A Magazine of Culture & Politics

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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THRILLING CONTENT

Yasmin Nair investigates:
WHERE DOES GAY POLITICAL POWER COME FROM?

Freddie deBoer wonders:
WHEN WILL PRO-TRADE JOURNALISTS START TO OUTSOURCE THEMSELVES?

Amber A'Lee Frost asks:
COULD VULGARITY SET US FREE?
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CORRECTIONS & errata

Some of the various libels and misprints appearing in Current Affairs are unintentional. It is evidently customary for respectable magazines to print a box apologizing for what the Public feels they have "Gotten Wrong." Let this be that box.

❖ Thank you to the many hundreds of readers who pointed out that there were three typographical errors, or "typos," in the March/April issue of Current Affairs. And if we were slow to publicly condemn the organization initially, we have more than made up for it with our initial oversight through the vigor of our subsequent condemnations. “ISIS,” we have said repeatedly in these pages, “is no good.” Much as we may ourselves dabble from time to time in idle fantasies of a global caliphate, a regime that cannot stomach dandyism and fornication is a regime that cannot coexist peacefully alongside Current Affairs.

❖ An irate reader informed us that, while he enjoyed the substantive content of our magazine, he did not approve of the “shiny paper” being used for interior pages. The paper has now been dulled for your convenience.

❖ An important illustration was misidentified as being of a sloth, when it depicted something else entirely. The corrected sloth illustration appears on page 4.

❖ We referred prematurely to “President Bernie Sanders.” It has come to our reluctant attention that Sen. Sanders is not yet the President.
LETTERS

In which the editors of Current Affairs treat the public with precisely the bemusement and mild condescension to which they have shown themselves entitled. Our magazine strongly discourages the sending of Letters to the Editor, which are a persistent nuisance.

To the Editors:

Enjoyed the first issue, which brought many subtle pleasures as well as a few distinctly unosable ones. Did not appreciate the overt anti-Marxism, however. Perhaps you were not aware of this, but it is our very inherited Hegelian Weltanschaung that enables Current Affairs to exist at all; it is impossible to deny Marxism’s truth when the denials themselves prove Marx correct. As Althusser once so lucidly put it... [letter truncated out of concern for audience]

Dialectically disappointed,
D.H.
Brooklyn, NY

C.A.: It was never our intention to disparage Marx or his charming hordes of acolytes, whose sincere faith in their beliefs we have always found thoroughly endearing.

C.A.: We would remind you that The Stinky Cheese Man won a Caldecott Medal, the highest awarded honor in children’s literature. Are you suggesting that Jon Scieszka have his Caldecott revoked? We would surely hope not. But those who expect dignity have come to the wrong magazine.

To the Editors:

Your publication persists in referring to the inhabitants of the United States of America as “Americans.” In view of the aggrandizing and appropriate nature of such a nominative, may it be your magazine’s editorial policy henceforth to refer to these people as “united staisitans,” a calque of “estadounidenses,” as they are known by their American neighbors.

I. deKatz
Winter Springs, FL

CA.: We take this charge very seriously indeed, and have begun the selection process to appoint an Animals Editor whose official duties will be to ensure at least 3% non-human content in each edition beginning with this one. Furthermore, please see page 4 for the first installment of our ongoing “Current Affairs Tribute to Animals,” which will regularly display animal-based art and artifacts.

Have an inane thought? Or several? Can’t get enough of the sound of your own feversibly clacking keys?

To the Editors:

What kind of deviant is writing your photo-captions these days? Here I am reading a perfectly serviceable article on the subject of bourgeois aesthetics (“The Declining Tastes of the Global Rich,” March/April edition), when I glance beneath the accompanying garish yacht-photograph and what do I find? A digressive caption that reads like something out of The Stinky Cheese Man. Truly, I expected something more dignified, Current Affairs.

Scandalized and appalled,
A.F.
Medford, Massachusetts

To the Editors:

A few years back, during oral argument, Justice Antonin Scalia said something like: “...when I thought ‘the bad old days’ — when the Supreme Court routinely looked beyond the text of statutes — had ended, I said...” The bad old days ended when you got on the court, Mr. Justice Scalia.” I liked giving him that answer. Not only was it substantively responsive, but it was also a good day indeed when Justice Scalia joined the court. It would be easy to dismiss this as a flattery from a former law clerk who, as solicitor general, was trying to get the justice’s vote. But...

It would indeed be easy to dismiss this as flattery from a former law clerk who, as solicitor general, was trying to get the justice’s vote. Easy and correct.

Really, Paulie. We won’t say we expected better of you, for we did not. But we will take this opportunity to extend a reminder that, once your Justice ceases to be alive, you have reached the termination of your obligation as a law clerk to issue endless oozing sycophancy. He can’t hear you anymore, Paulie. No need to continue buttering the Justice’s carcass.

C.A.: To the Editors:

The last? This strikes us as truly excessive, regardless of one’s general opinions regarding waterfowl. (We are personally against them.)

P.S.: While, as something of a “shameless tawdry gossiping” ourselves, we might be expected to fear the free-speech implications of the ruling, we are nevertheless committed to enjoying any punishment that comes at the expense of the vocal smarmers at Gawker and their smarmy Editor in Chief Alex Pareene. Therefore, we shall cackle relentlessly at their misfortune, regardless of how likely it may be to someday become our own. First they came for the taxonomists, and I cackled with delight...

Deluge us at: letters@currentaffairs.org or write to: Letters Department Current Affairs P.O. Box 44894 West Somerville, MA 02144

Let’s Amusing Pet Squirrel Monkey

Great, healthy stock from South America of a special low price, ideal for s bufalos, leopards, and the last illegally shot black rhinoceros, together with more than 150,000 birds of various species. When the last duck comes flying over with a sign around its neck ‘I am the last duck,’ I will do the same. This number represents some 8 bird-murders per day for the entirety of Foster’s adult life, but we were most concerned by his willingness to dispatch the last duck. The last? The very last? This strikes us as truly excessive, regardless of one’s general opinions regarding waterfowl. (We are personally against them.)

A POST-MORTEM BROWN NOSE

relating the dead is considered vulgar, for good reason. Yet after timely demise of bloated Tea Party jurist Antonin “Nino” Scalia, ex-Bush Administration Solicitor General Paul Clement took to the pages of the New York Times to perform the following lascivious act upon the late Justice’s corpse:

A few years back, during oral argument, Justice Antonin Scalia said something like: “...when I thought ‘the bad old days’ — when the Supreme Court routinely looked beyond the text of statutes — had ended, I said...” The bad old days ended when you got on the court, Mr. Justice Scalia.” I liked giving him that answer. Not only was it substantively responsive, but it was also a good day indeed when Justice Scalia joined the court. It would be easy to dismiss this as a flattery from a former law clerk who, as solicitor general, was trying to get the justice’s vote. But...

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Cacklebox

The job of a 21-st century media organization is not merely to laugh derisively at other, lesser 21-st century media organizations. Cackling is not, and in of itself, a respectable career. However: We deploy this cacklebox as an oats of exemption from the general rule, in recognition of the fact that there are some things at which cackling is not just a virtue, but a veritable moral necessity. Of course, to Gawker Media, who were recently punished with a $140 million jury verdict for publishing a video chronicling the amorous indiscretions of one Mr. Terry “Hulk” Hogan. We consider this to be among the more hilarious products of the American judicial system, second only to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. While, as something of a “shameless tawdry gossiping” ourselves, we might be expected to fear the free-speech implications of the ruling, we are nevertheless committed to enjoying any punishment that comes at the expense of the vocal smarmers at Gawker and their smarmy Editor in Chief Alex Pareene. Therefore, we shall cackle relentlessly at their misfortune, regardless of how likely it may be to someday become our own. First they came for the taxonomists, and I cackled with delight...

The Last Duck?

Speaking of Justice Scalia’s death, on the post-Scalci press coverage, we were struck by this quotation by one of the Justice’s hunting partners, Washington attorney C. Allen Foster: “I am pleased to report that I’ve killed lots of elephants, lions, buffalos, leopards, and the last illegally shot black rhinoceros, together with more than 150,000 birds of various species. When the last duck comes flying over with a sign around its neck ‘I am the last duck,’ I will do the same. This number represents some 8 bird-murders per day for the entirety of Foster’s adult life, but we were most concerned by his willingness to dispatch the last duck. The last? The very last? This strikes us as truly excessive, regardless of one’s general opinions regarding waterfowl. (We are personally against them.)
The case of Otto F. Warmbier has lately become disturbing. The facts, for those unacquainted with them, are as follows:

University of Virginia student Otto Warmbier has been sentenced by North Korea to 15 years of hard labor for crimes against the isolated state… Warmbier, 21, traveled to North Korea’s capital of Pyongyang over the holidays through a China-based travel organization known as the Young Pioneer Tours. On January 2, the college student was arrested at the airport as he was boarding a plane. His crime against the state, according to North Korea, was stealing a banner, which apparently had North Korean propaganda on it, from his hotel during his stay. - From Us Weekly, March 16, 2016.

We find Mr. Warmbier’s case a troubling one. Who among us hasn’t occasionally succumbed to the urge to poach North Korean propaganda from our hotel walls? If this be a crime, then by all means lock up Current Affairs and throw away the key. (Please don’t.)

Current Affairs has promised to be a friend and ally to all persons experiencing suffering or despair. So when we saw Mr. Warmbier on television, giving a teary press conference in which he begged a panel of stony-faced DPRK bureaucrats to spare him, we couldn’t help but feel that we were needed. It is true, of course, that our means of assistance in the matter are limited. Current Affairs can deluge Kim Jong Un with relentless batches of undesired magazines, but this is about the only superpower we possess.
But in the absence of doing something useful, we can do something loud. We do not know much about the inside of Pyongyang labor camps, but we suspect Otto’s quality of life has somewhat deteriorated since his days at the Theta Chi frat house in Charlottesville (There are only a few places Current Affairs would less rather be than the Theta Chi frat house in Charlottesville, but a North Korean prison cell is probably one of them.) It is likely that he is being denied access to food, perhaps even to bowties. This cannot be tolerated.

And so Current Affairs is resolved to help Otto stay resolute. We shall include a small note to him in each edition of our magazine (very small*), wishing him well and encouraging to defy his tormentors. We will send him a Current Affairs subscription (gratis), so that he may gain a fully accurate understanding of the world beyond the prison gates.

(North Korea has not previously been known for enthusiastically transmitting subversive political magazines to its imprisoned dissidents, but we are willing to offer small bribes to postmen if it will help, and promise to refrain from printing lewd caricatures of Mr. Jong Un and from putting the phrase “Supreme Leader” in derisive quotation marks.)

We are confident that this will help. Not for nothing did a critic once refer to the act of reading Current Affairs as “the only thing that could make 15 years of hard labor seem tolerable.” Keep your chin up, dear fellow! Current Affairs is with you through all of this, not in any sort of real way, but certainly by the intention of our spirits. And after all, what could be more helpful to an imprisoned man than to have his plight discussed at length by intellectuals and academics in the pages of journals and periodicals?

But we find ourselves interrupted...

Now, look here, Current Affairs, all of this is a bit rich. Here you are focusing on one young white American chap, when scads of similar horrors take place across the globe daily. Why should Current Affairs expend its considerable political capital to aid Mr. Warmbier, when there are hundreds of us poor wretches who did not attend the University of Virginia? Methinks Current Affairs has become a tad blinded by its love of bowties.

Oh, how right you are, mysterious italicized intruder. There are an awful lot of human travesties about which to make a fuss, and to expend valuable ink on Otto is surely rather biased of us. Why, right as we type, Saudi Arabia continues its relentless bombing campaign against Yemen. Otto has the full diplomatic muscle of the United States Government pulling for him, does he truly need us by his side?

There is, for example, the case of Mr. Bernard Noble, a 48-year-old man sentenced to “13 years and 4 months imprisoned at hard labor and without the possibility of parole” for the possession of two marijuana cigarettes. Mr. Noble does not live in the DPRK, but in the State of Louisiana. And as Louisiana justice goes, Bernard may have gotten off lightly; sentences of 20 years or even life for similar crimes are not unknown.

Now, it’s certainly true that there are many differences between the United States and North Korea. They are on different continents, for instance. But, well, 15 years at hard labor is 15 years at hard labor, and it can’t bring much comfort to Bernard to know that he lives in the World’s Freest Democracy. Did we mention he has three children?

Bernard Noble, then, seems at least as deserving of our comfort and assistance as young Otto. And to speak frankly, we’re all probably a bit more complicit in Mr. Noble’s fate, since it’s our own legal system in which he finds himself ensnared.

We must therefore be just as dedicated to reminding readers of Bernard as we are to reminding them of Otto. We shall write regularly to them both, so that they know they are loved and will never be forgotten. Hello, Bernard!

But you know, there are more victims of injustice in this world than the poster-ripping bowtie enthusiast and the pot-smoking New Orleanian dad. There are, after all, plenty of people in North Korea’s prisons who are not Otto F. Warmbier. There are plenty of people in Louisiana’s rural penitentiaries who are not Bernard Noble. And there are 49 other states, and numerous other countries, in which the hapless and unfortunate spend their days confined to dismal cells, sometimes without a friend or lover in the whole of the cosmos.

To these people, then, Current Affairs dedicates its affections. Bernard and Otto are mere synecdoches, vessels through which we transmit our message to you. That message, broadcast from the innermost depths of our hearts, is this:

To the Imprisoned of the World, Current Affairs is with you always!

*like this. Aloha, Otto.
SLAVERY IS EVERYWHERE
(YES, EVEN THERE.)

by BRIANNA RENNIX & OREN NIMNI
“IT’S CERTAINLY VERY STRANGE TO SEE SLAVERY SO ALIVE AND WELL IN A COUNTRY SO CONVINCED IT HAS ABOLISHED IT.”

All human beings are enslaved, though some are more enslaved than others. Our typical binary distinction between freedom and slavery (I am either free, or I am enslaved; I cannot be enslaved but free, or free but enslaved) is false, for coercive conditions exist on a spectrum. At the extreme end of that spectrum is the typical scenario of slavery, the ante bellum South with its whippings and overseers. But a myriad of other conditions bear striking similarities to this kind of slavery, even as they lack what we think of as its central features (auctions, manor houses, white-suited masters with sluggish drawls). For example, say you were to take Highway 61 out of Baton Rouge, and head north toward the Mississippi border. If, after about 35 miles, you turned off into the country, you would soon find yourself at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, known informally as “Angola.” There, you would notice something striking. You would see open fields, filled with cotton and other crops. And in these fields, you would see rows of black men, young and old, tilling the fields and picking the cotton. It might seem like a scene from the 1850’s. But then, as you looked closer, you would notice something else, something even more disquieting: these rows of black men were being watched over, overseen, by other men. Men with guns. And it would quickly become clear to you that if the men picking cotton decided they were tired of picking cotton, and began to pack up and wander off, these men with guns would have something quite emphatic to say about it.

The Angola prison facility began as a slave plantation, and little has changed about it since its earliest days. Perhaps the only difference is that it has since installed a gift shop, where tourists can purchase T-shirts and coozies emblazoned with cheery confinement-themed slogans (“Angola: There’s No Escapin’ It” and “Angola: A Gated Community”). In all but the most superficial aspects, the facility is the same: black men in chains, working the fields from dawn to dusk, their every personal liberty surrendered, every wish granted solely at the discretion of the fat old white man who runs the place.

It’s certainly very strange to see slavery so alive and well in a country so convinced it has abolished it. But for a nation of lawyers, Americans are startlingly oblivious to a gaping loophole in their formally codified rights: they’ve never actually prohibited slavery at all. That sounds like somewhat of a conspiratorial exaggeration, but it’s indisputably the case. The 13th Amendment, the one that supposedly abolished slavery, reads as follows:

“Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”

Did you notice the loophole? It’s alright if you didn’t; it seems to have passed the rest of the nation by for 150 years. But there it is: slavery is prohibited, except...

It’s perfectly fine to enslave someone, then. The only condition is that it be punishment for a crime. The 13th Amendment therefore does not prohibit slavery; it doesn’t even pretend to. What it does is offer a procedural guarantee that nobody will be enslaved without first undergoing a legal proceeding to determine whether they deserve it.

In practice, this does very little. After all, nearly anything can be made a crime; by some estimates, the average American commits three felonies per day without knowing it. And the State of Louisiana has taken full advantage of the 13th Amendment’s useful little caveat; it officially sentences people to “years at hard labor” rather than “years in prison,” and it often assigns people to decades of labor for even petty crimes like marijuana possession (See p. 8).

Now, fortunately, for most people, there is little risk of falling in the loophole and ending up enslaved. But this shouldn’t be especially comforting; if we had been told in 1850 not to worry, because most people have no risk of ending up as slaves, this would be irrelevant to the moral horror of the institution. The fact that for most people the risk of slavery is low, but the law sanctions it for others, turns rights into little more than a myth. The question of whether or not a person becomes enslaved depends on whether they stay on the correct side of the law, a law that is destined to be crafted far more by the powerful than the powerless (that is, after all what power means to begin with).

Indeed, in the years after the Civil War, white Southern elites figured out how to take full advantage of this opportunity. Frustrated by the prohibition on the buying and selling of human beings, they turned to the criminal law to obtain a continuing supply of cost-free black labor. As Douglas Blackmon documents in Slavery By Another Name, a system of “neoslavery” arose, in which being poor effectively became a crime, and since crime could be punished by enslavement, black people could be re-enslaved. It was a near trick, almost effortless. The ease with which the South simply replaced slavery with Jim Crow is a cautionary tale for those who act as if the existence of legal procedural rights is a sufficient guarantor of social equality.
As a word and a concept, slavery is troublesome. It’s etymologically arbitrary, deriving from the word “Slav,” since a number of Slavic people were captured and enslaved during the Middle Ages. Slavery therefore does not have some kind of easy inherent connotation, the way that a word like “prisoner” might (from the Latin præsionem, “a taking,” thus “one who is taken”). Of course, all words are arbitrary at their core, but some have more intelligible conceptual underpinnings than others, and “Slav”-ery doesn’t do much to help us answer the question of what slavery is.

The 1926 International Slavery Convention defined slavery as “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised,” and most other definitions are similar; slavery is what happens when person becomes a commodity. But determining whether the “powers of the right of ownership” are being used is less clear than might initially be supposed. In legal theory, property is a kind of “bundle” of rights; the right to use something, the right to alienate (sell) it, the right to proceeds from it, and the right to destroy it. Now, a person can’t sell me or destroy me, so he can’t have the full rights of ownership, but people are given the right to use others all the time. Getting the right to use without the right to sell is called a lease; and people regularly lease land, cars, and people. A labor market is just a market for people-leases.

Focusing on slavery as a set of theoretical property rights constructions is therefore somewhat bizarre. It focuses on the types of legal rights the owner holds or exercises, rather than the person in question’s actual experiences. Thus the same two experiences could be slavery or not, depending on how they arose. If we see a row of men doing back-breaking work picking cotton, whipped and beaten, working 12 hour days, they might be enslaved. But what if we learn that they’re employees, that they’ve signed up for this since it’s the only job in the area? Well, according to all the theories we’re not dealing with slavery anymore, but it sure looks pretty similar.
That’s one of the reasons the phrase “wage slavery” arose to describe industrial toil. By the people-as-property definition of slavery, it’s an oxymoron; if everybody in the factory is being paid, nobody is being enslaved. But workers’ rights campaigners used the term “wage slavery” to illustrate a crucial point: being given wages so pitiful you couldn’t afford to move elsewhere meant that a wage system and a slave system could end up feeling exactly the same for the worker. Some even argued that wage-systems were worse; a capitalist who rented his labor could brutalize and destroy workers’ bodies and simply replace them one they wore out, while a slaveowner had some incentive to protect his investment. Most people treat rental cars with less care than cars they own, thus leased wage-workers could be even more poorly treated than slaves in many cases. (Rather than justifying slavery, that fact indicts wage work.)

Because the boundaries of slavery are difficult to pinpoint, and at the estate shop, and was then bound to the plantation by ever-mounting debts. The coffee industry, overflowing with the milk of human kindness, has performed a Cost-Benefit Analysis, but says that ensuring that child labor and forced labor are absent from their supply chains would be “onerous and especially costly to implement.”

“Alright, so coffee is slavery. I’ll stick to tea.” Ah, don’t be so quick. Workers on tea plantations endeavor to live on about 17 cents a day. Sex trafficking of tea pickers’ children, with or without their parents’ knowledge, is rampant, because parents cannot afford to feed and educate children on the wages they earn.

The pattern repeats across products in dozens of industries. There are similar stories behind your sweets, your clothes, your electronics. Nor is this confined to remote corners of the world: right here in the United States, slaves and child laborers are part of the labor force that picks the fruits and vegetables we eat every day.

“Slavery is invisibly present in the architecture of our lives.”

Contemporary slavery comes in several varieties. Some occurs on a lucrative black market, while other forms are perfectly legal components of the economy. The old-fashioned kind of slavery, kidnapping people by force or trickery, who are then bonded into performing labor against their will—is common, and becoming more common every day. There are twice as many in this kind of enslavement today as there were during the entire 350 year duration of the transatlantic slave trade.

But there are legal horrors to match the illegal ones. Shockingly enough, for example, your American-grown blueberries may have been picked by an elementary- or middle school-aged child, who then had to go wearily to class and try to learn their multiplication tables. This is because, since 1938, using children for agricultural labor has been permitted by law, and the National Farmworker Ministry estimates that there are 500,000 agricultural workers under the age of 18. In 2014, Human Rights Watch released a report on U.S. child tobacco farm workers, some of whom are as young as 11 and work full 10 or 12 hour days. On the tobacco farms, many of these kids develop nicotine poisoning, experiencing “vomiting, nausea, headache, dizziness, skin rashes and burning eyes.” Yet for migrant families struggling to survive on meager wages, sending a schoolchild to work for a local farmer may be the only way to stay afloat. If you thought child labor had disappeared from the United States, you haven’t seen the agricultural sector.

And then there are countries like Bangladesh, where the main source of employment is the garment manufacturing industry, which pays about 14% of a living wage, and where factory working...
conditions are infamously unsafe. (Should we be surprised that Bangladeshis comprise a significant percentage of the refugees fleeing to South Asia and Europe, as desperate for escape as if their country were irreparably ravaged by violence and war?)

There's a tendency to cast Bangladesh's story as the growing pains of economic development, or cast the U.S. story as a consequence of irregular immigration. Of course, one shouldn't downplay the complexity of the economic and logistical issues implicated by global trade, or large food systems. There may be some truth in saying that misery is a fact of human life, that we cannot simply will it away by disliking it. But let's be honest with ourselves: we all instinctively know that to harness the misery of humans in one part of the world to provide comfort and entertainment for humans in another part of the world is a perverse and inexcusable form of evil.

"TO RATIONALIZE IT IS TO ACCEPT OBVIOUS MORAL EVILS."

If the choice were available, no person on earth would voluntarily toil away all the years of their life, on starvation wages or worse, with no hope of improving their lot, manufacturing useless luxuries to be fleetingly enjoyed by others upon whom the accident of birth has bestowed greater fortune. That is injustice itself. To respond to exposés of worker exploitation with statements like, “Well, they'd be worse off if they weren't making our products” is to employ the logic of a slaver. It means shrugging and accepting obvious moral evils simply because they would be difficult to address, because altering the prevailing system will likely have complicated economic and political consequences. This is the kind of thinking that perpetuated the institution of slavery in this country throughout multiple centuries during which many people of both conscience and influence were fully aware that it was wrong. During those intervening years, thousands of human lives were trampled, degraded, mutilated, both spiritually and physically; and the ruination of those lives can never now be repaired. For those who believe that justice is not a mere category defined and circumscribed by our legal system, but is rather a holistic moral worldview that should inform all the decisions of our daily lives, it is impossible to accept a status quo that makes us all into the mirror image of an earlier generation of American elites: “masters who do not know how to free their slaves.”

The prevailing wisdom in some circles is that the bad PR surrounding labor abuses can compel multinationalos to voluntarily improve their standards; or that multinationals, which are major regional players in most developing economies, will self-regulate in increasingly a humane direction due to the growing popularity of the “corporate responsibility” ethos. Perhaps that’s true. But this requires us to repose a large amount of trust in the personal goodness (or, at any rate, care for reputation) of company executives; and to trust also that this mindset will be handed down as a sacred charge to each new generation of managers. History should make us skeptical about the resilience of this sort of hereditary ethics. It would be preferable to have a somewhat more solid assurance than mere noblesse oblige.

On an individual level, the “conscientious objection” approach is ethical consumerism: to boycott companies that engage in unfair labor practices (including unpaid or minimally-compensated labor, use of child labor, bans on or retaliation against unionization, inadequate sanitation and safety standards, tolerance of sexual assault and harassment, and environmental destruction) and patronize companies that use good practices. But this is necessarily an approach with severe limitations. For starters, making ethically-informed choices can be extremely difficult due to the differences between the amount of information known by companies and by consumers, and the misleading or unverifiable nature of most “fair trade” labels. (Most companies claim themselves not to know what is happening on the contractor or sub-contractor levels of their supply chains, which may well be true, though it’s hard to believe that they could not possibly bestir themselves to find out if they so chose.) And while it’s comparatively easy to be an ethical consumer of certain common food products, it’s next to impossible when it comes to necessities such as clothing and (what is now effectively a necessity in modern society) technology. Ethically-produced garments are nearly impossible to find; ethically-produced electronics are entirely impossible. You can buy used items, but that’s as close as you get. The “free market” approach is to buy the products that one wishes to see the market moved towards, but it’s hard to move the market towards a product that doesn’t exist.

Ethical consumerism is also something a middle- or upper-class gambit, because most ethical products are specialty products, difficult for low- and fixed-income people to afford. Companies like Wal-Mart have had great success with the reverse-Robin Hood approach, whereby, in charging rock-bottom prices for cheaply-manufactured goods, they rob the poor to feed the poor. And this is all to say nothing of the economic ravages and immediate hardship to vulnerable workers that would occur if all companies were to suddenly pull their operations wholesale from countries where exploitation is perceived to be “endemic.”

But what of the law? Can it save us? Until very recently, the answer was a resounding no. The law was, as it usually is, a pretty pitiful guarantor of basic human liberties, and slave conditions have persisted for centuries with statutory blessing.

However, a modest new legal tool may now be at our disposal. This February, with very little fanfare, Congress passed, and President Obama signed into law, a bill with the potential to significantly impact the extent to which companies are held accountable for the presence of slave labor in their supply chains. Section 901 of the Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act, introduced by Republican Congressman Tom Reed and co-sponsored by seven other Republicans, mandates the “elimination of the consumptive demand exception to prohibition on importation of goods made with convict labor, forced labor, or indentured labor.”

The “consumptive demand exception” refers to a provision of the 1930 Tariff Act that forbade the import of “all goods, wares, articles, and merchandise mined, produced or manufactured wholly or in part in any foreign country by convict labor and/or forced labor and/or indentured labor,” except for those items “not mined, produced or manufactured in such quantities in the United States as to
meet the consumptive demands of the United States.”

In other words: you couldn’t import slave-made goods into the U.S. unless, you know, people really, really wanted to buy them. The exception rendered the Tariff Act’s prohibition on slave-made goods effectively meaningless. It was an almost sublimely-constructed piece of self-negation: we don’t import slave-made goods from abroad unless we don’t have enough of such goods here; but almost by definition, the goods we import are the goods we don’t already have.

Predictably, the law was rarely invoked. Many goods highly likely to contain slave labor in their supply chains—including coffee from the Ivory Coast, electronics manufactured in Malaysia, and garments woven from Uzbeki cotton—are regularly imported into the U.S.

Theoretically, with the passage of the new law, the import of all such goods is completely prohibited. But many questions remain. How far down its supply chain does a company’s obligation extend—all the way to the raw materials stage? What penalties will companies face for attempting to import slave-made goods? How will the enforcement effort be funded? Who will undertake the difficult, research-intensive work of supply chain investigation, which will be necessary to prove specific violations?

As is so often the case, without public pressure, the law will likely be a dead letter. But if people concerned about the eradication of slavery come together to demand an articulate legal framework and substantial funding for enforcement, we may finally see the penalties for slave labor allocated onto the actors who drive the market for prices, the actors who are best equipped to bear economic risk: large multinationals.

The closing of the “consumptive demand” loophole, even if well-enforced, will admittedly not directly improve the lots of those workers whose dire situ-

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LAVRY HAS ACTUALLY BEEN IN THE NEWS QUITE a bit recently. It’s come up repeatedly in debates over removal of the Confederate flag. At Harvard University, student activists successfully advocated to eliminate the title “house master” from residential dormitories, and to remove a slaveowner’s family crest from the Harvard Law School shield. As national debates examine the role of race in our justice and our correctional systems, in our social structures, in housing and employment and education, the U.S. is confronting the ways that the underlying evil of slavery has metamorphosed and reappeared in many guises throughout the subsequent life of our nation.

But slavery does not just exist as the continuing reverberation of a tragic past, and by focusing on rooting out the symbolic and material consequences of historical slavery, we risk missing something quite important: the world is still full of actual, literal slaves. From the penitentiaries of Louisiana to the garment factories of Bangladesh to the coffee plantations of the Ivory Coast, slavery is ubiquitous but invisible. Faced with this disconcerting fact, each person must decide whether she is comfortable in continuing to passively participate, or whether she will accept the conclusion of our 19th century abolitionist predecessors: that one cannot coexist quietly alongside a slave system, and that it is one’s basic moral duty to find every available means of eliminating slavery from the earth for good.
“GIVES NEW MEANING TO THE TERM ‘UTOPIAN TRACT...’”

In this book of utopian prophecies, the problems of contemporary human society are theorized and textually rectified. The authors expose the dysfunctions embedded in modern life, from shoddy architecture to the existence of police. Featuring over 125 chapters, countless footnotes, an extended bibliography, four appendices, and a full index, this revised and expanded edition of Blueprints for a Sparkling Tomorrow promises to restore the prospects for a civilization gone mad.

Blueprints for a Sparkling Tomorrow
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IRONING COULD ACTUALLY BE ENJOYABLE

ONCE THE PATRIARCHY IS DEAD
The Unendurable Horrors of LEADERSHIP CAMP

Our correspondent is subjected to one of the most agonizing torments known to humankind: a weeklong corporate leadership training seminar...

As a professor of law, I am accustomed to leisurely mornings. “There is nothing worth doing,” we indolent law professors often say, “that cannot be done better after 11 a.m.” Late starts are one of the highlights of a career as a teacher of law (the main lowlight being that you are occasionally forced to teach the law). So I was in a doubly wretched condition when I found myself, in the earliest hours of a Monday morning, arriving at 1 Leadership Place.

1 Leadership Place is home to the Center for Creative Leadership, and I had been dispatched there at my new employer’s behest. I was to participate in a five-day “Leadership Development Program” intended to hone my leadership abilities (of which I admittedly have none). This was treated as a great perk of my new job, though given a choice I might have opted to use my time differently (perhaps a week in a Siberian prison camp, or having a series of my organs removed without anesthesia). According to the publicity materials, I would be learning to “think and act systemically,” “create buy-in,” and “leverage multiple life roles.” I did not (and, spoiler, still do not) know what any of these things mean. But I supposed it would be better to be systemic than not systemic, better to leverage the life roles than not leverage them. I therefore insist that I approached the whole thing with an open mind.

As it turns out, sending academics to leadership camp is not an aberration. As the leadership industry has grown over the last three decades, it has roped in all kinds of institutions, convincing them to shell out exorbitant sums for training programs. In a 1993 investigation for Harper’s entitled “Choice Academic Pork,” Benjamin DeMott traces the expansion of leadership education from business to universities:

The current leadership boom has at least one root in an early 1980s pop phenomenon—best-selling business manuals such as Management Secrets of Attila the Hun, The One-Minute Manager, and A Passion for Excellence, by Tom Peters and Nancy K. Austin. Leadership theory then trickled down (or up) into the universities and the public sector.

DeMott documents how this vast and profitable industry, which resembles a cult in its language and culture, managed to obtain substantial funding from government agencies to conduct endless seminars of dubious value. They have successfully persuaded people in an array of different sectors that leadership training is useful, even necessary. They have, uh, “created buy-in,” so to speak.

In the weeks leading up to my internment, I was asked to complete a battery of online “assessment instruments,” glorified pop-psych personality tests not unlike the ones people often post on Facebook. There were questions about how I relate to others (badly), how often I embrace new things (seldom to never), my attitude toward work (hate it), and how I solve complex problems (I do not. They fester.)

Many of the questions seemed like they could not possibly yield informative answers, e.g.:


The tests were ostensibly designed to reveal my leadership style. Instead they revealed that Leadership Camp was going to be a tedious waste of time and money. A lot of money ($7,000), in fact, which fortunately wasn’t my own.

Leadership Place itself turned out to be a driveway leading to a stone-and-glass building set amidst several wooded acres alongside a lake. The triangular building surrounds a courtyard with flowing water, abundant greenery, and several sculptures, resembling discarded bits of plumbing, labeled “Leadership,” “Learning,” and “Life.” The tranquil and tasteful setting could pass for an upscale rehab facility, of the type populated with affluenza-afflicted wayward teens. The company eagerly cultivates an academic aura, and the facility is referred to as its “campus.” The campus bookstore sells dozens of business books, of the kind ubiquitous in airport newstands. Typical selections included The World’s Most Powerful Leadership Principle: How to Become a Servant Leader (featuring a jacket blurb from the Senior Vice President of Operations for Chik-fil-a) and Leading with Soul: An Uncommon Journey of Spirit. Alas, they did not have my favorite managerial tome of all time, If Harry Potter Ran General Electric: Leadership Wisdom from the World Of Wizards, which is...
a genuine, honest-to-God book that you can look up and purchase.

Directed to the meeting room, I took an open seat at a table occupied by what looked like the cast from a community theater production of *The Office*. I soon learned that the group consisted of:

- Don, from an industrial plastics company in Reading, PA.
- Graham, district manager for a retail cosmetics chain.
- Greg, electronic controls
- Derwin, fibre optic cable manufacturer
- Paul, medical devices at Big Pharma Corporation
- John, health insurance
- Tom, dental insurance

I am sure that at some point in human history, a more flavorless collection of white-collar bores has been assembled, but I think you would have to search far and wide to find it.

The program began with a PowerPoint intended to provide an overview of the coming week. Even for a PowerPoint presentation on a leadership campus, it was remarkable for its vacuity.

We would receive feedback from executive coaches about our leadership challenges and “gift areas.” We were urged to practice active listening. We were given learning journals in which we were to record our “learnings.” We would be empowered as change agents armed with best practices for leading change.

The presenter, who was like a whiter Mister Rogers, then had us stand in circles, with each participant offering their definition of leadership, their personal leadership challenge, and three words their friends would use to describe you. The answers were obvious:

1. An ideological construct deployed to legitimize power and domination in the state and the labor process.
2. Avoiding any situation calling for leadership.
3. “Can’t stand bullshit.”

And bullshit it truly was. Leadership education has its own unique jargon, which is related to, but distinct from, business jargon. “Learnings” is not just a quirk of the Center for Creative Leadership, it’s one of the terms of the trade. Leadership studies is a whole field, with leaders categorized as exercising “transactional leadership” or “transformative leadership” (even “toxic leadership” if you screw up). Everything comes with its convoluted diagrams, and there elaborately developed theories, each with “7 Stages” or “5 Types.”

One of the strange things about the business world is the extent to which its jargon is euphemistic. When we talk about leaders, we’re talking about bosses. Yet for some reason bosses don’t like to admit what it is they do. That’s why employees become “team members,” why firing becomes “letting go.” In a way, it suggests that people’s human instincts are that capitalism is something rotten; the more you describe it with precision, the more horrendous it sounds. At the level of uplifting abstractions, derived from self-help culture, everything can be pleasant and neutral. It’s only when you hack through the forest of buzzwords that you can understand what is actually being discussed.

At the end of the week, each participant received a one-on-one “effective coaching” session, which was almost certainly modeled after Maoist self-criticism. I met with my coach in a small room, where I was seated on a stool. It began with the coach offering bits of feedback based on my performance during the week. According to the instructions, I was to regard each comment as a “gift” and accept it by saying only “thank you.” “Ok, whatever,” I thought. “Thank you,” I said.

“During the bridge-building activity, you stuck to hot-gluing sticks together the whole time. The others on your team thought that showed a lack of engagement.”


“You made a joke about being like David Koresh. One of your teammates found that hostile.”


“You said you ‘can’t stand bullshit.’ This projected negativity to your team.”


“I think you would benefit from some executive coaching. We offer follow-up sessions.”

“Thank you,” I said. “Fuck that,” I thought.

That evening, there was a group dinner and closing ceremony. Unforgivably, the meal included no alcohol, but did include a series of peppy recitations of our leadership principles by the coaches. If there is a number beyond “umpteenth,” it would describe the amount of times I heard the word “paradigm” in a single week.

After eating, we had to go around the room (we were always Going Around the Room) so that everyone could “share your learnings from the week.” Of course, what I’d learned was that I really can’t stand bullshit, and that leadership camp is truly bullshit of the highest order. “What I learned,” I said, “is that I am a visionary leader and that I’m very good with a hot-glue gun. Thank you.” They seemed satisfied enough.
An Open Letter

To The Woman in the Harvard Coop Bookstore in Cambridge, MA on February 29th Who Spent Half An Hour Looking At the Magazine Rack Without Picking Up A Copy of Current Affairs

Dear Madam,

We believe you know who you are. You are the woman with the numerous grocery bags who spent 30 minutes gawping at the magazine rack in the Harvard Coop Bookshop closely examining every single bloody newspaper and periodical on the shelf without so much as touching a copy of Current Affairs, despite the fact that it was right in front of your nose, displayed prominently on the first row between TIME and Harper’s.

Madam, as the editors of Current Affairs sat in the adjacent café watching you from afar (a standard market research technique for major national political magazines), we were initially heartened by your arrival. The magazine’s Legal Editor and Editor-in-Chief had been stalking out the place for upwards of forty minutes, with nary a customer so much as casting a mild curious glance at the newsstand, nevermind eagerly leaping to be the first to snag Current Affairs’s first and latest edition. So when you came along, our hearts whistled a melody! Here at last was the sort of intelligent and discerning consumer that forms the backbone of the Current Affairs readership. We thought you might have made an attempt to have managed the grocery bags, and we didn’t know quite what to make of this. We also concluded that there was something slightly unsettling about your puffy jacket; it was just ever so slightly too puffy, as if the manufacturer was pulling some sly lampoon or using the design to make a social statement. Nevertheless! You had quirks, we knew, but so what? The readers of Current Affairs are a diverse cross-section of the American public! They are allowed their little eccentricities, their mountains of grocery bags and their superfluous puff. We take pride in such qualities. Other magazines (The Economist) may think their readers should all wear Pierre Cardin ties and sport headset telephones. Not Current Affairs. Our readers are proudly unfashionable and unemployed. Jobs and neckties are for sissies.

We editors kept our eyes keenly fixed upon you as you approached the newsstand. Every previous customer had betrayed us; they had gone near the magazines, only to look right at the last moment to peruse the decorative souvenir magnets instead. About once per five-minute interval, we would gasp in suspense as some bright-looking bookish type headed straight toward Current Affairs, before suddenly veering in the direction of that treacherous siren, the magnet display. Young people these days! None of them wants a respectable journal of common sense policy analysis; now they’re all about decorating their fridges with cheaply reproduced depictions of Cantabrigian autumns. The rotters!

But you, you were different. You had a certain puffy sparkle to you. It was immediately obvious that you were a person who liked looking at magazines. We knew this because of the care with which you picked up and examined each and every existing publication as you shuffled your way steadily down the line, from “Specialty & Sporting Magazines” to “Celebrity News/Entertainment” to landing finally at, yes, “Current Affairs and Politics.”

You what did you do when you arrived there? You picked up, for God only knows what reason, The Atlantic. Your motivation here was unfathomable. Perhaps you thought it was a trade journal for oceanographers. Out of a desire to judge “current affairs,” you walked straight toward Current Affairs. You looked at the cover of Current Affairs for upwards of a minute, then turned it over and examined the Table of Contents. You didn’t skip a single page. You covered the magazine from cover to cover. You read every single bloody newspaper and periodical on the shelf worth its cover price ($10.95, $60/yr). Current Affairs beckoned to you, it whispered, it cooed. And yet you spurned it, not once, but repeatedly, ever allowing it to feel you coming close while ultimately withholding your affections, like you were Jenny taunting Forrest Gump.

And how could we forget how horribly, how cruelly, the whole thing ended? After dating and dumping every single one of our friends and nemeses, what did you do? Did you at last give us our long-awaited chance, and let us pick you up and take you to the drive-in? You did not. You did not even simply quietly depart, which would have stung, but which was merciful. Instead, you turned to leave, then stopped. You looked back. You walked over to the magazine rack, and took up a copy of Current Affairs. You quickly scanned it, and flipped to the Legendary Puzzles & Activities section.

Needless to say, we were crushed. We know our magazine is not for everyone (insufferable bourgeois need not apply) but, my God, you could have shown some simple tender humanity: Let us down easy, you know? There’s no need to give the dagger in our gut that final agonizing twist.

Madam, surely you realize: the hurt that you inflicted can never truly be repaired; wounds that deep leave permanent scars. But there remains one thing you can do for us, one thing you owe us if you possess even the most basic shred of empathy. You can head to www.currentaffairs.org/subscribe. You can purchase an annual subscription. (Choose the more expensive, and enable the “auto-renew” option.) You can get our magazine and read it religiously, and recommend that others act likewise. And in doing so, you can at last begin to mend the trail of devastated, quivering broken hearts you have left in your wake.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Staff

Current Affairs
Daesh College of Music
LETTERS FROM THE EDITOR

Dear [Name],

We were disturbed to read your recent interview in the [Magazine Name]. Your comments are not in keeping with the principles of [Magazine Name].

To be honest, we believe your words may have been delivered in bad faith. We are not convinced that your statements are accurate or fair.

We hope that you will take this advice to heart and reconsider your position.

Yours sincerely,
[Your Name]
THE POLITICAL NECESSITY OF VULGARITY

by Amber A’Lee Frost
ANY WERE SURPRISED TO SEE THE
notoriously centrist Vox.com run a
glowing profile of a revolutionary
socialist quarterly. In leftist circles
Vox is generally derided for its bland
liberal politics, so when it published
a lengthy examination of the popular
socialist magazine Jacobin, a hatchet job seemed more likely. But astonishingly
enough, Vox covered Jacobin fairly, even generously, in a piece flatteringly titled
“Inside Jacobin: how a socialist magazine is winning the left’s war of ideas.”

For a publication inherently antagonistic to capitalism, Jacobin felt
downright reasonable to Vox writer Dylan Matthews. Matthews described
it as the “leading intellectual voice of the American left, the most vibrant
and relevant socialist publication in a very long time,” leaving one to wonder
how Jacobin’s frequent allusions to violent revolution sat so comfortably
with such proudly pragmatist liberals.

One answer is that, however radical Jacobin’s political program may be,
the magazine is committed to maintaining civility and sobriety in its tone. As Matthews explained:

The long-term goal might be a revolutionary working class, but for now
Jacobin publisher Bhaskar Sunkara is most passionate about trying to get more
uniques than the New Republic or FiveThirtyEight. He has little patience for
left-of-center writers who go out of their way to make enemies, saying of Gawker,
“It’s less mean and snarky than it used to be. I don’t like that kind of mean
internet humor . . . Being mean as a way to fight the power is kind of ridiculous.”

“Being mean” is an interesting aversion for an impertinently revolutionary
magazine that sells posters of guillotines and regularly invokes the specter of
Soviet communism. Are not guillotines a bit—dare I say—“mean”?

What Sunkara is talking about here is much more specific than “mean,”
a rather vague word that he pairs with “snarky” (behead the kings of course,
but don’t dare snark against them!). What he is actually talking about is
vulgarity, the crass, ugly dispensation of judgment with little to no regard
for propriety. Vulgarity is the rejection of the norms of civilized discourse;
to be vulgar is to flout the set of implicit conventions that create our
social decorum. The vulgar person uses swears and shouts where reasoned
discourse is called for. Someone like Saul Alinsky for example, might be
considered vulgar, for considering protest tactics like his famously unrealized
“fart-in” at the Rochester Philharmonic. (One might question the efficacy of
a flatulent protest during a symphony, but it is certainly the sort of vulgarity
that cannot be ignored.)

It is understandable for a magazine aspiring to respectability to eschew
vulgarity in its pages. To poach the New Republic’s readers may require
poaching the New Republic’s restraint in tone, and one does not impress Vox
by childishly taunting the bourgeoisie.

Yet to dismiss vulgarity as a tool for fighting the powerful, to say that
being mean is “ridiculous,” is to deny history, and to obscure a long and
noble tradition of malicious political japery. In fact, “being mean” not only
affords unique pleasures to the speaker or writer, but is a crucial rhetorical
weapon of the politically excluded.

VULGARITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN EMPLOYED IN REVOLUTIONARY
rhetoric, perhaps most notably in the propaganda leading up to
Jacobin’s own beloved French Revolution. Forget snark, the
pamphleteers of France were all too happy to satirize and smear the
upper class with the utmost malice. Clergy, royals, and anyone else in
power were slandered and depicted visually in all manner of crass and
farical political cartoons.

Of all the public figures subjected to such vicious derision and gossip
(often highly inaccurate gossip at that), Marie Antoinette was singled out
for especially inventive and vicious taunting. True to French tradition, the
slanderous pamphlets, called libelles, were fond of wordplay. For the Austrian-
born Antoinette, they coined Austrichienne, meaning “Austrian bitch,”
but also resembling the French word for “ostrich.” Thus, layering a visual
pun upon a verbal one, one artist actually portrayed Antoinette stroking
a massive, ostrich-like penis, complete with legs and a saddle. Mounted
upon the penile steed was progressive royalist Marquis de Lafayette, who
sympathized with the peasants but was eventually denounced as a traitor by Robespierre (revolutionaries tend not to be terribly fond of diplomatic fence-straddlers). In another of the ostrich-themed cartoons (it was evidently a series), Marie actually bared her own genitals to the phallic beast and its rider. It’s a stunningly vulgar image, and without a doubt, quite nasty and mean. One couldn’t imagine a Beltway professional depicting the ruling class so crudely today; even the most offensive of right-wing political cartoonists haven’t yet dared to explore the satirical possibilities for giant ostrich-dicks.

There was also no requirement that a piece of anti-royal propaganda be clever or punny in order to be published. Quite a few of the cartoons regarding Marie were the sort of pure tabloid sensationalism that would make Gawker blush. Likely owing to the rumor that the King suffered from sexual dysfunction, leaving his wife to wild bouts of promiscuity, Antoinette was often in flagrante delicto—sometimes with Lafayette, sometimes the king’s brother—the Count of Artois, and sometimes even with different ladies of the court and her close female friends. These pornographic little pamphlets showed various stages of undress, ranging from a hand up the skirt to full nudity and sexual contact. Cartoonists enjoyed drawing Marie in orgies with both men and women, and the King’s own sad and scandalized penis often made an appearance.

The line between farce and rumor was often blurred by the flip ambiguity of the libelles. It can be difficult to discern today what was speculation and what was just a joke, but some of it was clearly very elaborate parody.

Take the 1789 libelle, L’Autrichienne en Goguettes ou l’Orgie Royale (that’s The Austrian Bitch and her Friends in the Royal Orgy), which is written as a play. In this ribald little piece of fan-fiction, Louis XIV’s brother has cuckolded the impotent king and sired the royal heirs himself:

**Characters:**

**LOUIS XVI**

**THE QUEEN**

**THE COUNT OF ARTOIS**

**THE DUCHESS OF POLIGNAC**

**BODYGUARDS**

The action takes place in the apartments.

Guard: To arms, there comes Her Majesty.

Another guard: There will be an orgy tonight. The female Ganimède is with the Queen.

Another guard: Artois, the beloved one, there he is between vice and virtue. Guess who the vice is.

Guard: You do not need to guess. I can only see that this God is multiplying.

Scene II

The Queen (to Madame de Polignac, who steps aside to let the Queen go): Come, come in my good friend.

The Count of Artois, slightly pushing the Queen and pinching her buttocks: Come in too. What a nice butt! So firm!

The Queen (whispering): If my heart was as hard, wouldn’t we be good together?

The Count of Artois: Be quiet you crazy woman, or else my brother will have another son tonight.

The Queen: Oh no! Let’s have some pleasure, but no more fruits.

The Count of Artois: All right. I will be careful, if I can.

Madame de Polignac: Where is the King?

The Queen: What do you worry about? Soon he will be here to annoy us.

Charming, no?

It’s important to note that libelles like these were highly illegal—just as illegal as the writings of Voltaire or Rousseau, or any explicitly political tract deemed guilty of “heresy, sedition or personal libel”—and that they were sold right alongside their more serious-minded counterparts (under the counter, of course). Illegal pamphlets had to be printed outside the country, producing dozens of printing presses just outside French borders. Hundreds of agents smuggled pamphlets through a secret network to reach the tabloid-hungry French masses. In order to stem the tide of banned pamphlets about Marie Antoinette in particular, the French government actually sent spies to England to buy up the entire stock before they could make it France. It’s therefore not particularly difficult to argue (as many historians do) for a causal relationship between nasty political porn and the revolution that followed, especially when the pamphlets posed such a risk to produce and obtain.

Historian Robert Darnton noted in The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France, his fascinating book on the illegal pamphlets and their illicit circulation, that primary documents indicate that booksellers themselves did not distinguish between the intellectual and the prurient, saying, “We consider [Rousseau’s] Du Contrat Social political theory and Histoire de Dom B pornography, perhaps even as something too crude to be considered literature. But the bookmen of the eighteenth century lumped them together as ‘philosophical books.’”
So if nasty little libelles weren’t that much of a threat to power, why suppress them and punish possession with imprisonment as you would revolutionary philosophy? And for that matter, why would a French citizen risk their freedom for a cartoon of Marie Antoinette enjoying an orgy if there wasn’t something satisfyingly transgressive in the insolent and forbidden consumption of vulgarity?

Historian Lynn Hunt, author of both Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution, and The Family Romance of the French Revolution, also holds fast and hard to the significance of meanness and vulgarity in a revolutionary context, saying of the libelles, “There’s a disagreement about this among historians, but I have argued and others have argued that this was a part undermining the aura of the monarchy and making it easier in the end to arrest the king and execute him—and especially to execute the queen.”

One lesson of the French Revolution, then, is that rudeness can be extremely politically useful. There are arguments to be made over who constitutes a valid target, but when crude obscenity is directed at figures of power, their prestige can be tarnished, even in the eyes of the most reverent of subjects. Caricature is designed to exaggerate, and therefore make more noticeable, people’s central defining qualities, and can thus be illuminating even at its most indelicate.

And evidence abounds for the galvanizing power of vulgarity in our own time—just look at the appeal of Donald Trump. Trump has successfully undermined opponents through the use of innuendos and crudities, and has turned the political process upside-down by gleefully undermining its dignity.

Of course Trump’s willingness to be disgusting has been alienating to those who like their politics to come with a sheen of respectability. He so revolted the punctilious and proper conservatives at the National Review that he inspired an entire “Against Trump” issue of the magazine. His braggadocio and dick jokes appall the traditional right; he would have made William F. Buckley’s eyes bulge (although what didn’t?) and he gives Peggy Noonan a traumatic case of the vapors.

But Trump’s vulgarity is appealing precisely because it exposes political truths. As others have noted, Trump’s policies (wildly inconsistent though they may be) are actually no more extreme than those of other Republicans; Trump is just willing to strip away the pretense. Other candidates may say “national security is a fundamental priority,” whereas Trump will opt for “ban all the Muslims.” The latter is far less diplomatic, but in practice the two candidates fundamentally mean the same thing. We should prefer the honest boor, as polite euphemism is constantly used to mask atrocities.

This candor is also the fundamental reason why Old Money types have always detested the arrivistes. The nouveau riche with their gaudy tastes, their leopardskin carpets and solid gold bathroom fixtures, upset the balance of things by giving the game away. They make wealth look like something nasty and indefensible. Douchebags in Lamborghinis fundamentally undermine the self-conception of the upper classes, which is that they are the appointed stewards of taste and judgment against the vast uncultured hordes. But since the rich of all flavors are a monstrosity and a cancer, it’s the flashy, obnoxious kind of wealth that we should hope for, the kind that tells no lies and is more obviously despicable. Civility is destructive because it perpetuates falsehoods, while vulgarity can keep us honest.

In fact, there are times when political vulgarity is not just useful, but vital to convey the passion of messaging. In 1968, a 19-year-old anti-Vietnam protester was arrested in a courthouse for wearing a jacket with the words “Fuck the Draft,” leading to a major Supreme Court decision protecting freedom of speech. In 1988, N.W. A. released “Fuck tha Police,” a song that instantly became notorious for the bluntness of its confrontational, profanity-laden lyrics.

In both cases, the vulgarity was an unmistakably clear response to political circumstances. The Vietnam war was a moral obscenity of the highest order; there was no polite way of expressing the appropriate depth of revulsion. N.W.A. were saying what every black person had wanted to say for a long time, in the only words strong enough to even begin to communicate the truth. The depravity of the atrocious acts committed by the powerful far exceed the depravity of any swear words one could use to describe those acts. The death and brutality of Vietnam didn’t just deserve an f-word or two, but warranted every last curse that could be spoken by the human tongue. And as the 18th-century French knew, monarchy is the real barbarity; it was the libellistes who were the true allies of the Enlightenment.

To maintain its potency, vulgarity should certainly be the exception rather than the rule. And there will always be Jacobin and its kin for the more genteel set. But there are certain people to whom one must be mean, certain circumstances in which one must be crude. A politically effective propriety means knowing when to use one’s manners, and when to tell an ostrich-themed dick joke.

And of course, vulgarity isn’t inherently subversive. Even when politicized its effects are often mild and mostly cathartic. When anonymous Twitter trolls deluge establishment journalists with bon mots like “I will eat your ass like McRib,” it may not be particularly revolutionary. But it is not at all unprecedented; it’s not even particularly shocking if you know a little history.

The left will always need its journals and polemic and academic writing, but there are times when it is both right and proper to terrify the bourgeoisie with your own feralness. Reclaiming vulgarity from the Trumps of the world is imperative because if we do not embrace the profane now and again, we will find ourselves handicapped by our own civility. Vulgarity is the language of the people, and so it should be among the grammars of the left, just as it has been historically, to wield righteously against the corrupt and the powerful.

We cannot cede vulgarity to the vulgarians; collegial intellectuals will always be niche, but class war need not be.
Dwayne Betts explains why prison prose is possible

R. Dwayne Betts is an award-winning poet and memoirist whose latest collection is *Bastards of the Reagan Era*. Betts spent eight years in prison starting when he was 16; he is now a student at Yale Law School. He spoke to Current Affairs editor Nathan J. Robinson in response to the article “Mass Incarceration and the Limits of Prose,” published in Current Affairs’ March/April edition, which had reviewed recent books on the American criminal justice system and explored the possibility that prisons were nearly impossible to write about well.

**NR:** You take issue with the idea that mass incarceration is a problem impervious to literature, that there’s something about its nature that is uniquely impossible to convey in words. Why do you think that’s wrong?

**RDB:** I don’t think that there are any problems impervious to literature. Also, it seems that the issues with these books is on one hand their imperfection and on the other their failure to offer a cogent solution to a complex problem. I’m not sure that’s a fair assessment or standard. And, just as a broader point - I challenge the idea that mass incarceration cannot be conveyed - its problems, challenges, and tragedies - in words. This is particularly a hard task - this conversation when you consider that we are talking about two memoirs, a book of legal scholarship, and work by a young ethnographic scholar. The standards for judging them vary so widely that they can’t, even with their considerable ambition, begin to carry the water of decades/centuries of racist and unjust criminal justice policies.

**NR:** So if the existing literature on mass incarceration fails us (and it seems like you might not disagree with that), it’s not because there’s something inherently impossible about the subject, it’s just a function of the way people are doing the writing. It’s nevertheless going to be difficult to use words alone to communicate the nature of racism and a criminal justice system that ensnares millions. How could someone possibly hope to convey those truths to people who will never experience them firsthand?

**RDB:** I’d ask you what literature you find compelling about Vietnam? *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien? *Diee Ca Dau* by Komunyakaa? [In Elizabeth Alexander’s essay “A Black Man Says Sorbet”], one of the issues she takes with the prison memoir is the way it essentializing prison as the experience of young black men. So this is a critique of *Makes Me Wanna Holler*, of Manchild in the Promisedland. She talks about this narrative of redemption, and I think she is talking about the way that these narratives are woefully disengaged from politics and community, both in the downfall and the rise. But the existing literature on prison goes beyond that - and, I’d argue that failing to be fully realized, is not failing. The memoir itself, with the author trying to resist being the hero, is as much to blame as all else. The need to write people as more than flimsy representations of violence. This is probably where the prison memoir, at its worst, has failed. I think about the rape scene in *Makes Me Wanna Holler*, for instance. But there are other books that don’t fail like this. Mitchell S. Jackson’s *The Residue Years*. Etheridge Knight’s poetry. But your final point brings up something I struggle with. Has prison gave me some unique understanding
of hell that you cannot have? And if it has, can my writing bring you close to that? The philosopher L.A. Paul has a new book called *Transformative Experience*. She defines a transformative experience as one that gives you new information (that others who haven’t experienced don’t have) and changes the way you experience being you. Prison is the quintessential transformative experience. There are things you can’t get, without being there. But that inaccessible thing (horror, agony, absence?) does not prevent you from getting the texture, the feel, the gut wrenching absurdity of prison. If that were true, there would be no capturing real knowledge: of war, of prison, of power, of childbirth, while standing on the outside of it. That’s not a tenable position.

NR: When we’re talking about the specific case of race and criminal justice in American life, one problem seems to be that writers who want to draw attention to these things are trapped by the perceived necessity to create some kind of narrative with publishable, marketable appeal. Yes, they face the problem that every writer faces; experience will only ever be imperfectly captured on the printed page. That’s unavoidable; if you thought writing needed to create a perfect picture of its subject matter, you could never write. The trouble seems to be that as well as trying to depict the situation, they also feel the need to provide an explanation for it, and this is a case where a lot of explanations are destined to be cheap. So Jeff Smith only gets a book deal because he’s a professor/state senator who went to prison, and that gives it an entertaining narrative; Alice Goffman is telling us about the Ivy League sociologist who went into the wilderness of the Philadelphia streets. What gets read (and so what gets written) is the stuff that tells the best stories, not the stuff that tells the most truth.

RDB: But even Goffman’s book, which I have been highly critical of, is an attempt to understand something. And her failures have little to do with genre specific challenges, but the challenges of any writer. In fact, her book is really about the kinds of narratives that I think will force us to look at this situation with more complexity. I just think her analysis failed.

There is no hard distinction between the truth and best stories. I’m not convinced that the best writers aim for explanations. Michelle Alexander’s book is scholarship, Alice Goffman’s is scholarship. And so explanations drive it... But ultimately, we can point to books of all genres that use stereotypes and tropes as their author’s major cache.

NR: No, I think it’s exactly true that the best writers don’t aim for explanations, that attempts to explain rather than depict are a major pitfall. When you try to come up with some theory for why everything is the way it is, rather than just trying to show what it is, the facts end up being contorted to fit the theory rather than the theory emerging from the facts.” If I were rewriting the article, I don’t think I’d refer to the “limits of prose,” but probably the “limits of explanatory nonfiction” and the challenges of prose. Goffman is an interesting study in failure, because she clearly felt as if her intentions were good, and she clearly doesn’t like mass incarceration, and she spent 8 years doing field research. What went wrong there? I do think one problem is that, as a sociologist, she had professional incentives to write a big explanatory book. What you criticized her for in your review of *On the Run* was creating this cops and robbers story in which black life was defined by criminality at its essence. But in sociology, you’re always kind of looking for an essence.

RDB: Right. I agree with the idea of the challenges of prose. But probably think that we’re better off reading better books.
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SAMPLE TESTIMONY
Q: Dr. Zanforth, what was your professional opinion of the defendant?
A: It is my soundest professional opinion that the defendant is incapable of feeling love. He is what we would refer to, medically speaking, as a pathological stone cold killer.

Q: And how did you make that diagnosis?
A: I carefully examined a photograph of the defendant.

Q: And what did you find?
A: I discovered that the letters in his name can be rearranged to spell the words "THE GUILTY ONE" if you drop three of them and add an L.

Q: Is it your professional opinion that this finding is meaningful?
A: In my professional opinion, it should carry significant weight in our assessment of the defendant's character and culpability.

Q: And is this a standard accepted form of analysis in your field?
A: Certainly. It's used in courtrooms across the country on a daily basis.

Q: I have nothing further, Your Honor.

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CHOOSE YOUR VERDICT

How much scientific certainty can you afford?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>NOT GUILTY</th>
<th>GUILTY</th>
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<td>&quot;The test results were inconclusive.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I found an exact match!&quot;</td>
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WHEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS DISAPPEAR

Regardless of student performance, charter schools and vouchers may have other worrying consequences...

With last year’s 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, media coverage of New Orleans’ recovery also revived the debate over the city’s controversial all-charter school district. After the storm, New Orleans schools were entirely revamped, with 7,000 local teachers laid off, and the business of school administration turned over to private non-profits. The resulting system is unlike any other in the country, with traditional public schools having entirely disappeared.

Anyone looking to fair-mindedly assess the results of the New Orleans charter program faces a difficult task, since views of the experiment are strongly colored by partisanship. Conservatives think it is a wonder, a model of innovation and entrepreneurship that ought to be replicated across the country. George W. Bush hailed the New Orleans program as “amazing” and the Wall Street Journal said it proved that “disaster can be an opportunity.” Those on the left are more inclined to be skeptical, with an In These Times investigation deeming the program a “failure” that continues to produce low overall performance.

Some things are not in doubt. The graduation rates in New Orleans have jumped and the school system has gone from basically non-functional to basically functional. But it’s also true that the gains were extremely costly and →

by L.M. Orbison
“CHARTER PROONENTS HAVE FAILED TO DEAL WITH ONE OF THE MOST SERIOUS LIKELY LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF EDUCATION REFORM POLICIES: THE DESTRUCTION OF TEACHING AS A VIABLE MIDDLE-CLASS PROFESSION.”

have some troubling aspects: large amounts of outside money needed to be funneled in, and there are allegations that during early phases a lot of disabled and difficult students were excluded by dubious means, with the remaining public schools serving as “dumping grounds” for those who would drag down the reputation of the charters. Thus critics of the New Orleans system suggest that the numbers are misleading, that many children are being left out of the metrics.

It is common for debates over charters to focus on issues like these, examining whether the schools fulfill their stated promise. Do they in fact boost student performance significantly, or is this a bit of statistical sleight-of-hand? Much depends on how outcomes are measured, and while some make the case that charters work wonders, others see their impact as anything from neutral to catastrophic.

But discussions of performance are inevitably narrow. Even if there may be good reason to believe that charter performance is frequently mediocre or even poor, it’s important to also recognize that schools have functions and consequences beyond graduation rates. The welfare of students can be improved even as the welfare of teachers, parents, and communities is damaged. Assessing charters properly requires assessing all costs, and when we do so, privatization looks worrying indeed.

Crucially, charter proponents have spectacularly failed to deal with one of the most serious likely long-term consequences of education reform policies: the destruction of teaching as a viable middle-class profession. Jonathan Chait, in New York magazine, praised the New Orleans model for “breaking the traditional union model of teacher compensation,” eliminating job security guarantees that were not tied to measures of job performance. Chait blames “inflexible contracts” for the fact that the hiring process for teachers is less competitive than in other fields, and that American teachers tend to graduate lower in their college classes than their counterparts around the world. This rhetoric, that teacher tenure is killing the schools, has become one of the reformers’ most repeated clichés.

Yet there is a strange contradiction in this logic. After all, if teaching isn’t a competitive profession as it stands currently, how can reducing job security and benefits possibly make it more attractive? Education reformers want to rein in what they see as luxurious excesses in teacher compensation, yet speak in the same breath of attracting a talented pool of applicants. The two goals are in direct economic conflict; lower compensation means worse applicants, and there are already strong arguments that low teacher pay partially explains the talent deficit Chait laments. Thus the real likely outcome of education reform’s changes is that teaching will simply cease to be a realistic potential career; only inexperienced recent college graduates will be able to afford to live on teaching’s poverty-level salaries. The hardest might stick it out for a few years, but as they begin to desire homeownership and a family, being a teacher will no longer remain an option.

Some education reformers remain optimistic that talent can still be attracted on this model. But the reasons they highlight are bleak. Neerav Kingsland, the former CEO of New Schools for New Orleans, was one of the prime movers behind the city’s charter experiment. He has written for the American Enterprise Institute that as more and more middle-class jobs are destroyed in the years to come, there will be plenty of highly skilled unemployed people. The unlivable low salaries therefore will not prevent the recruitment of excellent teachers, since higher pay simply won’t be available in any other sector.

What’s striking is that this is the best answer education reformers have to the question of how to sustain the teaching profession. It’s a model predicated on misery: it’s true that teaching will offer guaranteed poverty, but fortunately mass unemployment will ensure that good people will be desperate enough to do it anyway. That such an argument is seriously made in education reform circles should cause some deep reflection on the movement’s social implications.

One of the other major oversights of education reform is its failure to consider the risks of spinning off government functions into unaccountable private entities. Chait describes this by saying that charters are controversial because “their structure cuts crossways through the liberal ideal of governance.” By this he means that liberals think public policy should be transparent and voted on democratically, but charters take major decision-making abilities away from the electoral sphere. Hence the complaints by New Orleans parents that even as school performance has improved, they feel totally shut out, tossed about by forces they cannot control.

Charter proponents know how wary people are of allowing standards to be determined privately rather than by voters. This is why a large controversy exists over whether to call charters “public” or “private,” with charter supporters insisting that the schools are public. But the label certainly adopts an unusual definition of the word; if entities that are both owned and managed privately are nevertheless public, so are all government contractors. The National Review said that charter schools are public because they are “paid for by the taxpayers,” but by this standard, so are Lockheed Martin and Princeton University.

Branding issues aside, it’s clear that the risks of private management are quite high. Amy Baral of the Roosevelt Institute has written about the way that charters enable the blurring between corporate and community interests. In Michigan, for example, 80% of charters are run for profit, meaning that students can expected to be treated and educated well solely to the extent that doing so makes money. And in both for-profit and non-profit charter schools, the incentive to meet standards by any means necessary can come at the expense of both teachers’ and students’ ultimate well-being. The competitive pressure explains why many charter schools adopt brutal and inflexible disciplinary policies, with students punished heavily for everything from coughing too much to wearing the wrong-colored shoes, and constantly being expelled to keep outcomes and budgets up. “Every kid is money,” as one New Orleans principal put it.

It’s also true that education reformers seem worryingly uninterested in meaningful community control. Kingsland of New Schools for New Orleans is scathing of those who believe in an autonomous and participatory model of schooling. “The future is not autonomy,” he writes. “The future is trust, risk, freedom, and accountability.” Kingsland is cynical about giving teachers increased flexibility, scoffing at the belief that “the magical moment is when you give an educator the chance to pick her math curriculum.” So much education reform rhetoric carries these authoritarian undertones, whether it is the emphasis on discipline or the suggestion that democracy is a mere inefficiency.

But there is a final major danger to education reform plans, one seldom noted, which is that even as it injects money into the school systems it touches, it ultimately clears political space for funding reductions that hurt poor children. It does this by strength-
enabling the consensus that education should operate more like a marketplace and less like a basic universal guarantee.

As the education reform movement has built power, it has emphasized the primacy of choice, which comes in the form of either charters or school vouchers, both of which are intended to create a miniature market where schools compete over students. The ultimate aim is to remove government entirely, what Jeb Bush called “total voucherization,” and proponents are open about wanting to “move from a government-operated school system to a nonprofit-operated school system.” This would not only change the way schools themselves operate, but would also change the way political conversations about schools operate.

Take the case of school vouchers. In their function, school vouchers are logically indistinguishable from food stamps. They are an in-kind benefit for the poor, redistributing wealth downward and subsidizing a basic good. Food stamps allow poor people to go to a grocery store and purchase food, school vouchers allow them to go to an educational institution and purchase learning. The two operate in precisely the same way.

That might be a perfectly legitimate way to ensure a basic educational standard. But there will inevitably be political ramifications to the change. Food stamps themselves are highly controversial, because conservatives see them as an unearned subsidy to the poor. Last spring, congressional Republicans announced that they would be pushing hard to roll back food stamp benefits, on the grounds that they undermine the “dignity” that comes in “taking care of yourself. Others spoke out against those who haven’t “contributed quite as much to society” being fed for free.

There’s no reason why this dynamic would not immediately replicate itself if education operated similarly. If food subsidies shouldn’t be guaranteed, why should educational ones? In fact, “education stamps” might be even more vulnerable to attack than their nutritional counterpart. Food is a more essential necessity of life than education, thus if conservatives reject arguments that food should be guaranteed on necessity grounds, they are even more likely to reject such arguments when deployed in favor of a right to schooling.

In fact, it’s easy to suspect that conservatives are not really in favor of vouchers, and that once public schools were fully abolished, the vouchers would be next to go. Milton Friedman even said something similar in his original proposal for school privatization. Though he strongly supported vouchers, Friedman was clear that the vouchers were only a way of getting the public to sign on to a fully-privatized system: “Vouchers are not an end in themselves; they are a means to make a transition from a government to a market system...” Friedman was perfectly honest about what the ends were, saying that ultimately “the privatization of schooling would produce a new, highly active and profitable private industry.” Friedman spoke of the advantages that businesses would get from a whole new crop of customers, and the wondrous efficiencies that would be introduced to education by a complete surrender to market forces.

A nightmare scenario is easy to picture. When education operates like food stamps, there will be pressure to cut spending on the grounds that they are a handout from the taxpayer (which they are). Just as conservatives consistently want to attach work requirements to other forms of welfare, a series of onerous conditions would be placed on poor people’s receipt of vouchers. The current system, with its absolute guarantee of schooling as a fundamental unconditional right, will quickly erode. In this situation, poor students would have to take the schooling they could afford. Most of the cheap or subsidized schools would probably be rudimentary job training centers, which only offered education in exchange for a student’s agreement to permanently indenture themselves to the school’s parent company. It’s a less far-fetched scenario than it seems, particularly because it’s exactly what already exists for other basic resources such as food and healthcare.

In New Orleans, despite the much-touted improvements of the all-charter school system, teacher diversity has plummeted, and is less and less reflective of the student population.
JOURNALISTIC SELF-OUTSOURCING
an indisputably sensible policy

by Fredrik deBoer

BRADFORD DELONG, a former Clinton Administration official turned aggressive neoliberal blogger, once gave a nasty rebuke to those who lament the consequences of free trade on American workers. DeLong, like many of his peers in the media world, insists that by complaining about poverty among out-of-work Americans, we must necessarily be wishing that the Chinese had not experienced the benefits of outsourcing. He asked:

Is there a way to interpret [critics of the effects of trade with China] other than as a call to keep China a society of poor subsistence rice farmers as long as possible—keep them poor, barefoot, uneducated, and by no means allow them to work at any of the high-value manufacturing occupations we want to keep in the United States?

DeLong’s reasoning is echoed in recent attacks on Bernie Sanders by liberal journalists. In Slate, Jordan Weissmann said Sanders was telling Vietnamese seamstresses that he wanted them to remain impoverished. At Vox.com, Zach Beauchamp said Sanders’ skepticism of trade means trying to help Americans while “screwing over the global poor.”

So this the phase we are in. One in which media commentators (raised in affluence and currently enjoying at least middle class incomes—who are thus, according to their own moral calculus, very economically privileged) tell Americans devastated by the collapse of the uneducated labor market that their poverty, marginalization, and hopelessness is Actually Good, because people in Bangladesh can now move from absolutely abject poverty to slight-

GLOBAL INCOME DISTRIBUTION

Source: UNICEF report Global Inequality: Beyond the Bottom Billion (July 2011), using data from the World Bank, UNU-WIDER, UNDP, and Eurostat
ly-less-abject poverty. That is, provided the sweatshop where they work doesn’t collapse on them. And provided they are willing to endure a nightmare of nonexistent labor power, terrible health and safety standards, total impunity for their bosses, and for the women, an atmosphere of near-constant sexual threat and exploitation.

The first thing to say is that DeLong is offering a transparently bogus choice. “Help poor people in Bangladesh” or “help poor people in Yuma” is a false binary. Yes, as the working class in America have suffered, the incomes of some of the poorest people in the world have risen. But do you know who else have seen their incomes rise? The world’s wealthiest, by vast margins. Pretending that globalization is a simple matter of siphoning from the poor-but-less-poor to the more-poor is a willful deception. It completely ignores the vast explosion in the income and wealth of those at the top. If you want to know where we can get the money to help poor

people in China and India and Mexico, we know where to look: the upper half of the global income distribution diagram. (See left.)

Now the actual numbers of such distributions are often debated. But you don’t have to accept UNICEF’s exact numbers to acknowledge that there is a vast ocean of income that is controlled by a tiny portion of the world’s people. There is more than enough money being generated in the global economy to ensure a decent standard of living for a Bangladeshi factory worker and an out of work Ohio iron worker with a bad knee and two kids. To constantly frame this as a zero-sum game between the global poor and the American poor is an act of basic dishonesty.

But suppose you’re a journalist, writer, or academic who really does think that outsourcing is the only way to help the world’s poorest. Isn’t your own moral path then clear? Shouldn’t you be outsourcing your own job to people from the poorest parts of the earth? There are many talented and ambitious writers and scholars in China, India, Pakistan, Nigeria. If you make, say, $80K a year as a pundit, isn’t your moral duty to work with your employer to outsource your work to a poorer country? Punditry, after all, is very easy to conduct via telecommunications, unlike being a waiter, an orchard worker, or a yoga instructor. And isn’t it very possible that you could get at least a large majority of the value of your work from a team of people in India at a fraction of the cost, while providing all of them with wages far higher than the median income of their home country? You could have your employer pay five Indian writers $10K/year to replicate what you provide for the company. The Indian writers would make better than six times the Indian median annual income. And your employer gets to pocket that extra $30K—which, after all, is why outsourcing actually exists, to improve profits. Everyone wins! Well, not you. But this is precisely the bargain that you think America’s uneducated labor force should make. It is, in fact, a condition that you have loudly argued is morally necessary.

Yet to the best of my knowledge, not a single neoliberal wonk has fallen on his or her sword and given up their job to a worker in the developing world, nobly sacrificing their own economic good for that of several other people, and accepting a life of poverty, despair, and opiate addiction in the devastated post-industrial landscapes of modern America. It seems that the morality of outsourcing only applies to other people, and not the kind of people who live in the tony precincts of post-collegiate cosmopolitanism. Funny about that.

I have a particular individual who should step right up to the plate. J. Bradford DeLong, Clinton apologist, hippie puncher, and relentless enemy of the well-being of America’s uneducated labor force. As a professor of Economics at UC-Berkeley, DeLong is paid $135K a year. (As a public employee, DeLong’s salary is a matter of public record.) Couldn’t his job be performed by some of the self-same Chinese workers that he has such deep concern for? It’s not like there aren’t a lot of talented Chinese workers with degrees in economics. Let’s be generous and assume that those Chinese workers could only perform his job at 80% of his value. If you’re UC-Berkeley, and you could hire five Chinese people with MAs in economics at $20K, have them teach the three classes he probably teaches in a year via Skype, publish some research, and attack commies and poor people on his blog, all while pocketing the extra $35K? Those five Chinese people would make about two and a half times the median Chinese income for that kind of money, after all. Wouldn’t you take that deal at 80% of the quality? And wouldn’t Brad’s own moral compass insist that you were morally obligated to do so?

(If you’re worried for ol’ Brad, don’t be: tenured economics professors always have side hustles, doing “consulting” work that typically pays more in a day than your average destitute former factory worker on food stamps makes in a month. He’ll be just fine.)

But let me finish with a familiar question: is there a way to interpret DeLong’s refusal to outsource his job to China other than as a call to keep China a society of poor subsistence rice farmers as long as possible—keep them poor, barefoot, uneducated, and by no means allow them to work at any of the high-value professor of economics and anti-poor class warrior occupations we want to keep in the United States? ❖
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❖ Oren Nimni’s “Inedible Anarchist Recipe Guide.”
❖ Famous architects compete in our inaugural World’s Unsightliest Building contest (they’re all winners!)
❖ Building your own nudist detective, churning your own butter, and various other Handy Home Hints...
❖ Giving Wolf Blitzer what’s coming to him...
❖ Pivx: America’s most bloodthirsty foreign policy experts, a headline outbreak at the New York Times, “Against Bipartisanship,” an interactive Virtual Pie-Eating Contest...
❖ Some nauseating Silicon Valley B.S., Editors of Famous Magazines Who Have Snubbed Us, why people who enjoy exercise should be cast into a volcano, Sex Secrets of the Federal Judiciary, “Should Guns Exist At All?”, The Richard Dawkins Award for Repugnantly Self-Destruction, Puzzles, Games, and a special Murder Mystery...

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HISTORY’S VILLAINS REDEEMED...

“Professor Ferguson refuses to let political correctness get in the way of scholarly integrity. He dares to ask the questions nobody else is asking, like ‘Aren’t bloodthirsty amorality and humanistic compassion kind of the same thing when you really think about it?’” - David Irving
Don't get caught without a facebook
Dear Mr. Kristof,

As per our conversation, enclosed is the copy of Current Affairs mentioning you. I hope you do not think the language too harsh; as I said to you on the phone, the particular phrasing was highly contested and a number of us on the editorial board dissented. Personally, I believed the description “meat” to be generous. That is certainly not how I would describe you publicly.

No need to apologize about harsh. I know it was a bit of a faux pas for you to take a man with a severe allergy to the city’s most famous seafood restaurant, but we all make mistakes. I assure you that my annoyance had fully subsided by the end of the week, and I retract every word I said in that voice mail. You know I have nothing to do with your human rights work today and your defense of sweatshops guts; and I have always considered your human rights work vital and your defense of sweatshops guts, and nothing I said to the contrary in some whiskey-soaked voice message should carry any lasting weight.

I have an excellent idea for an article you should write, which I would love to explain to you over a non-seafood meal sometime next week (if you are back from Myanmar by then). Essentially, you would point out that since the economic growth and expansion of the 18th century would not have occurred in the absence of slavery, it’s the liberals who oppose slavery who are the actual villains in the story. Rather counterintuitive, I thought, and right in.

I’m afraid I couldn’t pass on your regards to Marcia as requested; she has always had a thing about you and refers to you as “bourgeois swine.” Of course we both know that this is preposterous; I have never thought of you as remotely bourgeois.

Thank you for the ice cube tray, though I do not see the point of it.

Yours ever,

Nathan J. Robinson
Editor, Current Affairs
WHOSE GAY HISTORY?

Chicago went from raiding gay nightclubs to painting rainbows all over its streets. But as Yasmin Nair explains, queer history is a bit more complicated than the standard progressive fable...

With photographs by Margaret Ölin.

When 38-year-old Ron Huberman landed the coveted job as head of the country’s third-largest school system in Chicago, he did so with absolutely no background in education. But Chicago was ruled by then-Mayor Richard M. Daley, son of Richard J., who continued a proud dynastic tradition of political appointments. Huberman had formerly been appointed president of the Chicago Transit Authority (by Daley) and before that, was Daley’s Chief of Staff and, before that, Executive Director of the Office of Emergency Management and Communications (also appointed by Daley). By Daley standards, he was a perfect fit for the job.

But the news of Huberman’s appointment in 2009 was soon dwarfed by his apparent revelation to the Chicago Sun-Times: that he was gay. Huberman’s coming out left many in Chicago’s influential gay community bemused; he had already been out for a long time. He had a partner with whom he openly attended social and workplace events in gay bars and establishments all over town, and he had been out to his parents since the age of 15. In effect, Huberman re-emerged from a closet that he had thrown wide open many years ago.

Daley and his administration always had a tight grip on what kind of stories accompanied news of appointments, so the coming out story was clearly no accident. It was meant to deflect attention away from both Huberman’s lack of qualifications and the controversies surrounding CPS at the time. Daley had just announced the closure and reorganization of 22 schools and everywhere parents and students were agitating against the slashing of funds to the beleaguered system. Daley himself was not doing well in polls, facing widespread criticism for having ceded too much on a citywide parking meter contract which quadrupled residents’ parking costs. He would eventually decide to not run for re-election and Huberman, who began his CPS term promising to stay in for the long haul, would hand in his own resignation soon after Daley’s announcement.

But in retrospect, the Huberman appointment was a novel new kind of political scheme. Got a school district to kill? Hire the gay guy, have him “come out” to the press, and continue your decimation of schools while everyone is even momentarily distracted.

To be gay in Chicago was once a potential source of shame and stigma, especially in the senior Daley’s administration. On April 25, 1964, police carried out an early morning raid on a nightclub called the Fun Lounge, to which the city’s gays flocked to mix and mingle. As John D. Poling writes in Out and Proud in Chicago, Cook County Sheriff Richard Ogilvie had placed the club under surveillance, describing its activities as “too loathsome to describe.” The raid resulted in the...
arrests of 109 people. The Chicago Tribune reported the names of eight teachers and four municipal employees in the paper, ruining their and several other lives in the process.

The Chicago of today is almost unrecognizably different. The city has become a hospitable landscape for gays, especially the wealthy and powerful sort. Chicago is now home to numerous gay nonprofits and swarms with gay politicians, activists, and officials. It is home to gay men like Chuck Renslow, the founder of International Mr. Leather, a long-standing (since 1979) annual conference and contest for leathermen. It is also home to wealthy gay men like Fred Eychaner, one of the most powerful and influential men in the country, ranked as the sixth highest contributor to the Democratic National Committee. In 1998, Daley renovated, with great fanfare, the predominantly gay Lakeview neighborhood popularly known as Boystown. The $3.2 million facelift came with giant, phallic rainbow pylons that marked the area’s limits and was the ultimate sign that the city of Chicago loves its gays, at least of a certain type.

Within people’s lifetimes, then, Chicago went from police raids on gay lounges to taxpayer-funded rainbow streetscapes. All of which raises a baffling question: how did the city get from there to here?

It’s the question examined by historian Timothy Stewart-Winter’s new book *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics*, which looks at Chicago in the post-war years in an attempt to identify just how these dramatic changes came about.

For the most part, gay history has focused on the coasts. It is widely and in some sense accurately assumed that those fleeing the repression of the heartland inevitably departed for the east or the west. But there have always been gays in the Midwest, and their story is only beginning to be told. Chicago is, as Stewart-Winter rightly points out, “a major transportation hub and one of the nation’s largest cities, and it drew gay migrants from across the Midwest.” It is also an international city, home to several immigrant communities, and historically a bastion of left-wing organizing (we gave the world the eight-hour week, and you’re very welcome).

Chicago has a long and storied history, having been home to several such political and social movements. Give this complexity, it makes sense that Stewart-Winter focuses on a particular period of gay history, and how it unfolded within the context of the growing civil rights movement.

Sensibly, he also emphasizes the local aspect, and the importance of state laws. State and municipal politics and law have always had a large effect on the lives of gay people. It was, after all, local laws and policing practices that first made life hell for gays and then eased the restrictions on them.

And the state government has constantly been of major import. For example, in 1961, the Illinois legislature passed two laws which almost contradicted each other. The first decriminalized gay sex by repealing the Illinois “crime against nature” statute. But the second “altered liquor regulations in a way that gave the city of Chicago more power to keep gay bars closed after a raid.” This, Stewart-Winter points out, had a negative effect on gays as individuals and as a group: “Chicago’s experience thus revealed that legalizing intimate acts was not enough to make gay people feel safe when they gathered.”

But who were these “gay people”? They were a far more diverse group, economically and racially, than is traditionally acknowledged. One of the contributions of Stewart-Winter’s book is to examine how the struggles of gay peo-
ple were fought in tandem with those of African Americans.

2016 is the 100th anniversary of the Great Migration, and Chicago was one of the cities to which African Americans moved from the south. The city's racial history has been a troubling one, marked more by hostility, stigma, and exclusion than by acceptance, and the urban segregation and division between whites and blacks can also be seen in its gay community. *Queer Clout* examines the rise of gay power in the unavoidable context of black-white relations. Stewart-Winter posits that gay activists employed the tactics of the civil rights movement and even briefly worked with its leaders. Today's gay movement is largely cynical in its use and appropriation of civil rights history and rhetoric: gay marriage activists have repeatedly and troublingly likened themselves to Rosa Parks. But at least for a brief period of time in Chicago, the alliance between white gays and African American civil rights activists was more palpable and genuine.

Early in the morning of December 4, 1969, Fred Hampton, chairman of the Illinois Black Panther Party and deputy chair of the national BPP, was murdered by police during a raid, while he lay sleeping. Also killed was Mark Clark, the Black Panther member on security duty at the time. The killings incited explosive responses amongst blacks and whites, with support or denunciation falling along mostly predictable racial lines. Stewart-Winter writes that the incident would “cement the fragile black-gay alliance in Chicago” when the leaders of the Mattachine Midwest, the leading gay organization at the time, were taken on a tour of the apartment in which the two men were killed, the walls still riddled with bullets. Shortly after, Mattachine Midwest and Chicago Gay Liberation, another new and more radical group, issued a joint statement supporting the Panthers in challenging the police version of the raid.

Equally fascinating is the political history of Chicago's black politicians and their efforts on behalf of the gay community. Gays fighting against restrictive laws found allies in men like Alderman Clifford Kelley and Harold Washington, Chicago's first and so far only black mayor. Such alliances were not entirely outside of traditional Machine politics—Washington, for instance, was innately progressive in his sympathies, but his stance came just as much from political necessity: he needed gay white progressive votes to combat the racist vote-gathering of white politicians opposed to him. Ultimately, though, neither the alliances between activists nor the ones between politicians and activists would last very long. This was because, as Stewart-Winter writes, “...ironically, in the very years when policing and punishment in black neighborhoods began to increase, the policing of predominantly white gay establishments and neighborhoods became far less systematic.” As the gay rights movement scored victories, and the police raids finally stopped, the experiences of black and gay people were no longer as obviously comparable. The gay rights movement would go on to score several victories, and police raids on mainstream (white) bars finally stopped. But this came at the same time as deepening poverty and more police surveillance on the south and west sides where blacks and an increasing Latino population resided. Eventually, the racial rifts between white gays and the rest of the city widened again, as the differing populations dealt with more or less a sense of security and safety from the state.

Over the course of detailing such shifts and changes, *Queer Clout* introduces hitherto relatively unknown Chicago activists like Pearl Hart, a Jewish lesbian lawyer who defended prostitutes and left-wing activists, and Ron Sable, a gay physician and activist who would be instrumental in developing gay-focused health care resources in the city. And it reveals interesting details about those

The accompanying photographs by Margaret Olin were taken at a gay liberation rally in Chicago in 1970. They show queer activism in all of its diversity, radicalism, and resiliency, a perspective seldom seen.
who have since gone on to rosy careers as established progressives. For instance: Jesús “Chuy” García, a Latino member of the Chicago Board of Commissioners, became famous in 2015 for nearly ousting incumbent Mayor Rahm Emanuel. In a city famous for its allegiance to the Machine, and for only having elected one non-white mayor (Washington), García was lauded as the lefty-progressive alternative to Emanuel, who has long been seen as one of the more conventional liberals of the Democratic party. But in Queer Clout, we learn that García, had to be “hauled in and sort of beaten” by union people when he attempted to wiggle out of supporting a gay ordinance in the late ‘80s, according to writer Achy Obejas.

Queer Clout gives us many such tantalizing glimpses into Chicago political life, though it sometimes feels discordant and episodic as it tries to mold several stories and a wide range of characters into a larger, coherent narrative. The book will become a resource for those curious about gay history outside the coasts, and could easily have been at least twice its size.

In his most lucid chapter, “Lesbian Survival School,” Stewart-Winter paints a comprehensive and poignant picture of the challenges facing Chicago’s lesbian community as it worked on developing what was often a radical feminist agenda and also dealt with the complexities of race and ethnicity. Chicago was “the epicenter of the socialist feminist union movement that spread to more than a dozen cities in the 1970s,” Stewart-Winter points out. “Since the emergence of gay liberation,” he notes, “lesbian politics has been far more inflected by radicalism than has gay male politics.” As women, lesbians needed to pay more attention to matters like workplace harassment, equal pay, and abortion and reproductive rights. As feminists, they were more inclined to resist the pathway of marriage towards respectability.

But lesbians are not a homogeneous block, and there have been racial divisions from the beginning. Early lesbian feminism was imbued with the politics of separatism, something that black lesbians, who have historically needed and wanted to be part of their families and communities, have not always aligned with. In addition, white lesbians have historically tended to work on the assumption that queer=white.

As nearly anyone with the most casual understanding of the city knows, race continues to centrally define Chicago life and politics. In 2009, reporting on Chicago being ranked the most segregated city (it has recently moved down to third place), the Chicago Tribune interviewed several residents, asking why they chose to live in segregated neighborhoods. Not once did the paper even use the word “racism.” It concluded the piece by quoting a black woman: “There is a comfort level being among people of your own race...I don’t think that there was any intention of segregation behind that.”

But segregation in this city is not some genteel agreement between the races and ethnicities to quietly live away from each other. Rather, the segregation that is starkly evident to anyone who travels beyond the city’s justly celebrated downtown landscape is marked by economic devastation on the south side and much of the west. Everywhere on the south side, school buildings are shuttered, grocery stores are scarce, and large patches of neighborhoods are simply boarded up. Nearly all of this has been the result of many decades of brutally enforced, plantation-style racist and economic policies and actions. As recently as 1975, the Chicago Reporter sent a black journalist, Stephan Garnett, to Marquette Park, located in a white neighborhood, to report on its facilities. He was set upon by nearly 20 white men, had a beer bottle broken on his head, and his car set on fire. In 2011, mostly white and gay residents of Boystown, insisting that black youth coming to the area’s social service agencies were committing crimes in their neighborhood, declared that they would create dog squads to patrol in the evenings.

All of this is to say: the alliances between black and white gays and lesbians were doomed to fail in a city whose racism survives in its most unmediated, primal form...
Latinas survived for over two decades, bringing together lesbians and trans people in spaces that helped budding activists develop their own organizing talents. Many of them have gone on to work as immigration activists.

This kind of dynamic, activist fervor did not come out of the blue but has been decades in the making. Much of it has been slowly and carefully nurtured out of the limelight. In contrast, the white gay community has received far more city and community funding, and has, especially in recent years, been far more beholden to a mainstream national agenda which has included issues like gay marriage, hate crimes legislation, and Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.

One of the few black activists discussed in the book is the late Vernita Gray, who died in March 2014 and who is acknowledged here as a primary source and mentor to the author. Her story becomes a way for Stewart-Winter to trace the lack of clout at the start of the book to its conclusion, where she becomes the symbol of the ultimate attainment of queer clout.

At the close of the book, Stewart-Winter proves that gay political success has been achieved by relating the tale of a wedding: the marriage of Gray, an out African American lesbian, to her white partner Patricia (Pat) Ewert. Gray was a longtime activist in the city, with a large part of her career devoted to working within the Chicago municipal machine. During the Daley administration, she worked in the office of the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office, Dick Devine, for 18 years. Devine was first assistant to Richard M. Daley when he was the State’s Attorney, and both men have been publicly called out by police torture activists for not prosecuting police commander Jon Burge, finally convicted of torturing more than 100 black suspects. While she cannot be held responsible for these acts, Gray’s role in the office required her to frequently justify, defend and explain away the actions of Devine who was frequently accused by queer activists of engaging in police brutality (full disclosure: I was among the queers who protested against him).

Gray was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 2012. By then, she was already in a civil union partnership with Ewert. Gay marriage finally became legal in 2013 but was only scheduled to take effect in June 2014. Gray, fearing she would die before then, asked for and received, with the help of Lambda Legal, a waiver. On November 27, 2013, Gray and Ewert had a wedding ceremony in their home and were given a legal marriage certificate.

This intimate ceremony was widely covered world-wide, with write-ups in The Independent, the Chicago Tribune, The Guardian and the Daily Mail. The wedding was a brilliant framing of the poignancy of gay marriage: who but the most heartless monster could be critical of the cause after seeing a dying black woman unite with her white partner in holy matrimony? It was a classic media moment.

But concluding a book about queer clout in Chicago, one that claims to focus on local politics, with a gay marriage, makes no sense at all. Throughout, Stewart-Winter barely mentions the larger national battles like gay marriage. In fact, gay marriage was largely funded by and brought to local cities and towns by national organizations, and it was ultimately decided at the federal level, not the local one.

The concluding section on Gray’s wedding seems beautiful and innocuous. But it’s actually insidious, insofar as it makes gay marriage the center of gay politics. The message—and Stewart-Winter’s politics—are clear: Gay marriage constitutes the ultimate success of gays and lesbians. In a book that pays little attention to the vast richness of black queer life except as an accessory to white gay organizing, Gray (one of the few black lesbian activists mentioned a few times) becomes a tool for reconciling the deep racism that still exists in this city.

For many liberals and even progressives and leftists, gay marriage is seen as the pinnacle of achievement for the gay community, marking its entrance into a system of state-endowed rights and privileges not available to the unmarried. But looked at more critically, gay marriage is not an achievement for a community; rather, it shows the deep division in that community’s priorities.

In the early 1990s, the gay community, ravaged by the onset of AIDS, marched on behalf of Haitian immigrants who were being rounded up and placed in camps as suspected carriers of the HIV virus. Collectively, they demanded an end to the discrimination that also kept HIV-positive gays out of hospitals and the institution of universal healthcare. Today, most wealthy and well-off white gays can afford HIV-medications while the more vulnerable, mostly poor, mostly women, and mostly people of color have to struggle for access to resources to which they must travel long distances. Stewart-Winter himself points out that the majority of social service and healthcare resources in Chicago are on the north side, compelling black and other queers of color to travel long distances to gain access to them.

A better postscript, then, would have continued Stewart-Winter’s documentation of the inequality in resources, and the continuing challenges facing queers of color in a city marked by an intense rise in violence and brutality towards immigrants and black and brown people. A key problem with Stewart-Winter’s book is that its focus on the development of clout leads him away from a fuller consideration of the power behind it. In the end, he attempts to paint a happy portrait of reconciliation—a black-white wedding, the national triumph of gay marriage. But power is at work behind clout, and power ultimately defines who lives or dies, who gets funding for HIV resources and who doesn’t.

When it comes to queer clout, it is simply not enough to note how it came about but to ask the bigger question: What is clout used for?
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On Inequality
Harry G. Frankfurt
Princeton University Press, $14.95
In which the author of *On Bullshit* demonstrates that he is just as capable of
chanting the stuff out as of theorizing it. There’s an extraordinary arrogance in writing
a 90-page book on such an incredibly thorny topic; it implies that the author has figured out
something that nobody else has. Frankfurt’s ostensible revelation is that inequality doesn’t
matter, because if people weren’t poor, it would be fine that they were unequal. This is a useless
point to make, the kind only a philosopher would think helpful.

The Clintons’ War on Women
Roger Stone and Robert Morrow
Skyhorse Publishing, $27.95
There is an excellent book to be written about the Clintons from a feminist perspective. Unfortunately, we have this book, a collection of bizarre conspiratorial innuendos.

Did you know Bill Clinton isn’t Chelsea Clinton’s father? That Bill Clinton’s own father isn’t his biological father? That everybody’s father is somebody else’s? Some good stuff in here about the way the Clintons discriminated Bill’s rape and sexual assault accusers, but it’s
sandwiched between too much sleaze about Bill’s rape and sexual assault accusers, but it’s

syndicated by the American media, even though it is doing some of the most intelligent anal-
ysis of the Middle East. This book is adapted from his diaries and articles of the past 10+
plus years, recounting the breakdown of Iraq
and the rise of ISIS. It’s a very good guide to
understanding the world and everything in it is
bizarre and curious, albeit fascinating. This book
is not for those who dislike thinking of themselves
as being confused, purposeless animals.

Chaos & Caliphate
Patrick Cockburn
OR Books, $28.00
Patrick Cockburn is strangely neglected by the American media, even though he is doing some of the most intelligent analysis of the Middle East. This book is adapted from his diaries and articles of the past 10+
plus years, recounting the breakdown of Iraq
and the rise of ISIS. It’s a very good guide to
understanding the world and everything in it is
bizarre and curious, albeit fascinating. This book
is not for those who dislike thinking of themselves
as being confused, purposeless animals.

Syria Burning
Charles Glass
Verso, $16.95
Charles Glass is very good at his job, if only because he thinks reporting on Syria should involve... talking to Syrians. The best parts of this book are his recounting of the effects of the present conflict upon the lives of ordinary people. This is an informative, succinct, and straightforward overview of the present state of Syria, featuring illuminating detours into the country’s history. Glass is the sort of fellow who helps us make sense of things.

The Black Presidency
Michael Eric Dyson
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, $27.00
Michael Eric Dyson is a bit of a blowhard, as everyone knows. He takes a few too many trips to the White House, and he did a cruel and unnecessary hack job on Cornel West in the *New Republic*. That said, this book is not the hagiography one might expect, though it displays the usu-
al Dyson flaw of being hastily written. Dyson
thoughtfully explores the complexities of Obama’s relationship with black America, and the enormous racial burden he faces.

Austerity Ecology
Leigh Phillips
Zero Books, $27.95
Leigh Phillips is a socialist, but one infu-
sliated by the tendency of his fellow lefties to fall for ludicrous hippie woo-woo when it comes to
industry and the environment. He smartly and brutally takes down a few doomsayer icons of the green left like Derrick Jensen; Phillips believes in harnessing capitalism’s productive powers rather than needlessly jettisoning them. He’s overly fond of industrial monstrosities, but Phillips comes across a charming chap, well-read and good fun to spend time around.

Ultimate Questions
Bryan Magee
Princeton University Press, $16.95
There are two kinds of books in this world; those that remind readers that they are a skeleton under their skin, and those that do not. Bryan Magee’s *Ultimate Questions* is in the former category. Magee insists on relating of all the terrifying truths about our mortality and our absurd condition; we do not know what we are or what we are doing here, we are unable to understand the world and everything in it is
bizarre and curious, albeit fascinating. This book
is not for those who dislike thinking of themselves
as being confused, purposeless animals.

Zero to One
Peter Thiel
Crown Business Press, $27.00
Peter Thiel has made a billion dollars in Silicon Valley, and like so many rich people, he believes this give him license to expound a political philosophy. He draws ainsine four-square diagrams containing his personal theories of Hegel and Epicurus. He explains why monopolies are good and why he doesn’t hire anyone who wears a suit to a job interview. He’s a crackpot whose wealth has deluded him into thinking he has wisdom. Peter Thiel, *Current Affairs* is coming for you. You have been warned.
All books are reviewed fairly and given a full chance to defend themselves before being flayed. If an author wishes to protest that a review has been unjustly harsh, she is free to challenge our editors to a public quarrel, at which all of our opinions will be proven devastatingly correct. Positive reviews may be available for small bribes.

Saving Capitalism
Robert B. Reich
Kneip, $26.95

This is a terrible title for quite a good book. Reich gives an excellent explanation of how markets come into existence, and why there is no such thing as a true “free market,” because every market is embedded in a legal structure. It’s bizarre, then, that he frames his purpose as “saving capitalism,” since there’s so no such thing as true capitalism. To the extent that there is, why would anyone want to save it? Excellent stuff (along with heaps of Occupy-esque platitudes) buried throughout this flawed book.

In Defense of The Terror
Sophie Wahnich
Verso, $16.95

What the hell is wrong with these people? Wahnich dismisses those who condemn the chopping off of heads as ahistorical “moralists” who fail to appreciate the necessities of egg-breaking in the pursuit of omelettes. In doing so, of course, she sounds like every apologist for every brutal regime. Why this weird recent left-wing nostalgia for the French Revolution and Soviet rhetoric? These are the worst part of your history. Ditch them, don’t redeem them. Of course, there’s a foreword from Savoy Zelec. Of course.

A History of Violence
Oscar Martinez
Verso, $24.95

Oscar Martinez has done some excellent on-the-ground reporting on the effects of the drug trade on Central America. Not only is he brave, repeatedly endangering his own life to bring incredible up-close stories of traffickers, but he is a gifted and compelling writer. The title is accurate, though; the accounts of violence are numerous, vivid, and disturbing. This book is shocking, and it is sad, but nobody will regret reading it.

Tibet on Fire
Tsering Woesser
Verso, $16.95

What with SYRIZA RISING and Tibet on Fire, it would seem as if Verso have lately gotten rather into suggesting that the whole world is aflame. Although that’s not so far wrong, is it? Anyway, this is a fine book; the author is a Tibetan who explores the question of why 150 Tibetan monks were burned at the stake for various offenses. Start replacing in our email. Rector (silence.)

Things They'd Rather We Forgot

It is the sworn duty of Current Affairs to discomfort the complacent, a mission that as editors requires us to dredge up some unsavory behavior on their part. In our experience, one of the things people don’t like is when you incessantly remind them of embarrassing incidents from their past. We therefore use this space to remind various people of embarrassing incidents from their past.

❖ That time Bill Clinton killed a disabled guy—In 1992, Ricky Ray Rector was an Arkansas death row inmate who was missing 1/3 of his brain, having effectively been lobotomized by shooting himself in the head after having killed his victim. Ricky Ray was scheduled to die via capital punishment. Clinton offered a plea deal: Rector spent most of his time in his cell howling like a dog and casting imaginary Indians. Clinton received a call from attorney Jeff Rosenzweig saying that Rector was “crazy, a zombie — it couldn’t, it shouldn’t be done. He’s a child. It’s like killing a child.” Clinton then “hung up with a non-committal pleasantry.” Even the warden went to pieces at the idea of executing a clearly delusional disabled man. The execution went ahead. Clinton not only refused to stop it, but came back to Arkansas to be there for it in order to send a “tough on crime” message. The Houston Chronicle noted that “never—or at least not in the recent history of presidential campaigns—has a contender for the nation’s highest elective office stepped off the campaign trail to ensure the killing of a prisoner.” But the tough on crime stuff, as the ACLU director put it, “he had someone put to death who only had half a brain. You don’t find them any tougher than that.” The night before his execution, watching Clinton television, Rector had said he was still going to vote for Clinton come November. And as he ate his last meal, Rector put the dessert aside “for later,” still unaware there wouldn’t be a later.

❖ When Paul Krugman worked for Enron—We mention this only because Paul Krugman gets extremely irritated when people bring it up. They used to use this to him fairly frequently but seem to have stopped lately, which is a pity. So we must fill the gap: in 1999 Krugman became a paid consultant to Enron, and wrote a glowing article about the Enron Energy (for Fortune magazine (which named Enron “America’s Most Innovative Company” six years running), shortly beforehand it was revealed that Enron was a scam built entirely on corporate fraud and corruption. Again, Krugman hates when you mention this, and has written lengthy responses challenging people to prove that his job as an Enron consultant influenced his Times columns. Which is hardly the point; the point is that the Nobel-winning pundit is a credible dupe who isn’t as smart as he thinks he is.

❖ Marc Ambinder and the Muscular Foreign Policy—Now this gives you a sense of how the press works; the Clinton emails revealed an embarrassing exchange between Clinton’s spokesperson and Atlantic journalist Marc Ambinder. Ambinder asked the spokesperson, Phillippe Reines, for an advance copy of a Clinton speech. The spokesperson agrees to provide the copy, but sets conditions for the article Ambinder must write about it: 1) You in your own voice describe them as “muscular” 2) You note that a look as the CFR seating plan shows that all the envoys—from Holbrooke to Mitchell to Rass—all were arrayed in front of her, which in your own clever way you can say certainly not a coincidence and meant to convey something 3) You don’t say you were blindsided. “Ambinder replies, saying “got it.” And the story he wrote, it turns out, rated Clinton’s speech “muscular” and indeed made reference to the seating thing: “The staging gives a clue to its purpose: seated in front of Clinton, subordinate to Clinton, in the first row, will be three potentially rival power centers: envoys Richard Holbrooke and George Mitchell, and National Security Council senior director Dennis Ross...” Journalists, then, who constantly insist that they are not stooges and stenographers for the powerful, are definitely stooges and stenographers for the powerful. Astonishingly, Ambinder has actually defended himself on this, even though he should be laughed out of his profession forever.

All reminders of past transgressions are curated by Nelly Stampington, the Current Affairs animal dupe. She remembers all.

The Entire Problem with Everything Summed Up in One Simple Quotation

“I was on a call with a White House official once, asking why the administration didn’t do this or that obvious thing. I’ve never forgotten his reply. Look, he said, we may have gotten it wrong. But all those things were considered and rejected by smart people who are way better at this stuff than you or me. It’s almost never the case that there’s an obvious right answer and everyone else was just too dumb to do the obvious thing until the branch of puritans pointed it out. Defensive? Sure. But correct, too.”—from Ezra Klein, Editor-in-Chief of Vox.com

Mr. Klein believes it is highly implausible that the Best and the Brightest young wonks could ever get something colossally wrong, evidently forgetting that the entire history of American governance is the history of bright young wonks getting things colossally wrong....
For someone who is so thoroughly disliked by anyone who ever meets him, Ted Cruz has done inexplicably well at the political popularity contest. Political campaigning is supposed to be the art of winning people over, yet Cruz somehow manages to pull it off despite a total lack of charismatic warmth. Bill Clinton always had to be the most well-liked guy in the room; Ted Cruz will almost certainly be the least-liked guy in any room he ever enters.

It’s almost impossible to overstate the Texas senator’s off-putting qualities. Cruz’s senate colleagues unanimously despise him, and Sen. Lindsey Graham once made a “kidding-but-not-kidding” remark that if you killed Ted Cruz on the Senate floor, and the trial was held in the Senate, not a single Senator would vote to convict you. Cruz’s college roommate from Princeton has been asked to explain why he didn’t take the opportunity to smother Cruz in his sleep, and a pair of psychologists have attempted to posit a biological theory for why Cruz’s face is so unsettling.

Seemingly, the only real debate around Ted Cruz’s personal qualities is whether he’s better described as a “creep” or an “asshole.” Those who went to college with him knew him as a creep (it was the word most frequently offered when The Daily Beast interviewed his old classmates), citing his habit of lurking in the women’s hallway in his paisley bathrobe. On the other hand, those who worked with him on the Bush campaign in 2000 seemed unanimous in thinking him an asshole.

Profiles of Cruz are filled with first-person accounts confirming his unpleasantness. Consider a few:

❖ “A classmate confided in Ted Cruz that her mother had gotten an abortion. Ted called her mother a whore.”
❖ “We hadn’t left Manhattan before he asked my IQ...When I told him I didn’t know, he asked, ‘Well, what’s your SAT score? That’s closely coordinated with you IQ.’ It went from, ‘Nice guy,’ to ‘uh-oh.’”
❖ “Ted’s style was sneering, smirking, condescending, jabbing his finger in your face—a naked desire to humiliate an opponent. No kindness, no empathy, no attempt to reach common ground.”

None of this is especially noteworthy in itself; the Ivy League and the Senate are swarming with the condescending and cretinous, though it must take a special kind of arrogance to make one’s self stand out as being uniquely insufferable among the Princeton undergraduate class. The real question is how someone this toxic could end up winning friends and influencing people. How could a man so downright creepish (as Matt Taibbi memorably called him) get people to spend time around him, hand him money, and fill out ballots with his name on them? How could he get volunteers going door to door in support of him, people who have lives and families and surely some other things they could do than advance the career of a man so personally repellent?

This is a mystery that goes beyond Ted Cruz. Plenty of politicians...
are terrible people; this is universally acknowledged. But the voting public actually selects these people to be in charge. Nobody in Texas was forced to vote for Ted Cruz. George W. Bush, who makes a policy of never speaking ill of another Republican, was moved by the existence of Cruz to break his affability pledge for the first time, saying “I just don’t like the guy.” Indeed, nobody does. Yet Cruz won a Republican senate primary against Texas’s Lieutenant Governor, then a general election.

The question, then, is how people that nobody likes can become extremely successful. We might predict that such people would be “losers”; because Ted Cruz is arrogant and nobody likes being around him, he has few friends and nobody wants to hire him to work with them. But the opposite is often true: they not only win, but rise and rise indefinitely. How do they do this? By what process does raw ambition subvert the ordinary rules of social success? Why do losers win, why do assholes finish first?

Ted Cruz’s autobiography is as useful a place as any to begin the search for clues, to figure out how he has managed to make people give him whatever he wants without making any effort to get them to like him. To be sure, it’s a propaganda book, written specifically to aid his campaign for the presidency, but it’s clear that it wasn’t ghostwritten, and it therefore contains a number of useful insights into how Ted Cruz thinks about and presents himself.

The first striking thing is how open Ted Cruz is about his prioritization of personal ambition over any kind of deeply-held moral conviction. Cruz doesn’t speak very much about the formation of his conservative worldview. He does not portray himself as being concerned with the issues first and himself second. Instead, he sees aspirations toward humility as essentially dishonest:

“Anyone considering running for office, as I was at the time, is supposed to act totally disinterested in the political process, to pose as the reluctant public servant only answering the call because the people need him or her so desperately. But that wasn’t the truth. Not for me.”

For Cruz, then, ambition is a given; the only question is whether you’re going to pretend you don’t have it, or honestly admit that you do. Cruz gives himself points for telling the truth, but it’s notable that his worldview doesn’t allow for the existence of a genuine public servant, one who isn’t “posing.” Cruz cannot even conceive of the idea that someone would genuinely wish to serve others, would care about politics as something useful to society rather than the mere pursuit of personal success.

This view of the world, in which everything is a game and the aim is to win, has been with Cruz since the beginning:

“Midway through junior high school, I decided that I’d had enough of being the unpopular nerd. I remember sitting up one night asking why I wasn’t one of the popular kids. I ended up staying up most of that night thinking about it. Okay, well, what is it that the popular kids do? I will consciously emulate that.”

Of course, Cruz doesn’t seem to have done a good job of emulating popularity, but it’s again notable how cynically he thinks about it. Popularity is desirable, thus you should ape the popular, then you will have the desirable thing, and thus you will have won. There’s not a moment’s thought that friendship is something intrinsically enjoyable, that people might like each other for reasons that go beyond their pursuit of particular self-interested ends.

So even as a teenager, Cruz’s only motivating force was political ambition. The 18-year-old Cruz spoke on camera of his desire for “world domination,” and he listed his life goals as: go to Princeton, go to Harvard Law, start a successful law practice, enter politics, become the President. Not a word about actually making the world better, understandable since Cruz thinks anyone professing a desire to serve others is lying.

The lack of talk about values in the book is almost stunning. Cruz describes what he has done, and how he did it, but he almost never talks about why he did it. Most politicians use the opportunity of a campaign book to explain and justify their principles; Cruz seems to believe that such an exercise would be dishonest. Indeed, if you don’t actually believe anything, it certainly would be.

So one of the most surprising aspects of Ted Cruz’s book is that he doesn’t actually come across as being particularly conservative, at least not in the sense of believing that being a conservative is about holding a particular set of moral convictions that one thinks are beneficial to society. In fact, as he describes the world, he can offer facts that make him sound almost like a left-winger. Consider the way he talks about his grandparents’ indenture in Batista’s Cuba:

“The store gave the families credit, and the sugar mill paid their salaries through the general store, which then took the money to pay their debt and (in theory) give them any remaining money. But, of course, no money ever remained, and the arrangement led to perpetual servitude.”

Or the hope offered by America to his destitute immigrant father:

“It is difficult for many of us to fully comprehend what a beacon of hope this country offers the rest of the world. There is no other place on earth that would have welcomed so freely to its shores a man like Rafael Cruz. He was eighteen, penniless, and spoke no English… Barack Obama, noting his own rise from humble beginnings, has observed that ‘in no other country on earth is my story even possible.’ My family can relate to that sentiment. In no other country would Rafael Cruz’s story even be possible.”

The framing of these anecdotes is strange. In the first, Cruz describes a scenario in which ostensibly free market employment relationships created “perpetual servitude” for workers. In the second, Cruz speaks positively of America allowing poor, uneducated Hispanic immigrants to enter the country. Yet this is a man who supports untrammeled capitalism and massive new restrictions in immigration. Cruz’s official immigration platform proposes to evaluate potential new entrants to the country so as to “prioritize the interests and well-being of Americans,” with an immigrant more likely to be admitted based on their “language skills,” “formal education,” “resources to create jobs,” “ties to the United States,” and “lifetime earning potential.” It’s hard to see how Rafael Cruz, a broke teenager who spoke no English, would ever be admitted under such a regime, yet Cruz the younger is proud that America made his father’s story possible.

Such paradoxes occur repeatedly. Cruz’s background, as the child
of an immigrant raised in a home with some family difficulties, has infected him with the kind of personal experiences that turn one left-wing. Yet he is committed to a rigid conservatism that prohibits him from allowing these facts to change his mind.

Consider an especially bizarre example of the tension between Ted Cruz's knowledge and his behavior. Here, Cruz describes the sexism his mother experienced as a female computer programmer in the 1950s:

“One need not be a devotee of Mad Men to understand what faced working women in the 1950s. Coming out of college, my mom deliberately didn’t learn how to type. She understood that men would stop her in the corridors of the Shell offices and ask her ‘Sweetheart, would you type this for me?’ With a clear conscience she could answer ‘I’d love to help, but I don’t know how to type!… I guess you’re just going to have to use me as a computer programmer instead.’”

Later in the book, Cruz relates an anecdote from his time working alongside his wife, Heidi, on the Bush presidential campaign:

“One day [Heidi] went into the office of Robert Zoellick, who was serving as Jim Baker’s de facto chief of staff. Sitting at his desk with his glasses perched on the tip of his nose, Bob peered up, and Heidi said ‘Bob, I just wanted to see, is there anything I can do to help?’

He said, ‘Yes. Grapefruit juice. I want grapefruit juice.’ And with that he went back to work.

Heidi came into the office where I was working hopping mad. ‘Damn it,’ she said. ‘I’ve got a Harvard MBA. I’ve worked on Wall Street as an investment banker. And his request for me is grapefruit juice!’ After a moment, she asked me, ‘What do I do?’

I sympathized with her completely. Then I said, ‘Sweetheart, here are the car keys. Go get him grapefruit juice, right now.’”

Cruz isn’t an idiot; he knows from what happened to his mother that being called “sweetheart” and told to perform some mindless task is miserable and demeaning. And yet he can talk about “what faced working women” in one passage, and participate in the replication of that very same behavior later on.

Isn’t this bizarre? Well, not really. It’s actually not much of a paradox at all; it just requires you to accept the twin conclusions that Ted Cruz is (1) quite perceptive and (2) not very nice. That should be easy enough to admit, and is in fact confirmed throughout the text.

The thing about the autobiography, as others have noted, is that as a book it’s really not bad. It’s well-constructed and it isn’t boring. Cruz is a good writer, insofar as writing consists of selecting appropriate words and combining them into pleasingly rhythmic sentences. But that only serves to reinforce the point: Cruz is an intelligent person whose pathological ambition and ego keep him from allowing that intelligence to do any good. He should know better, but because he was born incapable of feeling inclinations other than self-interest, he will never follow his observations through to their implications if doing so might unsettle his convictions and cause him to stray from his path.

All of the observations of classmates and colleagues confirm this. Cruz at Princeton is described as someone who arrived with a sense of purpose and never strayed from it; he wanted to win, and he would do anything it took in order to do so. A reporter who met him during the Bush campaign said Cruz “was all pure unbridled ambition,” coming across as “a guy who would use whatever means necessary to get on top.” All of that makes Cruz much more frightening than a sincere conservative.

If you want snapshots of Cruz the asshole, you’ll find them in the book. Consider the following account of the birth of his child:

“As she lay in the hospital bed, in labor, Heidi was typing furiously on her Blackberry, still tending to the needs of her clients. I admired her tenacious work ethic—it’s one of the many qualities that made me fall in love with her—but this was too much. I gently pulled the Blackberry out of her hands. "It will be here later," I said. She had more important things to do.

To be fair, when it came to leaving work at the hospital steps, I wasn’t completely innocent. During much of the time were there, I was studying cases for an oral argument before the U.S. Supreme Court scheduled for two days later. I was appearing in support of a Louisiana law that allowed capital punishment for the very worst child rapists… So just hours after Caroline was born, I said a prayer of thanksgiving, kissed my beautiful wife and baby daughter, rushed to the airport, and flew to Washington to argue the case.

So he made his wife feel bad for checking her work messages after the birth of their child, then immediately ditched her because he felt his own work was more important. (In fact, throughout the book one is astonished at how somebody so successful and attractive as Mrs. Cruz could tolerate a lifetime of being entwined with such a man. The Universe seems to have attempted to send her a warning; her first date with Ted was at a restaurant called “The Bitter End.”)

But if Cruz is an “asshole,” made of pure self-interest and guile, we must wonder the extent to which he has any real political convictions. His ex-colleague roommate, who loathes him, has insisted that Cruz believes nothing, and that his every attempt to insist otherwise is calculated. But it’s impossible to see inside Cruz’s brain, and figure out the extent to which he is driven by conviction versus self-aggrandizement. What we can ask is a hypothetical: if Ted Cruz were given the choice between enacting a conservative utopia (while sacrificing his political career in the process, becoming a powerless nobody), and becoming the President of the United States (but guaranteeing that a conservative utopia would never come about), which would he choose? Again, we can’t resolve it, but based on the evidence presented in Ted Cruz’s book, in which his life seems to consist of the pursuit of success (as opposed to the pursuit of good conservative outcomes), it’s hard to
think that he’d turn down the Presidency for the sake of realizing his ostensible ideal political outcome. For Cruz, there is only one ideal political outcome, which is “world domination” (to quote 18-year-old Ted) by Cruz himself.

Hillary Clinton is not Ted Cruz. Nor is she much like Ted Cruz, in any of the obvious ways. But she is a person about whom it is instructive to pose that same question: do we believe that, given the choice between becoming the President and enacting a liberal utopia (but being forgotten), Hillary Clinton would choose power or principle?

Clinton’s supporters have long insisted that her reputation as being underhanded and power-craving is unwarranted. The charge, they suggest, is sexist; it creates an image of Clinton as a conniving shrew, when any fair-minded examination of her record reveals this isn’t true. But it’s certainly the case that Clinton shifts her professed principles in accordance with the political needs of the day. Even a Clinton-supporting newspaper columnist admitted that her stance on trade had shifted to better align with the populism of Bernie Sanders:

“When it comes to campaign trail flip-flips, Hillary Clinton delivered a doozy this week. On Wednesday she announced her opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade deal reached between the United States and Asian nations. Clinton says that any new trade deal must “create good American jobs, raise wages, and advance our national security” — and this one doesn’t. Clinton, however, has long been a proponent of the TPP, particularly when she was secretary of state just a few years ago (by one estimate, she expressed support for it 45 times). It’s doubtful she has suddenly become a protectionist or that, as president, she won’t find some way to support a different version of the TPP. So let’s be honest, this isn’t about jobs; it’s about one job, president, and Clinton’s desire to be the next one.

Clinton’s stances on other matters have shifted similarly. After defending gun rights in her race against Barack Obama, and pitching herself as a defender of the 2nd Amendment, Clinton used guns as a way to make herself seem more progressive than Bernie Sanders, going after him for coddling the 2nd Amendment. Her views on gay marriage seemed to change in accordance with its popularity among the public; after steadfastly insisting for years that marriage should be between a man and a woman, Clinton suddenly became a major gay marriage supporter when it seemed to be a nationwide inevitability. Clinton even wavers on women’s rights; she will steadfastly defend Planned Parenthood to progressive audiences, but will then suggest that conservative sting videos against the organization offer “disturbing” evidence. She has been consistently inconsistent, morphing herself skilfully to fit each political circumstance. Is she a friend or an enemy of Wall Street? The answer seems to depend on whether she is standing on a stage next to Bernie Sanders.

In this respect, Hillary Clinton is a kind of mirrored opposite of Ted Cruz. Each of them is driven by ambition over principle, but each has chosen a different orientation: for Clinton, it’s to adopt any position necessary to get votes. For Cruz, it’s never to let the temptation toward compromise and harmony get in the way of the quest for domination. Yet both of these figures clearly wake up in the morning attempting, above all else, to win. Their goals are about them. Even right out of law school, Hillary Clinton was bragging that Bill would be the president. Once Bill did in fact reach the highest office, he and Hillary devised a plan for the presidency: “8 years of Bill, 8 years of Hill.” It’s hard to see this kind of strategizing as in the service of progressive goals; it seems much more like a Machiavellian quest to maximize one’s time at the top. There’s something very strange indeed about people like Cruz and the Clintons, who even in their 20s were openly plotting their political dominance.

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How could a room not thusly be improved?

The Current Affairs Online Shopping Experience
http://currentaffairs.org/store
“Radical” law professor Duncan Kennedy has been teaching at Harvard since time immemorial. He is one of the principal theorists of “Critical Legal Studies,” a left-wing academic movement that aimed to transform law schools everywhere. (It did not.) Recently, the “Harvard Journal of the Legal Left” interviewed Prof. Kennedy, dedicating an entire issue to him. But the interview was an act of journalistic fellatio. It did not ask the important questions, like what a self-styled left-wing radical is doing spending forty years cranking out treatises. We have therefore decided to annotate the Journal’s interview with some illuminating remarks that will begin to set things straight. Is such a practice fair? No. Does this concern us? It does not.

Did your radicalism take an intellectual shape at law school or would the radical critique of law come only later? We were a small cohort in 1970 at the Yale Law School, about five or six of us who eventually went into legal education and who were the intellectual participants in the student protest movement. Mark Tushnet was very important, a post-Marxist—he ended up at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. And Rand Rosenblatt, another post-Marxist, went to Rutgers-Camden. He was married to Ann Freedman, a radical who was also a serious feminist. I decided to become...a law professor. “That doesn't sound especially radical.” Oh, but you don't realize. The decision was abrupt.

Surely this ultra-progressive participatory environment[...] was how “we” felt about things. And which flatly contradicted how “we” felt about things.

Did your radicalism take an intellectual shape at law school or would the radical critique of law come only later? We were a small cohort in 1970 at the Yale Law School, about five or six of us who eventually went into legal education and who were the intellectual participants in the student protest movement. Mark Tushnet was very important, a post-Marxist—he ended up at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. And Rand Rosenblatt, another post-Marxist, went to Rutgers-Camden. He was married to Ann Freedman, a radical who was also a serious feminist and also went to Rutgers-Camden. We were different from the liberals, most of whom went into law practice, and, if they didn’t become thoroughly corporate, became civil rights lawyers and plaintiff-side anti-discrimination lawyers, labour-side labour-lawyers, progressive civil servants, lawyers for NGOs of all kinds. They were much more practice-oriented. They had a generational and political agenda, but they were only somewhat interested in either legal theory or social theory. What set us apart was our intellectual agenda, which was to bring to bear some revolutionary left, i.e. not actual participants in the student protest movement. Mark Tushnet was pretty thoroughly radicalised. By the time I finished law school I was pretty thoroughly radicalised. The anti-war movement was going strong, there were riots in the ghettos, and every summer cities were burning. Second wave feminism was taking off. Already by my third year at Yale, I realised that the government/corporate practice option, which I had been oriented to in one way or another since 1964, was not for me. In my first summer in law school, I had worked for Mayor Lindsay in New York. Lindsay was a Republican, but he was really very liberal. Then, in my second summer, I worked for Debevoise, Plimpton, Lions and Gates, which was a Park Avenue white shoe firm, a classic corporate law firm. The firm was like a Woody Allen-type experience in which I was imposing an up-and-coming Wall Street lawyer with complete reservations by now—extreme psychic reservations—but an aspect of the experience. So, in my third year, I decided quite abruptly to become a law professor.

Q: Can you tell us a bit about your early childhood?..

David: I went to a progressive elementary school in Cambridge, Massachusetts and my first moments of political rebellion were rebellions against the various authoritarian undercurrents of this ultra-progressive participatory environment[...]

Q: When did you decide to pursue a career in legal academia?

Duncan Kennedy

THE ANNOTATED INTERVIEW

DUNCAN KENNEDY

No, of course we’re not skeptical at all of the claim that Duncan Kennedy engaged in “political rebellion” while in elementary school. And we definitely don’t think the authoritarian undercurrents of this ultra-progressive participatory environment just means “I didn’t like it there.” Activity for home-devise an elementary school without any authoritarian undercurrents.
Q: From Yale you went to the Supreme Court where you clerked for Potter Stewart. What was it like, now a radical, working at the heart of the U.S. judiciary? I planned to go on the law teaching market while I was at the Court. It was simply, from my point of view, a vehicle to become a law professor. And of course I was curious. My co-clerks were liberals or conservatives. There were twenty-seven of us and I’m pretty sure I was the only self-proclaimed radical, but many of the liberals would turn out to be pretty lefty. It was the first year of the Burger Court. Potter Stewart said ‘I hear you’re very left-wing’, and I said ‘Yes sir, I am’, and he said ‘You know I don’t care about that’. And he did not; he just cared about my credentials and my technical competence as a clerk.

Q: Did you have a hand in any of the judgments?

Absolutely. The experience of writing opinions was amazing. Stewart would say ‘I want to come out this way’ and then you could write it more or less as you wanted, and he would lightly edit it. I was very proud of my rhetorical skills as a clerk in helping Stewart get a majority in Condliffe v. New Hampshire and then pushing back against a dissent from the conservative side. The most thrilling was writing a threatened dissent in Swann v. New Haven when it looked as though the new conservative majority was going to end bussing. It was an exciting moment: there I was, a bright young staffer.

Q: You went on the academic job market in the fall of 1970. Were you open about your radicalism?

I went on the market with a paper, written as a third-year student, about the Hart and Sacks ‘Legal Process’ materials. It was an attack on liberal-legalist education, [Legal Education and the Reproduction of Hierarchy]? Of course, of course, the most thriling was writing a threatened dissent in Swann when it looked as though the new conservative majority was going to end bussing. It was an exciting moment: there I was, a bright young staffer.

Q: Why, Current Affairs, what have you against radicalism?

Oh, nothing, it’s just, well, it all feels a bit like cheating, doesn’t it?

Daring, indeed! Courageous, even. Nay, virtually heroic!

If literally every Ivy League school is eager to hire you, and a prominent conservative judge is singing your praises, might it not be wise to consider the possibility that you are not quite as threatening to the status quo as you think you are?

Q: How much success did you have in undermining the hegemonic model of legal education?

That is hard to assess. Morry and I—and then Gerry Frug joined us—had a following amongst students who understood us to be doing something exciting. These were 140-student sections—that is a quarter of the whole entering class—and we were evaluated by the whole 140 students. You would be delegitimated if you were experienced by the student masses as a bad teacher. So a basic requirement of a successful radical leftist strategy of this type was to be able to control the political conversation. You need to be seen as someone that you were a good law teacher, a technician who was helping them prepare for the Bar—maybe less well than Clark Byore or Arthur Miller, who were the tough-guy professors, but at least in the ball park. And that meant you had to sell to them that you were making them competent professionals in their future careers. A second, requirement of course, was that you found the radical content... Several dozen of these students became left-wing law teachers. They were the second generation of Critical Legal Studies and they have produced a very large, very impressive body of radical and left-liberal scholarship. In this sense we did indeed undermine the hegemonic model of legal scholarship. It has never been the same again.

Q: What was your interaction with leftist students?

We did attract a radical audience, but it was internally divided. The more Marxist students thought we were revisionist, hippy, bullshit. The very hard-organizing people committed to direct action also had strong critiques of us. And the students oriented to public interest practice, whether public service or eventually international human rights, they saw us as not putting our money where our mouths were. So there was a theoretical critique from the hard left, there was a radical-legal critique from the direct-action people, and there was a failure-to-serve critique from the NGO-public interest people...

Q: What was the motivation behind writing [your well-known] pamphlet on legal education, Legal Education and the Reproduction of Hierarchy?

I was reading a lot of Situationist literature, including Debord, and a lot about the Russian opposition... On the one hand, it was one of the bases of the charge of Maiom to the Utopian Proposal at the end called for equal pay for everyone, random admissions for law school, equalization of law schools by random assignment of professors within a given geographical area. It still makes me laugh even to list these things. It was totally in the mode of provocation.

Why, Current Affairs, what have you against radicalism?

Oh, nothing, it’s just, well, it all feels a bit like cheating, doesn’t it?

What on Earth do you mean by that?

This whole thing about ‘I’m a revolutionary... A revolutionary law professor.’

But Duncan Kennedy has challenged the theoretical underpinnings of the power structure.

Has he? Has he truly? Or are these all just somewhat elaborate ways to feel progressive while doing nothing?

You are being very cynical.

Only about law professors.
What sentence can the words in the search be arranged to spell?

The words found in the Word Search can be reordered to spell the sentence: "every moment spent doing wordsearch is time that could be spent solving global poverty or writing letters to long lost friends telling them you miss them." None of the words in the list of words is included in the Luxury Word Search.

List of Words:

- Plenitude
- Diaspora
- Leftmost
- Miasma
- Quelling
- Crawdad
- Turnstile
- Erratic
- Festooned
- Otiose

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