MARKETING ASSISTANT: Will Herman

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER, DEVELOPMENT: Sarah Burke

DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE: Guia Marie Del Prado

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER, ADVERTISING: Suzette Cabildo

ADVERTISING ASSISTANT: Kit Gross

DIGITAL PRODUCTS MANAGER: Joshua Leeman

IT/PRODUCTION MANAGER: John Myers

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR: Duane Stapp

DIRECTOR OF FINANCE: Denise Heller

ASSISTANT MANAGER, ACCOUNTING: Alexandra Climciuc

BUSINESS ADVISER: Teresa Stack

PUBLISHER EMERITUS: Victor Navasky

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: E-mail to letters@thenation.com (300-word limit). Please do not send attachments. Letters are subject to editing for reasons of space and clarity.

SUBMISSIONS: Go to TheNation.com/submission-guidelines for the query form.

Each issue is also made available at TheNation.com.

Q&A

Dr. Abdul El-Sayed

Even if the dream of getting a Medicare for All champion into the White House ended with Bernie Sanders's defeat in the 2020 presidential primaries, the fight to win single-payer health care is far from over. The House and Senate Medicare for All bills have more than 100 Democratic cosponsors, and Congress's insurgent left flank is growing. Voters continue to voice strong support and prioritize health care above nearly every other political issue. Meanwhile, a year into the Covid-19 pandemic, the inequalities at the heart of the market-driven health care system have never been more apparent.

In a new book, Drs. Abdul El-Sayed and Micah Johnson argue that the meteoric rise of Medicare for All ought to galvanize advocates to keep building the movement. *Medicare for All: A Citizen's Guide* is a resource in that effort, laying out the case for how a single-payer system will revolutionize US health care and why no other reform proposals measure up.

—Natalie Shure

NS: Should Medicare for All be a litmus test for Democrats?

AES: Yes, and I think it's already emerging that way. If you're honest—if you really believe that health care is a human right, and you really believe that health care corporations are standing in the way—there's really just one answer that you can reasonably come to. Because of the health care industry's enormous political spending, what you see in our politics is not necessarily representative of what people want on the ground. So what I would say is that if you are serious about fixing both our politics and our health care, then the answer here is pretty obvious: You need to support Medicare for All, and you need to support reforms to our political system, which continues to prevent the will of the people from getting translated into our public policy.

NS: Medicare for All emerged as a central policy plank for grassroots leftist candidates like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Cori Bush to challenge powerful Democrats to their right. What role do you see these insurgent figures playing in the movement?

AES: They're going to be critical to eventually winning the future for Medicare for All, and we need more of them. In a democracy, we have to win the middle—we have to keep pushing and keep winning race after race. We're making incredibly great strides. But what powers that isn't

just people in Congress; it's people across the country who are dealing with health care inequities and challenges in their own lives and deciding to be a part of the movement to build power for Medicare for All.

We focus a lot on the electoral politics, but sometimes we forget that this movement is just getting started. Many of the opponents of Medicare for All are deathly afraid that we will continue forward, and they want this movement to believe that it cannot win. But we're not going anywhere.

NS: How should Medicare for All advocates orient themselves toward incremental reforms and differentiate between those that get us closer to or further from our goals?

AES: I have a simple rubric. I ask myself: (a) Does it expand health care access generally, (b) does it do so via public means, and (c) does it reduce the power and influence of health care corporations? If the answer to all three of those things is yes, then I support it. And if the answer to any of those things is no, I've got to take a closer look, but usually I don't [support it]. So, for example, take COBRA subsidies for people who have lost their employer-sponsored insurance. In theory, it's going to extend health care access, but it does so by feeding money into the corporate health system, and it doesn't extend the footprint of public health care. So I don't support COBRA subsidies. I think they fuel the brokenness of the system. Compare that to something like a public option—which, don't get me wrong, has its real issues. But if you have a truly *public* public option that expands the footprint of public health care, expands health care generally, and reduces the power and influence of health care corporations, then I think it's a plan we could get behind. We can accept that as a step toward the answer. You can't try to pitch it as the be-all and end-all of health care reform—only as a step toward a truly universal single-payer system. But I'd rather take a step forward than a step back, and I'd rather take a step forward than staying where I am. **N**



“Opponents of Medicare for All are deathly afraid that we will continue forward.”

January 6 was a

FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE



The insurrection at the U.S. Capitol showed the dangers of ‘One Nation, Under God.’ Let’s return to ‘One Nation, Indivisible.’ The white Christian nationalist movement poses a clear and present danger to civil liberties and our secular republic.

Join FFRF in our vital work to preserve our *godless* Constitution.

JOIN FFRF TODAY!

ffrf.us/nation 1.800.335.4021

or request a complimentary issue of *Freethought Today*, ffrf.us/newspaper

★★★★ RATING

—Charity Navigator
Join our national membership association of 33,500 freethinkers (atheists, agnostics and other skeptics) working to buttress the wall of separation between church and state. FFRF is an educational 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1978.

FFRF . Nation Ad . PO Box 750 . Madison, WI 53701 . 800.335.4021 . FFRF.org

I would like to become a member (includes 10 issues of *Freethought Today* newspaper).

I would like to donate to FFRF's Legal Fund. \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City / State / ZIP _____

Phone / Email _____

Make payable to "FFRF." Dues and donations are deductible for income-tax purposes.

FFRF protects membership confidentiality and does not divulge, rent, sell or give away its mailing list.

Annual Membership Dues

- Student \$25
- Individual \$40
- Household \$50
- Gung-ho \$100
- Sustaining \$250
- Sponsoring \$500
- Life Member \$1,000
- After Life \$5,000
- Beyond After Life \$10,000

FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTORY SPECIAL:
**4 EXCEPTIONAL
WINES FOR \$30**
AND ONLY 1¢ SHIPPING!

Each wine comes with a detailed tasting note from our buyers featuring insights into what makes the wine unique, the stories behind the wine, a rundown of its flavors and aromas, and delicious food-pairing suggestions.

Your membership supports *The Nation's* indispensable, one-of-a-kind journalism.
The Nation Wine Club sources wines that reflect progressive values.



World-Class Wines That Support Progressive Journalism

Each month you'll receive a new shipment of four captivating wines for just \$15 per bottle plus \$9.99 delivery. Cancel anytime.

**ORDER NOW AT [THENATIONWINECLUB.COM/NAPA](https://thenationwineclub.com/napa)
OR CALL 800.946.3568**