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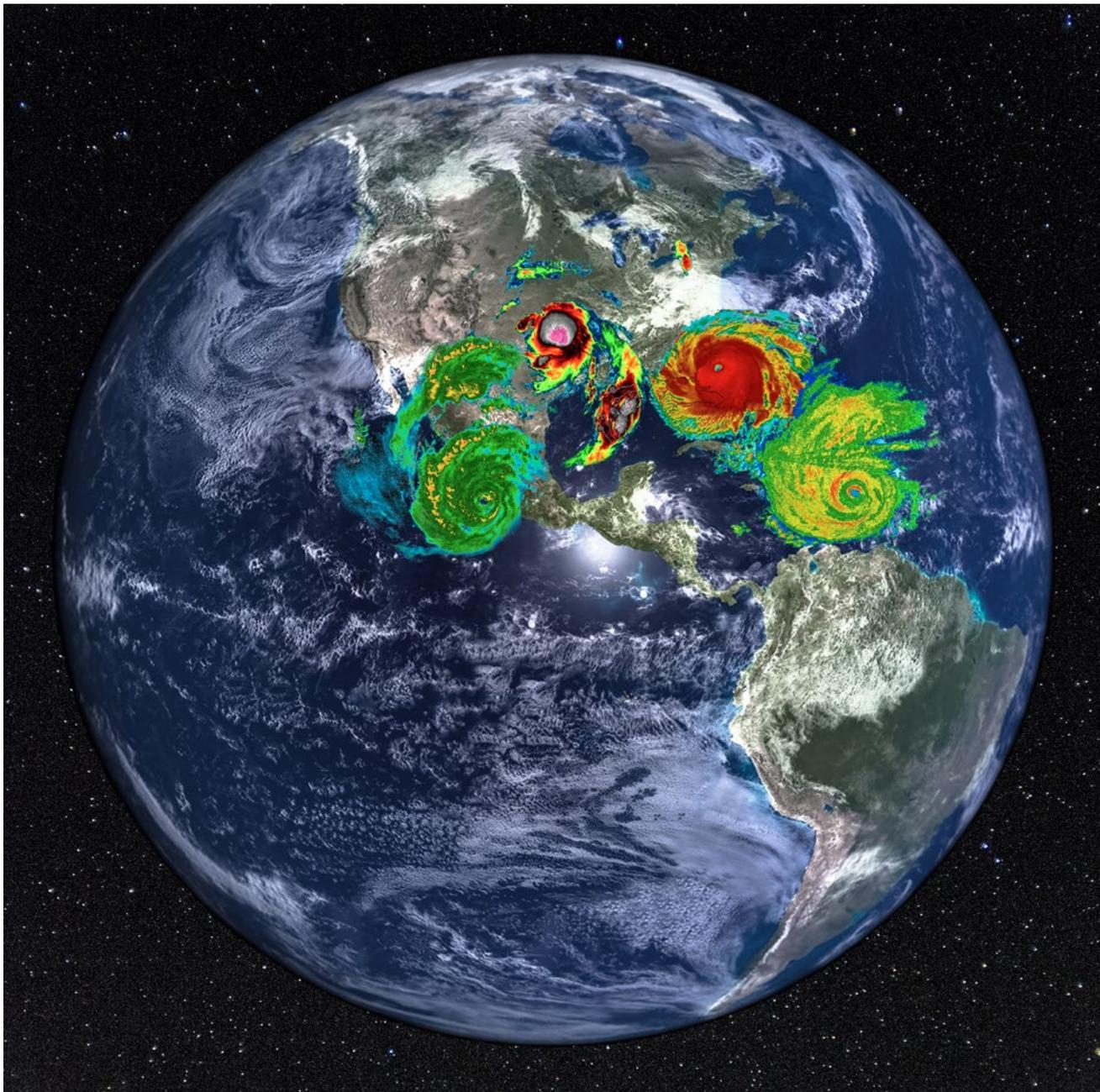
THREE HURRICANES, ONE CLIMATE BY JOHN DAVIS

TAKING WOMEN'S LIVES SERIOUSLY BY LAURA CARLSEN

CUBA: LAND OF THE FORBIDDEN FAN BY NED SUBLETTE

OPIOIDS AND ADDICTS BY CHRIS FLOYD

REVISITING THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION BY JOHN WIGHT



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In Memory of
Alexander Cockburn
1941–2012



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Syrian Proxy War

Thank you Mike Whitney (Syria: How Does This End?) for explaining all the factions in the Syrian proxy war. I flew helicopters in Vietnam from 1968-1971. At age 19, I enlisted because I believed the U.S. to be the “good” empire. After what I saw and did in Vietnam, I learned that what I believed—was U.S. propaganda. There is no such thing as a “benevolent” empire. Predatory, global capitalism and hegemony go hand and hand. The deep state, war-at-any-cost coalition provides the rationale for the empire’s decision makers, the three branches of the U.S. federal government do their bidding, and the big money folks provide the political funding. Déjà vu all over again... and again... and again.

*John Everhart
Carson City, Nevada*

Fear of a Black Planet

The FBI is wise to fear Black musicians. During the Reformation, Martin Luther’s secret weapon to reach the masses wasn’t stodgy and Byzantine theological pamphlets. It was the doctrine-laced hymns sung in every Protestant congregation across Europe.

Kenneth Miyazaki

Goes Well With Coffee

Dear Jeffrey,

I’ve just contributed \$100 to CounterPunch, as I always go to your website while I drink my morning coffee. I may have some disagreements with a few of your writers, but overall, you have the most important, most powerful political website of

them all. And I’m glad to see you like Mindy Abair, as she was a wonderful musician on my CD album some years ago. It’s called BENZALI, and it’s an American Songbook album with arrangements beginning in the SADE style and gradually becoming more of a fusion of Samba and Jazz.

Daniel Benzali

New New Democrats

Republican right-wingers and neo-liberal corporate Democrats always agree that this country is diverse or “homogeneous.” Please! Neither party represents the working, middle class, the poor & young people. They both have the same donors and represent the very wealthy and big corporations. We need a party that will represent us, that will give us healthcare for all, a minimum wage, decent jobs, affordable housing, free higher education, stop throwing our tax money (trillions of \$\$\$) to the military industrial complex or the prison industrial system for the profit of the few. The only Democrat I’ve ever liked is FDR.

Leticia Cortez

Centrist Spin Cycle

We’re going to see a lot of this centrist spin for the next three years. I wouldn’t say the Democrats have lost touch with “fact and reality,” they’re just trying to spin it in their own neoliberal direction! Here’s lame duck President Obama lecturing the public about the dangers of the Labour Party moving left shortly before oryn’s stunning vote gain: “President Barack Obama has

suggested that Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party is ‘disintegrating’ because it has lost touch with ‘fact and reality.’ Mr Obama said that the Democrats are not at risk of ‘orbynisation’ and that even the party’s more left-wing figures like Bernie Sanders are more moderate than Jeremy Corbyn.”

George Mastellone

Liberal Until It Matters

So, the good liberals of Malibu are trying to stop churches from feeding the homeless, because it devalues their property. It figures. I remember when Teresa Heinz Kerry wouldn’t let the workers on her property in to use the bathroom because, well, they were workers!

Joyce Helen Fredman

Sorry, Sorry

I’m sure that Congressman Joe Barton is among the “saved,” so I guess for him anyway, that makes sending out genital-selfies is all right. I gotta laugh, though, at all these lame apologies coming from these people: “Gee, I’m sure sorry I did that (but it seemed like a good idea at the time!)”

Tim Withee

Uncle Joe Biden

I love the fact that Anita Hill came out to crush Joe Biden for his despicable behavior during the Clarence Thomas hearings. As important as that is, Biden’s role in the student loan debacle is impacting millions of people. i.e. not allowing bankruptcy to forgive SL debt, the credit card “reforms,” blah blah. That’s sweet “Uncle Joe,” uh huh.

Crystal Kingston

Dallas Rose

I was in Dallas in the late 70s and Charlie Rose had a show there. It was rather Jerry Springer like. I saw one episode, it was set up as a “Dating Game” format. The women competed for Rose’s attention & approval by answering his questions. Eventually he decided the winner, who would go on an extended date with ... Rose. I was so repulsed I can remember it to this day.

Rob Cotter

Charlie the Pig

I’d hate Charlie Rose even if he wasn’t a chauvinist pig. This just gilds him in my eyes as more despicable. Liberal tool and pompous ass.

Heather Cottin

CIA’s Talking Head

I watched Charlie Rose every night on PBS...just to know what the CIA was thinking.

Don Bush

Food for Thought

Sen. Orrin Hatch: “Trump is one of the best presidents of my lifetime. He really knows how to make decisions.” Reagan, Dubya, and Trump all seemed like clowns, but they were expert at getting political things done. Us smart guys should think about that.

John Emerson

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ROAMING CHARGES

Between the Null and the Void

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Happy cultures are all alike. But this is not a happy culture. Sullen and sour, America seems like a country whose nerves are shot. And, after 16 straight years of war, why wouldn't the political neurons be frayed? Each day the fear factor is being ratcheted up. New threats are being targeted. New wars being planned. A paralytic dread hangs over the Republic.

To watch the news these days is to be seated at a dark table in a casino for games of death. Or fantasies of death. At a certain point, it doesn't really matter. At a certain point, one will lead to the other. Eventually, the fantasy must become reality. Those are the house rules. The thrill of the fantasy will ultimately be paid out in real blood.

Listening to Donald Trump speak is to be privy to a weird kind of political séance. He has become a fuming animation of the broiling grudges and resentments of white America, people who feel their invisibility made flesh in the figure of Trump, people who thrill at every low-minded slur and threat. He conjures up phantasms of what the elites and the minorities have done to them. He feeds them their fears in raw chunks. He offers sacrificial killing on their behalf. Mass arrests. Torture. Deportation of the sick and helpless. He vows to turn entire nations into glowing morgues. All for them. And they eat it up, savoring the bitterness.

I am listening to Trump's incendiary speech in Seoul. He is standing at the dais in Proceeding Hall, the National Assembly building in South Korea. Perhaps it's the color saturation level on our old monitor, but on this night Trump looks like a grotesque figure

from a George Grösz painting. His face is glazed an acidic orange as if slathered in mortician's makeup. Even though he is reading from a prepared text written by one of his sycophants and projected for him on a teleprompter, he speaks in a switchbacking syntax that I've come to call Trumponics. He looks and sounds like the dictator of bad taste.

Of course, it's useless to probe Trump's ramblings for their symbolic content. He strikes right for the spleen. Still, I continue to hunt for some logic to what he's saying, knowing it's futile. Except, perhaps, for the logic of the suicide pact. But a pact implies a deal, and most of us haven't signed away our consent, except, I suppose, through our passive acquiescence to his resurrection of the old nuclear demons.

Each Trump speech should come with a risk assessment of its potential fallout. Yet none of Trump's military-grade handlers—McMaster, Mattis or Kelly—seem up to the calculus. Tillerson may have some idea, but Rexxon's been locked out in the cold for months, as the State Department, though alas not the state, withers away.

Trump's bombast never seems quite serious. But I fear we must begin to take him so. He is, after all, a man without humor. In front of South Korea's legislature, Trump brags about America's military prowess, a boast reinforced by the looming spectre of three aircraft carriers and two nuclear subs prowling the Korean coastline in real time. He gives the impression that he considers military quagmires about as problematic as the sand trap on the 16th hole at Pebble Beach. He warns that his country, that is, our country,

will not hesitate to vaporize hundreds of thousands of beings. We've done it before, Trump implies, and felt no guilt, no remorse. This is the voice of a man who has learned nothing from mass death, except that it paved the way for the globalization of American power. In a voice that slips from talking about index funds to nuclear missiles, the prime rate to F-35s, Trump projects the image of president as gravedigger. Is it possible, Trump seems to ask, to profit from H-Bombs after you use one? Is nuclear war really a growth industry? I was surprised that the Korean delegation didn't jump up and run screaming from the chamber. Or storm the dais, as they did during the impeachment of President Roh Moo-hyun.

What happens when the president, a man with the capacity for continent-wide annihilation, strays beyond the reality principle?

Finally, I clicked Trump off in mid-threat and turned on someone who had found many of the answers to the most important questions in life: John Coltrane. Coltrane, the human antithesis of Trump. Coltrane, who had been inducted into the segregated US Navy, on the very day that Hiroshima was nuked. Coltrane, who prayed on his knees at both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on his 1966 tour of Japan. Coltrane, who said at Nagasaki: "I dislike war, period. So, therefore, as far as I am concerned, it should stop." Coltrane, who would die of cancer, the disease of the nuclear age, only a few months later.

The record I put on was "Ascension," as liberated a piece of music as has ever been played. Coltrane's only instructions to his bandmates was to end their solos with a crescendo. On that night, it seemed to me that Coltrane's music might be invoked as a kind of sympathetic magic against Trump's nuclear nihilism as if rising notes could cast a spell against falling bombs. In between the null and the void, the truth can still be heard in the organic phrasings played by Coltrane's breath. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

Opioids and Ashes: An American Ending

BY CHRIS FLOYD

Her spinal column was fusing. Arthritis was clutching at her joints, balking every movement, filling it with pain. Her insides were a wreck, and had been for 40 years, after an unnecessary hysterectomy in the days when that operation was ordered for every mild form of “women’s troubles.”

Pain filled her mind as well, the bitter, implacable anger at a life gone wrong and now slipping away. Her husband had died. One son had lost his mind then died. Her life had been lived in servitude to others, from her girlhood slopping hogs on sharecropper farms to the middle-class treadmill of office work and motherhood to this wretched curdling in a dark house in a backwater town she’d always hated.

She had no appetite. Some days she forgot to eat until late at night when she’d spoon a few bites of ice cream while watching re-runs on the channel she never changed because she didn’t know how to operate the cable system with its all its bewildering options. Pain in the body, pain in the soul; the pain of the past, the pain of the now; the pain of the future in the endless dark.

People tried to help: they did chores, ran errands, made repairs on the failing house. But for the most part, she rebuffed them. Her mind had been addled by a series of mini-strokes—messing with her memory, confusing her check-book—but she remained competent enough to resist any effort to take control of her life and get her into a better situation. She would remain alone, aloof, untended in her bitterness and sadness and self-torment and affliction. Except for one person.

She had been raised in an isolated

rural hollow so racist that the boys would go down to the crossroads and throw rocks at the railroad trains rattling past because the train company employed black men. The black midwife who’d brought her and all her many siblings into the world of sharecropper penury had to leave their house before sundown every day lest she be caught out after dark when she’d be fair game to be attacked or killed.

But now, in her long, slow lacerating crawl toward the end, there was only one person she’d allow to help her, one person she trusted, one person she would let herself love: the “colored woman” who had cleaned for her each week for decades. In the 21st century, they re-enacted the old template of a faithful black servant and benevolent white mistress. There was sincerity in the feelings that ran both ways, but perhaps what sealed the relation most firmly was the fact that the cleaner could alleviate her pain: she could obtain the illegal opioids that her employer required in ever greater quantities to dull the anguish of her living death.

She had legal prescriptions for the bodily degeneration that was devouring her: but these were a paltry balm, used up within days each month. The cleaner knew how to get more. Doctors bribed and wooed by gilded, respectable Big Pharma firms were throwing out prescriptions like V-E Day confetti. Pills were flooding the streets; if you needed them, and could pay, you could get all you needed. And you always needed more.

Addiction took hold. Hallucinations followed. There was a strange family living in the basement who beguiled

her and bored her for hours on end with convoluted tales of their woes. Her grandson came to visit on his way to Mexico, running from the law after beating up the senator he worked for in Wisconsin. Someone kept stealing her money. She was stuck on the roof and couldn’t get down.

Near-starved, undone, fallen on the floor, she refused to press the panic button she wore around her neck. Someone found her at last and took her to the hospital. She was detoxed, came back to herself for a few brief weeks, pouring out the story of her painful life as she had never done before. She went out and had her hair done one last time—then died.

She was a staunch Southern Baptist and a fanatical Democrat. A proud Confederate descendant who loved Obama and Michelle. A Bible-believer who spent her last happy day on earth with her gay hairdresser and his transgender partner, admiring the drag queen friends her granddaughter showed her on her phone. (“Oh, how pretty! I wish I had those legs.”) A woman of passion and ambition thwarted by religion and convention and her own personal damage, who lived the empty middle-class dream and died as a dope addict killed by corporate drug pushers. A sharecropper’s daughter, a little girl rising in the pre-dawn darkness to break the ice on the trough so the hogs could drink.

Who can tell us what it means to be an American? Who can untangle all these threads that bind us without and strangle us within? I say damn to all savvy analysis, all reductive categories—and damn to every profiteer of blood and pain.

She refused to have a funeral. No service, no family, no goodbye. She told her two remaining sons to take her ashes to the ocean, to Myrtle Beach, where she’d been a newlywed. We poured her out there, according to the law, beyond American jurisdiction, in waters that belonged to the whole world. **CP**



EXIT STRATEGIES

Donna Brazile and The Machine

BY YVETTE CARNELL

In reaction to developments within the Black political class, it is routine to write off the entire group as a useless tool within the Democratic establishment. And if history is any indication, this is a safe bet: From PayDay loans to loopholes for Wall Street, Black political functionaries within the political apparatus often act in opposition to their constituents.

In the broader body of politics, especially among conservatives and leftists, this appraisal is commonplace. So, when Black Democratic insider Donna Brazile released *Hacks: The Inside Story of the Break-Ins and Breakdowns That Put Donald Trump in the White House*, the reaction was largely one of dismissive disregard, at least by those who have long ago written off the American political project as being in need of an overhaul. This makes sense for many reasons, not the least of which is that in Brazile's book, she stopped shy of offering a meaningful explanation for how Hillary Clinton's campaign, which she nicknamed "Brooklyn", got sent the debate questions ahead of time from Brazile's email address.

The leaked questions offered a rare opportunity for the Black community to hear an impromptu policy recommendation from Clinton on mass incarceration and the lead poisoning in Flint, Michigan. Even after reading the book, it is still reasonable to conclude that Brazile, in collusion with TV One's Roland Martin, used the CNN debate to curry favor for themselves as opposed to being responsive to the material concerns of the broader Black community. This only further established Brazile as hackneyed elite; a veteran member of

a group that had long ago sold out to the highest bidder, and needed to be replaced collectively through electoral politics, or through revolution—the radical solution. This assessment, however, disregards much instructive information in Brazile's book, during which she not only revealed the corruption of the Clinton campaign, but the nonfulfillment of a project to make Democrats more responsive to the Black community's needs by bringing on board more Black political operatives.

Brazile's rise began in earnest after Rev. Jesse Jackson's first bid for president in 1984, during which Jackson garnered what Dr. Adolph Reed called in his book "The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon", a "brokerage position." Because of Jackson's insurgent campaign, he won concessions from the party, which included Brazile, and a few other Black Democrats getting prominent roles within the Democratic Party. From the outset, this project seemed promising. Brazile eventually made history as Al Gore's campaign manager. She was dutiful in the role, just as she was taking over leadership of the party after then-DNC chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz scurried away from the role. Brazile sounded much like a Berner when she mocked Wasserman Schultz as "hunkered down in her hotel room trying to make a deal to negotiate her exit."

Figurehead positions aside, Brazile never cashed in at the level of Paul Begala, a political consultant catapulted to the international level after Clinton won, or even Obama's former campaign manager David Plouffe, who went on to Uber and, last I checked, was building a \$7.6 million dollar home in San

Francisco. The point here is not to elicit sympathy for Brazile over her not being able to capitalize off her insider status, but to highlight the limitations of Blackness, even within the political party where Blacks are the most faithful voting bloc.

Brazile's accusation, that she was treated like a "slave" by Brooklyn is likely closer to the truth than most people are comfortable imagining. According to Brazile, her nickname at the White House was "trouble", which may surprise some who've lazily equated Brazile with Obama in the class of Black sellouts, but why? Brazile's mentor, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Black America's unelected surrogate, was infamously replaced with Rev. Al Sharpton after the former got caught on a hot mic berating Obama for talking down to Black people. And whereas Brazile said she never felt comfortable among the Black so-called elite at Martha's Vineyard, Obama was at home in that space.

Over a five-decade career, Brazile had built herself a strong political resume. In the end, it didn't earn her anything. The project of accruing incremental power through the appointment of Black political operatives ended with Brazile recounting the myriad of ways the Clintons used the power they wielded to disrespect and diminish her.

But by treating Brazile, her revelations, and her opinions as mostly disposable, we are adopting a Clintonite framework, which projects onto her the hostility we have for Clintons, Obama and everything Washington D.C. But these things are not identical by any measure. Brazile confirming our suspicions about the rigged primaries matters. And central to understanding how Brazile mattered, and how her book is instructive, is the realization that she didn't matter at all to the Democratic Party that she served throughout her career or the broader political arena. **CP**



GRASPING AT STRAWS

Widening Inequality? It's No Accident

BY MIKE WHITNEY

What's wrong with the U.S. economy?

In many ways, things look pretty rosy. The stock market is flying high, housing prices have rebounded, unemployment has dwindled to a mere 4.5 percent, and third quarter GDP is expected to come in at a rip-roaring 3.0 percent. So, what's the problem?

The problem is that basic issues that precipitated the crash in 2008 have never been fixed. Instead of nationalizing the underwater banks and writing-down their debts, Central Banks expanded their balance sheets and pumped upwards of \$20 trillion into their respective financial systems to keep the ship afloat. So now, almost ten years after Lehman Brothers collapsed, the entire western banking and financial systems are still held together by the slender threads of cheap money and an ocean of red ink.

The Federal Reserve thinks it can reverse this trend and put things on a normal footing again, but it can't be done. The Fed's balance sheet currently exceeds \$4 trillion. If the Fed "winds down" its balance sheet by allowing bonds to mature without reinvesting the money in more debt, the demand for bonds will weaken and push up long-term yields. If yields go up then interest rates will rise which will weaken growth by putting a damper on spending. It's a vicious circle.

There's no way the Fed can pare-down its balance sheet without pushing the economy off a cliff, which is why all that red ink the Fed generated during the downturn is still with us today. The debts that were transferred onto the Fed's balance sheet, through all

manner of tricky subterfuge (mainly QE), haven't been reduced by soaring stock prices or lower unemployment. In fact, it was the Fed's meddling in the markets, particularly its bond purchase program, that lit the fire under stock prices, to begin with. Should the Fed decide to reverse that policy and dump its \$4 trillion stockpiles of bonds onto the market, demand will dry up, prices will fall, and stocks will plunge into the abyss. That much is certain.

And the same rule applies to cheap money. The Fed keeps threatening to "normalize" rates, but that's simply not going to happen. It can't happen or the three main stock indices and most of Wall Street would collapse in a heap.

Keep in mind, the current Fed Funds Rate is a lowly 1.25 percent which is slightly up from March when the rate was 1.0 percent. The Fed wants to create the impression that things are returning to normal and that it is gradually withdrawing its extraordinary multi-trillion dollar accommodation that sent stocks and bonds into the stratosphere. But there are limits to what the Fed can do without triggering a panic. Sure, the Fed can raise rates to 1.25 percent, but that's still below the rate of inflation which means that the Fed is actually lending money at a loss. It's providing a subsidy to borrow. This is an important point because it underscores the extent to which the Fed's intervention has disrupted the so-called "free market" where prices are supposed to be determined according to the laws of supply and demand. By underpricing money and using its balance sheet to sustain current 'astronomical' stock valuations, the Fed has assumed the role of Central

Planner, the all-powerful price-setting authority.

Investors understand this new reality and have adapted accordingly. Instead of basing their decisions on market research and analysis they simply try to anticipate what the Fed's going to do. If it looks like the Fed is going to "stand pat", then investors go on another spending spree pushing stocks higher into record territory.

Did you know that the Dow Jones Industrials (DJIA) bottomed on March 9, 2009, at 6,507. As of Thursday (11-16-17), the Dow finished the day at 23,459 nearly four times higher. The same goes for the S and P 500 which slipped to 676 in March 2009 but rebounded to 2,583 as of yesterday afternoon. Then there's the Nasdaq which fared even better bouncing back from an abysmal 1,268 in 2009 to a lofty 6,785 yesterday.

So the people with money have done quite well under the Fed's system. Unfortunately, these moneybags speculators represent the only small portion of the total US population. Most people still have to work for a living. And among working stiff's, life has gotten a lot harder. As it happens, asset inflation and housing inflation have not translated into wage inflation. Quite the contrary. According to the Economic Policy Institute, "the pace of annual pay increases for the top 1% wage grew 138% since 1979, while wages for the bottom 90% grew 15%." Also, "The wages of middle-wage workers were totally flat or in decline over the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s...(while)... The wages of low-wage workers fell 5 percent from 1979 to 2013."

So while things have gotten a lot better for the rich, everyone else seems to be losing ground. And the reason they're losing ground has nothing to do with impartial market forces or abstract economic trends. No. The upward flow of wealth in America is due entirely to the policies that have been put in place to ensure that the scales remain forever tipped in favor of the uber-wealthy. That's just the way the system is designed to work. **CP**

BORDERZONE NOTES

Taking Women's Lives Seriously?

BY LAURA CARLSEN

The recent scandals regarding first, Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein and then-Republican Senate candidate Roy Moore have broken the usual impunity surrounding men's sexual assault on women by bringing it into the public sphere. That's a good thing. But the scandals also reveal what women have always known—the pervasiveness of sexual assault in our daily lives.

Usually, if you bring up the sexual assault in a group of women friends the response will be, oh yeah, me too. At least for an older generation, if the incidents fall on the less-violent end of the scale, they're considered almost a rite of passage, something you endure as part of growing up. We weren't even given much information on how to avoid it, but we knew we had to be careful all the time. Patriarchy creates a minefield for girls growing up, and even for women on into adulthood. Like avoiding falling into a pothole, you keep a lookout all the time, and if you fall, you tend to think it was your own lack of attention to the terrain that caused it. I remember it never even occurred to me to tell my mother, and this pattern still repeats itself. On the more-violent end of the spectrum, the social taboos that tag shame onto injury, pressuring victims to hush up attacks, function powerfully, especially as victims see how society treats those with the courage to break the taboos and come out publicly. Girls

and women internalize injury until it becomes an indistinguishable part of our identities.

It's certainly an indistinguishable part of our society's identity. Just look at the record: We have a president who was elected after admitting to predatory, non-consensual practices with women: "I just kiss beautiful women and grab 'em by the pussy". We have a Supreme Court Justice (entrusted with defining and applying the highest law of the land) who was given a seat on the court after the attorney Anita Hill testified to suffering repeated acts of sexual harassment as his employee—and the congressional committee hearing the testimony decided it wasn't even relevant to call the four other women witnesses prepared to testify to the same. Male celebrities who tout their aggressive behavior with women are held up as role models.

Placing in power men who openly believe that violence against women is acceptable erodes society on every level. Gains in women's rights are stripped back and even if left on the books, increased discrimination against women in the legal system decreases their effective reach. The few protections that exist are weakened and the social climate becomes a more openly misogynist. Women who speak out are re-victimized.

It comes as no surprise that male dominance exists, and intentionally

protects and recreates itself. But our society also seems to be genuinely confused about sexual assault on women—it has no idea where the lines are even supposed to be drawn. Attacking women permeates the culture and is considered entertainment. Remember the 2014 Emmy Awards when Bryan Cranston grabbed Julia Louis-Dreyfus in an interminable clench as she tried to push him off? Although the two later claimed it was a stunt, it did not look consensual and aside from a disconcerted Jimmy Fallon, no one reacted. The press unanimously considered it a good joke. Countless movies and television shows portray men who force women and women who then fall in love with them.

It's shocking to see the ease with which men's sexual assault on women is dismissed. The (female) governor of Alabama Kay Ivey, when asked about Senate candidate Roy Moore's alleged behavior, said she had no reason not to believe the women but, "I believe in the Republican Party, what we stand for, and, most important, we need to have a Republican in the United States Senate." So what does the Republican Party stand for? Child molestation? Others defending Moore have said Alabama girls 'sometimes look much older', that it was a long time ago, that he was not yet married, etc. No other crime generates such blatantly absurd defenses. In sexual harassment and assault cases, our courts of law automatically put the plaintiff on trial. She is obliged not only to prove her specific case but to prove her personal validity to even be making a case like this against a man.

U.S. society as a whole seems to have no moral compass on the issue. It is confusing, or indifferent, or downright immoral in its failure to consistently censure violence, and especially sexual violence, against women. This makes it easier for the press to expose acts selectively, politically or not at all, making it, in turn, easier to dismiss the validity and scope of the problem. We seem to have a separate category for male

attacks on women, located in a gray zone that men would never agree to inhabit. Time after time, we hear that women deserve to be attacked, provoke violent attacks, even like being attacked.

In the Weinstein scandal, we've also seen how women themselves often feel a mixture of shame and confusion. The "star-making machinery" implicitly obliges women to ignore or whitewash sexual harassment and worse. Ironically, many do this precisely to overcome barriers of sex discrimination in their careers, and they end up further mining the field for women who come after. All of us who have suffered in silence have done this. We should never lose sight that the criminal behavior is on the part of the aggressor and the society that condones his attacks, so I mention

adults, as much as it frightened and repulsed them as kids. Many articles have noted the direct link between Devin Kelley the wife-beater, and Devin Kelley the mass murderer who walked into a south Texas church last month and massacred 26 people. The question came up repeatedly: If we had taken the woman seriously, could we have saved all these lives? And the implied response is clearly: yes.

A Sea-Change or a Passing Current?

Last year Ronan Farrow, whose article in the New Yorker unleashed the Harvey Weinstein scandal, penned a piece for Hollywood Reporter about sexual assault in the industry. He wrote at length about his sister Dylan Farrow's well-founded accusations against their estranged father, Woody Allen.

we talk about sexual assault and abuse. But there is more work to do to build a culture where women like my sister are no longer treated as if they are invisible."

Unfortunately, it might be too soon to talk about a sea change. The recent scandals and the media attention they've garnered are a step in the right direction, but we have to keep pushing forward. In the process, we also have to make some distinctions. Forcing a kiss on an adult woman is not the same as driving a 14-year old into the woods and assaulting her. The legal repercussions are different and the ethical scale varies, even though both acts are reprehensible. We have to use clear terms to clear up society's confusion and to avoid a backlash that ends up trivializ-

Placing in power men who openly believe that violence against women is acceptable erodes society on every level.

that vicious cycle not as a criticism, but rather as a call to action. That's why the women actors who have spoken up in the Weinstein case and the former teenagers who have come out and accused Moore of what reportedly was an open secret have carried out a major public service for us all.

Another way the system turns a blind eye to women's rights is to state that violence against women is simply not a priority. In Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria devastated the island, feminists have had to reconstruct women's shelters even as women become more vulnerable to violence because the authorities insist it isn't a priority.

The sad part is that we know that violence against women is a bedrock form of violence. When male violence gets a green light, families become more vulnerable, and abuse of women and children rises. Hundreds of studies have shown that children who grow up around violence tend to reproduce it as

He details the many ways in which Hollywood covers the trails or dismisses allegations that go against its own self-interest, such as Cate Blanchett's explicit nod to Allen as she accepted an Academy Award just days after the account of abuse. In both the Weinstein and Allen cases, Farrow describes how the two entertainment powerhouses deployed elaborate and expensive public relations campaigns to deflect and discredit the accusations. In Allen's case, it worked (so far); in Weinstein's case, it might be a tipping point.

The attempts to sweep under the rug demands justice for men's crimes against women arguably does as much damage to society as the crimes themselves. Farrow writes, "[Silence] sends a message to victims that it's not worth the anguish of coming forward. It sends a message about who we are as a society, what we'll overlook, who we'll ignore, who matters and who doesn't. We are witnessing a sea change in how

ing the most heinous crimes, like rape.

As we make progress, we invariably get backlash. Today in many parts of the world, rightwing, often neo-fascist, movements threaten to wipe out gains in women's rights, even as a new generation of young feminists refuses to accept violence against women as normal. It's our responsibility to de-mine our culture so this new generation can safely defend women's gains and forge new paths. Calling out the Weinsteins and the Moores is a big part of that. **CP**

EUROZONE NOTES

Catalonia, Spain, Europe: Rule By Law

BY DANIEL RAVENTÓS AND JULIE WARK

Nearly everyone is edgy here in Catalonia. We don't know how far the Spanish government will go in pushing its neo-Franco (and not so neo) agenda in trying to crush the Catalan independence movement, and how much the European Union will tolerate it. But we're not the only edgy ones. The Rajoy government has been unmasked, not just in Catalonia but in other regions of Spain and around the world, as a true chip off the old block of the dictatorship, while the European Union has been forced to show its true colors and challenged to take a stand vis-à-vis its own self-promotion. This is spelled out in a letter which Barcelona's mayor, Ada Colau, sent on September 27 to the mayors of Europe's main cities: "Given the refusal of Prime Minister Rajoy's government to find an agreed solution to the conflict, the Catalan question can no longer be considered merely an internal Spanish matter; it now needs to be approached from its proper European perspective. [...] At a time when the European project is being threatened by an upsurge of xenophobic populism, and various forms of isolationism from national states, Europe cannot wash its hands of this threat to fundamental rights and freedoms whose safeguarding and defence do after all constitute the European project's main *raison d'être*."

For some months now, Catalonia's struggle for self-determination has been front-page news. In this nation with a population of less than eight million, non-violence has long been the hallmark of the massive demonstrations which have previously not attracted much international attention precisely because of this. But all this changed after the referendum of October 1 in which violence was introduced by the Spanish National Police and the Guardia Civil beating up peaceful citizens who were trying to exercise their right to vote.

The EU is looking askance at Catalonia, partly because of other nationalist claims: Corsican and Breton

in France, not to mention the French Basque region and Catalogne Nord; Sardinia and right-wing Padanian secessionists in Italy; the brutal history of Northern Ireland and the Scots in the United Kingdom; Flanders and Wallonia in Belgium, and other bigger, smaller, more and less radical separatist/irredentist/federalist/nationalist/ethnic movements. But separatism isn't alone in challenging the EU's self-image. Serious social fractures also raise the question of what kind of "union" we have, just as Catalonia, by demonstrating a powerful social unity, is questioning the kind of "unity" that is being imposed in Spain.

The Republic of Catalonia was declared and on October 27 the Catalan parliament voted in favor. Madrid's response, professedly "restoring legality", was the so-called nuclear option: the never-before invoked Article 155 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution—written with Franco officials and military men standing over its drafters and, here, one only has to imagine Germany's postwar Grundgesetz being negotiated with the Nazis...—allowing the government to take control of an autonomous region. So now we have two incompatible sovereign powers. One doesn't have an army. The other does. One demands the democratic right to self-determination. The other tries to crush it. Invoking "rule of law", Prime Minister Rajoy is withholding funding for Catalan government services (like health and education), has put the Catalan police force

at the orders of a Guardia Civil commander, sacked the Catalan government, given its powers to himself and deputy-prime minister Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría, and imposed elections in Catalonia on 21 December in a state of exception in which pro-independence parties are likely to be banned and elected politicians have been charged with "rebellion", "sedition" and "misuse of state funds", imprisoned and obliged to go into exile.

The latter charge is rich coming from the ruling People's Party (PP) when it has several hundred prominent members facing corruption charges. A leading investigator into one of at least sixty big corruption scandals—almost a record in this Europe which claims that the PP defends "rule of law"—testified that Rajoy himself received payments from shadow books dishing out kickbacks from succulent public contracts. The "Catalan question" and the constant escalation of tensions has conveniently covered up this major news.

The elections won't resolve anything. They distract from the social crisis, which is still a political battlefield in which the Spanish left is divided over the right to self-determination in Catalonia. Yet the situation is more complex than it first appears. Of the pre-referendum supporters of the Catalan republic, 72% describe themselves as left-wing by comparison with 40% in the case of those opposing it. Moreover, as Madrid becomes more despotic, defense of democracy is now

appearing as a priority. The PP fouled its own nest when it used its “legal” powers to ban demonstrations elsewhere in Spain in support of Catalonia’s right to decide, thus giving out the message that Franco-style repression and gagging had never gone away.

Apart from the barefaced cozying-up of juridical and governmental powers the PP, by getting its friendly courts to do its dirty work, has turned a political problem into a legal one. It might just be hoisting itself by its own petard by drawing attention not only to grave problems with the Spanish judiciary, but also the EU legal system. In Spain, as the Andalusian jurist Javier Pérez Royo notes, the National Court is behaving like Franco’s Public Order Court and he quotes the writer Rafael Chirbes: “This country stinks of Francoism everywhere.” For a taste of what he means, take the PP spokesman Pablo Casado. He says that the Catalan President Carles Puigdemont deserves the same fate as Lluís Companys, who declared the Catalan State within a federated Spanish Republic in 1934. After being caught by the Nazis, handed over to Franco and tortured, Companys was the only democratically elected incumbent European president ever to be executed. The compatibility of the National Court with the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights has always been problematic. A democratic state should have only one legal body with jurisdiction over the whole territory, namely the Supreme Court. Moreover, “rebellion” doesn’t figure among the crimes the National Court is authorized to investigate and rule on. If the decisions of Judge Carmen Lamela condemning Catalan politicians and independence supporters aren’t annulled in the National Court, the defendants can have resort to both the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights. And, Puigdemont and the four ministers of his government who are presently in Brussels have a strong case against Judge Lamela’s European arrest

warrant, which not only contravenes the Spanish Constitution but attacks rule of law in general. A “legal atrocity”, in Pérez Royo’s words. This should be crystal clear to the Belgian court dealing with the extradition order.

Puigdemont’s move to Brussels is intelligent. He’s Europeanizing the problem and introducing a legal safeguard in the form of courts that might have more respect for rule of law than the Spanish National Court. In the EU, rebellion and sedition aren’t extraditable crimes, which means that the charges boil down to misuse of public funds. This could end up being a most embarrassing mirror for the “rule of law” of M. Rajoy (as he appears in incriminating slush-fund documents). Even if the former two charges were contemplated, the court would have to prove the rider “by violent means”. This is easy-peasy for the Spanish Supreme Court which says that voters’ peaceful resistance against Spanish police on referendum day obliged the police to resort to violence. It is hoped that a Belgian court wouldn’t stoop to such an argument.

An open letter co-signed by 188 scholars, politicians, public intellectuals and members of the European Parliament was sent on November 3 to Commission President Juncker and European Council President Tusk, calling attention to the Spanish government’s contempt for civil and constitutional rights. In brief, they stated that the Spanish government is invoking Article 155 to impose direct rule and trample on other constitutional rights, including right to assembly and right to free speech. And this is where Europe comes in. Now that the Spanish government has taken out a European arrest warrant against Catalan political leaders, Belgium—a multilingual state, which might better understand the Catalan situation—is forced to make legal decisions on an “internal” Spanish matter. In any case, its legal system is known to be protective of the rights of the accused. In Articles 2 and 6 of the

Lisbon Treaty, the European Union upholds Rule of Law and declares that respect for fundamental rights and freedoms is binding on all member states. Although it has recently condemned violations of these rights in Poland and Hungary, Spain’s violations are somehow seen as a matter of domestic politics. Yet, Rule of Law in this member state has been seriously infringed in several ways, for example by contravening Constitutional provisions on freedom of peaceful assembly and of speech; with repressive action against citizens; by shutting down websites and media networks; and with disproportionate use of force. Even at the procedural level, the cases against Catalan leaders contain so many irregularities that the accused can’t count on legal guarantees in Spain.

If the EU really is a union, it now has political prisoners. In any case, it is tacitly upholding possible thirty-year prison sentences for citizens who exercised their rights as enshrined in Article 21 of the Spanish Constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as Articles 2 and 6 of the Lisbon Treaty. The EU is exposed as lacking capacity (or concern) for social and legal protection. Loud in its silence, its leadership is saying that the Spanish government’s rule-by-law is Rule of Law, which further damages an already shaky EU whose social contract, to the extent that it ever existed, is self-destructively undermined by its neoliberal policies. Its very identity is in question. Is it a “union” or isn’t it? If so, what kind? For starters, the refugee crisis and its sabotage of the Greek economy already suggest answers.

By pushing austerity and stymying social investment the EU is egging on the xenophobic ultra-right (fragmenters par excellence) and creating the conditions for its own demise. Instead of the federation on just social terms, it has achieved the disintegration of inequality. The EU is profoundly anti-

democratic and seems set to remain so. Against this backdrop, the Catalan independence movement has brought democratic anti-violent politics to a new high with a transversal organization and many invisible leaders. It will be impossible to decapitate. This also explains the draconian response from Madrid and Europe's feigned nonchalance about the flagrant violation of its laws. It seems that the EU would only support Catalan independence if the Spanish government was left-wing and Catalonia neoliberal. The PP is eminently right-wing and, so far, Europe is supporting it at its own peril. **CP**

Climate Change and Hurricanes The Flowers of Evil

BY JOHN DAVIS

Do you remember this summer's gang-of-five? Known individually as Harvey, Irma, Jose, Katia and Maria, a strangely mellifluous invocation of the deluge (or a diluvian mantra), the climatological spawn of cyclogenesis (the spin cycle in the South Atlantic) they collectively represented the most powerful group of hurricanes in over a hundred years. They were part of a train of such events in 2017, which totaled, at the time of writing, eight Atlantic hurricanes—the-hateful-eight—an unprecedented cyclogenetic sequence. Their combined death toll is conservatively estimated at over five hundred people with property and infrastructure damage low-balled at 200 billion dollars.

Bruno Latour, the French sociologist, and anthropologist writes, in *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, 2017, "In the Anthropocene, how can the state maintain that it has a monopoly on legitimate physical violence in the face of the geo-historical violence of the climate?" These weather events now terrorize the state and as we become increasingly subject to anthropogenic phenomena—those characteristics of climate that we believe are acting out of humankind's historic and present burning of fossil fuels—we anthropomorphize their impact. Wildfires rage, threaten and ravage; hurricanes bear down, hit and devastate. Their actions deriving, we understand from the frantic reporting of them, not from a set of climatological beginnings but devoted to the terrorizing of the human beings in their path—fire, flood, and wind marked by a teleological stripe as wide as the swathe they purposefully cut through civilization. Either way, it's all about us. We have created these vaporous monsters, these flowers of evil - their whirling florescence stunningly captured in satellite imagery—that can only survive in the hot-house of an anthropocentric world. Their evil is the evil that men do, their monstrosity mirrors ours. It is we who have turned the page of geologic epochs to the one named the Anthropocene.

The fight to reduce CO₂ levels to diminish global warming remains the central field of operations in the global climate

war that was enjoined some decades ago. Capitalism and its enabling political environment of neoliberalism are locked in battle with a growing army of opinion (scarcely yet reified as action) that suggests that planetary health would be better served by a dramatic re-visioning of our hegemonic anthropocentrism towards an enlightened co-existence with other life-forms. As the world warms, this new Cold War is fated to get increasingly hot. It is a war between the Moderns - those living out the scientific rationalities of the seventeenth century and who still formally exist within the Holocene, a geological epoch characterized by the geomorphic changes signaled by the end of the last ice age and the subsequent advent of agriculture—and those whom Latour calls the "Earthbound of the Anthropocene", populations alive to the geologic epoch which takes account of humankind's impact on geo-history and which embrace a world suffused with animism.

Timothy Morton, proclaimed by *The Guardian* as "the philosopher-prophet of the Anthropocene", and most recently author of *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, 2017, sees a similar divide between modern humans who cleave to the modes of production established by those early fertile-crescent civilizations with their tendencies towards "the overkill intensity of the logistics of post-Neolithic agriculture"—and those who continue the traditions of the foragers, the people of the Paleolithic for whom the world is fully animated. He writes, "Everywhere in post-agricultural psychic, social and philosophical space is evidence of a traumatic Severing of human and non-human relations". 'Severing' is capitalized because of his conceit that our current dilemmas can be usefully framed in a Game of Thrones-like world. He continues, "traditional ecological models rely on the ruling class mandala structure... Nature gets to mean something pristine and pure, an endlessly exploitable resource or majestic backdrop to the doings of (human) folk". Latour posits that "one of the great enigmas of Western history is not that there are still people naive enough to believe in animism, but that many people still hold the rather naive belief in a supposedly de-animated material world". Like Morton, Latour is driven by the inherent drama of our predicament to make theatrical analogies: he sees the natural world as the scenery jumping up on the stage and demanding a part in the human play—a speaking part, no less!

We casually crossed the CO₂ threshold of first, 350-ppm, sometime in the 1980's and, as of a year ago, have driven over the 400-ppm line. Latour writes, "we went through total war and hardly noticed a thing". We have arrived at what he calls "a profound mutation in our relation to the world". We have quietly folded our tents and ceded our accustomed atmosphere to one that is now accelerating the sixth extinction towards its almost inevitable denouement: that of our own contingency in a profoundly changed world. Fire, winds and epic rains signal our loss in a war in which we barely engaged, while the scorekeepers at the National Oceanic

and Atmospheric Administration's Mauna Loa Earth System Research Laboratory daily records our crushing and ever-deepening defeat. The geologic aggregations of plastics, the drilling of oil and gas reserves and their ignition, the resultant changes in the chemical composition of the atmosphere, and the chemical residues of industrial production are now frequently stirred, wind-driven, and rain pelted into spongy anthropogenic chimeras that, like the trenches of Northern France and Belgium in World War One, are the record of a war, but one in which we have stubbornly refused to fight. The latest United Nations projections point to a global temperature increase of 3.2 C (5.75F) by the end of the century. By then, sea level rise is expected to flood Alexandria, The Hague, Miami and Rio de Janeiro amongst countless other communities. Hurricanes and typhoons and their attendant storm surges now bring seasonal death and destruction but they are but precursors to this permanent submergence of coastal conurbations across the world.

Hurricanes are profoundly non-human. Like us, they are ecological beings but the temptation to render them as evil intruders is almost irresistible since they act in what we think of as our exclusive terrain. Yet we have begun, hesitatingly, to accept the rights of other predatory nonhumans to live in 'our' world. Growing numbers of people are beginning to accept the idea of co-existence with large carnivores such as wolves, grizzly bears, and mountain lions. We are beginning to discuss the acceptance of forest fires (which struck California this summer with apparently deadly intent) as naturally regenerative - the threat to human life and property that they pose seen as a problem of human settlement patterns rather than that of their inherent maliciousness. How long will it be before we bring weather phenomena into this fold of accommodation?

The globe has been impacted by an asteroid-like extinction syndrome driven by the New Climatic Regime—in the Western hemisphere, the Caribbean is at the epicenter of the materially destructive forces this regime has unleashed. Florida and the Gulf Coast reap similar levels of weather chaos. If the-evil-that-men-do has been transmuted into the temper tantrums of our atmospheric swaddling—and which (who?) is now an actor on the no longer exclusively human stage (an erstwhile fantasy of the modern age) - the actions of our anthropocentric states (none more so than Trumpistan) appear to be increasingly marginalized.

The most destructive hurricanes of the season, Maria, Harvey, and Irma, manifested in three of this nation's most extreme political environments—at the frayed edges of our Republic where the potential for its unraveling is perhaps the greatest. One, the poster child of late-modern imperialism, mired in debt and under the thumb of Wall Street; the other a global hypercity - a metastasized oil metropolis surrounded by kudzu-like suburban and industrial malignancies that entrap and stifle it; and the third, a state existentially vulnerable to climate change and global warming but where the reality of

those phrases is effectively denied by their Governor —using the tired 'I am not a scientist' defense. Each was viscerally impacted by a climatological body blow, the state powerless to control the violence and largely ineffectual in dealing with the resultant societal and infrastructural hemorrhaging. Hurricane Jose threatened outer areas of the Caribbean but in the end, brushed by the northern Leeward Islands already battered by Irma. A weakened Katia made landfall at Tecolutla in Eastern Mexico where torrential rains caused deadly mudslides and added to the chaos in the earthquake-shaken state of Veracruz.

The human tragedy following Hurricane Maria's devastation of Turks and Caicos, Puerto Rico, Dominica and Haiti is heart-breaking. The Island of Puerto Rico (or Borinquén) harbors a much-diminished patch of Edenic tropical rain forest in the El Yunque National Park but elsewhere functions as a low-wage haven for pharmaceutical, pesticide, and biotech production and as a provider of minimum wage service sector jobs. It represents half a millennium of the colonial rule now fully incarnated as the late-capitalist exploitation of a vulnerable and politically powerless workforce. Given its debt status, it faces decades of austerity tactics from its Wall Street overlords who will doubtlessly ensure that its post-hurricane reconstruction is repaid with an enhanced immiseration of the local population. Areas of the island may be in the process of becoming the world's newest wet slums.

The hurricane claimed over fifty lives in Puerto Rico (a very conservative estimate recently amended by the journalist Vijay Prashad to a number almost ten times as large based on his travels in the highland villages) and left thousands more injured, sick, homeless and hungry. This was extreme climate violence enacted on a territory with a notably impoverished governmental structure. What promises to be a decade's long Maria hang-over will serve both as a reminder of the supreme power of cyclogenesis and as a continuing demonstration of the puny authority of a marginalized government. The territory's outlook is grim, unless you are willing to count its people as heroic counter-revolutionaries trying to minimize the impacts of what Latour identifies "as a revolution that has taken place without us, against us, and, at the same time, through us".

By chance or the vagaries of academic tenure, Timothy Morton lives in Houston. The English-born, Oxford-educated, and Bjork's favorite philosopher teaches at Rice. He experienced Hurricane Harvey but was not rendered homeless, because, as he explains in his blog, he lives "at high altitude for Houston, aka 1 meter above sea level (joke estimate)!" Many were not as fortunate. Houston has assumed the mantle of Los Angeles as the ultimate late-twentieth-century American City: of sprawl, freeways, smog; and with it, its vulnerability to disaster and its ecological racism. It is a pre-cursor city of Latour's New Climatic Regime—an old-world oil, gas and petrochemical metropolis sited on marginal lands; its cancer-

ous growth feeding on the city's surrounding wetlands and prairies. It is, as Morton suggests, an emblematic spatiotemporal piece of the hyper-object (that consists of humankind and their works) that has initiated a mass extinction of life-forms in the Anthropocene. Now deprived of buffer landscapes, lacking zoning regulation and in an era of weakened environmental standards it will be increasingly vulnerable to weather terrorism; its inhabitants in low lying suburbs more frequently at risk of flooding, toxic spills and chemical fires and ever more likely to become climate refugees.

It is academics who have been at the forefront of both promoting the modernity project and of the attempt to expose it as an anthropocentric conspiracy to side-line the sentience of other beings. In the proto-modern world, Copernicus drove humans out of the center of the cosmos; then Descartes established human consciousness at the center of our Universe surrounded by a de-animated and inert nature—anesthetized and ready to dissect. Now, the cost to the world of this segmentation is amply apparent: human history seems cold and natural history frenzied: this summer, a frenzy called Irma was Florida's Nemesis.

Chantel Acevedo, the Floridian novelist and academic of Cuban heritage, imagines sharks in the deep water of Miami's flooded intersections and actually sees octopi stranded in her parking garage. Her five-year-old asks her, "Mom, will my room blow away?" "Irma was biblical", she writes, in *Vogue*, November 2017, "the warm waters of the Atlantic provided fuel, and Irma gulped and gulped. The swirling, giant storm, with its menacing eye, spoke of desolation to come." Fully personified in the pages of a fashion magazine, one is left only to wonder what Irma will wear. In the event, she arrived in the Keys dressed as the grim-reaper, killing seventy-four before departing the state as a tropical depression. Property damage is in the sixty billion range.

Long ago, in 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans killing a total of 1,836 people along the Gulf coast and causing over \$100 billion in property damage. Just five years ago, it was Hurricane Sandy that left New York with a death toll of 106 and property damage of almost a billion dollars. Unless we learn to co-exist with these heightened weather events, we will continue to be terrorized by them. From hurricanes alone, there have been well over 500 deaths in the U.S. since 2010. Never mind the death toll from other weather events such as floods, tornadoes, droughts, and wildfires. The cost of this year's hurricanes and wildfires in the U.S. is estimated by the General Accounting Office at \$300 billion. Since 9-11, there have been 148 deaths in the U.S. attributable to foreign terrorist attacks while the bill for the U.S. War on Terrorism has ballooned, from 2010 through 2018, to \$1.774 Trillion. The 2017 budget for civil works by the Army Corps of Engineers, much of it earmarked for storm remediation, is a puny \$4.62 billion.

If keeping the American people safe and their property protected is the criteria, the inevitable conclusion is that our

Federal spending priorities are grotesquely out of whack. The state has indeed retained its monopoly on violence rendered by guns, missiles, drones, chemical agents, capital punishment, torture and incarceration, and spends trillions exercising that right; it has, however, through at least six presidencies since Carter (the first World Climate Conference was held in Geneva in 1979), been entirely remiss in making any sort of reasonable attempt to control weather terrorism. As such, it has likely confirmed its fate as an irrelevancy in the New Climatic Regime, in this, the first century of the Anthropocene.

Timothy Morton notes, "Since the UN's Earth Summit in Rio, 1992, what has underpinned the fascist right in the USA has been opposition to solidarity with nonhumans." In other words, our government's refusal to engage with geo-history has made it complicit in the sixth extinction. Culpability can be spread across the decades, but perhaps it reaches its apogee with the incumbency of Al Gore as vice president, 1993 - 2001, who, he wants us to believe, understood what was going on. Given that he presumably understood the Earth to be imminent danger, his signal failure to act aggressively on his putative presidential victory in 2000 (and thus be in a position to 'save the Earth') suggests both a towering cowardice and a profound narcissism. Morton writes that when he hears the word sustainability, he reaches for his sunscreen, echoing the Nazi propagandist Hanns Johst, 1890 - 1978, who wrote, in 1933, "when I hear the word culture, I release the safety catch from my Browning". When I hear the name Al Gore I think to check the appalling list of nonhuman extinctions cataloged by The Center for Biological Diversity. Morton has doubts about Gore's avowed mission—the saving of the Earth - if that only means "preserving a reasonably human-friendly environment". What this preserves, he suggests, "is the cinema in which human desire projection can play on the blank screen of everything else". Like Latour, he counsels a solidarity with the nonhuman.

Since Latour correctly suggests that we have already lost the war against limiting the ppm of carbon in the atmosphere and the resultant weather extremes, we have been reduced to creating secondary lines of defense consisting of hard and soft infrastructures that attempt the containment of these new, globally warmed geo-storms in the attempt, worthy or not, of preserving a human-friendly environment. The money to create these defenses comes from a combination of State and Federal budgets, institutions and private enterprise: most of that money is devoted to hard infrastructures which are mostly made of concrete—which has a huge energy footprint. Concrete production currently contributes about 1% of the greenhouse gases emitted in the U.S. exacerbating the very reasons for its extravagant use in storm barriers and sea walls.

In Manhattan where the surrounding sea level is projected to rise six feet within the century, an ambitious scheme originally conceived of as a big "U" of concrete and steel for-

tifications, water parks and dunes around Lower Manhattan promises protection from future storm surges and is currently undergoing community review. In Bridgeport Connecticut, hard and soft infrastructures are planned for this community hard hit by superstorm Irene in 2011 and the following year by Sandy. An existing seaside park, originally designed by Frederick Law Olmstead, is being re-engineered by Dutch flood control consultants to act as a storm surge buffer.

Manipulation of the landscape to enhance human and non-human existence (making a friendlier human environment in ways complementary to other life and landforms) has a long tradition reaching far back into the paleolithic era. The hard edges of our continent that support the logistics of energy, food and raw material import and export as well as the incoming container loads of finished Chinese goods, will inevitably soften: our choice is whether to encourage this process by design or resist it and thus prolong the recalcitrance of weather terrorism.

In Miami, key roads are being elevated to serve as escape routes for flood refugees; an extensive system of pumping stations is being augmented; sea walls proliferate, and floodgates have been installed to protect strategic highway tunnels. New commercial buildings are designed to sit on concrete plinths that rise sixteen feet or more above grade. The high-style Perez Art Museum designed by Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron sits on a plinth while its expansive glazed areas have undergone ballistics testing to verify their ability to repel a weather terrorism weapon-of-choice: a 2 x 4 wood stud, wind-driven at a speed of 50 feet per second.

The newly relocated Whitney Art Museum in New York, now sandwiched between the Hudson River and the Highline park, was re-designed, mid-construction, after Sandy, to withstand storm surges through a system of sea gates and barricades. Our finest cultural storehouses are thus being elaborately protected against impending weather terrorism while they serve as symbols of the privileging of human consciousness that characterizes modernity and which, in turn, has now been geo-historically reified as the 'asteroid' of the sixth extinction.

In New Orleans, twelve years after Hurricane Katrina, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is upgrading the city's levees and finally removing or replacing the temporary floodgates and pumps it installed after the emergency—which was exacerbated by their earlier engineering miscalculations. New schools, hospitals, and housing are being built under a city-wide water plan which requires that individual developments contribute to the storage and ground-infiltration of storm-water flows. New waterways and parks are being designed as stormwater management elements as well as recreational resources. Marshes and grasslands are being revived as natural retention and infiltration areas, yet the coastal wetlands, the city's best and softest defense against storm surges, continue to erode.

The wisdom of defiant urban renewal in the face of the overwhelming vulnerabilities of the Mississippi estuary and its coastline is rarely questioned; solutions are more usually framed in terms of the hard re-engineering of miles of the great river below New Orleans; while plans to save the coast to protect the city and its industrial infrastructures will likely destroy the rural communities who have developed ecologically viable settlements in the littoral. Alternatively, a program that restores indigenous plant, animal and bird communities at the water's edge would provide soft-landings for violent tropical storms and push urban and industrial development into the hinterland away from the continent's most vulnerable ecotones.

It is useful to heed Morton's advice: "It's very important that we keep our imagination, which is our capacity to open the future, awake, at a time at which the urge to collapse into the fetal position is high." There are practical things one can do to mitigate the impacts of weather terrorism, and developing community solidarity in preparedness for such events (as widely practiced in Cuba and elsewhere in the Caribbean) may be the most valuable; but as important, perhaps, is to understand that the various parts of our lives that support the hyperobject—that historic, socio-economic and political 'asteroid' that warms the waters of the Atlantic and causes daily nonhuman extinction - are quite small and can be easily subverted: your credit card cut in half, for instance.

Solutions to our predicament will likely be similarly small in scale. Latour shares Morton's notion that seeking 'wholes' is necessarily dismissive of what they subtend: our connectedness to each other and to the nonhuman depends on diverse symbioses, not on holism. We need to attend to these connections, not their ideological containers. Latour writes, "Each time we talk about *Nature, Earth, the Global, Capitalism or God*, we are presupposing the existence of a superior organism. The passage through connections is immediately replaced by a relation between parts and the Whole".

The gang-of-five has quietly retired, and the hateful-eight has drifted into history, but these heavily anthropomorphized ecological beings have played their part. They did indeed enact our (and perhaps their) fantasy of getting up on the stage and speaking. Did we hear them amidst the howling of their winds, amidst their apparently willful destruction as they demonstrated the awful majesty of their climatic power?

Can we now welcome them, and those that will follow in annual alphabetized procession, into the family of human and nonhuman beings in a newly non-anthropocentric, re-animated world as both intensely scary ecological objects morphed into gigantism by our exploitation of fossil-fuels but also as regenerative beings - like their elemental ally, forest fires - of great beauty and spiritual power? To do so would signal a re-connecting to the nonhuman by humankind mitigating both the contingency of our own existence and that of all non-human beings.

The alternative is to continue in our extreme Cartesian anthropocentrism: to continue to resist the impacts of weather terrorism with concrete, steel, and bullet-proof glass; to continue to rebuild in place and attempt to deny the terrestrial morphological modifications that climate change makes inevitable.

In 2017, as in past years, there were many heroic examples of human solidarity in the face of the marauding hurricanes. It is tempting to believe that in the Caribbean, where the people deal with these regular emergencies stoically and with sensible preparedness rather than under the influence of media shock and awe and of hasty evacuation plans, there is also an underlying solidarity with the nonhuman. Is it entirely too romantic to believe that the death grip of modernity on the Caribbean is less tenacious than on the U.S. mainland; to believe that the disease that is America (another hyperobject) is less fully entrenched in these islands that bear the initial brunt of so many South Atlantic hurricanes? That in Puerto Rico, this vestigial solidarity is evidenced in what Vijay Prashad calls the ‘Campsites of the Forgotten’ - epitomized by a mountain town called Utuado, 104 kilometers south-west of San Juan - where the 33,000 inhabitants have banded together to sustain themselves in the face of great infrastructural damage; where there is a re-discovery of old ways of ‘making-do’ (like using mountain spring water) he so movingly described in his essay, *The Devastation Of Puerto Rico?* As a part of this reawakened solidarity, can we doubt that the Island’s people have also re-activated their nonhuman surroundings?

Are we ready to understand the lessons of weather terrorism and follow Morton and Latour, outliers of the environmental movement, purveyors of what Morton and others characterize as ‘Dark Ecology’, into the realm of non-anthropocentric ecognosis (the logic of future co-existence) where humankind subtends from the whole in an interconnectedness with the nonhuman? **CP**

JOHN DAVIS is an architect living in California.

Land of the Forbidden Fan Return to Cuba

BY NED SUBLETTE

We’re in Matanzas province, in the heart of 19th-century Cuban sugarland. We’ve come to visit the Ingenio Álava, the ruin of a slave-powered sugar mill next to the modern, functioning Central México.

We walk through the gate below the ruined bell tower. Back when the Álava’s labor force lived in slavery, this gate closed every night, locking them in at ten. It was the entry to the great yard that housed the barracones (barracks), whose residents were legally the property of the Marqués of Álava, Don

Julián Zulueta.

In the center of the yard is the largest ceiba tree I’ve ever seen. There are houses all around, some of them dedicated casa-templos (house temples) that conserve sacred items, including some said to have physically arrived from Africa. Many of the people who live here are direct descendants of the enslaved population that lived here. Many are named Zulueta.

Artifacts from slavery days remain in the community’s families without ever having left the site. Manacles. An iron bed, a luxury that belonged to the favored wet-nurse. An Elegguá, the red-and-black trickster of the crossroads. The residents of the former barracón have created a small museum out of these artifacts as part of a formalized, legally constituted community project that they call *Tras las Huellas de Nuestros Ancestros*, In the Footsteps of our Ancestors. They throw a mighty bembé. (bembé: a sacred party for the gods, Yoruba Cuba style.)

I’ve been going to Cuba since January 1990, always legally. These days I take people on musically immersive visits. Travelers on my Postmambo Cuban Music Seminars have used words like “transformative” and “life-changing” to describe their experience. I started doing this in 2000, ten years after my first trip to Cuba, but Dubya put me out of business in 2003. After a twelve-year hiatus, I resumed following the surprise Obama opening of December 17, 2014, trying to provide the kind of cultural travel experience that has little to do with the stereotype of tourism.

Things were going well. Now we’re getting screwed again.

* * *

As I write these words, U.S. carriers service six different cities in Cuba, though those routes were initially overserved in anticipation of a wide-open tourist traffic that never materialized, and have been cut back. JetBlue, United, and Delta all have daily direct commercial flights from the New York area to Havana, a destination also serviced from Los Angeles, Atlanta, Charlotte, and multiple cities in Florida.

JetBlue, which opened two Havana ticket offices on September 1, has been particularly bullish about Cuba. The company’s investor relations press release brags about the relationships it built during its five years of flying in and out of Cuba for the charter companies, about being the first U.S. airline into Havana on November 28, 2016, and about Havana as JetBlue’s 100th destination. They reduced what used to be complicated U.S.—and Cuba-mandated paperwork to a few online clicks when you buy the ticket. They brought in 390,000 passengers (several of them were me) in their first year of operation. Before then, we were paying almost a grand to go on mandatory round-trip charter flights; right now, we’re paying \$189 each way and it’s almost as easy as booking a domestic flight.

This is what we’ve been calling for, all these years. We got it. But the big sustained rush hasn’t materialized, and now, three

years after Cuba became fashionable in the U.S. following the Obama administration's surprise opening, I'm going down there on planes that are less than half full.

People canceled their reservations for Cuban *casas particulares en masse* after Trump's June 16th speech in Miami, which made United Statesians think it's illegal to go to Cuba. And, thanks to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's bogus September 29 "travel warning"—actually, there were three different warnings, emanating from the hollow shell of the post-Trump U.S. State Department with no legal force—Cuba's been stigmatized as unsafe.

In fact, it's perfectly legal to go to Cuba, provided you comply with certain conditions. And Cuba is about the safest place you can go. It's never been easier to go there, travel has never been cheaper, and Cubans want you to visit.

Meanwhile, as U.S. governance continues to decline, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has imposed a *de facto* travel ban against Cubans coming to the U.S., which is cruel to families and fatal to Cuban musicians' access to U.S. audiences.

* * *

Young, thin, and pale—that's who Aeroflot hires—the flight attendants glide in birdlike formation through Havana's José Martí airport in their identical designer uniforms, all orange one month, navy blue another, past the long queue boarding for Moscow. The thirteen-hour direct from Moscow to Havana gets in every day at 12:40 p.m., then turns around.

Russia's back. Russia never left Cuba, of course. There was continuity, as the debtholding Communist Soviet Union was succeeded by the debtholding oligarchic Russian Federation. But this isn't Khrushchev and Fidel. As Venezuela deteriorates, Russia has been supplying petroleum to Cuba. Vladimir Putin wrote off \$32 billion in unpayable Soviet-era debt in July 2014, leaving a balance of \$3.2 billion. If Cuba doesn't pay, it doesn't have electricity, because most of the power on the island is still generated by petroleum. Meanwhile in the U.S., a number of figures in the Trumpist world apparently have deep business connections with Russia, and Trump himself seems mysteriously in thrall to Putin. Debt here, debt there, who's got the leverage?

* * *

When the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) released its modified Cuba travel regs on November 8 (seven weeks after the promised date), "Little" Marco Rubio, who on June 16 had chest-thumped with Trump in front of a hard core of elderly Miami anti-Castrists, walked back his participation in something he claimed the "bureaucrats"—i.e., the remaining employees at OFAC, who are also charged with defunding ISIS and policing North Korea deals—had watered down.

There's no vision of Cuba's future, from any political point of view, that doesn't count on revenues from tourism, so attacking Cuba travel is an existential threat to the island's sta-

bility. The fundamental innovation of the Obama opening was that it recognized Cuba's sovereignty and thus created a basis for international cooperation. That's gone.

The new OFAC regs micro-manage to the point of specifically prohibiting (for some travelers, not all) business dealings with the Casa del Abanico, the House of Fans. This is a storefront in the former high-style shopping district of Old Havana that sells nothing but small handmade ladies' fans, personalized for you with a paintbrush while you wait. That's all they sell.

You're also not supposed to do business with El Soldadito de Plomo, which sells toy soldiers. These shops are part of *Compañía Turística Habaguanex S.A.*, the magnificent Old Havana restoration and development project formerly headed by city historian Eusebio Leal that played an incalculable role in modernizing the city by redeveloping its most ancient parts. Habaguanex was taken over last year by the GAESA military holding company, which controls a big chunk but by no means all of Cuba's tourist economy, and which is the target of what is effectively a new U.S. embargo against the Cuban military's commercial holdings.

You're not supposed to buy Caney or Varadero brand rum, or certain soft drinks, but actually, it's okay (as well as unenforceable) to buy Tropi-Cola from a sidewalk vendor or to drink the brand in a restaurant, as long as the restaurant isn't ... well, part of the enemy's chain. No, really. This is Mafia-type stuff: attempting to set one sector of the Cuban economy against other.

You're not supposed to stay in any of 83 named hotels, but you're encouraged to stay in a *casa particular* (private house). Thing is, I stay in private Cuban homes anyway, since my first trip in 1990. I much prefer it. At the risk of stating the obvious, *casas particulares* aren't enemies of the Cuban state. But now my choice has been twisted into instrumentalizing some notion of state-vs.-private enterprise in a way palatable to a neo-Bushist think tank.

Another prohibition in the OFAC list, one that doesn't take any more space on the page than the House of Fans, is the *Zona Especial de Desarrollo Mariel*—the giant, still-under-construction multibillion-dollar container port and enterprise zone that aims at remaking Cuba's status as a shipping center. I suppose that at this rate, when Cuba's highways are rebuilt, it'll be with Chinese heavy equipment and Chinese contractors, like it is all over Africa.

The Obama team's strategy seems to have been to lay down as much commercial infrastructure as possible between the two countries so as to make it hard to subsequently undo, and it's kind of worked. But s Russia and China sign deals with Cuba, and as more manufactured goods circulate in Cuba, U.S. companies—from the big boys down to one-person operators—are still bystanders. We're increasingly locked out by our own government of the development that is, barring some giant catastrophe, inexorably under way.

* * *

As to the purported sonic attacks, which you've surely read about: we've been shown no reason to believe they really happened. We haven't been told the name of a single person who's been harmed. No known sonic device is capable of what's been alleged, and the story of what happened keeps changing.

Cuba at first took the allegations seriously, even—incredibly—allowing the FBI into Cuba to investigate. But until we've seen evidence to the contrary—we haven't seen a single piece of evidence—the best default is to assume the Cubans are right when they say this is a hoax—and, please, this is the Trump State Department we're talking about here, so why would anyone believe it? Whatever the ultimate genesis of this implausible psyops episode that recalls the high paranoid moments of the Cold War—could it have been the Russians, practicing another way to drive us madder than we already are? did it even happen?—it provided a convenient pretext for Rex Tillerson's drastic step on September 29: shutting down basic functions of the newly restored US Embassy in Cuba.

One of those basic functions—visa-granting—brings in Marco Rubio's constituents' old folks to Florida for family visits, as well as bringing some of the world's greatest musicians from Cuba to US concert stages. The visa section of the US Embassy in Havana had been helpful, its chief persistently continuing services even in the chaos after Hurricane Irma. And indeed, we had a brilliant Cuban-musical year in the US this year, with Daymé Arocena rocking Central Park and a barrage of other, brilliant shows by the greatest names in Cuban music—Chucho Valdés, Silvio Rodríguez, Los Van Van, Revé y su Charangón, Harold López-Nussa, and on and on.

But now the Embassy's personnel have been recalled, and visa applications will not be accepted. It's tantamount to halting the visa process. There's a loophole: the US Embassy in Bogotá will take applications for visas from Cubans who have the wherewithal to go 1400 miles each way to apply. (The Obama administration was granting five-year family visas, and many are still in effect, but those don't allow the visitor to work, e.g., play music for money.) But applicants must go in person, which makes it much more expensive for an individual, and prohibitively expensive for a musical, athletic, or academic group.

So, the alleged sonic weapons attacks were the rationale for what is effectively a US travel ban against Cubans right now, with no indication of how long it might last, resuming the hateful Bushist policy of cultural disengagement, this time under the guise of protecting Embassy workers.

But you can still go to Cuba from the United States, and if you can, you should. Or, rather, start going to Cuba, because hardly anybody goes once.

* * *

Not only is it not illegal for United Statesians to go to Cuba, it's your right to travel there, as long as you satisfy some con-

ditions—which shouldn't exist at all, but which are not hard to meet if your interest is real.

Read the regs. If not a family visit, your trip has to be educational, professional, religious, etc. Basically, the existing regulations have been left in place, with some changes. It's illegal, and has been all along, to go as a capital-T Tourist for a casual sun-and-beach beer-pong resort-type vacation. Canadians have been fleeing winter to baste and fry on Cuban beaches for decades, but that remains off-limits for United Statesians under U.S. law.

Group people-to-people travel—those Postmambo trips I lead—hasn't been touched, and I'm taking groups in January, March, and July 2018. Individual people-to-people, an Obama-era innovation, has been cut, but there are still a number of ways you can go to Cuba as an individual—if you're doing professional research, for example, like musicians do pretty much every minute they're in Cuba. And you can even bring your family.

You might also qualify under a “Support for the Cuban People” category, now reconfigured to allow individual travelers to stay in a casa particular and “engage in a full-time schedule of activities that result in meaningful interaction with individuals in Cuba.” As the wording makes clear, the intention of this category was to facilitate travel by private-enterprise evangelists, with an eye toward subversion of an economic system the United States doesn't like. But you don't have to be a Young Republican to Support the Cuban People; as written, these regs contemplate a wide spectrum of activities that could—real-life example—include helping rumba dancers and drummers build a school.

* * *

Much of greater Havana as we know it was built in the early 20th century, often during periods of hot cash flow and lack of other compelling domestic investment opportunity. Some houses are quite grand, some are in decayed condition; all were demonetized in the post-revolutionary financial regime. Now those families that have hung on to their houses through the decades are beginning to monetize their property once again, investing in their properties in the course of developing a b-and-b. In the process, they've learned, or rediscovered, or invented, the techniques of business.

When Airbnb execs turned their attention to Cuba, they were astounded to find a heavily built-out market in rented-out rooms that developed long before there was an Airbnb. That installed rental base, combined with Cuba's primitive cyber-infrastructure, means that Cuba might be the place Airbnb works best; its interface, its international accessibility, and its ability to accept credit-card prepayment in the US are valuable services for Cuban rental owners. (If you know your way around, you don't need Airbnb; there are Cuban brokers who cover certain neighborhoods and communicate from city to city.)

The post-Obama upsurge in individual U.S. tourist traffic, which is a heavy user of Airbnb, brought cash flow to this class of individual homeowners in Cuba, which in turn did much to distribute resources into an informal network of service providers of all types. I have been in dozens of these casas in the last years, throughout the country. My anecdotal experience is that many of the owners reinvest everything they make into continuing to upgrade their property and their business. Blocks that were dark at night twenty-five years ago now have lighted signage announcing a restaurant or a room for rent. To someone who lived through the Special Period of the early 1990s, this is a very different world. More money is in circulation, more manufactured goods are available.

It became legal to sell private homes in 2012. For years before that, homes changed hands clandestinely as families' needs changed, sometimes for tens of thousands of dollars in illicit amounts of cash, without a legal title; whatever the political future, property-title law will surely be a growth profession in Cuba. (If you know your way around, you don't need Airbnb; there are Cuban brokers who cover certain neighborhoods and communicate from city to city.) Today, Cubans (not foreigners) can legally buy fixer-uppers and add value to them before reselling them, and prices for homes are rising. Unfortunately, this more monetized economy creates greater inequality, since not everyone in Cuba inherited fine old homes. The renting-out of bedrooms and the restaurantizing of old-school dining rooms rehydrates a pre-revolutionary state of affairs: those big houses weren't owned by black Cubans, who mostly inherited poorer housing stock. As housing monetizes, a specter of generational wealth—and generational poverty—reappears.

The present appreciation of property value is creating potential collateral, which lays the basis for a possible but not yet implemented next step: creating credit, which is to say, creating money. The Cuban banking system doesn't offer homeowner mortgages—not yet, anyway. But the fact that Cuban housing can now generate money is a profound transformation that will presumably become fundamental to a developing Cuban economy.

Meanwhile, there's a long-term housing shortage. While rooms are being rented out to foreigners, many people in the barrios sleep three to a bed, or on a couch, and / or in precarious housing stock. And then there were those houses that crumbled after the storm surge from Hurricane Irma flooded parts of Centro Habana and Vedado. Deep-soaked in a salt-water inundation, then dried out in hot sun, the crumbly porous limestone becomes more brittle. The problem of structural tension is exacerbated by barbacoas, the loft-bed-like horizontal dividers that many residents have improvised in their houses to double living space at the expense of headroom. And a structurally deficient house can weaken its neighbors.

Much repair is needed, much rebuilding. People and com-

panies in the United States are the logical partners in this effort, but despite all the work invested in better relations over the last three years, it may not shake out that way.

* * *

When we visited Colón in November 2016, the community's children danced a bembé, in full orisha costume.

This was a party in the hot sun, dancing on broken rocks in fact, for the orishas, the deities of the widely practiced Yoruba religion, with the elaborate drumming tradition that is perhaps Africa's most musically complex legacy to the Americas. You know how children become Superman when they put on the costume? A child orisha is something to behold.

One by one the children danced the gods they embodied. Changó swung his axe, Babalú-Ayé limped, Yemayá's skirt simulated the ocean's waves. Eighty people or so from the neighborhood gathered around the ceiba tree, singing along in Yoruba, in responsorial choruses that changed every four lines. They knew all the changes. **CP**

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Divided By History United By The Present

BY LEE BALLINGER

Each fall, the NBA champions from the past season traditionally visit the White House. This year, in late September the Golden State Warriors announced that they would refuse to go to the White House. The next day Donald Trump said the point was moot because the invitation had been withdrawn. Steve Kerr, the Warriors coach, said at a press conference: "These are not ordinary times. They are probably the most divisive times in my life. Our values, such as inclusion, are just so different."

Indeed. Yet the primary division in America isn't between Donald Trump and the rest of us, it's economic. The top 10% of families held 76% of the wealth in 2013, while the bottom 50% of families held 1%. The average employee needs to work more than a month to earn what the average CEO earns in one hour. The CEO-to-worker compensation ratio was 20-to-1 in 1965, grew to 123-to-1 in 1995, and was 296-to-1 in 2013.

In 1980, there were 4,414 millionaires in the United States.

Today, there are 10.8 million millionaires and, according to Fortune, 1,700 people become millionaires every day in the U.S. Meanwhile, 400,000 Americans become homeless every month.

Steve Kerr is right—these are divisive times. But these are also times of growing unity.

A few examples

- On June 25, 2016 in Fresno, Dylan Noble, a 19-year-old white kid, was shot and killed by Fresno police. Soon after Dylan Noble died, Lou Standifer, who works at Harley Davidson of Fresno and is a leader of the Underlords Motorcycle Club, organized a vigil that drew hundreds to the gas station where Noble was killed. The vigils and protests continued and the leadership of them broadened. Justice Medina, who is black, organized one of them, saying “We have to hold them accountable.”

“He’s white and he died in the streets the way a lot of black and brown people have,” said Ernesto Saavedra, the son of Mexican immigrants. Since 2014, Fresno police have shot 23 people, killing 14 of them. According to a study by the Washington Post, police in the United States fatally shoot more whites than blacks.

- In just two weeks in 2012, three million people of all colors signed an online petition demanding that George Zimmerman be arrested for the murder of Trayvon Martin. Then one person, a white country singer named Meghan Linsey, took a knee after she performed the national anthem at a September 24 NFL game in Nashville. “I took a knee for those who are mistreated, beaten down and disregarded in this country,” Linsey said.

- In *Unlikely Alliances: Native Nations and White Communities Unite to Defend Rural Lands*, Zoltan Grossman makes clear that these alliances don’t come about because of white guilt or due to reparations for all the harm done to Native Americans. They come about because of common problems, especially with corporate land takeovers and the poisoning of the environment.

“The Native organizers in these alliances understood how to reach farmers, ranchers, and fishers in deep-red ‘Trumpland’ and enlist them in a populist movement that cut across racial lines,” Grossman wrote me.

“This is not Indian versus white. It’s a land-based ethic versus a profit-oriented motive.”—Cindy Reed, Black Hills rancher

“The very same communities that had been in Wisconsin headlines as the worst flashpoints of Native-white conflict became those most at the forefront of collaboration,” Grossman writes in *Unlikely Alliances*. “The borders of fear between them became borders of cooperation.”

In many parts of the country, the process of unity has gone well beyond the original political impetus. People feast

and dance together. Ranchers have defended native cultural heritage and spoken out against the murder of Lakota men outside the reservation, while the Northern Cheyenne have defended the property rights of ranchers, even though that land belonged to their Cheyenne ancestors 150 years ago.

“The model of capitalism is trying to suffocate us, because with capitalism you need an underclass. Capitalism cannot survive without poor farmers, without poor Indians, without poor people in the cities.”—Ihanktonwan Nakota/Dakota elder Faith Spotted Eagle

- On May 4th, 2017 House Republicans voted to pass the Affordable Health Care Act, popularly known as Trumpcare. Then they went on a week-long recess—during which many held town halls, where they were confronted by primarily Republican audiences outraged by the health care vote. There were cries of “Shame!” from the crowds, GOP lawmakers were shouted down when they claimed that “nobody dies because they don’t have health care,” and there were demands for single-payer health care. Despite differences in party affiliation, the folks at the town halls were objectively aligning with all those who had earlier attended rallies called to defend Obamacare.

- At the massive annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in South Dakota in the summer of 2015, riders made a statement against Black Hills mining by using six hundred of their bikes to spell out “Honor Vets, Protect Water.” It was no coincidence that last fall thousands of veterans came to the aid of Native American water protectors at Standing Rock.

- Roanoke is in southwest Virginia, where Trump won most counties by 65 percent or more. Yet in the wake of Trump’s open gloating about abandoning Puerto Rico, on October 14 the Roanoke Times ran an editorial entitled: “How Appalachia and Puerto Rico Can Help Each Other.” The piece expresses sympathy for the devastation of Hurricane Maria and concludes:

“Puerto Rico’s economic situation is really no different than that of Appalachia’s. Puerto Rico is poorer and has a bigger out-migration, but those are differences only of degree... The Appalachian coalfields of Virginia, Kentucky and West Virginia are basically a mainland version of Puerto Rico. They may not see themselves that way, but in economic terms—and population decline—they are exactly the same. They just don’t have a hurricane that has ravaged them, only the decline of the coal industry. It’s unclear whether any proposed Marshall Plan for Puerto Rico will be forthcoming, but the point here is not to resent the idea. Rather, it’s to make the case that Appalachia should be making common cause with Puerto Rico.”

- A group of veterans from Appalachia has formed Veterans Disaster Relief, a team which has responded to the crisis in Puerto Rico by flying there at their own expense and working

hard to get food, medicine, water, and other necessities to trapped Puerto Rican families. Beckley, West Virginia native Jason Maddy explains that away from the coast the island is a lot like West Virginia, with mountains, windy roads, and extreme poverty. Describing the Puerto Ricans they work with as “mountain folk,” Maddy says: “We feel part of their family now. So it feels like we’re taking care of family members.”

- Communities across the country have rallied to try to stop the deportation of their friends and neighbors. Most of the town of Clinton, Iowa came to the aid of a Mexican family, longtime residents, when they faced deportation. Many have rallied in Mineola, New York on behalf of Dennis Guerra from El Salvador who was deported after being pulled over for a traffic violation. Guerra worked as a baker and was a youth leader in his local church. Minerva Garcia, originally from Mexico, has lived and paid taxes in Winston-Salem, North Carolina since 2000 and now faces deportation. Local residents have joined with her to try to keep her at home.

There are countless other examples out there and a lot more coming in the future, in part because the thinking of the American people is changing.

- In 2015, the Public Religion Research Institute released the American Values Atlas based on more than 40,000 telephone interviews. Majorities of the residents of all 50 states support a path to citizenship for immigrants. The four states in which residents hold the least concerns about immigrants being a burden are California, Hawaii, New Jersey, and New York—the historic centers of immigration. Majorities of Republicans (52 percent), white evangelical Protestants (54 percent), and seniors (56 percent) all support a path to citizenship for immigrants.

- According to a Texas Lyceum poll, 61 percent of Texans are against building a wall on the border and 62 percent believe immigration can help their state.

- In 2016, the Christian research Barna Group asked if people agree or disagree with the statement “we allow too many immigrants into the country,” three in 10 strongly agreed. One year later, less than one quarter (23%) strongly agree. The drops in anti-immigrant sentiment are particularly significant among the older generations, with Boomers seeing a 16-percentage point drop and Elders a 17-percentage point drop from 2016 to 2017. Evangelicals dropped 11 percentage points from 42 percent to 31 percent. Roxanne Stone, editor-in-chief at Barna Group, notes that compassion toward refugees and immigrants—an often stated command in the Bible—has become a theme for many public Christian voices and many American churches.

- Approximately twelve million people are held in jail each year. The majority of them are nonviolent offenders and people detained for their inability to make bail. According

to a new poll conducted by Zogby and RTI International, 62 percent support rehabilitation for nonviolent offenders instead of locking them up or using jail as a form of punishment. The poll also found that few Americans support pretrial detention for people who can’t afford bail.

- A Gallup poll found that 58% of U.S. adults favor the idea of a federally funded healthcare system that provides insurance for all Americans.

National opinion and action is shifting, primarily because increasingly people have problems in common.

- A survey by the Bureau of Justice Statistics showed that an estimated 500,000 people were threatened by or had force used against them by police officers in one year. Blacks and Latinos made up half of those who had such experiences even though they made up only one-fifth of the population covered by the survey. On the other hand, half of them were white.

- The demographics of the military are changing, which means that the problems of veterans are now shared more widely throughout the population. There are 212,000 women on active duty and they serve with the men. There are now 1.7 million women veterans. There are 65,000 immigrants in the military, 11,000 of them women.

- The U.S. government’s designation of “deep poverty” is \$8.30 a day per person. The World Bank sets that line much lower for the “developing world” (Afghanistan say, or Mexico) at \$2 per person a day. There are currently 1.5 million U.S. households with 3 million children, one out of every twenty-five families, who live on less than two dollars per person a day. The number of people living in such destitution has increased 70 percent over the past fifteen years. Although the rate of growth was highest among African Americans and Hispanics, nearly half of the \$2-a-day poor were white.

- Unity is now possible between the cities and the suburbs. In 1990, U.S. cities had 9.5 million people living in poverty as compared to 8.5 million people in the suburbs living in poverty. 2014 data show that cities had 13 million poor people, while the suburban poor totaled 17 million people (an increase of 100 percent). In the fifty largest U.S. metro areas, 44 percent of suburban residents live in multiracial, multiethnic suburbs.

- Since 2004, when homeownership rates peaked, seven million homes have been foreclosed on. This epidemic has spread everywhere—the seemingly serene Los Angeles suburb of Temecula has often been ranked as the California city with the most foreclosures.

- The ongoing wave of foreclosures has helped to fuel the rise of mass homelessness. 41% of the homeless are white, 40% are African American, 11% are Hispanic, and 8% percent are Native American. In November 2016, 76 percent of Los Angeles voters approved a \$1.5 billion bond issue to create

housing for the homeless. That overwhelming majority was a result of the growing fear of homelessness by LA residents of every age and color.

- In 1964, the 24th amendment abolished the poll tax, but in Alabama and eight other states, anyone who has been incarcerated not only loses their right to vote but cannot regain it until they pay off any outstanding court fines, legal fees, and victim restitution. Of the more than 280,000 disenfranchised felons in Alabama, a little over half are black and most of the rest are white.
- According to a study by the *Los Angeles Times*, nationwide there are several thousand locally-based environmental organizations, typically with less than a hundred members, meeting in homes or churches and dealing with the poisoning of their city or neighborhood.

Bubbling under the struggles over issues, the potential for greater social unity is also growing because, whether dating or mating, shackled up or married, people are uniting one on one.

“After *Loving vs. Virginia*, the game of divide and conquer continues, but rising interracial intimacy could alter tired scripts.” —Sherryl Cashin

Sherryl Cashin is an African-American law professor who details much of the changing terrain and the changing attitudes that go with it in *Loving: Interracial Intimacy in America and the Threat to White Supremacy*. Her book takes off from the case of Richard and Mildred Loving, the interracial married couple who were arrested for that “crime” in 1958 and successfully fought it all the way to the Supreme Court.

Cashin makes a statistical case for how “tired scripts” have been altered:

“Millennials make news for hanging a noose on a campus, chanting a frat-boy song about lynching, wearing gangsta blackface to a Halloween party, or murdering nine African-Americans at a Wednesday night Bible study. The majority of millennials, however, are more open to our majority-minority future than are their parents and grandparents. Much less attention is paid to the 54 percent of millennials who have friends of a different race, or the 67 percent who say they view increasing diversity as a good thing.” The personal blends into the political. “Sixty percent of whites under age 30 support Black Lives Matter and agree with its critique of law enforcement.”

“In 1987 only 62 percent of Gen Xers approved of interracial dating. Twenty-five years later, 92 percent of them did, as did 95 percent of millennials. In a 2011 Pew Research Center survey, 89 percent of respondents said that cross-racial marriage was a change for the better or made no difference at all.”

“In 2013, 12 percent of newlyweds married someone of a different race. According to the Census Bureau, 19.7 percent of unmarried cohabiting partners were interracial or interethnic

in 2015....About one quarter of Americans have a close relative married interracially.”

On that firm base, Cashin raises the stakes, such as when she explains that when the Klan arose from the ashes of Reconstruction, it went after any semblance of contact between black men and white women and that “tellingly, the Klan was most active in areas where whites and blacks shared the greatest economic parity.” Similarly, in the twenty-first century, as Cashin noted in a recent radio interview, “Every time you have an assertion of white supremacy today, there’s an economic story there.” The book makes clear that the twists and turns of anti-miscegenation policies are dictated by the needs of elites for “asset accumulation.”

“After assassinating Lincoln,” Cashin writes, “John Wilkes Booth fled to Virginia. He was captured and shot at a farm owned by Confederate sympathizers in Caroline County, where Richard and Mildred Loving would grow up and find each other nearly a century later.”

Virginia’s current surge of mixed marriages should be seen as a direct repudiation of the Confederacy. Interracial relationships may seem merely personal or at most a social phenomenon. But, given America’s urgent need to break the chains of slavery’s legacy, collectively these relationships are part of an onrushing socioeconomic revolution.

Where is this all going? Bad River tribal attorney Phoebe Kebec says that “[The alliance is] going beyond mining... We are building a new society...Creating a new vision that embraces everyone, including a large number of underclass people, is our big challenge.”

Mike Wiggins, Jr., chairman of the Bad River band of Lake Superior Chippewa, adds: “How we’re going to coexist and, ultimately, how we’re going to end up with a model that is enviable on a planetary scale is we’re going to love our neighbor...We’re going to share.”

Of course, we have powerful enemies working night and day to ensure that we’ll never realize this vision on a local, national, or global scale. The greatest strength of the one percent isn’t their military machine, their surveillance apparatus, or their divisive propaganda. It’s that they are absolutely united in their determination to preserve their privileges, no matter the cost to humanity. On the other hand, while we have begun to awaken from the slumber induced by what was once an ever-expanding economy, we don’t yet fully see our commonality or grasp its historic implications. Instead, we see our embryonic linkages with each other as connections between categories. But we have the numbers. We have the moral high ground. If we can become as single-mindedly united as our enemies, as sure as they are that we represent a historical singularity, then they will become mere dust in the wind of earth-shaking change. **CP**

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The Meaning of the Revolution

Revisiting October

BY JOHN WIGHT

To its adherents the Russian Revolution of October 1917 stands as the single most important emancipatory event in human history—of greater importance than the Reformation or the American and French revolutions preceding it in that it went further than religious or political emancipation to engender social emancipation; and with it an end to the exploitation of man by man which describes the human condition fashioned under capitalism.

To its detractors, meanwhile, October ushered in a dark night of communist tyranny under which, per Marx, all that was holy was profaned and all that was solid melted into air. In this rendering October is considered, along with fascism, to have been part of a counter-Enlightenment impulse, one that arrived as the harbinger of a new dark age.

This attempt to place communism and fascism in the same counter-Enlightenment box is both ideologically and intellectually shallow, a product of the long struggle over the right to shape the future between capitalism and communism that raged over most of the 20th century, ending ultimately, so ‘they’ would have us believe, in the triumph of capitalism. However given the plethora of articles and books on the Russian Revolution that have appeared in this its centenary year, it is a struggle that continues in the second decade of the 21st century—at least on the level of ideas.

In his work, *Enlightenment’s Wake*, conservative English philosopher John Gray dispels not only the attempt to establish a synthesis between communism and fascism, whose relationship could only ever be antagonistic, but also the attempt to create ideological and moral distance between communism and a European Enlightenment that gave the world the universality of liberal democracy, regardless of culture or tradition, as the non-negotiable arbiter of civilization and progress. As Gray argues, “In truth, Soviet communism did not emanate from a Russian monastery...It was a quintessentially Western and European enlightenment ideology.”

In truth, the rendering of October from both left and right of the political spectrum is likewise questionable, suffering from the inevitable distortion that comes with viewing the event through skewed ideological prism—thus from the left responsible for shaping an analysis underpinned by idealism rather than materialism, while from the right producing a lapse into Manichaeism, rooted in a Kantian moral imperative which takes as its starting point the inference that the world exists on a blank sheet of paper, and as such the only thing separating ‘good’ from ‘bad’ nations and their respective political systems is the ‘good’ or ‘bad’ character of the men and women forging them.

Lenin’s evolving perspective and Stalin’s demonization

Of the two competing narratives of October it has long been the view from the right that predominates—i.e. the depiction of the event as a coup that succeeded in overthrowing and destroying the embryonic democracy that had begun to take shape in the wake the initial revolution of February 1917 in Petrograd, which had led to the Tsar’s abdication. At the head of this Bolshevik dictatorship, we are led to believe, sat Vladimir Ulyich Lenin—a man so infamous this cognomen is among the most distinct and recognisable of any historical figure—who upon coming to power immediately unleashed unbridled terror against any and all who dared oppose him. Here, the sentiments of Orlando Figes are instructive:

There was a strong puritanical streak in Lenin’s character which later manifested itself in the political culture of his dictatorship. He suppressed his emotions to strengthen his resolve and cultivate the ‘hardness’ he believed was required by the successful revolutionary: the capacity to spill blood for the revolution’s ends.

Figes would have us believe that the development of Lenin’s leadership can be credibly disconnected from the crucible in which its development took place, forced to adapt to changing circumstances and material conditions between the lesser-known and short-lived 1905 revolution, largely confined to Petrograd (now St Petersburg), and its universally recognised 1917 progeny. Such a one dimensional and reductive categorisation can and must be dismissed as analytically and intellectually bereft. As for Lenin’s supposed “puritanical streak,” did Oliver Cromwell not possess a “puritanical streak”? Was George Washington known for his sense of humour and levity? The stakes involved in the success or failure of a revolution—tantamount to life or death—are such that anything less than a ‘puritanical streak’ when it comes to committing to its aims can only be fatal.

But giving Orlando Figes and others of his ideological hue the benefit of the doubt for a moment, perhaps with the passage of time it is difficult to fully grasp the impact of mass poverty, immiseration, illiteracy and slaughter on Russian society and its people, a condition delivered them by a status quo of rigid autocratic rule in service to its own wealth and privileges. Moreover the First World War—the midwife of the Russian Revolution—confirmed the willingness of Russia’s autocracy to shed an ocean of its people’s blood to maintain this wealth and uphold those privileges. When viewed in comparison, Lenin and the Bolsheviks’ “capacity to spill blood” paled.

In point of fact, Lenin’s preferred model of a revolutionary party at the turn of the 20th century was Germany’s SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) with its mass membership, democratic structures, legal newspapers, clubs and associations. But tsarist suppression and the proscription

of socialist organisations drove the Bolsheviks underground and its leadership into exile, where apart from brief periods they were forced to remain until 1917.

Introduction of NEP and weakness of the worker-peasant alliance

The most significant outcome of Lenin's leadership post-1917 was the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921. It represented a retreat from the revolution's maximalist demands, born of the failure of the civil war policy of war communism when it came to driving the country's recovery in conditions of grievous economic and cultural backwardness. Thus, at this juncture, NEP was essential not only to the revolution but the country's survival as economic and social breakdown beckoned. Under its provisions state control of economic activity was relaxed and market relations restored between the peasantry and urban centres with the aim of stimulating the economy. "There was no other credible alternative", Tariq Ali points out, adding the crucial adjunct that in "order to preside over this new transition, the revolutionary dictatorship had to be tough-minded and make sure that the revolution did not collapse."

NEP was introduced in obeisance to the weight of the peasantry in Russia's economic and social life, constituting in 1917 approximately 80 percent of the population. With this in mind, the essential triumph of Lenin and the Bolsheviks was the triumph of the revolutionary alliance—*mychka*—forged between the urban proletariat and the peasantry, specifically the poor peasantry. The Bolshevik slogan 'Land, Peace, and Bread' was key to this alliance, outlining the revolution's aims simply, succinctly and powerfully.

Yet while the *smychka* may have been essential in the ability of the revolution to overthrow autocracy and its bourgeois cohort in October 1917, it was an impediment to the modernisation and industrialisation that was crucial to the revolution's success and development thereafter. Here it must be stressed that revolutions do not take place in a vacuum and are not made under laboratory conditions. When it comes to October, hostile troops from fourteen different countries were deployed to Russia at various points over the course of the civil war in support of the counter-revolutionary 'White' armies arrayed against it. In addition to the deployment of troops by the major and not so major capitalist powers, a determined attempt at economic asphyxiation with the introduction of a blockade was also undertaken - factors that cannot be gainsaid when analysing the course of the revolution's development and disfigurement.

The risks inherent in NEP were clear. By retreating in the face of the backwardness of the countryside, the Bolsheviks were merely deferring a reckoning with the peasantry until a later and more propitious time. There was the added risk of capitalist norms becoming entrenched, along with their political and social consequences. As Jonathan D Smele

outlines, "Just as the Bolsheviks had been obliged to accept, at Brest-Litovsk in 1918, a humiliating peace treaty with Austro-German imperialists as the price for survival, so too, in 1921, in surrendering "War Communism" (sic) in exchange for the NEP, they put their signatures to a "peasant Brest."

Objective conditions

That Russia in 1917 was the least favourable country of any in Europe for socialist and communist transformation is indisputable. The starting point of communism, Marx avers in his works, is the point at which society's productive forces have developed and matured to the point where the existing form of property relations acts as a brake on their continuing development. By then the social and cultural development of the proletariat has incubated a growing awareness of their position within the existing system of production; thereby effecting its metamorphosis from a class 'in itself' to a class 'for itself' and, with it, its role as the agent of social revolution and transformation.

The error in Marx's analysis was that rather than emerge in the advanced capitalist economies of Western Europe, communism was destined to emerge on periphery of the capitalist centres—Russia, China, and Cuba et al.—in conditions not of development or abundance but under-development and scarcity.

The event responsible for creating the objective conditions out of which October emerged was, as mentioned, the First World War. It resulted not in the expansion of the Russian Empire, as the country's tsarist autocracy intended, but in its own destruction. Recounting the start of the 1914-18 war, which found him in exile in Vienna, Trotsky observed how the:

Mobilization and declaration of war have veritably swept off the face of the earth all the national and social conditions in the country. But this is only a political delay, a sort of political moratorium. The notes have been extended to a new date, but they will still have to be paid.

From the vantage of exile in Switzerland, Lenin saw with uncommon clarity how the war presented revolutionaries across Europe with a clear choice. They could either succumb to national chauvinism, fall into line behind their respective ruling classes and support their respective countries' war efforts, or they could use the opportunity to agitate among the workers of said countries for the war to be turned into a civil war in the cause of worldwide revolution. It was a choice separating the revolutionary wheat from its chaff, leading to the collapse of the Second International as with few exceptions former giants of the international Marxist and revolutionary socialist movement succumbed to patriotism and war fever.

The war came, the crisis was there. Instead of revolutionary tactics, most of the Social-Democratic [Marxist] parties launched reactionary tactics, went over to the side of their

respective governments and bourgeoisie. This betrayal of socialism signifies the collapse of the Second (1889-1914) International, and we must realise what caused this collapse, what brought social-chauvinism into being and gave it strength.

Lenin's analysis proved accurate. The ensuing chaos, carnage, and destruction wrought by four years of unparalleled conflict brought the so-called civilised world to the brink of collapse. The European continent's ruling classes had unleashed an orgy of bloodshed in the cause not of democracy or liberty, as the Entente powers fatuously claimed, but over the division of colonies in Africa and elsewhere in the undeveloped world.

The result in Russia was the collapse of a parasitical tsarist autocracy under the weight of social contradictions which the war intensified and made insurmountable. The ostentation and decadence of the Tsar's court had been erected on the bones of the peasantry and an inchoate urban proletariat, whose relationship to the means of production had begun to mould it into a political as well as a social entity.

Splits over the role of the peasantry and Stalin's rise to power

NEP, as mentioned, marked the ebb tide of the post-October revolutionary emancipatory wave, and was introduced in de facto recognition of the Russian peasantry's economic and social weight. It was October's defining contradiction, one that produced splits and schisms within the Bolshevik leadership under pressure of the dark clouds of reaction that were, by the time of Lenin's death in 1924, already looming in the capitalist West.

From the left, or at least a significant section of the international left, the analysis of October and its aftermath is coterminous with the deification of its two primary actors, the aforementioned Lenin and Trotsky, and the demonization of Stalin; depicted as a peripheral player who hijacked the revolution upon Lenin's death, whereupon he embarked on a counter-revolutionary process to destroy its gains and aims.

In truth, the "working-class democracy" Faulkner describes was not ended by Stalin but by Lenin with the support of his comrades, including Trotsky, at the 21st Congress of the Communist Party in 1921 (the Bolshevik Party changed its name to the All-Russian Communist Party in 1918 upon its formal assumption of power) with the ban on factions under the auspices of his resolution, 'Decree on Party Unity'. In the tempest of the civil war that had ensued after the revolution, and concomitant threat to its very survival, Lenin's decree determined that the working-class democracy envisaged prior to the revolution was relegated to an objective that would be achieved in a future yet to be determined.

Writing in the second volume of his magisterial three-part biography of Leon Trotsky, *The Prophet Unarmed*, Isaac Deutscher describes how the Bolsheviks were aware that:

only at the gravest peril to themselves and the revolution could they allow their adversaries to express themselves freely and to appeal to the Soviet electorate. An organized opposition could turn the chaos and discontent to its advantage all the more easily because the Bolsheviks were unable to mobilize the energies of the working class. They refused to expose themselves and the revolution to this peril.

The harsh reality is that the cultural level of the country's nascent and small proletariat, whose most politically advanced cadre would perish in the civil war, was too low for it to take the kind commanding role in the organisation and governance of the country Lenin had hoped and anticipated.

Our state apparatus is so deplorable, not to say wretched, that we must first think very carefully how to combat its defects, bearing in mind that these defects are rooted in the past, which, although it has been overthrown, has not yet been overcome, has not yet reached the stage of a culture, that has receded into the distant past.

Stalin's victory in the internecine struggle for power within the leadership in the wake of Lenin's death was, according to conventional wisdom, down to his Machiavellian subversion and usurpation not only of the party's collective organs of government, but the very ideals and objectives of the revolution itself. This though is a reductive interpretation of the seismic events, both within and outwith Russia, that were in train at this point.

The key ideological questions splitting the leadership of the party post-Lenin were over the primacy of the countryside versus the primacy of the city when it came to the country's economic and industrial development, along with the merits of Trotsky's theory of 'permanent revolution' as opposed to Stalin's formulation of 'socialism in one country'.

As explored, October had been based on the centrality of the *smychka*—the worker-peasant alliance. However towards the end of the civil war it was an alliance that came under increasing strain as the socioeconomic contradictions between the countryside and the city came into ever-sharper relief. And it is here where the accusation that Stalin embarked on a counterrevolutionary process upon taking the helm after Lenin's death is untenable.

When it came to Trotsky, even after the failure of the second German revolution in 1923, his pre-1917 conception of October as the prologue to world revolution, without which it would be condemned to remain a prisoner of the primitive human and cultural material of pre-revolutionary Russia, remained unshakeable. At the same time his view of the peasantry, which had led to accusations of him underestimating its potential as a progressive factor in the revolution's development, was more or less unchanged from the view he held in 1905, when he was writing that the "knot of Russian social and political barbarism is tied in the village; but this does not mean that the village has brought forth a class capable of cutting it."

Despite Trotsky's determination to hold onto the belief in the catalysing properties of October with regard to European and world revolution—which he shared with Lenin—by the year of the latter's death in 1924 it was clear that the prospect of any such revolutionary outbreak in the advanced European economies had ended, and that socialism in Russia would have to be built, per Bukharin, “on that material which exists.”

Opposition to Trotsky and Bukharin's socialism with a human face

Opposing Trotsky on the question of the peasantry in the mid-1920s, Nikolai Bukharin was the most passionate champion of the continuation of the worker-peasant alliance as the key to the revolution's future, which he advocated should ensue along an evolutionary rather than revolutionary path from here on in—i.e. that the era of social convulsion should give way to an era of social peace and equilibrium

Arguments on the left of the party in favour of hyper-industrialisation on the back of the peasantry, utilising the coercive methods that had been employed under war communism to extract the grain required to feed the towns and cities, while exporting the surplus in order to obtain the heavy machinery and equipment necessary for industrial development, were for Bukharin and his supporters anathema. Instead, NEP should remain the cornerstone of the economy with its emphasis on incentivizing the peasantry to increase the yield of agricultural goods and commodities it produced through a reduction in industrial prices, which were controlled by the government. Thus industrialization in the city would take place on the back of consumer demand in the countryside.

“According to Bukharin,” his biographer Stephen F Cohen writes, “the NEP market economy had established ‘the correct combination of the private interests of the small producer [in the countryside] and socialist construction.’” This being said, Bukharin's vision of maintaining NEP as the fulcrum of development was for him not only an economic question but also an ethical one. “Bukharin was groping toward an ethic of socialist industrialization,” Cohen asserts, “an imperative standard delineating the permissible and the impermissible.”¹⁵

Bukharin's position in the mid 1920s, supported by Stalin against the Left Opposition triumvirate of Trotsky, Kamenev, and Zinoviev, turned on the philosophical question of is/ought. For Bukharin, whom Lenin had regarded as the favorite of the party, and who was lionised by the party as its major theorist during the height of his prestige, socialism was as much an essential mechanism for human development as it was for industrial and economic development. “The principle of socialist humanism,” Bukharin opined, involved “a concern for all-round development, for a many-sided life.” Further, he asserted, “the machine is only a means to promote the flowering of a rich, variegated, bright, and joyful life,” where “people's needs, the broadening and enrichment of their life,

is the goal of the socialist economy.”

In the context of the epic and brutal events of the Soviet Union in the 1930s, Bukharin's sentiments stood as a lone beacon of humanity amid the looming clouds of terror that were about to engulf the country. He himself was destined to be the most significant victim, sent to his death on fabricated charges of treason and counterrevolutionary intrigue by his one time comrade and fellow Old Bolshevik, Stalin, in 1937.

Stalin's terror unleashed

The terror unleashed by Stalin against his former comrades and tens of thousands of functionaries and officials occupying the lower echelons of the party and state institutions between 1936 and 1938 is commonly accepted as an exercise in evil for evil's sake, one in which the Soviet leader is reduced to a pantomime villain and latter day Genghis Khan. Though the savagery and brutality of the period is undeniable, arriving at a serious understanding of its place in the history of October does, nonetheless, requires that we take into account the specific political and historical context in which it took place.

By 1931 any pretence of continuing the worker-peasant alliance that had been the fulcrum of the revolution in 1917, and the basis of Bukharin's vision of an evolutionary approach to its continuing development, was over. Though Stalin, during the period of the triumvirate he forged with Kamenev and Zinoviev between 1923 and 1926 in opposition to Trotsky, had paid lip service to this rightist approach to economic and industrial development, the food crisis of 1928-29, leading to the serious risk of famine, saw him undergo a volte-face.¹⁷ Add to this events unfolding in Western Europe at this point, what with the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany, and the gathering storm within and without was real.

Isaac Deutscher: The first of the great [show trials], that of Zinoviev and Kamenev, took place a few months after Hitler's army had marched into the Rhineland; that last, that of Bukharin and Rykov, ended to the accompaniment of the trumpets that announced the Nazi occupation of Austria.

Even then, Deutscher goes on, Stalin was under “no illusions that war could be altogether avoided; and he pondered the alternative courses—agreement with Hitler or war against him—that were open to him. In 1936 the chances of agreement looked very slender indeed. Western appeasement filled Stalin with forebodings. He suspected that the west was not only acquiescing in the revival of German militarism but instigating it against Russia.”

As to the relevance of these events to the show trials and mass purge of Old Bolsheviks that was underway, Deutscher posits the thesis that in:

the supreme crisis of war, the leaders of the opposition, of they had been alive, might indeed have been driven to action by a conviction, right or wrong, that Stalin's conduct

of the war was incompetent and ruinous...Let us imagine for a moment that the leaders of the opposition lived to witness the terrible defeats of the Red Army in 1941 and 1942, to see Hitler at the gates of Moscow...It is possible they would have then attempted to overthrow Stalin. Stalin was determined not to allow things to come to this.

Brutal logic, maybe, but logic nonetheless.

The necessity and human cost of Stalin's five-year plans

In response to the food crisis of 1928-29, Stalin—who by now was approaching the summit of total power—introduced the first of the five-year plans devised with the aim of achieving rapid industrialisation. “We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries,” he declared in 1931. “We must make good this lag in ten years. Either we do it or they crush us.”

The catastrophic human cost of hyper-industrialization is not in dispute, especially on the part of the countryside, where forced collectivization of the peasantry into state run farms caused havoc. Crucially, by now there was no attempt to make any political distinction between the poor peasantry and Kulaks (wealthier peasants who owned farms and hired labourers). All were lumped together as enemies of the people with earth-shattering consequences.

The hard but crucial question when it comes to collectivization is this though: Despite its brutality was it avoidable?

The question answers itself if we accept that without Stalin's programme of hyper industrialisation, the ability of the Soviet Union to prevail in the face of the Nazi onslaught unleashed against the country in 1941 would have been impossible to imagine. Evidence in support of this assertion lies in the fact that between 1928 and 1937 coal production in the Soviet Union rose from 36 million to 130 million tonnes: iron from 3 million to 15 million tonnes: oil from 2 million to 29 million tonnes: and electricity from 5000 kilowatts to 29,000 kilowatts. Meanwhile, over the same period, major infrastructure projects were completed, while advances in education, particularly technical subjects, were also phenomenal.

Again, the price paid by millions of men, women, and children for those achievements was inordinate. It is why those guilty of romanticising October would do well to linger on the fact, previously touched upon, that revolutions are not made under laboratory conditions; their trajectories and outcomes are less the product of moral design and more the result of a merciless struggle against specific and concrete material, cultural and external factors. “Rights can never be higher than the economic form of society and the culture development which is conditioned by it,” Marx cautioned over half a century before, doing so with a cogency and prescience confirmed by the trajectory of October in the aftermath of 1917.

As for those who cite the human cost of October and its aftermath as evidence of its unadulterated evil, no serious

student of the history of Western colonialism and imperialism could possibly argue its equivalence when weighed on the scales of human suffering. Here Alan Badiou reminds us that “the huge colonial genocides and massacres, the millions of deaths in the civil and world wars through which our West forged its might, should be enough to discredit, even in the eyes of ‘philosophers’ who extol their morality, the parliamentary regimes of Europe and America.”

The process of industrialization, regardless of where and whenever embarked upon, has always exacted a heavy price in human suffering. Whether we are talking the century long Industrial Revolution which transformed the British economy and society between the mid 18th and 19th centuries,²⁴ or whether the industrialisation of the United States that occurred afterwards²⁵ (in a process that also included the 1861-65 Civil War), it is a historical fact that remains impervious to contradiction. Thus we can say that those generations forced to pay the price of industrialisation throughout the developed world are owed a debt of gratitude by the succeeding generations that have reaped its benefits and rewards.

October's place in history

No revolution or revolutionary process ever achieves the ideals and vision embraced by its adherents at the outset. Revolutions advance and retreat under the weight of internal and external realities and contradictions, until arriving at the state of equilibrium that conforms to the limitations imposed by the particular cultural and economic constraints of the space and time in which they are made.

Though Martin Luther advocated the crushing of the Peasants Revolt led by Thomas Munzer, can anyone gainsay Luther's place as one of history's great emancipators? Likewise, while the French Revolution ended not with liberty, equality, fraternity but Napoleon, who can argue that at Waterloo the Corsican general's Grande Armee was fighting in the cause of human progress against the dead weight of autocracy and aristocracy represented by Wellington? In similar vein, Stalin's socialism in one country and resulting five-year plans allowed the Soviet Union to overcome the monster of fascism in the 1940s.

This is why, in the last analysis, the fundamental metric of the October Revolution 1917 is the Battle of Stalingrad in 1942. And for that, whether it cares to acknowledge it or not, the world will forever be in its debt. **CP**

John Wight is the author of a politically incorrect and irreverent Hollywood memoir *Dreams That Die*, published by Zero Books. .

CULTURE & REVIEWS

Selling Ourselves to Live

BY RUTH FOWLER

About two years after I graduated from Cambridge University, I moved to New York to attend graduate school. I'd been waitlisted at NYU, accepted at The New School and Columbia still hadn't made up their mind, but in the end economics made up their mind for me. I failed to get the Fulbright scholarship I'd been shortlisted for, my loan application was rejected, and my internship at Hearst fell through because I needed to be on a student visa. It became pretty

thrown in) in exchange for cash so that I could survive. There was something so unashamedly prosaic and truthful about this transaction, that I wondered how I had managed to believe throughout my teenage years that my career would advance through [white skin] and mere meritocracy: good grades, hard work, nice manners.

Manhattan is saturated with sex. Not sexy sex, but sex as an urgent tick, an itch, a need, a compulsion. Groppers and masturbators on the subway, a bachelor party on a boat where someone ripped away your g-string, sex with strangers whose name you couldn't remember, the kind of sawdust sex that seems obligatory, you wish would end before it even began. In the strip club my fellow

a personal trainer, grabbed my soft, fleshy thighs (when the Champagne Manager wasn't looking, naturally) and declared that he would text me a workout routine to help me "make the best of myself".

I quickly learned to "make the best of myself"—or rather, to cram myself into a preconceived notion of a female commodity: fake blonde hair, perfumed and lacquered, perfectly winged thick liner, erroneous hairs ripped out, others neatly trimmed like an Ohio lawn. Working the day shift in FlashDancers, across the street from the David Letterman Theater, I began to make enough money that I no longer had to scour the Craigslist ads and wonder if I should contact "Keith"

"The honest truth is that any freedom I ever had in my three decades of living has been bought with the cold hard cash of being objectified in some manner, in trading my consent for the ability to survive."

clear that moving to New York without having any of these things in place had been an extremely bad idea. Instead of simply going home—home, as it was, did not exist, a story for a later date - I decided that I would take my clothes off for a living and write about it. While I'd already had tastes of confusing and painful sexual episodes, drunken, mollied-up mishaps, muddied wrastlings with consent where I'd woken up ashamed and sore and convinced that it was my fault—while I'd had tastes, that is, of what it is to be a woman in the 21st century—this time in Manhattan was the first time I completely embraced objectification. I chose to reduce myself to being a pair of tits, an ass and a vagina (the occasional funny anecdote

dancers would inch their butts, straining beneath tiny string panties, lower and lower onto their client's crotch, grinding quickly, deliciously, before the Champagne Manager would appear furiously and snap at them to "Quit that!" and they'd go back to waving their ass uselessly in the air, snapping gum, looking bored, instinctively batting away a roving hand without even registering it.

I was a pretty shitty stripper at first—the girls were horrified by my dirty feet (I'd walk, in flip flops, all the way from Marcy Avenue to the L train every day), appalled by my uncoiffed hair, disgusted by my short, bitten nails, and simply mystified by my complete inability to apply eyeliner. One of my first clients,

who had a spare room just off St Mark's Place and worked long hours in the city and wanted to offer that room, free, to someone just about my age and weight and height who was OK with wandering around in their underwear occasionally. By objectifying myself, I began to make enough money that I could afford an apartment of my own, a beautiful little one bedroom apartment in NoHo on Mott next to Bleeker, a place where I could retreat and, for a few hours every day, exist in a vacuum void of stares, gropes, comments and the ever-present, insidious reflex to smile to cover every emotion that might flit through my face.

Eventually I sold the book I wrote about this time and left the club, and

eventually, I left New York when it felt like the feral sadness it had grown in my heart might crawl up into my throat and settle there, making it impossible for me to breathe. It changed me, without a doubt. The book I wrote was roundly hated, women were the loudest, most vociferous opponents of my words, particularly women who had worked in the sex industry. The sexist, racist, cruel, objectionable world I described was, they said, evidence that I was sexist, racist, cruel and objectionable. When I wrote about the clichés and stereotypes perpetuated by both the club and preconceived notions of women who worked in this industry, I was perpetuating clichés and stereotypes. It was a difficult book, and of course, ten years later, much of it makes me cringe: its dramatic and convoluted, self-important prose, its hyperbolic sense of tragedy. It did not embrace sex positivity and it did not argue sex work should be embraced. It remained absolutely, unwaveringly apolitical in a sense. This exists. It fucking sucks. It's killing me and it's killing others. Maybe it's the only option sometimes. I got out. The end. Men hated the book as it wasn't sexy enough. Women hated the book because I was a cunt.

What I learned in the strip club taught me more about the realities of being a woman in the 21st century than anything else has done. It was there I became acutely aware that my intelligence, coupled with my sarcasm, my sharp tongue and my intolerance of bullshit, were probably the biggest handicaps I might have in life. I learned, also, that while men dictated the terms of my existence, women were complicit in maintaining systemic inequality. For each piece of my soul sliced off by a man, there have been just as many interactions I have had with women which make me feel even more isolated, bizarre and peculiar for feeling like I do: angry, furious, that I am disempowered by my gender and my sex, and that the only negotiations I have left are available to me only through transac-

tions, myself as the currency. "I was unprepared for the naked contempt, the unapologetically hateful public shaming and vilification I received in my own country. Much of it from women. Women! . . . It hurt me. Badly." Asia Argento writes. Part of our legacy as women has been the internalization of trauma so that it rips our souls apart, so that we, in turn, rip our sisters apart when they tell the truth, when they ask for support, when they articulate that, perhaps, they have had enough of this world of groping leers, fumbling threats and dark, frightening things far, far worse than I can articulate.

What has made me understand the social, political and economic status of my role as a woman in the 21st century has been the strip club: the women who worked there, the men who paid for us. The honest truth is that any freedom I have ever had in my three decades of living has been bought with the cold hard cash of being objectified in some manner, in trading my consent for the ability to survive. I dared to write about this in a way which revealed its ugly nature: the racism, sexism, cruelty, and sadness which existed in me and my peers by necessity, as survival skills, in an environment which was racist, sexist, cruel and sad. My failures, culminating in a difficult, objectionable personality which holds rage at its core like a bright, hard diamond—have been compounded by my inability to be as objectified as much as men would prefer. I am reminded of this most acutely as a woman in a Film Production class in Santa Monica College right now, a class where I have been chided by the professor and my male peers on my "attitude" after I dared to leave set, where I had an extremely low-level position, after an eight hour unpaid shoot with no breaks, to pick up my three-year-old son from preschool - and then failed to come back for a three hour production meeting. Unprofessional!

There is no difference—zero—between myself, Gwyneth Paltrow, Lupita N'yong'o, all the Hollywood

darlings whose claims of assault at the hands of Weinstein have sent ripples of pearl-clutching horror through a man's world which will still show up to buy a lap-dance from FlashDancers—sanctioned objectification, commodified and tamed. What we learn in Cambridge or Harvard, or Yale, or Hollywood, or FlashDancers, or the Film Production class at community college is exactly the same: that to survive, we must sell something of ourselves, and that also to survive, we must say no to selling all of ourselves, even when that no is not heard or acknowledged. **CP**

Ruth Fowler is a writer and photographer living in Los Angeles. Her play, 'bled for the household truth', dealing with sawdust sex and isolating intimacy in a hot and lonely New York, will premiere at Rogue Machine Theater in Los Angeles in November.

Bay Area Clay A Legacy of Social Consciousness

BY WESLEY T WRIGHT

Perhaps it's the humble and unassuming nature of clay that gives it its power. A naturally occurring common material with the ability to capture the unmitigated touch of an artist, in the same manor of the first human craftsman who dug it from the earth to fashion it into the form of their choosing. While at the same time the utility of this material and its association with craft and folk art may also be the reason that it has not been given its due respect in the art world.

The San Francisco Bay area has been a hotbed of alternative culture and a fertile ground for progressive creative minds and movements such as the beat poets, and Bay Area Figurative movement. Lesser known is the movement of representational ceramic sculpture that has embodied the spirit of creativity,

resistance, and irreverence that thrives there today. "Bay Area Clay; A Legacy of Social Consciousness," is a traveling exhibition that celebrates this movement, framing it within the context of the time and place of its origin, and acknowledging its influence on generations of Bay Area artists. The exhibition features a selection of prominent Bay Area Ceramic Artists who have been active over the last several decades or more teaching, and speaking their truth through the medium of clay.

One of the most eloquent voices of the group is that of Richard Notkin who is a contributing writer of the exhibition catalogue along with Lisa Reinertson who is a curator of the exhibition. In his article Notkin explains the genesis of this social consciousness in society and art within the context of the tumultuous 1960's which witnessed the assassinations of Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and others. Another trauma was the ongoing disaster of the Vietnam War. A war from which no young American man was safe. Notkin states that: "Even if we weren't sent into this muddy blood-soaked meat grinder ourselves, we were directly affected by friends and relatives who were returning damaged—mentally and/or physically—or in flag draped coffins" These events caused Notkin and others to not only question the leadership of the country but also the priorities of its leadership. This mindset would lead to the birth of art movements such as Pop and Funk. After studying at the Kansas Art Institute, Notkin ended up at UC Davis under the influence of Robert Arneson, one of the leading figures in the Funk Art movement, and a featured artist in this exhibition. Arneson was most well-known for his highly controversial portrait bust of San Francisco Mayor George Mascone, which was commissioned by the city of San Francisco. The controversy centered around the provocative content of the piece which graphically alluded to the circumstances of Mascone's

murder. The raucous, and sharp witted sensibilities of Arneson would permeate a generation of artists who studied under him including several ceramic sculptors represented in this exhibition such as Arthur Gonzales, Richard Shaw, Lisa Reinertson and of course Richard Notkin.

In her article in the exhibition catalogue Lisa Reinertson touches on the theme of mentorship, describing the way that Bay Area Educators including Arneson, Viola Frey, and Stephen De Staebler, propagated the medium of clay, revealing its versatile nature beyond the realm of pottery and its adaptability to a variety of artistic styles and applications including painterly surfaces, installation, pop art, and of course political narrative in the form of representational sculpture. Many of these students would go on to become teachers, and many of their students have become teachers in turn. In this manor, we are truly speaking of a legacy.

One cannot fully understand the roots of this legacy and the artists within this exhibition without touching on the Funk Art movement. Though many of the artists featured in this exhibition would not be considered Funk artists, this art form became a significant influence on these artists to varying degrees and in different ways. Funk Art emerged in the 1960s primarily in the San Francisco Bay Area. The name Funk eludes to the passionate and sensual nature of the art form which some art critics likened to Funk music, and an association with a foul odor. It is generally characterized as a reaction against non-figurative abstract art, though many Funk artists embrace the spontaneity of abstract expressionism which was held in high regard when Funk came on the scene. This movement also embraces some of the iconography of Pop Art often using every day subject matter in a joyfully subversive manor. It is generally sensual, quirky, disgusting, irreverent, and sometimes autobiographical or political.

Regarding the political nature of this

exhibition Lisa Reinertson also says that "one of the common threads I see in the work that has come from this legacy of clay artists is what I call "the subtle art of social criticism" as bold as the artwork often is, it seems to share a common subtlety of social critique. These artists avoid confrontational verbal argument and overly dogmatic literal statements by blending technical mastery, humor, beauty, pathos, and rich visual layers of meaning. Thus, the artist can express an idea in their artwork that hits the viewer deeply and intuitively. The personal is political and the political is aesthetic."

This statement is certainly consistent with Reinertson's own work. She is a true master of the figure and imbues her sculptures with highly nuanced gesture and emotion. Her work captures a sense of life and realism while retaining the evidence of her process through sensual scrapes and dabs of texture left by her tools and her hands. Reinertson's work often deals with mother and child imagery reminiscent of Mary Cassatt, but with a more timeless sensibility. Her deep sense of compassion extends in to the natural world as animals become interchangeable with humans. In her Pieta piece from the exhibition a Mother Mary figure holds the limp bodies of a polar bear, a gorilla, a wolf, a zebra and a mountain lion. This compassion is evident not only in Reinertson's work but also in her life history and her present-day activism. She has worked with animal rescue programs and has been active in fighting environmentally damaging practices of fossil fuel companies in and around the San Francisco Bay Area. Her parents marched with Martin Luther King from Selma to Montgomery in 1965. In 1999 Reinertson got the chance to honor Dr. King by creating a 7-foot-tall bronze sculpture of the civil rights leader in Riverside California.

Another powerful female voice in this exhibition known for creating monumental works of art is that of Viola Frey. Building modularly Frey

stacks often brightly colored units in order to create imposing and expressive figures, some of which exceed 10ft in height. The sheer scale of this work is essential to her conceptual content where suited male figures tower over the viewer, while beneath this veil of authority lies a vulnerability and a critique of corporate power and gender roles. Her bright color palate and playful rendering contrasts with the scale and often severe expressions of her figures creating an enigmatic tension in her work. Frey spent many years on the faculty the California College of Art beginning in 1965. Her work has received significant recognition and she has received numerous endowments and fellowships. Throughout her career she has played a significant role in elevating the material of clay into the realm of fine art.

Continuing this legacy of unique voices in the CCA faculty is Arthur Gonzales. Gonzales creates mysterious compositions with ceramic and mixed media, employing a creative freedom that transcends his materials. Often representing the archetype of the fool, his subconscious characters navigate a dark and perilous world. His artist's statement describes his work as encouraging "serious deliberation and reflection on the relationship between personal concerns and world issues." Gonzales is also a former student of Arneson.

Richard Shaw, another former student of Arneson would apply many of the lessons that he learned at UC Davis, but would take his work in a stylistically different direction from his mentor, becoming one of the leading figures in Trompe l'oeil ceramic scul-

ture. The son of an artist mother and a cartoonist father, Shaw's unique upbringing primed him for a career as an artist with impeccable craftsmanship and an eye for detail. Through the use of his endless collection of handmade plaster slip molds, he creates narrative still life compositions and assemblage figures entirely from slip-cast porcelain



Lisa Reinertson, "Pieta", 2012, 36 x 32 x 12". Photo: Scott McCue

and ceramic materials. Each composition is meticulously constructed and virtually indistinguishable from real life objects. Artist Beth Goldberg stated that "Residing amidst the humor and irreverence of Shaw's porcelain sculptures is a quiet sympathy for humanity and its foibles."

Ehren Tool, who worked with Shaw in the ceramics department at the University of California Berkeley for many years, is a Marine veteran of the first Gulf War. He has created nearly 20,000 cups depicting the harsh realities of war and directly faces the controversies surrounding geopolitical conflicts and the politics of war. The cups

become a canvas on which Tool creates his subversive collages using laser cup press-molds, stamps, drawings, decals, and other means, giving his work a rich visual texture. When displayed on large shelves in neat rows on a gallery wall this visual texture expands in to an energetic rhythm of storytelling that may leave the viewer with more questions than answers.

This is in fact Tool's goal; to spark a dialogue about the uncomfortable realities of war that are all too easy to look away from. But the gallery is not the primary place that Tools work exists. His work is more about social practice than gallery exhibition, this is why he has sent his cups to Pentagon Officials, presidents, and other politicians. While war so often is driven by capitalist forces, Tool defies the capitalist model by giving his work away to whoever shows up to his exhibitions so that these messengers of a suppressed reality can exist in a variety of spaces, where they will hopefully continue to help confront the harsh reality of war. One is

left with the impression of a congregation taking communion as Tool hands out his cups one by one, connecting with each person as if to bless them as he hands them a cup covered in horrific imagery. Tool says of his cups "I would like my work to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the world. That is a lot to ask of a cup..."

Speaking of messengers, another potent voice who confronts the topic of war is Mark Messenger. Mark packs a rich variety of symbolic imagery in to his monumental sculptures in an energetic yet orderly and illustrative manor reminiscent of Mayan or Egyptian Hieroglyphics. He is a student

of history, especially ancient history, incorporating the iconography of civilizations such as the Minoans, Aztecs and animistic indigenous cultures. His work often deals with the dualities of the human condition in which there is no pure good or evil, but rather conflicting deep ceded impulses that that when unchecked can lead to war, genocide, and exploitation.

Building modularly in a similar manor to Viola Frey, Messenger constructed his monumental sculpture “Cliff Hanger” which is the centerpiece of this exhibition standing roughly 10ft tall. The form of the piece consists of two hands clutching each other by the wrist as if one hand belongs to someone hanging on for dear life. Each hand represents an opposing side of the human psyche that are bound together by some sort of tumultuous yet symbiotic relationship. This epic composition leaves the viewer to ponder the

uncertain implications of this writhing set of forces in which the psychological manifests itself into the world.

Wanxin Zhang works in a similarly anachronistic manor often blending the format of the Terracotta Warriors from the 3rd century BC, with modern subject matter, connecting world history and culture of the past to the present as he addresses social and political concerns. His potent monolithic figures blend the technical mastery gained from his formal training at the

prestigious LuXun Academy of Fine Art in his native country China, with a San Francisco Bay Area ethos, a region which he has called home for the past 25 years. His surfaces bear the rough immediacy of his mark making, compli-

ing a “conversation between the artist and the material”. In describing her own work, she says that “The transient state of our existence” is her muse.

Stan Welsh utilizes the human form in an entirely different manor, creat-

ing beautifully bleak mixed media compositions often involving nomadic enrobed figures bearing the burden of their worldly possessions on their backs. As they travel these figures encounter imposing watery environments suggesting a feeling of isolation, struggle, and apprehension. In his series entitled “Migrations” Welsh seeks not merely to address the tragic mass displacement that has ravaged millions of people in recent years, but rather his goal is to “create an enigmatic space that evokes a perception of distance and emptiness where nature rules supreme. Compositions are meant to correlate with the complexity and strain of our at-



*Richard Notkin, “The Consent of Silence” 2015, 13.75 x 10”x 10”.
Courtesy of Zolla/Lieberman Gallery*

mented with splatters, drips and washes of slips and glaze reminiscent of the abstract expressionist ceramic sculptures of Peter Voukos.

The work of Michelle Gregor also blends elements of abstract expressionism with monolithic figures. While more understated and gestural than the work of Zhang, Gregor nevertheless imbues her female figures with an affirmation of power, grace, and celebration. The personal becomes the political as Gregor explores the female form engag-

tempts to understand morality in its entirety.” Recently retired, Welsh taught at San Jose State for over 30 years, passing on his gifts of knowledge and expertise to a new generation of ceramic artists, along with fellow teacher and ceramic artist Monica Van Den Dool.

Van Den Dool’s conceptual concerns lie within a connection or lack of connection with the nature and mortality. In her “Still Lives” series she subverts the traditions of depicting bountiful displays of game animals, fruits, veg-

etables, and other tropes of abundance by rendering such animals with a cartoonish sensibility and little to no color. She then highlights the piece with gratuitously “saccharine” bright luscious fruits literally oozing with color. This contrast confronts the viewer with lurid and unsettling imagery that is both morbidly playful and exquisitely composed. Lisa Reinertson describes Van Den Dool’s work as: “simultaneously experienced as a metaphor for the human condition, and as a jarring confrontation for the viewer to consider our “stewardship” of other living beings on the planet.”

Another artist who blends morbid humor with social and political commentary is Mark Lancet, who addresses the topic of war through figurative woodfired and mixed media sculptures. “Missile Defense” is a life size abstract torso with a copper pale on its head, an abstract geometric hole in its chest, and a warm orange sphere on one side of the torso. The sculpture references the Regan Era Star Wars missile defense system which Lancet describes as being About as effective as wearing a bucket a bucket on your head. After having spoken to engineers and scientists who have been involved in the development of this system, Lancet describes this system as merely an attempt to shift wealth from the citizens to the already wealthy military industrial complex. The price of Lancets sculpture is one million dollars, which is a bargain price for a missile defense system which is as effective as the multi-billion dollars one that our government currently has in place. The cavity in the chest references Aztec figurines which bear a chest plate or hollow space where a deity effigy might be kept. In Lancets interpretation, the cavity represents “the dynamic incompleteness of human beings.” This Incompleteness causes us to fill the void within us with knowledge, experience, or a partner which ideally complements and completes us. On the darker side this void can leave us vulnerable to addiction or to be tricked and taken

advantage of.

On November 12th 2017 Richard Notkin delivered a powerful artist talk to a packed room full of artists, students, and members of the public, at Arts Benicia, in the same town where Robert Arneson, the mentor of Notkin, Lisa Reinertson and others lived for many years. Before presenting Notkin, Reinertson stated that this exhibition is only a selection of artists who have been a vital part of this movement, and many artists who have greatly contributed to this legacy are “here with us today.” Notkin began his presentation with a history of the movement naming many of the 20th century figures who helped bring clay from a primarily utilitarian craft material, in to one of the most adaptable and expressive mediums ever employed by artists. He then showed a PBS documentary on his work and transitioned in to a slide lecture which showed a progression of his artistic practice, from an exquisitely rendered series inspired by Yixing teapots, to his massive tile murals created from impeccably rendered smoked relief tiles, which come together to create a grayscale image of an atomic bomb blast. Before taking questions Notkin concluded his talk with some reflections on the role of an artist in a world that seems no less cruel, corrupt, or violent than the one that he and his colleagues set out to challenge over forty years ago. I will conclude this article by paraphrasing some of these comments and the comments from the PBS documentary:

“The impacts of our many works—our collective creativity—can and should ripple outwards across our communities, and even our planet, and impact upon the lives of others in positive ways...“Works of art ... have always illuminated the potential of our species creative spirit, with its positive effect on our myriad cultures and civilization as a whole. Creativity is the polar opposite of destruction, and the collective efforts of all artists act as a counterbalance to our species

destructive tendencies, our dark side. The arts—visual, performing, literary, etc.—not only communicate across differing cultures and nationalities, but provide a universal link amongst the people who inhabit our planet. These links are timeless, and the great art and architecture, poetry and theater of past eras continue to illuminate the highest achievements of humankind...it is the conceptual and aesthetic strength of the art which is capable of carrying profound messages, as opposed to the corollary. The message alone will not carry the art...” “Our human species is very amazing. We have these 2 potentials for creation and destruction. If all creative people stop making art I really think we’d perish as a species... I’m not going to make the teapot that saves the world, but Gandhi said that if you drop enough grains of sand in to the mightiest machine than you will stop that machine. So I figure this is my contribution to man’s collective creativity.” Notkin concludes his talk with a quote from artist and philosopher Andre Malraux: “Art is a revolt against man’s fate.” (10) The exhibition continues on to the Pence Gallery in Davis California from April 27th to June 10th, 2018. It will coincide with the California Conference for the Advancement of Ceramic Art. **CP**

WESLEY T. WRIGHT is a Northern California-based ceramic and mixed media artist and arts educator. His evocative sculptures have been exhibited in galleries and museums across the country including the Glassell Fine Arts Museum in Houston, Texas, and the De Young Museum in San Francisco, California. Recently, Wright has been working on a community based art project in collaboration with Youth Spirit Artworks in Berkeley, California. He currently teaches ceramic sculpture at the Academy of Art University.

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