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THE BERLIN JOURNAL

A Magazine from the American Academy in Berlin
Number Thirty-Seven 2023-24

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS
OF FELLOWSHIPS

NOTES ON THE VIRGINIA CAPITOL

by Mabel O. Wilson

FOREST RUN

by Leigh Raiford

GREEN BACKED

by Mark Copelovitch

COLD PEACE

by Michael Doyle

ARTIST PORTFOLIOS

by Liana Finck and A.K. Burns

FICTION

by Brian Evenson

WHO "WE" ARE

an interview with
Anne-Marie Slaughter

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PRESIDENT'S NOTE

Committed to Optimism

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, the American Academy in Berlin first opened its doors. The project may have appeared to some at the time as quixotic. Conceived several years earlier by then-US ambassador to Germany Richard Holbrooke—with counsel from the eminent historian Fritz Stern and others—the Academy was meant to create a permanent bridge between the largest democracies in North America and Europe, following the departure of the fabled Berlin Brigade. Against a backdrop of the post-Cold War “end of history,” when the triumph of liberal democracy appeared assured, the creation of an institution whose mission was to deepen ties across the Atlantic—as a good in itself *and* as a hedge against unforeseen future forces of division—was an act that defied the *Zeitgeist*.

Fortunately, it was an idea that appealed to a group of people not much affected by the *Zeitgeist*: Richard von Weizsäcker, Henry Kissinger, Thomas Farmer, and, of course, Stephen and Anna-Maria Kellen, whose founding gift made possible the renovation of the home that Anna-Maria had to flee some sixty years earlier and who, with extraordinary generosity, established the financial basis for the new Academy on the Wannsee. With the backing of this exceptional assemblage, the new institution welcomed its first eight fellows, among whom were that giant of American theater Arthur Miller and the outstanding poet C.K. Williams. In those first few years, the Academy’s mission took shape, with the tripartite aim of providing America’s best scholars, artists, journalists, and public intellectuals the space to create great works, connecting them with their German counterparts and German audiences, and establishing a platform where leading figures from both sides of the Atlantic could come together and discuss the foremost challenges of the day.

Jump ahead to the present, and it is clear that our progenitors deserve the fullest praise. Instead of eight fellows per semester, we now welcome a dozen, and with a robust program of their presentations and those by Distinguished Visitors, the Academy now hosts some one hundred events per academic year. What has remained constant is not only a commitment to excellence and free inquiry but also a

determination to cover the waterfront of intellectual and artistic life *and* to address the big issues. This mix, we believe, is what makes the Academy so unique and what gives it a central place in the transatlantic discussion.

The pages of this edition of the *Berlin Journal* attest to that ambition. Consider the range of subjects: Mabel Wilson looks back at the racist foundations on which some of America’s most renowned buildings were constructed, while Stuart Kirsch looks ahead and considers the culture of combatting climate change and how we can strengthen our efforts to deal with this genuinely existential threat. Mark Copelovitch examines that central aspect of the international economy—the dollar’s status as the reserve currency—and its implications for America’s role in global affairs, and Michael Doyle argues against a complacent drift into a new cold war, making the case instead for a less fraught cold peace. At a time when the hopes of the 1990s have dissipated—Russian aggression has triggered a long, hot war in Ukraine; tensions with China continue to rise—the Academy remains an asset of real value. And because cultural expression is so much of what gives our societies their value, Andrew Moravcsik asks where all the powerful opera voices have gone, and *New Yorker* cartoonist Liana Finck reimagines the Book of Genesis with surpassing wit.

It is a privilege to be associated with an institution with these ambitions and these values. Twenty-five years on, the foresight of our founders has been more than confirmed, and the generosity of our donors, I hope, has been shown to be justified. It is also profoundly rewarding that our current and former fellows and Distinguished Visitors are doing such remarkable work (see pages 93–100) and that their appreciation—along with that of our trustees—for what the Academy provides is so palpable and lasting (see pages 82–85).

As an American institution, we are, of course, committed to optimism. The Academy’s first 25 years have been a success. I believe the next 25 will be better still.



Daniel Benjamin

FOCUS





Legacy and Latency

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William Jackson, *A Liverpool Slave Ship* (1780),
oil on canvas, 102×127cm. Courtesy Walker Art Gallery,
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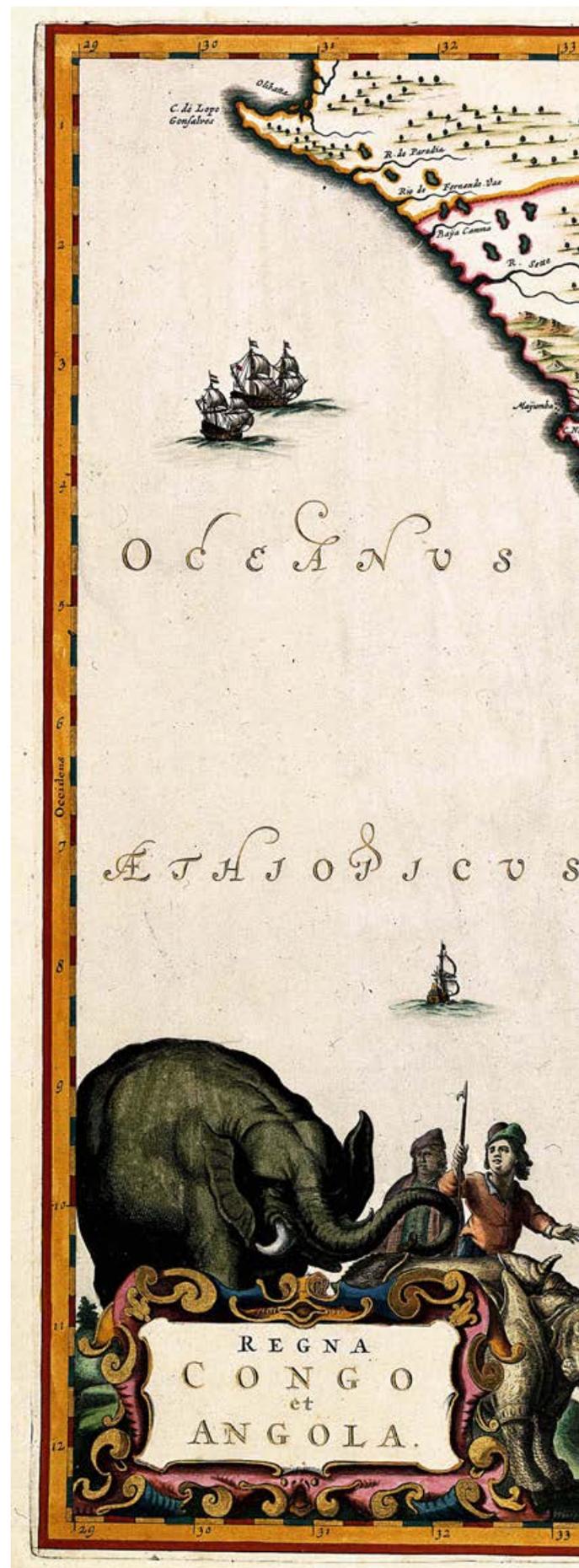
THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND

Legislating dispossession
in colonial West Africa

by Mariana P. Candido

IN RECENT DECADES, several studies have stressed the cultural and social importance of land for populations in West Africa. Land value went beyond its materiality and defined rights, obligations that linked rulers and their subjects. In sum, land was central to the political economy that sustained relationships and sovereignty. The same is true for populations in West Central Africa, including Mbundu, Umbundu, and Kwanyama and other non-Bantu populations that understood land not simply as a space of food production but also a space of belonging and maintaining contact with previous generations. Occupation of territory, and its use, defined rights over access and use, including over rivers and small lagoons. These ideas, however, were challenged by the arrival of European powers during the modern era, who expropriated land and justified it.

Possession of territory and control of its inhabitants and natural resources were the ultimate goals of expansionist Iberian powers. Since the fifteenth century, Portuguese and Spanish monarchies aimed to exercise control of newly encountered territories, debating whether indigenous





Dirk Jansz van Santen, Regna Congo et Angola, copper-engraving print, 45 x 54cm, from Joan Blaeu's Atlas Maior (1662). Courtesy Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Amsterdam

populations did or did not have a right to land and jurisdiction over territories and peoples. Before the nineteenth century in Portugal, or in most of Europe, however, there was no such a thing as a consolidated idea that land belonged to individuals and fixed law that legislated over it. By the 1800s, when the Portuguese state became interested in legislating property laws in Angola, it was in the context of ongoing European debate regarding land enclosure, communal use of land, and unproductive land influenced by Enlightenment and liberal ideas regarding progress, modernity, and productivity. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, however, the state began to encroach on communal land in Portugal, seen as an obstacle to the progress of capitalist agricultural practices that privileged private investment at the expense of collective gains.

In this perspective of liberal progress, communal land where people grazed sheep or cattle or collected water was understood as a sign of Portuguese economic shortfall; to achieve prosperity, the state had to distribute community land to individuals who would make their plots productive, addressing the market demands for specific crops. The debate over property rights in Portugal was directly linked to the existence of overseas colonies and the need to justify its occupation. In Angola, legislating ownership normalized possession and occupation of the territory, but also the status of its inhabitants as colonial subjects with limited rights. Legislation implemented in nineteenth-century Angola to protect individual property rights over things, land, and people reflected and consolidated governance and legitimacy. Notably, those laws made use of a language and a technology, based on the dominance of a paper culture, that determined colonized populations as being outside of history, lacking the cultural practice and economic sophistication to rule themselves. The consolidation of legislation and colonial courts made expropriation easier and normalized conquest, occupation, and inequality.

West Central African populations understandably also valued land and pushed back attempts of colonial officers to seize territory in different ways, most not necessarily effective from a long-term perspective. Rulers and commoners embraced techniques, such as written records, that allowed them to have their occupation rights recognized by others since the seventeenth century. In few instances, however, historians have access to these records—and this is the case of the surviving records of the Caculo Cahahenda's archives, which documented lineage history and migration, land tenure, and territorial limits since 1677. These documents became regalia of power in part because they described

political and economic events, but, more importantly, control over these written papers legitimized political rule, the state, and its relationship with the colonial administration. The existence of local state archives, such as the Caculo Cahahenda, as well as Umbundu records, indicates how the West Central African population embraced written technology to produce the evidence that could serve as proof for their land tenure claims. Missing from these records, however, are gendered dynamics of land claims and use, which are prevalent in colonial historical documents.

West Central African rulers appropriated written records when they realized that paper evidence, not possession and occupation, achieved the role of land tenure proof. This change was linked to the ad-

AFRICAN RULERS AND COMMONERS
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AND WRITTEN DOCUMENTS CAREFULLY
MANUFACTURED AND HELD.

advance of Enlightenment thought, new forms of governance, and the ensuing discourse of modernity and civilization at the turn of the nineteenth century. It led to the imposition of a new technique—writing—and to bureaucracy, altering everyday practices and governability. Manufactured evidence was privileged, in most cases, by omitting local populations' claims that supported counter-narratives of ancestral rights. Writing was also linked to legislation, rights, and ownership, legitimizing one form of power over others and displacing multiple legal orders in favor of a single narrative that privileged the colonial experience as central. Written evidence and property law were crucial in philosophical and political narratives of development that privileged individual rights as modernity in opposition to West Central Africans who supposedly lacked regulations, written culture, and private ownership laws.

This argument can be easily dismissed by the existence of the Caculo Cahahenda archive, seized by a colonial officer in 1934, as well as the survival of other records. This was all part of an imperial discourse that denied rights despite clear evidence that West Central African societies had multiple jurisdictions, recognized possession and occupation rights, and registered them. African rulers and commoners produced evidence that legitimized their ownership claims, but Europeans looted their symbols of power, including seats, divination baskets, and written documents carefully manufactured and held.

By the mid-nineteenth century, titling processes and the designation of land for individual and communal use radically transformed the use and access to land in West Central Africa. In many ways, the recognition of private ownership of land in nineteenth-century Angola was a mode of dispossession that continued in the twentieth century and later. It legitimized the capacity of an individual, including

a foreigner, to usurp, appropriate, and claim ownership over locals who lived and depended on land resources. The colonial state that ruled on ownership of land and things recognized inequality. As such, the consolidation of individual property rights played a significant role in the narrative of progress and modernity employed by colonial administrators and jurists in Portugal and Angola. During the nineteenth century, rights shifted from the earlier use of occupation of *sobas* (local rulers) and their subjects toward a more abstract form of individual property rights based on registration, titles, and written evidence that privileged colonial governance. Many African subjects, particularly women, were able to navigate and employ colonial law to advance their economic interests and agendas. This does not mean that their ability to employ legal spaces was successful or unchallenged by their peers.

Jurists and colonial officers misunderstood and mis-presented West Central African land regimes, privileging private over collective holdings, and setting in stone, or on paper, norms and practices that were undergoing reformulations. The support of chiefs who facilitated the colonial agenda favored the consolidation of specific voices and versions of the past, and practices that excluded youths, women, and anyone seen as dissident or nonconformist. The rush to register customary law and jurisdictions reinforced Western perspectives and notions of property, in the context of the expansion of colonialism and territorialization. Thus, it is not surprising that the little information on customary law recorded in early twentieth-century Angola stresses the absence of private ownership and women's exclusion. Written culture and legal forms of individual ownership and knowledge production in indigenous societies were articulated and realized in conjunction with one another, consolidating dispossession, colonialism, and inequalities.

FOR MORE THAN five centuries, West Central African societies were connected to distant markets abroad and inland. After the 1600s, they influenced how European empires conceived of and regulated ownership, as well as how they engaged in struggles over possession, control, and rights. The social lives of societies and objects tell us why and how people accumulated things over time and the ways in which they expressed rights and wealth. At a time of economic transformation, new notions of rights

emerged, and written forms of claiming ownership were consolidated. Historical documents available in Angolan, Portuguese, and Brazilian archives shed further light on this economic transformation, which was associated with the Portuguese conquest and occupation, the expansion of the transatlantic slave trade, the implementation of a plantation economy, and the land rush along the West Central African Coast from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.

Indeed, evidence from Angolan archives reveals that West Central Africans owned land, material objects, and people before the twentieth century. Still, most of the studies published in the past fifty years recognize only their ownership of dependents, as if

the lands they occupied were devoid of legitimate occupants creating historical narratives that normalize displacement, removal, and violence. The social inequalities of the last century in Angola relate to the past and are legacies of imposition of individual property rights over collective ones at a specific historical moment, the mid-nineteenth century. Liberal principles of land use, productivity, and

ownership are also normalized in narratives that take for granted that European rights have always recognized individual property while multiple jurisdictions in West Central Africa did not, without interrogating the historicization of these processes. To obtain a clearer view, it is vital that historians of Africa pay particular attention to the nature of the archives that normalize conquest, occupation, and exclusion—and which ultimately obscure West Central African forms of knowledge, ownership, and legitimacy. □

This essay is excerpted and adapted from the Introduction of Mariana P. Candido's book *Wealth, Land, and Property in Angola: A History of Dispossession, Slavery, and Inequality* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

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FOR MORE THAN FIVE CENTURIES, WEST CENTRAL AFRICAN SOCIETIES WERE CONNECTED TO DISTANT MARKETS ABROAD AND INLAND. AFTER THE 1600S, THEY INFLUENCED HOW EUROPEAN EMPIRES CONCEIVED OF AND REGULATED OWNERSHIP, AS WELL AS HOW THEY ENGAGED IN STRUGGLES OVER POSSESSION, CONTROL, AND RIGHTS.

NOTES ON THE VIRGINIA CAPITOL

Nation and race in
Jefferson's America

by Mabel O. Wilson



Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *View of the City of Richmond from the Bank of the James River* (1798), watercolor on paper, 10.5 × 7 inches. Courtesy Maryland Center for History and Culture

WHILE VISITING RICHMOND, Virginia, in 1796, newly immigrated British architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe painted two watercolors of the state's new capitol building. In translucent hues, one of the watercolors depicted the stately white temple in the distance, sitting nobly atop Shockoe Hill, overlooking the town's sparsely populated pastoral landscape. One of the earliest examples of American civic architecture, the capitol building, which had been completed in 1788, was designed by statesman, architect, planter, and slave-owner Thomas Jefferson and

modeled in part on the Maison Carrée, a first-century BCE Roman temple in Nîmes, France.

In 1776, twenty years before Latrobe's visit, Virginia had drafted and ratified its state constitution, of which Jefferson had been a key author; the document established a separation of powers that would go on to become a model for the organization of the federal government. The new building Jefferson envisioned to house Virginia's governmental functions needed both to symbolize and to enable the power of "the people" to govern and adjudicate the laws of the new

state. The self-trained architect also intended the neoclassical state capitol to serve as a model for civic architecture throughout the 13 states, as well as in the yet-to-be-determined seat of the federal government.

It is critical that we understand how “the people” of Virginia—and by extension “the people” of the United States of America—were identified and defined during this period of revolutionary action and post-revolutionary planning. In other words, who were Virginians or American citizens, endowed with constitutional rights, and who were not? A survey of the population of the port town of Richmond reveals the racial contours of this division. The city’s white residents, who were America’s newly minted citizenry, staffed and served in its government seat; patronized its taverns, shops, stables, and inns; profited from its docks along the James River and from its warehouses trading in tobacco and slaves; and lived in the wood-framed houses shown in the foreground of Latrobe’s watercolor.

Among the several thousand white Americans living in Virginia in the late eighteenth century labored an almost equal number of noncitizens—free and enslaved African men, women, and children. The enslaved served their masters and mistresses to produce the region’s great wealth. Chattel slavery—believed by some to be a necessary evil—buttressed America’s civilized values of freedom, liberty, and equality. Enslaved Black people, humans classified as property, also built several of the nation’s most important civic buildings: the Virginia State Capitol, the White House, and the US Capitol. Designed by white architects, these edifices stand as the Enlightenment’s monuments to the power of reason and the virtues of equality, justice, and freedom. There is, however, an inherent contradiction—some might argue a disavowal—in how the Founding Fathers constituted a new nation that ensured liberalism’s “unalienable rights” to “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” while continuing to violently enslave other human beings for personal gain.

THE WHITE-COLUMNED NEOCLASSICAL buildings appeared to visitors as idyllic beacons of democratic values overlooking sublime nature unsullied by the presence of those spaces in which unsightly slaves toiled to make the land fertile and the lives of white citizens comfortable. With nationalism growing in the West in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, Europeans continued to conceptualize the racial paradigm of human difference that had emerged from centuries of contact with and colonial expansion into Asia, Africa, and the New World.

During the Revolutionary period and shortly thereafter, “race” had not yet been categorized in the hierarchical terms of biological variations and evolution as would happen under the disciplines of modern science in the mid-nineteenth century. Natural philosophers and historians of this period, among them Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottfried Herder, Georges-Louis Leclerc (Comte de Buffon), and Thomas Jefferson himself, debated the meaning of the human species’ observable physiognomic variations (outer

character) and perceived mental distinctions, such as temperaments and humors (inner character). Their observations and experimentations sought to uncover the laws—climatic or geographic—that governed differentiation in the human species across the globe.

In *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764), for example, Kant scrutinized the “national character” to be observed in the Negro:

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have even been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world.

Kant and other such men of letters placed European “man” in a position of superiority above the other races, by virtue of the aesthetic perfection of white skin and the capacity to reason, evident in the ability to comprehend the law and to appreciate beauty. For theorist Sylvia Wynter, this overdetermined European mode of being human, “man,” evolved in two phases: The first period, from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century, charted the decline of belief in divine and magical causation and witnessed the rise of the physical sciences that sought to understand the natural forces that animated the world, replacing the belief that the biblical curse of Ham, for example, had colored Africans black. During the second period, from the eighteenth century onward, the biological sciences developed; these demonstrated that nature’s own laws were behind natural forces. It was through this rational framework that race came to be considered as biologically determined. This invented “man” was, for Wynter, “made possible only on the basis of the dynamics of a colonizer/colonized relation that the West was to discursively constitute and empirically institutionalize on the islands of the Caribbean and, later, on the mainland of the Americas.”

The resulting forms of racial patriarchy nominated white males as the bearers of power and the symbolic subjects of modernity, while simultaneously dismissing other epistemological frameworks as archaic and devaluing other ways of being human. Europe, as Wynter and others have written, invented race as an instrument of domination. As the West shifted from a Judeo-Christian cosmology of heavens and the earth to a humanist worldview, philosophers deployed universal reason to imagine a self-determined and self-conscious moral subject—political man—who perceived and conceived “the nature of things,” including his social relations. Natural rights became foundational for new social formations—nation states—whose governments,



Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *An Overseer Doing His Duty near Fredericksburg, Virginia* (1798), watercolor on paper, 10 × 7 inches. Courtesy Maryland Center for History and Culture

guided by historically derived ideas of democracy, ensured freedom for their citizens.

At the same time, Europeans also invented the category “Others of Europe,” to borrow Denise Ferreira da Silva’s term, to describe those who were not modern, not rational, not free, not white, and not citizens. These sub-humans, often feminized as weak and submissive, labored in the colonies and dwelled in yet-to-be-charted territories. Europeans consigned nonwhite people, with their supposedly tenuous moral and physical character, to the bottom of the repurposed Great Chain of Being. Natural historians and scientists developed representations of time and space in the emerging discourses of history and science that placed nonwhite people in prehistory and in regions unexplored on colonial maps. The rendering of nonwhite people as primitive and uncivilized in turn rationalized the conquest of their territories, the expropriation of their land and labor, and the elimination of their lives by war or disease. The “Others of Europe’s” racial inferiority, particularly their lack of culture in white European eyes, dialectically elevated and affirmed the universal man and whiteness as the ideal representations of the human in the West’s own imagination.

It is important to keep in mind that from the fifteenth century onward, secular reason also had an impact on European “arts of building,” on building’s transformation from a medieval trade guild to the modern discipline of architecture. With the rise of academies and learned societies, architectural treatises circulated debates on the appropriate use of architecture, proportions of classical elements, and the ideal configuration of different building types. New techniques of geometry and cartography influenced modes of architectural representation. A growing interest in mechanics, documented at length in dictionaries and encyclopedias, advanced new construction methods that separated architecture from engineering. In other arenas, natural philosophers explored man’s capacity for aesthetic judgment to assess which ideal forms were visually

pleasing. The taxonomic methods used by natural historians to discern speciation, in particular racial differences, were applied to the study of the historical transformation of buildings to determine character and organization. To begin to chart a history of architecture, scholars made comparative archaeological, ethnographic, and aesthetic evaluations of how far Europe’s architecture had advanced beyond the rest of the world’s ancient and primitive building practices.

These technical and aesthetic developments gave rise to the figure of the modern architect. At first self-taught elites like Jefferson, but eventually European apprentice-trained

architects like Latrobe, were employed by the state and private citizens to design the government buildings, offices, banks, customhouses, storehouses, libraries, museums, prisons, great houses, and plantations that symbolized regimes of power and organized the territorial dynamic between metropole and colony. Jefferson’s designs for the Virginia State Capitol reveal the mutually constitutive relationship between race, reason, and architecture.

BORN INTO THE WEALTHY European planter class of colonial Virginia, Jefferson was a slaveowner himself who also epitomized the consummate humanist polymath. Because his oeuvre encompasses the aesthetic and technical domain of architecture, the political realm of government, and the rational sphere of natural philosophy and history, his works offer an ideal lens through which to understand the intersections of the emerging discourses of architecture, nationalism, and racial difference as they coalesced in the late eighteenth century. Analyzing Jefferson’s architecture and his writings, together with correspondence from this period, broadens our understanding of the social, economic, cultural, and political context in which the first work of American civic architecture—the Virginia State Capitol—was conceived and realized.

In 1776, Jefferson proposed a bill to the Virginia House of Delegates to move its state capital from Williamsburg, the colonial seat since 1699, to Richmond, a fledgling settlement farther up the James River. Jefferson drew up the first designs for the Virginia State Capitol in 1776, and then revised them from 1779 to 1780. In Jefferson’s estimation, to adequately house Virginia’s growing white constituency and government, construction practices needed to evolve beyond the production of the crude, ugly wooden structures and awkwardly proportioned brick buildings that were found in Williamsburg. “Architecture,” he lamented, “seems to have shed its maledictions over this land.” Brick and stone were proper materials for building because of their longevity, he rationalized. However, Virginia lacked

craftsmen and workmen trained to draw and execute correctly the classical orders of entablatures, pediments, and columns. This lack of skilled labor was perhaps an outcome of the fact that one segment of the construction workforce was enslaved. Literacy, especially the ability to write, was discouraged among the enslaved in order to maintain subjugation and suppress revolt.

All the components of the new republic—executive, legislative, judicial—were accounted for in Jefferson’s bill and in his initial drawings of the state capitol that placed each branch in its own building on Shockoe Hill. Jefferson possessed several key folios of Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio and other volumes on Greek and Roman antiquities. He had experimented with Palladian neoclassicism at Monticello, his plantation house under construction in

This lack of skilled labor was perhaps an outcome of the fact that one segment of the construction workforce was enslaved.

the Piedmont, and in unbuilt designs for his alma mater, the College of William and Mary.

In 1784, Jefferson succeeded Benjamin Franklin as the minister plenipotentiary to France, a post he held for five years. During his diplomatic assignment in Paris, where he lived with his two daughters, along with several accompanying enslaved persons to tend to their needs—including a teenaged Sally Hemings, who would later sire children with him—Jefferson was charged with finally completing the plans for the Virginia capitol, once the land on Shockoe Hill had been claimed by eminent domain. Governor Patrick Henry wrote to Jefferson in the late summer of 1785 that a cornerstone had been laid and that foundations of brick were out of the ground, based on Jefferson’s earlier drawings. With construction commencing, Jefferson needed to act quickly to refine and complete his designs. To assist with the preparation of drawings and a model, he recruited French architect Charles-Louis Clérisseau, a skilled draftsman and archaeologist. Jefferson had reviewed drawings of the perfectly preserved Maison Carrée in books and greatly admired Clérisseau’s publication *Antiquités de la France, Première Partie: Monumens de Nîmes* (1778), which he eventually purchased from Clérisseau while in Paris. Clérisseau’s meticulous orthographic documentation suited Jefferson, who possessed not only the eye of an architect, but also the fastidious gaze of a naturalist.

Because the legislators desired to conduct all of the state’s business in one structure, Jefferson with Clérisseau revised the earlier plans and placed the General Court on the first floor, across from the state’s lower chamber, the House of Delegates. At the center of the elegantly proportioned two-story atrium that connected the two chambers with other functions in the building, Virginians planned to erect a statue to General George Washington. The second

floor housed the senate chambers and auxiliary spaces for clerks. The new design took advantage of the basilica form, so that the protocols of assembly, deliberation, and adjudication, adapted from the colonial government, would operate smoothly in the space.

In a letter to James Madison, Jefferson expressed his desire that Virginia’s new capitol building would become a model of architecture worth emulating throughout the new nation: “How is a taste in this beautiful art to be formed in our countrymen, unless we avail ourselves of every occasion when public buildings are to be erected, of presenting to them models for their study and imitation?” Jefferson apprised his friend that for many people the Maison Carrée was “one of the most beautiful, if not the most beautiful and precious morsel of architecture left us by antiquity.” The monuments of antiquity offered Americans perfectly preserved examples of Greco-Roman classicism, an architecture emblematic of truth, justice, and democracy, one that, for Jefferson, had not been corrupted by capricious flourishes of the late baroque’s rococo period that suited the tastes of the French aristocracy.

Jefferson commissioned model maker Jean-Pierre Fouquet to complete a plaster maquette of the design. In June 1786, he shipped the model along with Clérisseau’s drawings to Richmond. The rationale for replicating historical buildings held in high regard was that the design for such buildings was “very simple, but it is noble beyond expression, and would have done honour to our country as presenting to travellers a morsel of taste in our infancy promising much for our maturer age.” Jefferson hoped that the new capitol building would be a transformative exercise that would seed a new culture and society in the New World, yielding a ripe American civilization. His proposed designs for the Virginia State Capitol would offer an invaluable public primer on how architecture could represent the virtues of durability, utility, and beauty.

ONE CHALLENGE FACED by Virginians—and the new union of 13 states—was how to cultivate the character of its new political subjects, “the people.” In eighteenth-century Europe and its colonies, refined taste in art, dress, architecture, and food (fueled by the growing appetite for sugar, coffee, and tobacco) became a marker of elevated intellectual and economic status. But this “culture of taste,” writes Princeton literary scholar Simon Gikandi, also harbored “repressive tendencies—namely, the attempt to use culture to conceal the intimate connection between modern subjectivity and the political economy of slavery.” This interdependence between the formation of a new white American culture, one that included the arts of building, and the enslavement of African peoples, justified by their presumed innate mental and physical inferiority, can be found in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which Jefferson wrote in the same period in which he conceived the designs for Virginia’s capitol building.

Notes on the State of Virginia originated as a report Jefferson prepared in response to 23 queries sent to him in

1780 by a French diplomat, François Barbé-Marbois, who had created the survey to gain a better understanding of the geographic and historic character of the newly formed United States. Even though he sought to sever ties with what he believed to be a calcifying European aristocratic culture, Jefferson nonetheless preserved its aesthetic values as a visible register of white American culture. For Jefferson, Negroes, because of their naturally inferior faculties, could not be incorporated into the new nation state as citizens. In his response to Query 14, “The Administration of Justice and the Description of the Laws,” Jefferson sought a political solution to the problem of what to do with the Negro population living in Virginia, the majority of which was enslaved. On several occasions in state legislation and in early drafts of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson had proposed language that terminated the importation of slaves into Virginia and the United States. (During his presidency, he would succeed, in 1808, in abolishing the international slave trade, but not its lucrative domestic market.)

Along with political concerns, Jefferson held “physical and moral objections” to Negroes based on a lifetime of observations of what he considered to be their comportment and character. Because universal reason relied upon experimentation and observation for the validation of truth, Jefferson’s conceptualization of the racial paradigm of human difference found one promising register in skin color. He rationalized that what counted as beautiful could be applied to the breeding of animals and therefore also to the human species—where variations in physiognomy, hair texture, and skin color were visible. Out of all these markers, skin color was the most obvious indicator of racial difference.

The origins of the skin’s coloration for Jefferson, however, could not be discerned by dissection of the epidermal layers or a chemical analysis of blood or bile. He determined skin color then as “fixed in nature,” and therefore of divine causation. The aesthetics of blackness were part of a rationalization of the variations in the human species that divided peoples living on the continents of Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas and affirmed the superiority of Europeans and their whiteness. Under Jefferson’s probing gaze, the features of the Black body were seen as less beautiful in comparison to the symmetry and flowing hair of white physiognomy. The overall lack of beauty in blackness visually and viscerally appalled Jefferson. He verified this by suggesting that even Native Americans found whites preferable, just as “the preference of the Oranootan [sic] [is] for the black women [sic] over those of his own species.” To posit Black women as subhuman, closer to primates, was based on a theory of polygenesis in natural history, which maintained that each race was a different species.

Blackness signified the Negro’s sub-humanity and validated her ruthless exploitation. The Negroes’ supposed inability to appreciate beauty, except in the most sensual manner, or to create works of true aesthetic value, except out of mimicry, also provided Jefferson with additional evidence of their natural mental inferiority. In Query 14,

he surmised that in their ability to remember, Blacks were equal to whites, but in their ability to reason and to comprehend mathematics and sciences, they were certainly inferior. “In their imagination,” he wrote, Blacks were “dull, tasteless, and anomalous.”

DID THE NEGRO, whether enslaved or freed, have a place in America? Jefferson put forward an emancipation scheme in his response to Query 14. He proposed that enslaved children “should continue with their parents to a certain age, then be brought up, at the public expence [sic], to tillage, arts or sciences, according to their geniusses [sic].” Once adults, women age 18 and men age 23 should be colonized to African, Caribbean, or western US territories and supported until they grew in strength. To replace the now-absent labor Jefferson proposed to send “vessels at the same time to other parts of the world for an equal number of white inhabitants.”

Pragmatically, Jefferson believed that Virginia’s history of chattel slavery would prevent Black and white races from living together peacefully in the same place, citing those “deep rooted prejudices entertained by whites; ten thousand recollections, by the Blacks, of the injuries they sustained.” Emancipation and citizenship for freed Blacks could only result in “convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of one or the other race.” American civilization, therefore, could not thrive with a free Black population. The undesirability of Blackness, the “unfortunate difference of color, and perhaps faculty, is a powerful obstacle to emancipation of their people,” argued Jefferson. Once enslaved Blacks were freed, Jefferson required them to be “removed beyond the reach of mixture.” Not only did revenge by Blacks pose a threat to the new nation in Jefferson’s eyes; mixing with them biologically through miscegenation could have unforeseen consequences of physiognomic and cultural degeneration.

In the end, Black bodies and Blackness for Jefferson and for others of his era proved an impenetrable threshold to reason. They were distasteful. Wielding the tools of enlightenment, Jefferson rationalized the Negro belonged at the back end of the social and political forces that would advance American civilization, in the same manner he designed their spaces of interminable servitude to occur below ground. While all men were born equal, as natural-rights proponents advocated, to Jefferson, the Negro possessed neither the aptitude to reason nor faculties to appreciate beauty or liberty. “The people” did not include Negroes. The prospect of a free Black American was both unreasonable and unimaginable to the sage of Monticello. □

This essay is adapted from “Notes on the Virginia Capitol: Nation, Race, and Slavery in Jefferson’s America,” by Mabel O. Wilson, from *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*, edited by Irene Cheng, Charles Davis, and Mabel O. Wilson © 2020. Reprinted by permission of the University of Pittsburgh Press.

Daniel Richter

Stupor

London
October—November 2023



Daniel Richter, (Not Yet Titled) (detail), 2023
Photo: Eric Tschernow. © Daniel Richter / VG Bildkunst, Bonn 2023

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PREMONITION

Lincoln, Booth, and *Macbeth*

by James Shapiro

A **BRAHAM LINCOLN SPENT** April 9, 1865—five days before he was assassinated—aboard the steamboat *River Queen*, sailing back to Washington after a risky visit to the front, including a tour of the now liberated capital of the Confederacy, Richmond, where fires were still burning. Lightly guarded and accompanied by his son Tad as he entered Richmond, Lincoln was mobbed by newly freed slaves. He then proceeded to the “Confederate White House” and sat in the office of Jefferson Davis, who had fled the city. It was a gesture that sat poorly with those embittered by its symbolism; John Wilkes Booth was maddened by it, having heard rumors that Lincoln had spat tobacco juice while lounging on Davis’s chair. After leaving Richmond, Lincoln made his way to City Point, Virginia, where, awaiting news from General Grant, he visited wounded Union soldiers for five hours, shaking hands with thousands of them. Though Lincoln did not yet know it, as he was sailing back to Washington, Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox, all but bringing the war to an end.

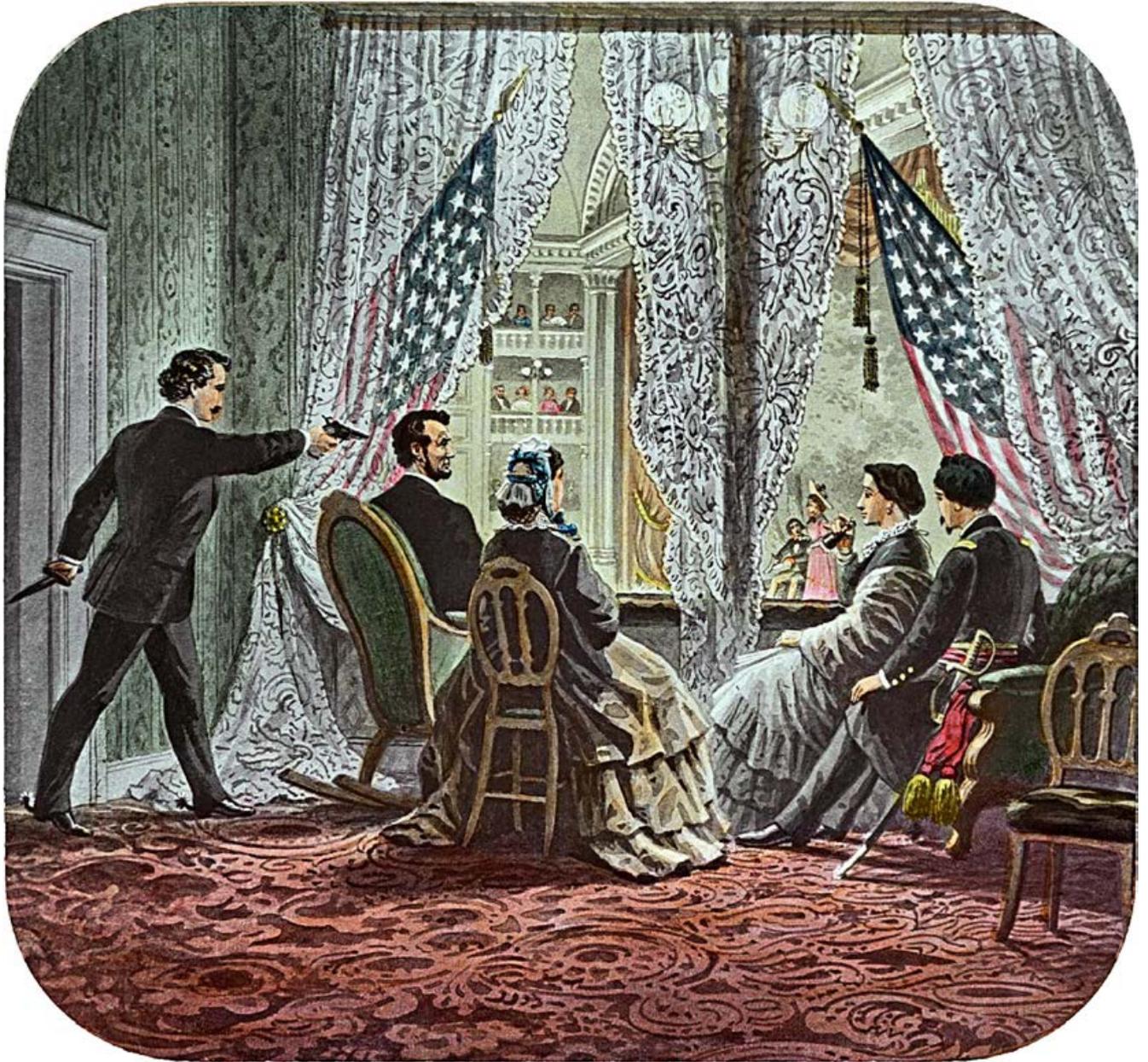
One of those who journeyed home with him on the *River Queen* was Senator Charles Sumner, who recalled how Lincoln’s thoughts at this moment turned to Shakespeare, and to *Macbeth* in particular, as the president pulled out a handsome quarto of the play that he brought with him and twice read aloud “the tribute to the murdered Duncan.” Sumner was accompanied by a young Frenchman, the Marquis de Chambrun, whose diary entry for that day offers a fuller account of what took place: “Mr. Lincoln read to us for several hours passages taken from Shakespeare. Most of these were from *Macbeth*, and in particular the verses which follow Duncan’s assassination. I cannot recall this reading without being awed at the remembrance, when *Macbeth* became king after the murder of Duncan, he fell a prey to the most horrible torments of mind.” In his usual way, “Lincoln paused here while reading and began to explain to us how true a description of the murderer that one was, when, the dark deed achieved, its tortured perpetrator came to envy the sleep of his victim; and he read over again the same scene”:

Methought I heard a voice cry “Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep,” the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,
The death of each day’s life, sore labour’s bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course,
Chief nourisher in life’s feast . . .

A more arrogant leader might have quoted Malcolm’s victorious lines at play’s end, having triumphed on the battlefield: “and what needful else / That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace, / We will perform in measure, time and place.” But Lincoln chose instead to dwell upon how perfectly Shakespeare had captured the unrelieved guilt of the “tortured perpetrator.”

Lincoln had told the actor Charlotte Cushman that *Macbeth* was his “favorite play,” and in his letter to the actor James Hackett, he wrote that “I think nothing equals *Macbeth*; I think it is wonderful.” Lincoln seems to have found comfort reciting from this dark tragedy. That at least was the impression of John W. Fornay, editor of the *Philadelphia Press*, and, during the war years, Secretary of the Senate, in which capacity he met with Lincoln regularly. Fornay writes that “Lincoln had his periods of depression” and that “one evening I found him in such a mood. He was ghastly pale, the dark rings were round his caverned eyes, his hair was brushed back from his temples, and he was reading Shakespeare as I came in. “Let me read you this from *Macbeth*”:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life’s but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.



Color print based on mechanical glass slide by T.M. McAllister depicting John Wilkes Booth entering to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln at the April 14, 1865 production of *Our American Cousin* at Ford's Theater, Washington, D.C. Date ca. 1900

"I cannot read it like [Edwin] Forrest," Lincoln added, "but it comes to me tonight like a consolation." If any American reader of Shakespeare has truly felt—through meditating on the tormented words of guilt-ridden characters like *Macbeth* and *Claudius*—the deep connection between the nation's own primal sin of slavery and the terrible cost, both collective and personal, exacted by it, it was Lincoln.

There was another reason he might have been brooding about *Macbeth* on that trip to Richmond. Lincoln's friend and self-appointed bodyguard, Ward Hill Lamon, recalled that "a few days" before he was assassinated, an unusually somber Lincoln had told a small group (which included his wife and Lamon) about a nightmare he had had ten days earlier, while awaiting "important dispatches from the

front." It was a dream, Lincoln said, that had "haunted" him "ever since."

Lincoln was loathe to mention this disturbing premonition to his wife, but the compulsion to share it was too great. Liking himself to a *Macbeth* rattled by visions, Lincoln said that "somehow the thing has got possession of me, and, like Banquo's ghost, it will not down." In the dream, Lincoln recalled, "I thought I left my bed and wandered downstairs." He saw himself entering the East Room of the White House, where he was met with "a sickening surprise": a corpse guarded by soldiers and surrounded by a throng of mourners, some "weeping pitifully." When he asked, "Who is dead in the White House?" a soldier replied, "The President." He "was killed by an assassin." A "loud

burst of grief” from the mourners woke Lincoln from his nightmare. The experience was so unnerving that for the rest of the night, Lincoln said, he “slept no more.” Lamon (who writes that he jotted down at the time what Lincoln said “as nearly in his own words” as he could recall), adds that Lincoln was “profoundly disturbed” by this nightmare, and continued to dwell on it: in “conversations with me he referred to it afterward, closing with this quotation from *Hamlet*: ‘To sleep, perchance to dream! Ay, *there’s the rub*,’ with a strong accent on the last three words.”

LINCOLN'S ASSASSINATION MARKED a beginning as much as an end—of Reconstruction, of the Lost Cause, of a battle for equality for the freed slaves and their descendants, and of the struggle to define the legacies of both Lincoln and Booth, in which Shakespeare, unsurprisingly, figured. Taking the hint from Booth himself, his few and scattered supporters defended the assassination on the grounds that, like Brutus, Booth had killed a tyrant. An editorial in *Sign of the Times* (Warsaw, Kentucky), praised Booth as a “lover of liberty, the great American Brutus . . . whose name will go down to future generations as the American Liberator—as the man who had the daring courage to destroy the first American tyrant.” The *Texas Republican* similarly maintained that Booth slew Lincoln “as a tyrant, and the enemy of his country.”

“Our Brutus” (a poem likely written in 1866 but that didn’t appear in print until 1913, in *The Confederate Veteran*) offers another example of how Booth was celebrated by his admirers as an American Brutus: “It was Liberty slain / That so maddened his brain.” It was easier to claim this heroic status for Booth, to hide behind the conspirators’ cry that “Tyranny is dead,” than to admit that Booth, a white supremacist, did what he did out of hatred for Lincoln and a deep-seated loathing of emancipation and racial equality.

Some of those who knew John Wilkes saw Shakespeare’s hand behind his act. In 1878, the theater manager John T. Ford told a journalist that “John Wilkes Booth was trained from earliest infancy to consider the almost deified assassin Brutus, just as Shakespeare immortalized him.” Ford imagined Booth thinking “If I failed to serve the South in my conspiracy to abduct, I can now be her Brutus.” Booth’s mind, Ford believed, “was turned by the poetic and dramatic glamour which transmitted the story of the Roman assassination.”

Others who knew Booth shared this view, including George Alfred Townsend, a harsh critic of the South, who published the first popular book about Lincoln’s murderer in 1865. Townsend had seen Booth perform and spoke with him not long before the assassination. He too subscribed to the belief that Shakespeare was somehow behind it all, that Booth “had rolled under his tongue the sweet paragraphs of Shakespeare referring to Brutus . . . until it became his ambition . . . to stake his life upon one stroke for fame, the murder of a ruler obnoxious to the South.” Townsend also believed that Booth “burned to make his name a part of history, cried into fame by the applauses of the South,”

and “that whatever minor parts might be enacted—Casca, Cassius, or what not—he was to be the dramatic Brutus.”

THIRTY-SIX YEARS AFTER the assassination, when it was safer to say such things, the Richmond playwright and businessman Edward M. Alfriend recalled that Booth had told him: “Of all Shakespeare’s characters, I like Brutus the best, excepting only Lear.” Alfriend also implicated Shakespeare in the assassination. He had “no doubt” that Booth’s “study of and meditation upon those characters had much to do with shaping that mental condition which induced his murder of President Lincoln,” and “that if the truth could be known, John Wilkes Booth, in his insanity, lost his identity in the delirious fancy that he was enacting the role of ‘Brutus,’ and that Lincoln was his ‘Julius Caesar.’”

But efforts to recast the assassination of Lincoln as a reenactment of *Julius Caesar* found little purchase among the vast majority of Americans, even in the defeated South. The play that the nation settled on to give voice to what had happened, and define how Lincoln was to be remembered, turned out to be *Macbeth*. As news of the President’s murder swept through the land and Americans struggled to put their

JOHN WILKES BOOTH WAS TRAINED FROM EARLIEST INFANCY TO CONSIDER THE ALMOST DEIFIED ASSASSIN BRUTUS, JUST AS SHAKESPEARE IMMORTALIZED HIM.

feeling into words, lines from *Macbeth* came immediately to mind: “O horror, horror, horror! / Tongue nor heart cannot conceive nor name thee,” wrote Benjamin Brown French, who would be responsible for planning Lincoln’s funeral, adding “We have supped full of horrors.” The same words echoed in the mind of Fanny Seward, whose father had been stabbed as part of the larger plot to eliminate the nation’s leaders, and who recorded them in her diary as well. There was even an attempt to implicate Jefferson Davis in the conspiracy to assassinate Lincoln by claiming that he quoted from *Macbeth* upon hearing that the President had been shot; John A. Bingham, who served as the assistant judge advocate at the trial of Booth’s co-conspirators, quoted sources in those proceedings who had heard Davis say, upon learning from a telegram that Lincoln was shot, that “If it were to be done, it were *better* it were well done.”

While lines from other plays were tried out, including passages from *Hamlet* and *King John*, it was *Macbeth* to which those mourning Lincoln found themselves turning to time and again, especially those likening him to the slain Duncan, who

Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking off.

These four lines were repeatedly recited in eulogies. They appeared on banners strung from storefronts. They were printed on illustrations, such as *The Martyr of Liberty*, in which they offer a commentary on the moment of the assassination. And they formed the centerpiece of the black-bordered funeral broadside that circulated: “Shakespeare Applied to Our National Bereavement.” The words became, as historian Richard Wightman Fox puts it in *Lincoln’s Body: A Cultural History* (2015), “virtually the official slogan of the mourning period.”

To mourn Lincoln as another Duncan was to move away from Booth’s violent understanding of *Macbeth* as much as from Lincoln’s introspective one. True, the play was about an assassination, but, unlike the one in *Julius Caesar*, not ideologically driven, so better suited to the story that America preferred to tell itself now that the war was over but what was to follow unclear. Some wanted to celebrate Lincoln as a radical who gave his life to free the slaves; others chose to memorialize him as a moderate who fought to save the Union, and whose death was a setback for Reconstruction and the reconciliation of North and South. Likening Lincoln to Duncan papered over the vast gap between these positions, for Duncan was something of a cipher in *Macbeth*. He may be the only ruler in all of Shakespeare’s works whose limitations are overlooked, one of those rare instances where Shakespeare did not build on the hints provided in his source, Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, where a “soft and gentle” Duncan is criticized for having been “negligent . . . in punishing offenders,” leading “many misruled persons” to “trouble the peace and quiet state of the commonwealth, by seditious commotions.” In aspiring to die like Macbeth (though not to reflect on his crime, as Macbeth himself had done), John Wilkes Booth had failed to anticipate that the man he cold-bloodedly murdered would be revered like Duncan, his faults forgotten. For a divided America, the universal currency of Shakespeare’s words offered a collective catharsis—once the story of Lincoln’s assassination was successfully recast as a national tragedy of Shakespearean dimensions—permitting a blood-soaked nation to defer confronting once again what Booth declared had driven him to act: the conviction that America “was formed for the white not for the black man.” □

This essay is adapted from chapter four of James Shapiro’s *Shakespeare in a Divided America: What His Plays Tell Us about Our Past and Future* (Penguin Press, 2020). It is reprinted here with the author’s permission.



Roware Bearden, *Ellington and Armstrong* (detail), ca. 1975.
Courtesy of DC Moore Gallery, New York © Roware Bearden Foundation /
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2023, Photo: Steven Baltes

I’VE SEEN THE WALL

LOUIS ARMSTRONG ON TOUR IN THE GDR 1965

16.09.2023 – 04.02.2024

DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam
Max-Planck-Straße 17, 14473 Potsdam
dasminsk.de

LOCKED IN PLACE

Inequality in the new American metropolis

by Margaret Weir

{ F } FOR DECADES, THE concept of poverty in the American public imagination and academic literature fixated on the system of “urban containment,” a pattern trapping the Black poor in low-income urban neighborhoods while middle-class whites benefited from suburban locations. The face of poverty anchored in the American public mind and in public policy was urban, African American, and nonworking. Yet the economic, political, and demographic forces that made containment an apt metaphor during the last century no longer describe the American metropolis. Today, more low-income residents can be found in suburbs than in historic central cities. This diverse group includes African Americans seeking opportunity or pushed out of the city by gentrification; immigrants settling near suburban employment centers; and white suburban residents buffeted by economic change.

Despite the tremendous changes that have remade metropolitan America over the past four decades, one feature of metropolitan life endures: place continues to impose burdens on most low-income Americans of color rather than serving as a springboard to opportunity. As American social policy has shifted increasing amounts of social and economic risk onto the shoulders of individuals, the spatial organization of the metropolis has itself become a major source of that risk. The very structure of the metropolis erects barriers to opportunity: spatial arrangements isolate low-income people in low-resource jurisdictions; insufficient investment in public infrastructure creates disconnections across the metropolis; and a haphazard array of safety-net institutions fails to provide support where it is needed. But the development of the new metropolis is not simply a story of unremitting setbacks that limit opportunity. It also features initiatives that offer glimmers of hope for a more inclusive and equitable metropolis.

At the heart of the divided metropolis is the idea of localism. From Tocqueville on, observers have praised American localism for its ability to nurture such virtues as community engagement and self-help. Yet for the past

century, American localities have come to promote the opposite of community engagement. Empowered by state laws to control land use, local governments, together with real estate developers, have used their powers to create homogenous suburban enclaves. By enacting laws that limit development or set large-lot sizes, local governments drive up the price of housing and exclude less affluent residents. Their actions have created a metropolitan patchwork that carves metropolitan populations up by income and by race. As a result, local boundaries now circumscribe a disaggregated and imbalanced set of arrangements in which the poorest localities with the greatest need and the least resources bear the highest costs.

Two suburban municipalities in the Chicago metro cast the differences between richer and poorer places into stark relief. Once an industrial powerhouse of manufacturing, Harvey, Illinois, fell on hard times when the steel industry collapsed in the 1970s. But its woes multiplied when whites

departed the racially changing city and then the middle class, regardless of race, moved out. For over three decades, the city has been caught in a downward spiral of population loss, shrunken tax revenues, and reduced services. The

majority Black town of 24,908 has struggled with pension payments, a budget shortfall, and a poverty rate double the nation average and 11 percentage points higher than that in the city of Chicago. In 2018, the city was forced to lay off a quarter of its police force and 40 percent of its firefighters. Yet, the town had a high tax rate—three times as high, in fact, as that of affluent, largely white municipalities.

The experience of affluent jurisdictions differs markedly. Wealthier municipalities can offer ample public services at a low tax rate. The well-off majority white suburb of Naperville offers a jarring contrast. With a poverty rate two-thirds lower than the national average and one of the highest incomes in the region, the city enjoys ample public amenities, including an award-winning public library, a downtown beach, and a historic riverwalk. Housing values have grown by seven percent since 2018. Naperville also

For the past century, American localities have come to promote the opposite of community engagement.

features one of the lowest tax rates of the municipalities in the Chicago suburbs. Political boundaries make the irrationalities of this system seem fair and even natural. One local suburban official explained his opposition to affordable housing: “We’ve prided ourselves as a high-end, low-density community,” and then went on to note that it would not seem natural to build affordable housing there.

It is not only older Rust Belt cities that separate people by race and income. Many cities in Sun Belt metros restrict redistribution through their annexation strategies. Cities such as Houston, which grew from 160 square miles in 1949 to 665 square miles today, have ballooned through annexation. But the city’s annexation strategy is not neutral: Sun Belt cities routinely annex affluent communities that will add to their tax base while skipping over poorer areas, especially older Black and Latino communities that require more services. This practice has left some areas as unincorporated communities that lack even the most basic services, including water and sewers.

The largely Latino working-class community of East Aldine fits this pattern. Even though the community lies only a stone’s throw away from affluent subdivisions that Houston annexed in the 1980s, the city deliberately bypassed East Aldine. Without city services and unable to attract many resources from the county, the unincorporated community has long resembled a rural outpost. It lacks sidewalks and streetlights, has only limited sewer capabilities, and suffers from plenty of unregulated dumping. East Aldine is not alone. Across the Sun Belt, Black and brown communities passed over for annexation live in conditions that lack the basic amenities of modern urban life.

{ T } **HERE IS NO** easy solution for remedying the deep inequalities that local governance arrangements have reinforced. The simplest answer—combine local governments—is politically off limits. In the 1950s and ’60s, many other countries aggressively amalgamated their local governments to suit broader economic and social goals. Scandinavian countries merged localities so that they would have the scale needed to implement the social programs delegated to them. Canadian provinces created large metropolitan governments that had authority over the city as well as its suburbs. These solutions are political nonstarters in the United States, where the legal bulwark defending local autonomy is strong, and the political costs of challenging it remain prohibitive.

Instead, less sweeping initiatives on multiple fronts offer more promise. Across the country, local activists have already made some progress in building organizations and coalitions that can cross

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local boundaries to promote equity. For example, the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights works to support the rights and well-being of immigrants in Chicago's suburbs. The organization played a key role in making Waukegan, a declining industrial suburb, more receptive to its majority Mexican population. Hoping to dissuade Mexicans from settling in Waukegan—or even visiting it—the city launched an aggressive towing program. For undocumented immigrants, who could not produce a license, towing meant losing their car. When local protests failed to win a response, boundary crossing groups including the Coalition, mobilized the city's immigrant population to vote out the city's leadership. Their political success not only halted the towing program; it also made local social services much more responsive to the needs of its lower-income Spanish-speaking residents.

A less political kind of boundary crossing gave East Aldine a new town center and a variety of social services. It began when the local state representative from the area reached out to BakerRipley, a very large nonprofit organization in the city of Houston. Given its broad experience in securing federal funds and raising private funds, BakerRipley had the skills and resources to build a large campus that resembled one it had constructed in the city of Houston. The organization raised \$20 million for the project, which ultimately provided a wide array of services for the community, ranging from a commercial kitchen for caterers to classes in entrepreneurship to a “fab-lab” for building projects. These services reflected the wishes of this low-income entrepreneurial Latino community. The boundary-crossing connection linked this poor community into the network of Houston philanthropy and to the acumen of a large, experienced organization.

These local boundary-crossing efforts cannot do it alone; they need complementary state and federal action. With their legal authority over land use, state governments hold the key to promoting more diverse housing choices in affluent suburbs. The power of the homeowners and real estate interests that benefit from exclusion ensured that states did not touch local autonomy for over a century. In the wake of the affordable housing crisis that has rocked many American metros, however, this diffidence has begun to change. A few states have altered regulations and offered incentives designed to produce more housing and a more diverse housing stock. Since 2017, for example, California has enacted over a hundred laws designed to limit exclusionary zoning and promote housing construction. Massachusetts recently required communities served by the Boston-area public-transit agency to zone for multi-family housing near transit stops. Washington State just enacted a law that prevents localities from zoning for only single-family housing. These initiatives mark a sharp break with the past, but they represent only a first step on the path toward more diverse housing stock across metropolitan regions. Moreover, these

new laws have only made headway in the most politically liberal states suffering from severe housing shortages. And they remain controversial: facing bipartisan opposition, New York State governor Kathy Hochul had to drop her proposal for more housing density in suburbs across the state. Such proposals do not even reach the policy agenda in Republican-controlled states.

{ T } **THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT** can help in at least two ways. The first is by enforcing the fair housing laws that prevent housing discrimination. Since 1968, the Fair Housing Act, passed in the wake of Martin Luther King's assassination, has been only weakly enforced. An Obama-era regulation, Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing, requires local communities that receive federal housing funds to submit equity plans and show progress toward meeting their goals. Its provisions will change local dynamics with requirements for broad participation and transparency around housing plans. Dismantled by then-President Trump, who vilified it as “Obama's war on the suburbs,” the regulation has since been revived under President Biden.

The efforts to build more affordable housing throughout metropolitan areas and to ensure fair housing will take many decades to bear fruit. This means that segregated municipalities with few resources will remain a feature of the American metropolis for decades to come. The second way Washington can help is by offering targeted place-based funding. While the United States has never had explicit territorial equalization policies common in some European countries, a broad array of federal grants and revenue sharing supplemented local revenues until the 1980s. Since that time, revenue sharing has been eliminated, and the value of the remaining federal place-based grants plummeted. Reinvigorating federal place-based support is critical to addressing the vast disparities in local revenue bases. While past policies focused mainly on the historic central cities, a new place-based assistance program would need to reach ailing suburbs as well as left-behind rural areas.

The twentieth-century image of the poor Black city and middle-class white suburb no longer describes the complex geography of metropolitan America. Racial and ethnic diversity now characterize both cities and suburbs and many lower-income residents now call suburbs home. But rather than ending the spatial isolation of low-income communities of color, the new mix of people and place has too often recreated spatial inequalities in a different form. These patterns are not simply the product of individual choices. On the contrary, policies at every level of government have turned the American metropolis into a patchwork of inequality. Transforming the metropolis into a place that offers all its residents a shot at prosperity will not be easy. But if America hopes to thrive in the twenty-first century, it needs to start. □

The twentieth-century image of the poor Black city and middle-class white suburb no longer describes the complex geography of metropolitan America.

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FOREST RUN

From the seen to the seeing

by Leigh Raiford

“Freedom was a thing that shifted as you looked at it, the way a forest is dense with trees up close but from outside, from the empty meadow, you see its true limits.”

Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad* (2016)

THE PHOTOGRAPH IS DARK, layers of black and gray and more black, its subject nearly indiscernible. In fact, you probably can't see much in the reproduction that accompanies this so you'll just have to trust my description. A tangle of thin tree trunks populates the entirety of the photograph. They root below the bottom edge of the frame and reach above its top edge beyond our sight. The branches are mostly bare, having given up their leaves to form a blanket on the lower third of the photograph. Some leaves cling to branches, a blurry cluster in the left foreground, at the top they appear as splattered watercolor droplets, or tiny exploding black stars.

Dawoud Bey's *Untitled #17 (Forest)* is a photograph of a dense forest in late autumn. But it is so redolent with darkness that it defies the very ontology of photography—writing with light, the index referent of what has been. Instead, a gelatin silver print patiently overexposed in the darkroom now ventures toward an abstractionist painting, a rendering of twisting black lines that form dark networks. It is not clear if those networks are there to impede or facilitate our movement. It is not clear that there is a path out, but when we move and sway in front of it, we find just enough light. It is dense but not impossible. I just have to trust that there is a way through.

Untitled #17 (Forest) is one of 25 images that comprises Bey's *Night Coming Tenderly, Black (NCTB)*. This 2018 series of large (44 × 55 inches) black-and-gray photographs of the outdoors in and around Cleveland, Ohio, is Bey's rendering of “the sensory and spatial experience of fugitive slaves moving through the darkness of a pre-Civil War landscape—an enveloping darkness that was a passage to liberation.”

Ostensibly, *NCTB* is about “the past,” and Bey has reminded audiences that “the [photographic] language





Dawoud Bey, *Untitled #17 (Forest)*, 2017, gelatin silver print, 111.8 × 139.7 cm. © Dawoud Bey. Courtesy Sean Kelly



Dawoud Bey, *Untitled #1 (Picket Fence and Farmhouse)*, 2017, gelatin silver print, 111.8 x 139.7 cm. © Dawoud Bey. Courtesy Sean Kelly



Dawoud Bey, *Untitled #3 (Cozad-Bates House)*, 2017, gelatin silver print, 111.8 x 139.7 cm. © Dawoud Bey. Courtesy Sean Kelly

of history is black and white.” Black and white is also the visual telegraph of archival document. *NCTB* revisits and imagines stops on the Underground Railroad, the network of activists who aided fugitives’ perilous journeys out of the slave South. Bey emphasizes the blackness of black-and-white to offer an imaginative act of visualizing history that doesn’t feign verisimilitude. Indeed, the present announces itself immediately in the form of an air-conditioning unit that appears, like a blinking eye, at practically the center

of the very first photograph in the series, *Untitled #1 (Picket Fence and Farmhouse)*. And the present repeats by way of telephone wires (*Untitled #3 (Cozad-Bates House)*), and a satellite dish (*Untitled #18 (Creek and House)*). Lest we imagine ourselves too far removed from the hold—the plantation—*NCTB* reminds us that the time of slavery is also now. This part is not clever framing on Bey’s part; the present and the past coexist all around us.

I **IN ITS FORM**, the series enacts the clandestine nature of the Underground Railroad, enhancing the darkness that protects the runaway from capture back into slavery; accentuating and reveling in the blackness that protects the would-be photographic subjects from overexposure and imprisonment in the camera’s luminous glare. In so doing, Bey upends the movement from the shadow to the light as the teleology of representational progress.

NCTB carves a path through so many of the visual conundra that have troubled the terrain of Black visibility. For Bey, long known and celebrated as a portraitist, *NCTB* refuses “photographic capture” through its shift to landscape. So too does *NCTB* refuse the affirmation of the self the genre of portraiture confers and confirms. There is no sitter in stasis, no subject either made regnant by or subjected to the sovereignty of the photograph. It is the loving, enveloping blackness of Roy DeCarava, one of Bey’s influences. It is the blackness of Glissant’s opacity. It is the blackness that Cedric Robinson, Teju Cole, and Tavia Nyong’o have each reminded us we can’t even yet imagine.

From his first series *Harlem U.S.A.* (1978) to the *Birmingham Project* (2012), portraiture has been Bey’s primary

mode of expression. It was *Harlem Redux*, the 2015 series imaging the rapid gentrification of Black Harlem, that marked a move away from the centrality of the human figure to convey Bey’s stories of people and place. Bey has acknowledged that *Harlem Redux* laid the groundwork for *NCTB*. But where *Harlem Redux* depicts an urban landscape saturated in color and devoid of people to convey an electric erasure, *NCTB* offers us fields, foliage, and waterways suffused in darkness and in subtle but constant motion.



Dawoud Bey, *Untitled #18 (Creek and House)*, 2017, gelatin silver print, 111.8 × 139.7 cm. © Dawoud Bey. Courtesy Sean Kelly

The move from *Harlem Redux* to *Night Coming Tenderly, Black* is a move from the enclosure to the outdoors; from confined and constrained spaces to air to breathe; from the ordered density of the city grid to “the uncleared and the overgrown.” It is a move from racial capitalism’s neon dystopic future to the “potential history” of the runaway and the maroon.

For me, the forest is a revelation, and also a cipher. In moving to landscape, Bey reminds us that Black folks both put their hands in the earth to build this nation’s wealth and were hung from trees for daring to live as though we belonged. So too does Bey assert the profound beauty and terror of the outdoors, and the uncertain pact fugitives made with these places as gauntlets to freedom.

Neither past nor present, at once abstraction and figuration, both document and fiction. I can only describe *Untitled #17 (Forest)* as *crepuscular*, “of or relating to twilight.” We often think of twilight as the passage between day and night. But *crepuscular* names its own time and its own sets of behaviors—frogs croak out a song in round,

fireflies dance bioluminescent in shifting light. So too do mice come to nibble at left-behind scraps and mosquitos search out blood to ensure their own survival. *Untitled #17 (Forest)* depicts the inexorable motion of the fugitive; it is a work of art that necessitates we take this time—so dense, so thick, so dark—on its own terms.

What if we choose, in the midst of flight (and fight), to linger here for a moment? To breathe together (which is the root meaning of “conspire”)? To listen for each other and all other things living and once living and still living? What if we share this quiet and let the darkness hold us, our secrets, and our dreams? Is this freedom? Is this home? □

“On the bed of damp earth, her breathing slowed and that which separated herself from the swamp disappeared. She was free. This moment.”

Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*



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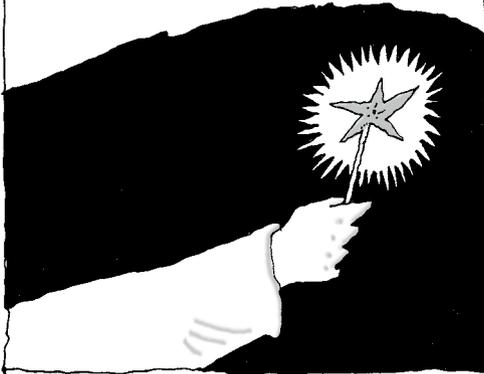
SIEMENS

Liana Finck

Artist Portfolio



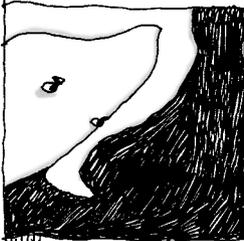
FIRST, SHE CREATED THE
HEAVENS AND THE EARTH.



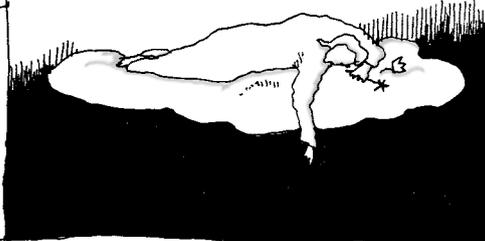
IT WAS ALL BASICALLY A MESS
AT THIS POINT—



WITH DARKNESS
FLOATING ON THE FACE
OF THE DEPTHS.

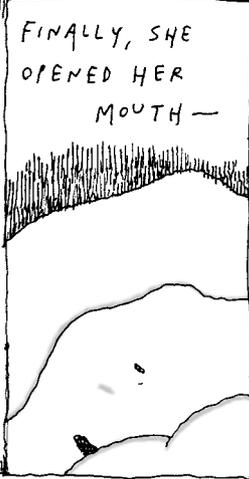
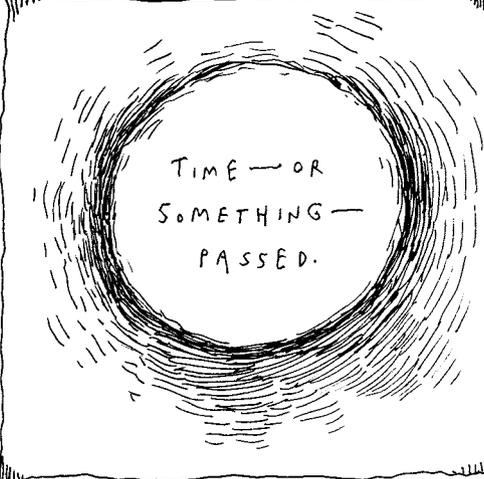


THAT WAS
THE BEGINNING
OF DISAPPOINT-
MENT.

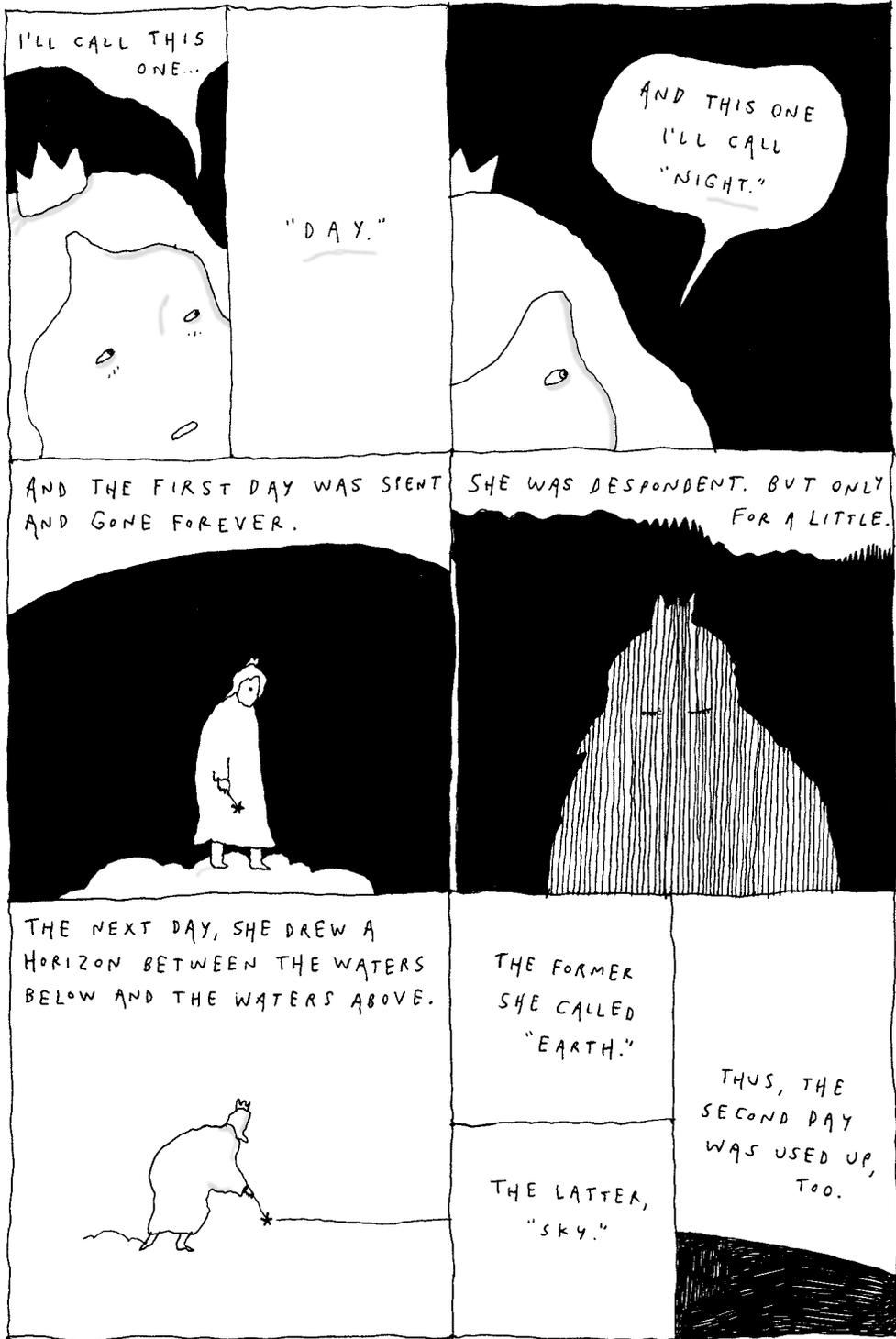


FINALLY, SHE
OPENED HER
MOUTH—

AND SAID:



AND THERE WAS LIGHT.



I'LL CALL THIS ONE...

"DAY."

AND THIS ONE I'LL CALL "NIGHT."

AND THE FIRST DAY WAS SIENT AND GONE FOREVER.

SHE WAS DESPONDENT. BUT ONLY FOR A LITTLE.

THE NEXT DAY, SHE DREW A HORIZON BETWEEN THE WATERS BELOW AND THE WATERS ABOVE.

THE FORMER SHE CALLED "EARTH."

THE LATTER, "SKY."

THUS, THE SECOND DAY WAS USED UP, TOO.



FEATURES



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Anna Escobedo Cabral

B₁

Treasurer of the United States.

SERIES
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A

100

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GREEN BACKED

Why the dollar still dominates, and why that matters

by Mark Copelovitch

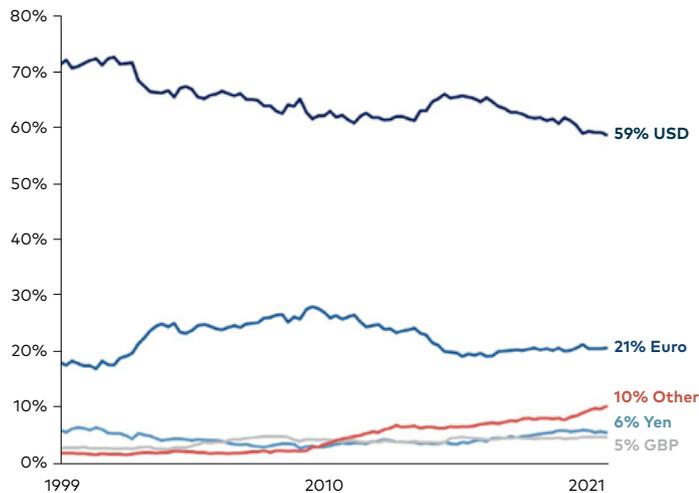
FOR OVER FIFTY YEARS, since Richard Nixon closed the gold window and ushered in the end of the postwar Bretton Woods international monetary system, a regular chorus of politicians, policymakers, scholars, and journalists has predicted the imminent end of American hegemony. From the Soviet Union to Japan to China, each decade has brought a new geopolitical challenger and

economic superpower to rival or replace the United States. The decline of American power, we are told time and again, heralds the end of the dollar's role as the world's dominant international currency.

More recently, in the wake of the pandemic-induced economic crisis and the Russia-Ukraine war, the dollar's demise again captured the *Zeitgeist*. Nearly every month, a global

FIGURE 1
Currency composition

Nontraditional currencies have played a larger role in global foreign exchange reserves in recent years.
(Currency composition of global foreign exchange reserves, percent)



Sources: IMF Currency Composition of Official Foreign Exchange Reserves (COFER).
Note: The "other" category contains the Australian dollar, the Canadian dollar, the Chinese renminbi, the Swiss franc and other currencies not separately identified in the COFER survey. China became a COFER reporter between 2015 and 2018.

smattering of articles and opinion pieces highlights the supposedly imminent passing of the dollar's preeminent status. Some argue that US-led financial sanctions on Russia will accelerate the dollar's downfall, as Russia, China, and other countries seek to shift into other currencies to escape America's economic and geopolitical coercion. And since the spring 2023 debt-ceiling histrionics, the drumbeat of predictions about the end of the dollar's "exorbitant privilege" has grown even louder, often accompanied by hyperbolic claims that the US may soon be unable to borrow or service its sovereign debts, or risks the onset of hyperinflation. The chorus of dollar skeptics has grown so loud that it is now a matter of conventional wisdom that the end of dollar hegemony is only a matter of time.

Yet despite this dominant narrative of demise, the dollar remains the unchallenged king of the international monetary system. Certainly, the US has its share of economic and political problems, and other currencies such as China's renminbi (RMB) are beginning to slowly play a larger role in global finance. Yet dollar hegemony rests on far deeper and more durable foundations than the skeptics realize, for reasons including the sheer enormity of the US economy, historical inertia, and the deeply embedded hierarchical network structure of international finance.

International reserve currencies

To understand why dollar hegemony is not under threat, it's important to fully grasp what it means to be the world's primary reserve currency. Reserve currencies are those held widely by governments, central banks, and private institutions to conduct international trade and financial transactions. The dollar shares this distinction with only a few other major currencies, including the euro, Japanese yen, Swiss franc, British pound, Canadian and Australian dollars, and the RMB.

The most common metric for measuring which currencies are global

reserve currencies is to look at those the world's central banks hold as foreign exchange (FX) reserves—the measure most frequently cited as evidence of the dollar's decline.

Figure 1 shows the US share of FX reserves declining from ~70 percent in 1999 to below 60 percent now. This sounds drastic and has sparked much consternation in the international media about the dollar's accelerating demise. Look deeper, however, and one sees two problems with this interpretation.

First, if you zoom out and look at longer-term historical trends (**Figure 2**), it becomes clear that the 1999 level was an outlier, largely reflecting uncertainty about the stability of the euro at its founding (amid concerns, particularly in Germany, about whether the euro would be as stable as Deutsche Mark and able to replace it as the number two global reserve currency), as well as the rush to the safety of US Treasury bonds during the Asian financial crisis of 1997–99. Indeed, when one looks back further, to World War II, one sees that the dollar's share has fluctuated somewhat since the 1950s, but that the current level of dollar dominance in FX reserves is

exactly the same as it was in the late 1950s and actually *higher* than it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Second, the dollar's "loss" in FX reserve shares since 1999 has not been the "gain" of any single other currency. Instead, what we see is that the modest and slow decline of dollar reserves mostly reflects the diversification of central bank holdings into a broader set of "other" currencies—the yen, Swiss franc, Canadian and Australian dollars, and, yes, the RMB—rather than a zero-sum shift from dollars into a single rising challenger currency. This is evidence of many things, including the deeper integration of a broader set of countries (including China) into the global economy since the 1990s. But it is by no means, on its own, evidence of the dollar's loss of its dominant position in the reserve-currency league table.

More importantly, FX reserves are only one dimension of reserve currency status. As **Figure 3** illustrates, reserve currencies are also the ones used in private international financial transactions (such as cross-border loans, foreign-exchange trading, and interbank transfers); they are also the currencies in which the central

FIGURE 2

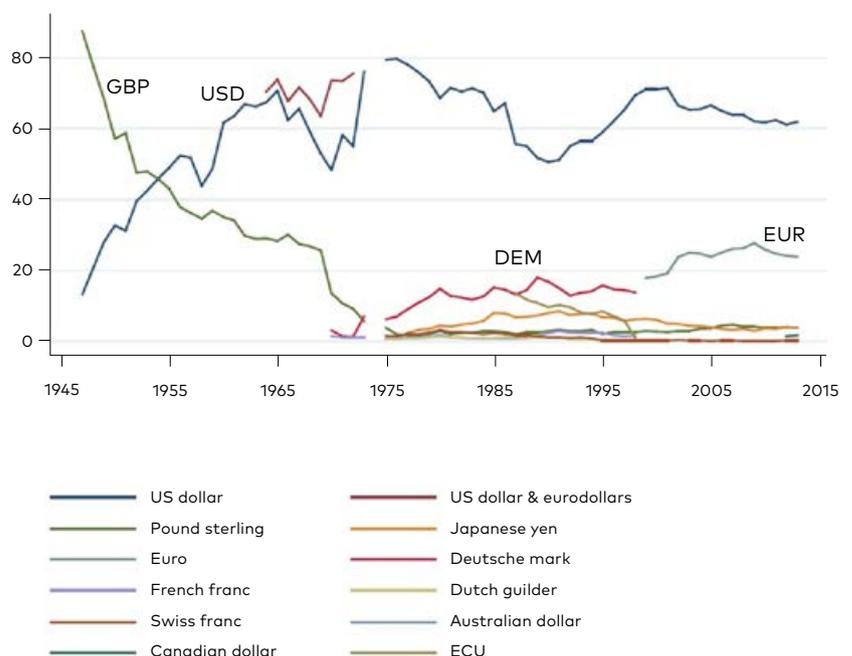
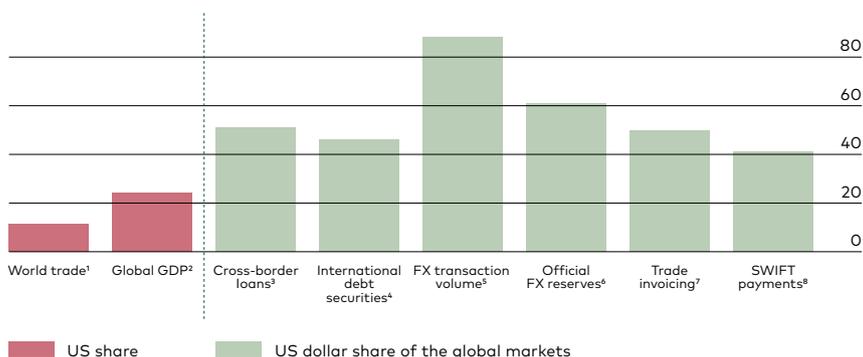


FIGURE 3
International role of the US dollar
(In per cent)



1 Data refer to 2019. 2 Data refer to 2019. 3 US dollar-denominated cross-border loans by banks to counterparties in all countries; data refer to Q4 2019 (excluding interoffice claims but including interbank claims on account of loans and deposits); loans comprise non-negotiable debt instruments that are lent by creditors directly to a debtor or represented by evidence of a deposit. 4 US dollar-denominated international debt securities by all issuers, data refer to Q4 2019; these securities are issued outside the local market of the country where the borrower resides, and capture issues conventionally known as eurobonds and foreign bonds and exclude negotiable loans; instruments such as bonds, medium-term notes and money market instruments are included. 5 Data refer to 2019. 6 Data refer to Q4 2019. 7 As estimated in Gopinath (2015). 8 Data refer to February 2020.

Sources: Gita Gopinath, "The International Price System," NBER Working Papers 21646 (October 2015); Federal Reserve; IMF; CPB World Trade Monitor; Bloomberg; SWIFT; BIS Triennial Central Bank Survey of Foreign Exchange and Over-the-counter (OTC) Derivatives Markets; BIS locational banking statistics (LBS).

activities of globalization—international finance and trade—are denominated. On every one of these dimensions, the dollar is either overwhelmingly dominant or shares dominance in tandem with only one other currency: the euro.

The Fed: international lender of last resort

Even more importantly, dollar hegemony exists because, for decades, the United States has been the only country able and willing to play the role of the international lender of last resort (ILOLR), providing liquidity to international markets and emergency dollar-denominated credit ("swap lines") to other major central banks in times of major global financial crises. **Figure 4** illustrates the Federal Reserve's leading role—in conjunction with the International Monetary Fund and its country-specific lending programs—in performing this key function in the global economy. Historical experience over the last two hundred years reveals that a dominant reserve currency is closely linked to which governments and central banks

are able and willing to perform the ILOLR function in the world economy, either bilaterally, through central bank cooperation, or through the funding of multilateral financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Here, again, we see that the US and the dollar play a dominant role unlike any other country or currency. The Federal Reserve's role in providing credit and dollar liquidity to governments and banks in the world economy is unparalleled and has only deepened in response to the economic crises of the past fifteen years. Aside from the Fed, only the European Central Bank, Bank of Japan, and People's Bank of China play even subordinate roles as providers of swap lines to other central banks, and the scope and scale of their operations pales in comparison to those of the Fed. In large part this is a chicken-or-egg issue: the US and the Fed do this because the world economy currently runs on dollars. But the direction of causality runs both ways: the demand for dollars, across all the dimensions of the international financial system

remains precisely because the US is willing to backstop the global economy and provide dollars to keep it running in hard times. Until and unless the EU, China, Japan, or anyone else is willing to step in and play this role as ILOLR, none of the other global reserve currencies are going to replace the dollar at the pinnacle of the international monetary system.

In sum, when one looks at the full set of factors determining global reserve currency status, it is abundantly clear—contra the conventional wisdom in popular debates—that the dollar's dominance has not declined in any meaningful way over the last two decades. Instead, dollar hegemony is now stronger than ever and its end is not even remotely visible on the horizon. This is not to deny that the RMB is slowly but surely starting to play a larger role in the international monetary system, or that the euro also plays a central role as the world's second-most-important reserve currency. But neither modest shifts away from the dollar, by a small number of authoritarian countries, nor modest increases in the international role of the RMB and other secondary reserve currencies, pose threats to dollar hegemony. They don't even signal that any other currency is rising to become a serious challenger to the euro's role as the second most important global reserve currency.

There is no alternative

The case for dollar hegemony rests not only on its dominant role across all dimensions of global finance but also on the weaknesses of each of the potential challengers. The euro—the number two international currency by a wide margin—is a currency without a government. The EU is the world's largest economy, but the Eurozone is neither a fiscal nor a political union, and this makes it difficult to persuade others that they can really rely on the euro in hard times. By design, the euro was set up to minimize its role as a safe haven during crises. The Eurozone's "no bailout clause" guarantees limited transfers from surplus

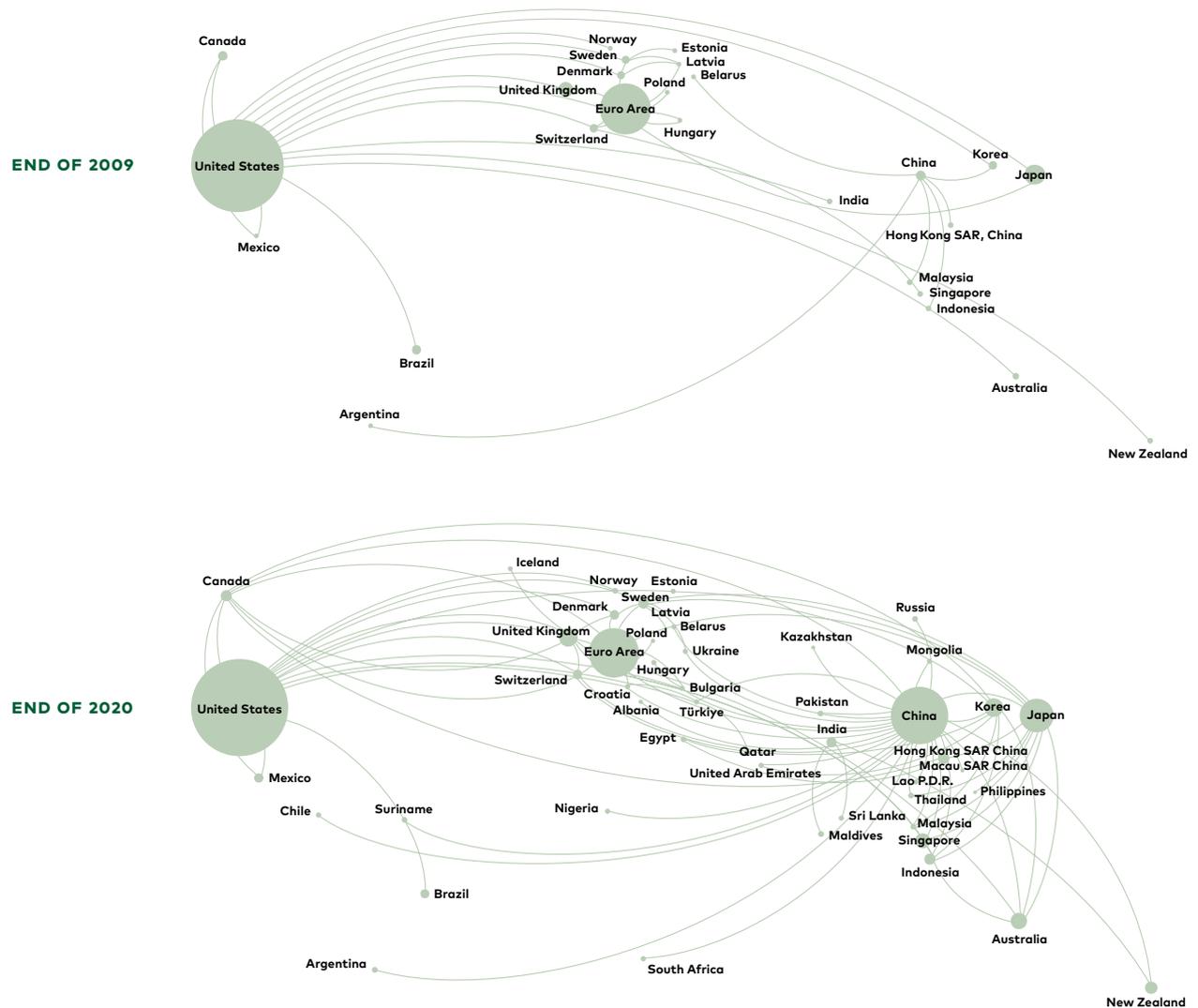


FIGURE 4 The size of each bubble represents the total amount of BSLs in US dollar terms. Sources: Central Bank websites; and IMF staff estimates.

to deficit countries with the monetary union during times of stress. This serves the internal political purposes of the Eurozone's most powerful countries (most of all, Germany), but it does not serve the external purpose of making the euro a viable option as the dominant global reserve currency. Indeed, the Eurozone now stands on the brink of a second Lost Decade and still has not resolved any of the central problems from the Eurozone crisis of the last decade. Until the Eurozone and its member states finally resolve these structural problems within the monetary union, the euro will remain a distant second to the dollar at the global level.

Likewise, while China's RMB is slowly beginning to play a larger role

in global finance, it is not remotely close to rivaling the euro or Japanese yen, let alone to challenging the dollar's monetary hegemony. China lacks deep and liquid private financial markets like those in the US and does not allow free flows of capital. Moreover, Xi Jinping's government has shown no sign that it will accept the political economy trade-offs necessary for the RMB to begin playing a leading role in the international monetary system. Moreover, as an authoritarian regime, China lacks the credibility and transparency necessary to play the role of international lender of last resort. The day may come when the RMB challenges dollar hegemony—or at least becomes a major player as one of a Big Three of global reserve

currencies—but that remains many years, if not decades, away.

Finally, despite the evangelism of Silicon Valley and Wall Street aficionados, cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin perform none of the three functions of money (a medium of exchange, unit of account, and store of value) at either the national or international level. Instead, they are speculative assets, without the political backing or foundations necessary to become reserve currencies, especially during episodes of financial instability. The world economy and international system, as currently structured, simply cannot function with a monetary standard that is not backed by sovereign political power and that cannot be rapidly increased in supply to provide global

liquidity in times of financial crises. Moreover, since essentially all so-called stable coins are pegged to the US dollar, any future increase in the reserve role of cryptocurrency assets would likely reinforce, rather than undermine, the dollar's dominance.

Put simply, there is no alternative to the dollar now and there is unlikely to be one in the years to come. None of its supposed competitors are remotely close to meeting the criteria necessary to replace the dollar as the dominant global reserve currency. Despite America's obvious political problems, which have raised uncertainty about US political and economic hegemony—most especially the increasing extremism of the Republican Party and its willingness to engage in high-stakes antics such as debt ceiling brinkmanship and President Trump's threatening to withdraw from NATO—the dollar remains unchallenged as the centerpiece of the international monetary system.

Economic and political implications of dollar dominance

The implications of the dollar's continued dominance are conspicuously missing from current debates about the future of American hegemony and economic policy. Indeed, on the most central issues surrounding US economic and foreign policy, discussion of dollar hegemony and America's overwhelming and persistent financial power are all but absent from the conversation.

First, consider what dollar hegemony means for US debt and fiscal policy. For years, long before the spring 2023 debt-ceiling crisis, political and policy debates about US debt have all but ignored the unprecedented degree of fiscal autonomy that issuing the world's dominant reserve currency conveys on the US. Given global demand for dollars (and dollar-denominated assets, including US Treasury bills), the US government can sustain higher levels of debt and deficits than any other country in the world. Yet, time and again, politicians, journalists,

and even many prominent economists portray the US as a cash-strapped household or a smaller, less financially important country—such as Greece or Argentina—that faces hard fiscal constraints and persistent debt sustainability problems. Such countries often face “sudden stop” financial crises or—because they borrow in foreign currency or have long records of defaulting on their debts—severe problems of currency mismatch and very high borrowing costs. The reality is that *every* country that issues a global reserve currency can borrow at the world's lowest interest rates and sustain levels of debt and deficits far in excess of other countries. This is true of Japan, Canada, Switzerland, Australia, the Eurozone, and even the post-Brexit United Kingdom. Yet in today's era of unprecedented global financial flows, this is all the more true of the US, given the dollar's overwhelming dominance and the sustained demand for dollar-denominated assets it entails.

This does not mean, of course, that we should abandon responsible fiscal policy or avoid discussions about the tradeoffs involved in fiscal policy choices. Reasonable people can and will disagree about how, whether, and when the US should invest more in infrastructure, scientific research, higher education, health care, military equipment, or anti-poverty programs, and whether we should finance these investments through taxes, debt, or some combination of the two. We should certainly have these discussions. But we need to do so in the context of recognizing the essentially nonexistent fiscal constraints the US faces today, given dollar hegemony and America's unparalleled, persistent dominance in the global financial system. Those arguing that the US—or, for that matter, Germany or the Eurozone as a whole—faces urgent needs or strong market pressures to balance budgets or reduce debt-to-GDP levels are expressing entirely political preferences, not hard economic realities.

Second, discussions of dollar hegemony and its implications are conspicuously absent from current policy debates in Washington, New

York, Brussels, and elsewhere about the rise of China and the future of American hegemony and transatlantic relations. American public debate has become obsessed with the US-China rivalry, and the belief that American hegemony is inevitably declining in the face of an inexorably rising China has—much like the inevitable decline of dollar dominance—rapidly become the conventional wisdom. Those advancing this view frequently cite China's GDP, its size in international trade, its growing military expenditures and technological advances, and other factors to bolster the narrative of hegemonic rivalry and American decline. Missing from these discussions, however, is a serious reckoning with the dollar's persistent and overwhelming dominance, let alone the broader gap in global financial power between the US and China along each of the dimensions discussed above. If we are going to take seriously the US-China rivalry and have thoughtful discussions about changes in relative power in the international system, we must address this glaring omission. As with discussions about US economic policy and debt sustainability, debates about the future of American hegemony and great power competition need to be grounded in a more accurate assessment of relative power.

Reports of the dollar's untimely demise—or even its decline—are not new, and they remain greatly exaggerated. Recognizing the gap between rhetoric and reality is crucial, not only for understanding the trajectory of the global economy and US economic policy, but also for understanding the nature of power in the international system and the future of hegemonic rivalry between the US and China. If we are to have thoughtful, productive debates about these topics, we must start with an accurate view of the world economy and international power structures as they are, not only as we believe them to be. And on the dimension of international money and finance, the US and the dollar continue to enjoy unchallenged dominance and will do so for many years, if not many decades, to come. □

**THE BEST REFRESHMENT
AFTER A HEATED DISCUSSION.**

Coca-Cola

CARE

Fiction by Brian Evenson



FOR THREE YEARS NOW, after each blood test, Erik's doctor had told him he needed to change. *Change?* he always said, as if this was the first he was hearing of it, and his doctor had always, patiently, ticked it off on her fingers: no more cigarettes, eat less and more healthily, consistent exercise, no more drinking. Yes, he always said, trying to look thoughtful, *Now that I know, I'll do better.*

"If you don't," his doctor warned, "I'll have to put you on medication."

Erik nodded sagely, as if he really meant to change, and then he left the examination room and went back living as he had been living: half a pack of cigarettes each day, beer at lunch, wine at dinner, whiskey before bed. He ate the same as always, exercised not at all, and when he went back to the doctor six months later, did his blood test, his numbers were once again borderline. A little worse, though so far not quite enough for the doctor to insist on a daily medication.

The last time he had done his blood test, the doctor had looked at his numbers, shook her head.

"Have you been better?" she asked. "Have you even been trying?"

Yes, Erik lied. *Much better. Trying very hard.*

The doctor shook her head.

"You're lying to me."

"Excuse me?"

"I can't have a patient who lies," she said. "I can't do anything for such a patient." She stood up stiffly and held out her hand. Surprised, he took it, and they shook. "You are no longer my patient," she said. "I'll let the front desk know not to charge you for this final session. My gift to you." And then she left the examination room.

Erik was so stunned he just watched it happen. Could she really do that? Wasn't it some sort of violation of medical ethics to drop a patient? Particularly a patient like him, who was on the border, right on the border of needing daily medication?

After a moment, he gathered himself and left the examination room as well. The hall outside was empty, none of the hustle and bustle he had experienced when first led to the

examination room. He wandered out to the waiting room to find nobody waiting at all. The only person in sight was the receptionist, but when he asked her if she could call the doctor out, she asked, "Are you a patient?"

"Yes," he said. "I've been a patient here for nearly five years."

"Name?" He gave it to her. "How do you spell that?" she asked. When he spelled it she just shook her head. "No active patient record under that name."

"But I was just there!" he said.

"Just talking to my doctor."

"I'm sorry," she said, looking wary now. "I can't help you."

He opened his mouth, then closed it again. He breathed in deeply, tried to relax. It wasn't good for him to get so upset: it made his chest ache, as if something was broken inside of him.

"I'd like to make an appointment to see the doctor then," he said.

"The doctor is not currently not taking new patients," said the receptionist.

"But I just—"

"—if you leave your name and number, I can give you a call if she does start taking patients."

Shaking his head, he gave her his name and number and then left.



WHICH WAS WHY, four months later, when Erik's chest really began to ache in earnest, when he abruptly found it difficult to walk for long without feeling like he was on the verge of a heart attack, he had no doctor.

He tried to go to the emergency room, but by the time he finally got there his heart had settled again, the pain receding. The emergency-room doctor told him he could admit him but that there was little they could do if he wasn't experiencing symptoms apart from monitoring him with an EKG—which he was happy to do, but which his primary care physician would be able to do for substantially less money.

"I don't have a primary care physician," said Erik.

"You don't?" said the ER doctor sternly. "A man your age and in your

condition? You have to have a primary doctor. You should be seeing them regularly."

Erik tried to explain how his doctor had dropped him, but the story seemed so improbable to the ER doctor that it began to feel improbable to him as well.

"A doctor wouldn't do that," the ER doctor said. "There must have been some sort of misunderstanding."

Erik shrugged helplessly.

The ER doctor exhorted him to return to his former doctor and insist on having a word with her and *setting things right*. As Erik tried to explain how it just wasn't possible, he saw the ER doctor's expression harden.

"What did you do?" he asked suspiciously.

"What?" said Erik, startled.

"Nothing!"

The ER doctor stared for a long time. "There's something you're not telling me," he said slowly.

Erik just shook his head. "I don't understand it either," he claimed. And then, "Can't you help me find a new doctor?"

WHICH WAS HOW, a day later, he came to find himself standing before a dilapidated building, the scrap of paper the ER doctor had scribbled the address of a new doctor on clutched in one fist. It was warm outside and he was sweating and his chest hurt. Could this be the right place? Even his fingers were sweating, which meant the address had gotten smudged. Which meant he was not completely certain he was at the right building. Was this the right building? There was no sign on it, no marquee out front. It did not look like a building a doctor's office would be found in. But who was he to say where a doctor's office was allowed to be? Couldn't a doctor's office be anywhere?

Not knowing what else to do, he went in. The inside of the building struck him as being as unpromising as the outside, no names on the doors, not even room numbers, no directory. He chose the first door he came to, tried to open it, found it locked. He tried the second, then the third. The

fourth finally opened, revealing a reception room, several people sitting reading magazines in uncomfortable chairs.

A woman behind a counter at the far side of the room raised an eyebrow at him.

“Yes?” she said.

“Is this the doctor?” he said. And when she didn’t say yes or no, he offered her his name. “I don’t have an appointment,” he admitted.

Without speaking she made a sweeping gesture at the chairs. He went to them, sat, picked up a magazine. It was a magazine for children, at least a decade old. He had barely opened it when the receptionist called his name.

He stood, approached the counter.

“Go through the door,” she said, pointing, “then all the way across the room, then through the far door.”

He nodded. The door she was pointing to was on the wall behind her. He had to pass behind the counter and go behind her chair to get to it. He did so, gingerly, sidling through. Why had they designed the room that way? On the other side was an unfurnished room, dimly lit, floor and walls and ceiling painted black, empty. It took him a moment to find the door in the far wall, so well did it blend with the wall itself. But once he saw it he moved confidently toward it, placed his hand on the knob, turned it, went through.

What precisely occurred after that was difficult for Erik to say. When he thought about it later it seemed that, almost without transition—with no transition he could remember in any case—that he was standing on the sidewalk in front of the building again, a bottle of pills clutched in his hand. His name was on the bottle. *Take one at night before bed*, the label read.

He was okay then. He had a doctor again. He was receiving care. He would be okay.



HE TOOK HIS first pill that evening, and immediately suffered a series of hallucinations. At least he hoped they

were hallucinations. There were, he felt, other people in the apartment besides him. He could hear them rustling, could catch sometimes the hint of their movement out of the corner of his eye, but any time he turned and tried to face them directly they vanished. He didn’t feel under threat, not exactly, but he didn’t exactly feel at ease with them either. For a long time, he moved from room to room, trying to reason his way through what he was experiencing, trying to determine if anyone was really there, but finally, unsuccessful, he gave up and went to bed.

There was no lock on the bedroom door, but he moved the dresser to block it, just in case. He fell asleep almost immediately. He dreamed of the same thing he’d been hallucinating while awake: he was alone in his apartment, only he wasn’t alone. Someone else was there: he just couldn’t see them. But he could feel them, could feel the way their gaze rested like the light touch of a hand on his back, always behind him. And then the dream shifted and he was watching himself move anxiously through the apartment, searching, looking, finding nothing and no one. He was seeing through other eyes now, was both the one looking and the one being looked at.

He awoke exhausted. He turned on his laptop and Googled the pill he’d taken to see what side effects were possible, but none were listed. None? How was that possible? Didn’t every drug have side effects? He entered the name of the drug and “hallucination.” Nothing. The name of the drug and “sleepiness,” “exhaustion.” Still nothing.

But what he did find was a picture of what the pills looked like. They were flat and squarish—a square with rounded corners. But that was wrong: the pill that he had taken was pentagonal, scored bilaterally with a single line.

They must be the generic, he told himself. But the bottle didn’t say “generic for” on it, just claimed to be the drug itself.

DESPITE THIS, despite being unsure that he’d been given the right pills, he kept taking them. After a week he felt exhausted, more and more paranoid. It was as if he wasn’t getting any sleep at all. He was beginning to glimpse shapes in the apartment even when hours had gone by since he had taken the drug.

His manager called him in. He was *concerned*, he claimed, worried about what seemed to be happening to Erik. His productivity had *taken a nosedive*. Was there something wrong? Something going on at home? He’d hate, so he claimed, to have to let Erik go . . . Erik hemmed and hawed, finally explained that he was experiencing a medical issue. He was on a new medication, for his health, and his body wasn’t accustomed to it yet. It would, he was sure, get better.

His manager just listened, nodding along with a concerned look. Once Erik was done, he told him that if he was in Erik’s shoes and wanted to keep his job—which he was sure Erik did—then he’d ask his doctor to prescribe something else.



WHICH WAS WHY, at the end of the day, he left work an hour early and hurried over to the same dilapidated building where he had found his new doctor. It had only been a week or two, but the building looked different, the façade had been power-washed and someone had affixed a sign in the shape of two overlapping circles. It was made of brushed steel. Stamped into the metal were three letters, *DIR*, which told him absolutely nothing.

The inside was different as well, plaques on most of the doors now bearing company names or the names of individuals. People moving with purpose from one end of the hall to the other. How was it possible that so much had changed so quickly? Had more time gone by than he realized?

He went to the fourth door and opened it, found that the reception area inside had been transformed as well, remodeled: different furniture, magazines up-to-date now and glossy

and new. It was unoccupied except for him and, behind a glass desk, a receptionist.

The receptionist looked up. She was a different one than before. "Can I help you?" she asked, a friendly smile wreathing her face.

"I," he said, "it's my medication. It's making me crazy. I need to change it."

A practiced but somehow still seemingly genuine concern creased her forehead. "I'm so sorry," she said. "Do you have an appointment?"

He didn't. He should have called ahead, he told her, but he hadn't. He was, he admitted, at her mercy.

"Let me see what I can do," she said.

He watched the receptionist stand up, smooth her skirt down, and disappear through the door behind her. He sat down. He began reading one of the magazines fanned out on the coffee table in front of him. But he had barely turned a page before she was back, gesturing for him to come.

"You're in luck," she whispered once he'd approached. "The doctor will see you." And she stepped aside so he could go through the door.

He felt relieved, until he passed through the door and found himself not in a bare room painted black but in what seemed to be an ordinary doctor's examination room. There seemed to be no door leading to a second room. There was just this room. Sitting in front of a low table, typing on a computer was the doctor—his doctor, the doctor he had had for the past five years, the doctor who had unexpectedly dropped him.

She finished typing and looked up, no sign of recognition on her face.

"How can I help you?" she asked.

Erik took a step further into the room. He opened his mouth to speak but had no idea what to say.

"I've been led to understand there's a medication issue . . ." the doctor prompted. There was still no sign of recognition in her face.

"I," started Erik, and suddenly found his tongue no longer worked.

"Are you all right?" she asked, concerned. "Maybe you should sit down."

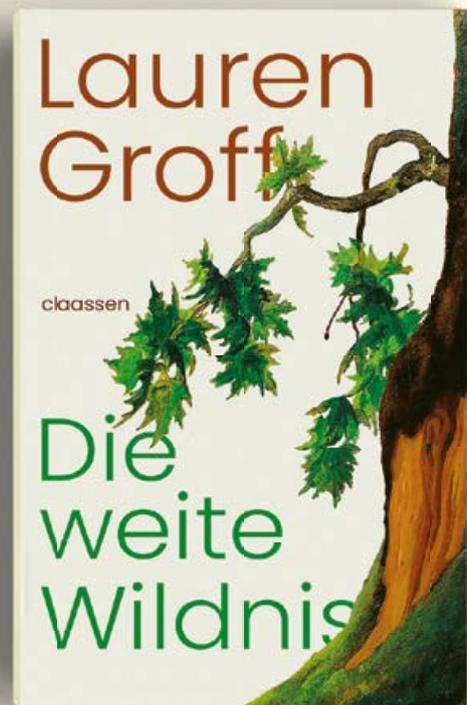
"I'm perfectly fine," he said. He tried to smile, but a smile was not what came out. Swaying, he took a step forward and collapsed.

He lay there, staring up at the ceiling light. Between him and it one or several faces were moving: something was happening. A doctor's office, he told himself, was the best place to collapse. *I'm all right*, he told himself. *They're helping me. I'm getting care. I'm going to be okay.* □

Doch jetzt spürte sie unter sich wieder die Erde, die sich drehte, und wusste, dass sie ein Teil davon war, wesentlich und groß genug.

Eine kühne literarische Expedition in die amerikanische Wildnis.

Der neue Roman von Lauren Groff.



COLD PEACE

Democracies, autocracies,
and the fate of Ukraine

by Michael Doyle

THE FEBRUARY 2022 invasion of Ukraine is the first proxy war of the New Cold War. Invaded by Russia (with the diplomatic support of China and other autocracies), Ukraine has valiantly defended itself with the support of NATO and its wide coalition, mostly consisting of democracies. Many are rightly absorbed in the survival of Ukraine, but equally pressing questions are why this war came about, whether the wider and looming New Cold War that fuels the Ukraine War can be contained, and whether as part of wider détente in that New Cold War a stable and legitimate peace can be restored to the region.

Putin's defenders have claimed that this a defensive war, launched to counter the threat to Russia posed by an ever-encroaching NATO moving closer and closer to Russia's borders. NATO has been moving east as eastern European states clamored to join the alliance to deter what they saw as threats posed by Russia. But a cross-border attack by NATO on Russian territory has never been and is certainly not today a credible threat. Russia is a nuclear power. Any invasion would be met by a nuclear response.

Moreover, Putin's own justifications for the invasion of Ukraine were different. Putin has condemned NATO expansion, but in an article written a few months prior to the invasion, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" (July 12, 2022), he set out more fundamental reasons for the attack: there was no independent Ukrainian nation. Russian, Ukrainians and Belarussians were and are one

people. Geographic Ukraine was a Russian province illegitimately separated from the Russian empire during the Communist Revolution of 1918–1920, tolerated by the Soviets, and now, following the collapse of the USSR, in the hands of fascist forces that have to be purged prior to the reunification of all Russian peoples. Simply put, this is an imperialist war, not a defense of the existing Russian state.

Like the Cold War proxy conflicts of the Korean War (1950–1953), the Vietnam War (1955–1975), and the Afghan War (1979–1989), this is part of a wider emerging axis of confrontation. This proxy war—while, fortunately,

**An aggressive new
right-wing populism
grips some formerly
liberal democracies.**

limited—does not exhaust the axes of tension that shape the new world order we appear to be entering. The post-Cold War era is clearly over. Instead of marking the end of strife over ideology and the start of an ever-growing international liberal order of peace and cooperation or even a return to a classical multipolar balance of power, the post-Cold War period has been followed by an emerging New Cold War. This is a war—so far, cold—between "democracies" and "autocracies," to borrow President Biden's distinctions. These clashes between systems of government are characterized by industrial espionage, information subversion, and cyber warfare. Cold wars are strife

over the legitimacy of governments and systems of governance, not merely contests over material interest, power, or prestige.

THE FIRST COLD WAR (1947–1991) was predominantly "fought" through arms races and proxy wars, such as those in Vietnam, Angola, and Afghanistan. The current cold war is fought with proxy war, such as in Ukraine, but even more directly, transnationally, through industrial competition and cyber warfare. The first was bipolar; this one is multidimensional and effectively tripolar. By the late 1960s, it was clear that US industrial might would overwhelm the Soviet Union. Now China's GDP continues to grow at more than double the US rate, with more than double the US population, and Russia (though weak economically) is investing heavily in military capacity and cyber warfare. The fourth "power," the EU, is the economic superpower, but it is overwhelmingly civilian in its orientation and less than united in its global foreign policies.

The global axis of confrontation is binary, pitting the autocracies (China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and their allies) against the democracies (the US, NATO, Japan, Australia, and their allies). The sources of conflict are deeply embedded in the political economies, cultures, and ideologies of the two systems. The legitimacy of the autocracies as political systems must be bolstered by political repression of dissidents, strong economic performance (poverty or economic crisis is but a generation in the past), or extreme

nationalism—or all three. Both Russia and China feel they have been slighted globally through the loss of empire: the Chinese loss resulting from Western and Japanese imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the Russian loss resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Both China and Russia feel deeply threatened by market democracies on their borders, having already been frightened by the Tiananmen protests in China in 1989 and by the democratic contagion that swept aside the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe and then undermined the Soviet Union itself. The security threats to these regimes are predominantly internal, not external. They arise from disgruntled and empowered citizens, such as those who demonstrated in the streets of Russia in 2012, not armies threatening to cross their borders. (Russia, like the United States, has experienced internationally organized terror attacks, including the 2017 ISIS-inspired attack in the St. Petersburg subway, allegedly conducted by ISIS as revenge for Russian intervention in Syria.)

All of their actual border threats are seen through this internal security prism: China asserts control over the South China Sea and has no wish for North Korea to collapse into a united democratic Korea on its Manchurian border. It has also shown that it will not tolerate a fully democratic Hong Kong. Putin supports Lukashenko, the Belarusian strongman to the west; to the south, he would not stand for a Ukraine that would join the EU. After Russia's client in Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, could not be propped up, Putin stripped Ukraine of Crimea, causing a restive and newly vulnerable Russian minority to be in constant need of potential rescue: all to keep Ukraine divided and crisis-ridden and to deliver a lesson to all who might seek democracy within, or autonomy outside, the Russian orbit.

These dynamics echo George Kennan's famous Cold War assessments of the Soviet Union. In his "Long Telegram," of February 1946, Kennan described what he saw as the sources of Soviet behavior. Rather

than geopolitical, he perceived them as domestic, driven by the political interests of the regime: "[T]he Soviet party line is not based on any objective analysis of the situation beyond Russia's borders . . . [I]t arises mainly out of inner Russian necessities." Later in the telegram—which Kennan subsequently published in expanded form in the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs*—he attributed those sources predominantly to the history of the Soviet autocratic system that required "justification for that increase of military and police power in Russian state."

THE DRIVERS OF TENSION and conflict in the emerging New Cold War are not all coming from China and Russia. In the democratic West, geopolitical strategists worry about threats to the West emanating from the destabilizing power dynamics caused by the rise of China. This is the so-called "Thucydides Trap," harking back to the Peloponnesian War between a rising Athens and a conservative Sparta in which the fear of Athens spurred Sparta to a readiness for war in defense of its challenged hegemony over Greece. This is now the subject of a popular book by the American political scientist Graham Allison. In it, he documents how only 4 out of 16 historical "Thucydides Traps" were resolved peacefully. In the other twelve, ruling powers such as the United States struck to preserve preeminence, or rising powers such as China struck to claim the privileges of leadership that had been denied them.

Liberals in the West, moreover, decry and want to impose additional sanctions on the authoritarians for their widespread violations of human rights. At the extreme end, the United States has launched destabilizing aggressions, such as the Bush administration's "Freedom Agenda"-inspired invasion against Saddam Hussein in 2003, that have set authoritarians everywhere on edge. And multinational corporate elites sound the alarm at having to compete with Chinese and Russian state-controlled or state-owned enterprises. Liberal democratic capitalism in just about any form will

find cooperation with the corporatist, nationalist autocracies difficult.

More destabilizing still, an aggressive new right-wing populism grips some formerly liberal democracies. Foreign policy, as almost never before, is rhetorical, driven by sensationalism and tailored to the psychological fears and aggressive drives of domestic political factions that are its almost sole intended audiences. The rise of Donald Trump in the Republican Party and his election to the US presidency is but one manifestation. Not since Charles Lindbergh's pre-Second World War, and similarly styled, "America First" movement has the United States seen so forthright a rejection of international engagement and the embrace of xenophobic nationalism.

THE ROOTS OF THESE populist upheavals lie in a combination of increasing domestic inequalities in some places (such as the United States) and with seeming loss of control over borders and economies in others (such as Europe). Both have rocked the foundations of stable liberal democracy. Political polarization strains governability, and "white nationalist" xenophobia erodes the values of all liberal democracies.

Just as the Cold War between the Democratic Capitalist "First World" and the Dictatorial Communist "Second World" spurred the creation of the "Third World" of developing nations seeking a neutral position. So, too, today Brazil, South Africa, India, Indonesia and Turkey (despite its nominal NATO membership) are seeking a separate course, profiting from and steering clear of the global confrontations of democracies and autocracies.

But, unlike the first Cold War, revolutionary transformation is not the preferred grand strategy. Putin and Xi want to "make the world safe for autocracy," and Biden wants to "make the world safe for democracy." All three countries respect—in theory—the principles of political independence, territorial integrity, and self-determination. In practice, however, the principles didn't quite apply to

Iraq in 2003 or don't apply today in Ukraine or Taiwan. The deeper problem is that a world safe for democracy is one in which human rights and free markets are normative (in the sense of worth promoting, peaceably). A world safe for autocracy is one in which human rights and free markets are nominal (and discretionary, based on national circumstances). Xi and Putin offer direct (as with the armed mercenaries of the Wagner Group, a Russian company, in Sudan) and indirect support to the world's dictators, and by doing so, they win their geopolitical allegiance. The United States and its democratic allies put dictators on edge, even when democracies regularly rely on them for oil and markets.

S TILL, WE NEED to recall that rational interests do and should push back against a cold war between autocratic nationalism and democratic liberalism. The fates of both are deeply engaged and interdependent, as the East and West never were in 1946. The EU has depended on Russian natural gas; the Russian economy relies on Western technology. The first Cold War is estimated to have cost the United States about \$11 trillion in defense expenditures alone. A second could be even more expensive: China still has one of the fastest growing economies and has now become the world's largest economy, according to some measures. Isolating Russia is showing itself to be extremely costly to both Europe and Russia. Moreover, restraining Iranian nuclear proliferation rests on US-Russian cooperation. And the habitability of the planet itself will rely on US-Chinese cooperation in leading curbs on global warming. All of this is put at risk by a New Cold War.

In that spirit, as we turn to policy and the prospects for a *détente*, a few key guidelines stand out. In human-rights policymaking toward Russia, we need to realize that Putin will deny access to human-rights advocates and liberal groups. Advocacy should focus on criticizing his policies, while avoiding rhetoric that exacerbates the threat of war. In domestically directed

advocacy, this can mean exposing the corrupt sources of the oligarchs' wealth in ways that resonate with the demands being made by ordinary Russian citizens. In foreign policy, this means acknowledging legitimate claims even when they are made by illegitimate actors.

Economic sanctions should always be targeted so as to alienate as few ordinary Russians as possible, while imposing genuine costs on the oligarchs who support Putin, until a negotiated settlement of the Ukraine conflict is reached.

Negotiations, facilitated by the international community, should be priority number one, not Cold War isolation and belligerence. Common ground should be cultivated, such as cooperation against international terrorist groups, including ISIS. While Finnish and Swedish accession should be welcomed as strengthening the NATO alliance, NATO should not be

Negotiations should be priority number one, not Cold War isolation and belligerence.

(over)extended to countries that are not yet either vital to the alliance or stable democracies.

Today, it is essential to support Ukraine's defense with the weapons it needs, while taking measures to limit the war in Ukraine. Genuine negotiations between Kiev and Moscow are needed to restore Ukrainian security and independence. Ukraine should be able to decide when it stops fighting and what terms it will accept. Those terms should include protection for Russia's supporters in Ukraine and Ukraine's supporters in Crimea and a recognition of these interdependencies with international monitoring. Russia needs the cooperation of Ukraine, since Crimea is currently nonviable and survives on enormous subsidies. Ukraine depends vitally on imports of Russian gas.

With China, domestic pressure will be ineffective and likely counterproductive. Xi Jinping has effective

control of the population and the corporate elite. In foreign policy, Western liberals can recognize the positive economic effects fostered by international economic investment in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and they can expose ways in which those investments can also foster autocratic clientelism in the developing world, such as in Myanmar, Cambodia, the Philippines, and various African countries.

Ideally, measures such as the above should be part of a turn from cold war to something we could call a Cold Peace. A cold war is war conducted without "hot" armed hostilities, but directed toward the destruction of the other side's political independence or territorial integrity. Today we require a Cold Peace, a *détente* in which subversive transformation is taken off the table in the name of mutual survival and global prosperity. Political systems will clash and persuasion and critical debate must remain legitimate. But armed proxy interventions, subversive cyberwarfare and covert operations directed against domestic political institutions and vital infrastructure need to be banned as a form of illicit force.

This means reasserting international rule of law principles, reaffirming existing alliances, and improving trade regimes across the Atlantic and the Pacific that are open to all who are willing to abide by their rules. Goals should also include building a more coherent regime for regular rules-based migration and protective and proactive plans to support refugees. More generally, this agenda calls for reinforcing the liberal order supporting human rights. These priorities are the foundations of long-term security. The lesson of the grim politics of the past year in both Europe and the United States is that international security will not be achieved without first rebuilding the economic foundations of liberal democracy at home. □

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TRACING TAINT

The inexorable
contamination of history

by Holly Case

IN A SPEECH from February 24, 2021, the day Russia invaded Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin argued that the aim of the war was to “demilitarize and denazify Ukraine,” and predicted that Ukraine and its supporters in the West would “kill innocent people just as members of the punitive units of Ukrainian nationalists and Hitler’s accomplices did during the Great Patriotic War.” His prediction assumed that the drive for Ukrainian independence during the Second World War amounted to both past and destiny, constituting an indelible stain that could never come clean. Meanwhile, in Ukraine and elsewhere, commentators argued insistently that the WWII past of Ukrainian collaboration with Nazi Germany was not identical with its present resistance to Russian aggression, and that Ukrainian nationalism was qualitatively transformed by subsequent events, not least the Euromaidan protests of 2013–14.

The exchange echoed the tenor of earlier debates, especially those that unfolded during the Wars of Yugoslav Succession of the 1990s, as the symbolism of the emergent independent states recalled that of right-wing paramilitary groups from the Second World War. Arguments about such “tainted” histories multiplied and were themselves wielded to justify war and ethnic cleansing.

Tracing tainted symbols, structures, and ideas through history is both necessary and important, yet like many approaches to history, it is

also fraught with dangers and open to manipulation. Long practiced by politicians and historians alike, taint tracing has enjoyed a golden age since the Second World War, when so much that happened needed to be explained, and part of the work of explanation entailed identifying root causes. Even before the war began and during the war years themselves, the evils of Nazism were traced back to German Romanticism, by scholars such as

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Peter Viereck, or, more famously, to the Enlightenment, by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. The notion that Germany took a *Sonderweg* (separate path) to modernity is also a story about taint.

There is an unsettling power and ambiguity to taint tracing that the German historian Reinhart Koselleck was among the first to register. As a doctoral student in the 1950s, Koselleck traced the origins of twentieth-century ideologies—among them Nazism—back to the eighteenth century. Later he would write that “whoever tries to trace Hitler back to Hegel or Schiller succumbs to a claim to be able to chart influences through history, one that proceeds in a selective manner.”

TAINT TRACING HAS by no means remained limited to the historiography and memory politics surrounding the Second World War. Earlier tracers included nationalists who objected to “foreign” (often French or broadly “Western”) thought, right-wing thinkers of the nineteenth century who viewed certain ideas and ideologies (materialism, communism, capitalism) as “Jewish,” and communists who decried the taint of “bourgeois” science, diplomacy, and democracy. The French West Indian psychiatrist and political philosopher Frantz Fanon wrote of the tainted ideas and practices that spread through European imperialism and colonialism such that, “when I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders.” More recently, the science-fiction writer N. K. Jemisin, in a similar vein, has written of “the taint of our world” and fantasized in fiction about “quarantine” and “harsh enforcement” in an imagined better world free from supremacist prejudice: “There is only one treatment for this toxin once it gets into the blood: fighting it. Tooth and nail, spear and claw, up close and brutal; no quarter can be given, no parole, no debate.”

Among the many ideas and structures to which taint has been ascribed are socialism, “the American Dream,” Judeo-Christian eschatology, idealism, Darwinism, Progress, and dualism. More recently, the development and expanding application of machine

learning (ML) technologies has given rise to another concept related to taint tracing: “dirty data,” or the insight that systems trained on existing data sets (images, text, etc.) contain the historical and social biases that produced them, including racial, class, and gender bias.

Taint tracing can take a variety of forms. One way of thinking about “dirty data,” for example, is to view the data as “dirty” but the algorithm as neutral. Other explanations suggest that once algorithms are trained on large data sets, the taint becomes locked in and reenacted indefinitely, moving from mere content to the very structure of decision-making. Some contemporary critics, for example, ascribe “epistemic injustice” to AI and machine learning systems, suggesting that the systems themselves—not merely the content they carry—are implicated in the problem.

This latter understanding locates taint in method rather than content. Historian of science Peter Galison has argued that cybernetic theory carries the taint of its origins in WWII aerial warfare into the various fields that were inspired by cybernetic models. Postmodernism and game theory were among the fields infected by the “ontology of the enemy” at “the heart of the Manichean sciences,” specifically cybernetics.

With a pedigree stretching back at least to the Abrahamic religions’ notion of the “fall of

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man,” and as one of the most widespread practices of our time, taint tracing is arguably *always* a matter of methodological interest and concern for the historian. Historians are both its most expert practitioners as well as its most insightful critics. Though reflections on the phenomenon are few, the insights gleaned from such reflection could affect a variety of fields—from the study of political rhetoric around the war in Ukraine to the methods and theories of machine learning.

Above all, the tendency to scale up taint-tracing claims, often to global/universal levels, makes it much more difficult to imagine alternatives to tainted histories. Although the ostensible aim of taint tracing is to eradicate taint, the effect is often the opposite, as taint tracers project the stain in ever-wider arcs and see it acting with ever-greater ubiquity and subtlety. How then to think rigorously about cause and effect in history without working the critical framework into a cage? □



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Stefan Kornelius, Süddeutsche Zeitung

«Wenn sich jemand mit den Beziehungen zwischen der Nato und Russland auskennt, dann Mary Sarotte ... Ihr Buch dazu wurde schnell zu einem Standardwerk.»

*Florian Neuhann,
ZDF-heute-Nachrichtenportale*

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Conscription and the law in Russia's war of aggression

by Saira Mohamed

THE WAR IN UKRAINE has unleashed an unrelenting and staggering series of horrific acts: summary executions, systematic rape and deportation, bombings of hospitals and orphanages and kindergartens. The scope and cruelty of the destruction are shocking, even in the face of the bald act of aggression that initiated it. The victims of this war are, in the words of commentators, too many to count. What would it mean to count Russian soldiers as the war's victims, too?

When aggression last spread horror across Europe, in the wake of the Second World War, the lawyers stepped in. They built a new world order, dedicated to preventing aggression and the brutality that accompanies it. They created new categories of acts that must not be perpetrated, whether by states or by individuals. They used international law and international institutions to imprison and execute the people who committed those acts.

Even if international law cannot prevent every instance of what we now call mass atrocity crimes, we in the international legal community take some solace in the fact that we have named these wrongs. They are not mere foreign or domestic policy; they are not standard operating procedure; they are not the necessary or justifiable acts of sovereign states. They are *crimes against humanity* and

genocide and *war crimes* and *aggression*. If they can be named, they can be seen. If they can be named, they can be condemned. If they can be named, they can be punished. Seen in this light, the International Criminal Court's announcement in March 2023 that an arrest warrant had been issued for Vladimir Putin carried with it some sense of vindication. Even if the Russian president would not be apprehended anytime soon, or perhaps ever, it meant something for at least some of his acts to be named as crimes.

But what about the wrongs not named? What about the acts we accept as perhaps tragic and awful but merely "the way of war"? What should we make of the fact that the law has no name for the individuals forced to fight for Russia, forced to leave their families, forced to die for this war of aggression?

These individuals have a name for their treatment, even if the law doesn't: cannon fodder. In a video from fall 2022, a Russian conscript in the north-east of the country yells, "We are cannon fodder!" at a local official who is trying to deliver a speech in which he reassures the group of men in front of him that they are trained soldiers, not sacrificial lambs. The soldier points his finger at the official, and his voice shakes. He has just had to say goodbye to his family. In another (as of this writing unauthenticated) video during what appeared to be an armed

rebellion launched by Wagner Group head Yevgeny Prigozhin, on June 24, a member of the Russian Airborne Forces is declaring his new allegiance to Prigozhin. Dressed in fatigues, the person has a blurred face and a distorted voice. The yellow subtitles at the bottom of the screen announce his pledge to himself and his brothers in arms: he "won't let them make cannon fodder from us."

It is not only the soldiers who see themselves as cannon fodder. Journalists, too, have been reporting for months that Russian conscripts are being sacrificed, thrown into combat without proper training or equipment, sent to die in order to prosecute the Russian war of aggression and attrition. But the law—one of our most foundational institutions for defining what is right and what is wrong, what is permissible and what is impermissible—continues to see this as unremarkable, or even acceptable.

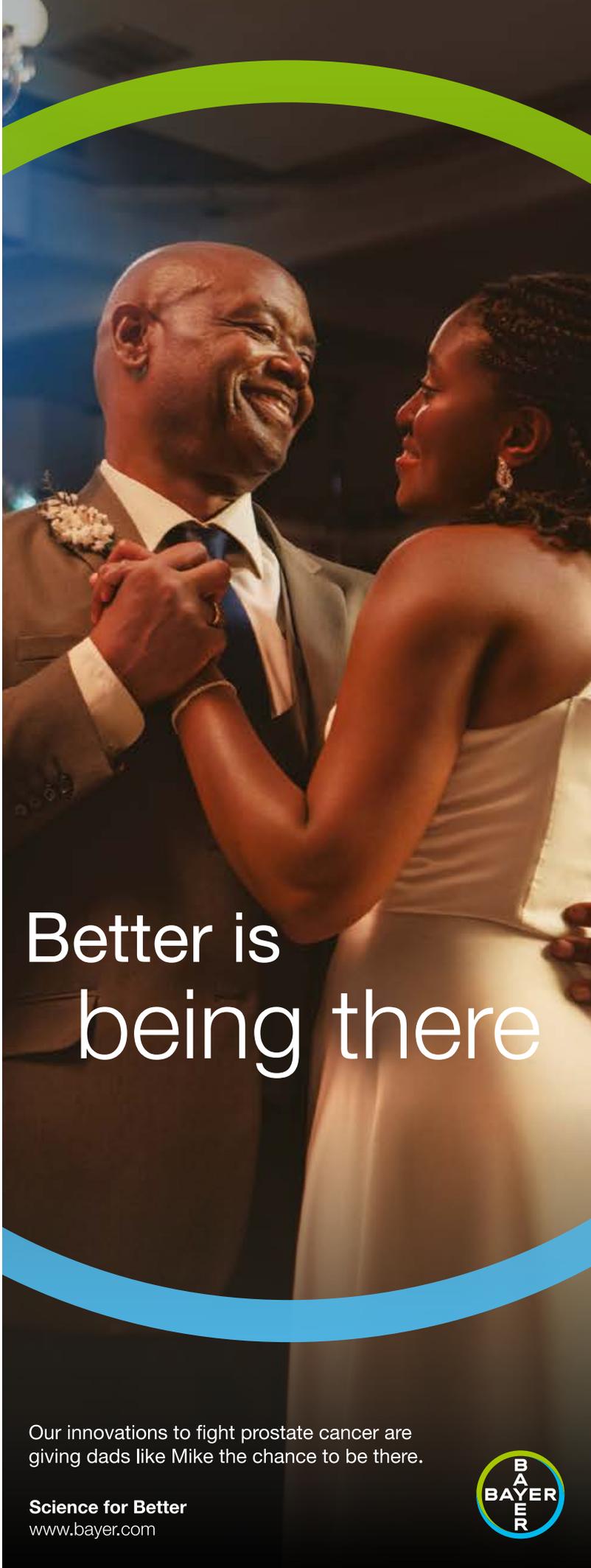
Russia has a longstanding system of conscription, through which individuals undergo military training in case of a mobilization. At the beginning of the war, Putin claimed that only professional soldiers and officers were fighting, but within weeks, public reports that conscripts were being deployed forced the government to acknowledge that conscripts were indeed fighting—though Moscow insisted that those deployments were a violation of official orders to

exclude conscripts from the so-called “special military operation” in Ukraine. A year into the war, however, Russia was relying heavily on conscripts. After having lost an estimated 200,000 troops to death or injury, and low on stocks of weapons, Russia began what it called a “partial mobilization” of 300,000 in September 2022, when it announced that any individual who had gone through military training would be required to serve in the war. The government then amped up its turn to conscripts, while it instituted a new system of electronic notification for conscription and an immediate ban on draftees leaving the country. Today, if a person fails to show up at the recruitment office, even if they simply missed the notification, they may be prohibited from opening a bank account or getting a driver’s license. And if they refuse to serve, they face a possible prison sentence of up to ten years.

It is clear that many Russians do not want to fight in this war. It is not only the soldiers facing imminent death who are protesting their annihilation for the purpose of aggression. After Putin’s “partial mobilization” decree, hundreds of thousands of Russians tried to flee the country to avoid the draft; others aimed to evade conscription while remaining in the country. Through their voices and their feet, they refuse to be sacrificed.

THERE IS NO QUESTION that under international law the war itself is a crime—an act of aggression perpetrated by Russia in order to conquer another sovereign state. But there is no language to describe what Russia and its leaders are doing to the individuals they are forcing to prosecute this war. We have a language and a legal framework to describe the civilians who are being killed, tortured, raped, displaced, kidnapped. We have a language and a legal framework to describe the horrors perpetrated against the adversary combatants—the illegal executions and acts of torture and other abuses of soldiers. But conscripting hundreds of thousands of people to fight a war of aggression remains in a legal fog. Courts at the end of World War II held that military conscription was evidence of the crime of aggression, but they did not see the conscription as a wrong in itself.

Indeed, international law treats conscription of adult citizens as a right of sovereign states, seeing it as indispensable to the preservation of the state itself. In his foundational treatise, *The Law of Nations*, the eighteenth-century jurist Emmerich de Vattel argued that “[a] nation is under an obligation to preserve itself,” and



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that every citizen is bound to serve the state, including through military service, if the state demands it. International law situates the state as the central constituent unit of conduct: international law is made by states and for states; state survival is *sine qua non*. Even international human rights law, born of the postwar recognition that states should not be free to abuse their own people with impunity, treats the state as the structure through which individual rights are provided. And so, even today, even when states are undoubtedly prohibited from initiating an aggressive war, they remain free to conscript individuals for military service in it.

To be sure, international law does impose some limitations on states' authority to conscript: individuals have a right of conscientious objection; children may not be pressed into military service; occupying powers may not force persons living in occupied territories to fight in their armed forces. Outside of these exceptional circumstances, forced military service remains permissible.

Some observers may say this is sensible policy. The law must enable the state to protect itself against domination and demise, especially in an era that recognizes sovereignty as a responsibility toward the people, and that recognizes the state as the protector of individuals. Beyond that, supporters of conscription point out that universal military service instills patriotism and a shared sense of duty. For some, conscription preserves goodwill in the state and is inherently fairer than a volunteer service. Better to rely on the entire populace for military service than to leave it to the "pitiful rascals," as Shakespeare's Prince Hal describes the ragtag army that Falstaff assembles—only to be outdone in his insult by Falstaff's quick retort that the men are "good enough to toss; / food for powder,"—the first literary invocation of what came to be known as cannon fodder.

These arguments may fit a state defending itself against aggression, but not a state that is perpetrating a crime in prosecuting a war. The state

pursuing conscription to feed the belly of aggression has already broken its promise to preserve itself, for it is sustaining only a mutation of the state, one that operates to victimize rather than to protect. An aggressor state is by definition not fulfilling its contract to its people, and so the people have no obligation to reciprocate in their duty to the state.

Not only do the people have no obligation to fight for the state; they also ought to have an affirmative protection against fighting for the state. When a state forces individuals to take up arms in a war of aggression, it is forcing them into the position of leaving their families, suffering mental and physical injuries, suffering death, or committing acts that inflict physical or mental injuries and death upon others—all in the name of an act the entire world order has declared atrocious. This is an abuse in itself.

The Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits an occupying power from forcing a person to serve in its armed forces. This is an absolute rule, and it is defined as a grave breach—the most serious category of violation of the Geneva Conventions. The rationale for this rule is that forcing an individual to serve a hostile state might undermine their allegiance to their own state, or be "offensive to their patriotic feelings," in the words of Jean Pictet's 1958 Commentary to the Conventions. If we view the aggressive state as the mutated version of its original self, we can extend the rationale of this prohibition to conscription of the aggressive state's citizens, too. An individual must not be compelled to serve the hostile doppelgänger of their state, must not be forced to participate in its perverse and bloody goals, must not be forced to become an instrument of its destruction.

IT MIGHT BE JARRING to juxtapose the wrong of conscription alongside the others, to imagine the victims of this war as not only the civilians who have been brutalized and the Ukrainian soldiers forced to defend their country, but also the Russian soldiers forced to fight. But

whatever discomfort that attends the naming of the wrong of conscription for aggression might stem more than anything from the tendencies—which are nourished by our laws and institutions—to conflate the soldier and the state they serve; to require a purity test for victimhood; and to accept a world in which states—even aggressor states—are allowed to treat their soldiers as dispensable resources rather than as people.

Shall we imagine what it could mean to describe conscription in Russia as a violation of human rights law? A recognition under international law that Russia may not permissibly conscript individuals to fight in a war of aggression will likely not change Russia's stance toward conscription. Just as it has flouted the laws prohibiting mass atrocity, it would flout these laws, too.

Still, to recognize that conscription is impermissible in wars of aggression would give a name to the treatment that Russian conscripts are experiencing. It would announce as legally and morally wrong for a state to force individuals to leave their homes and sacrifice their lives in order to support their government in an international crime. And it would chip away at the idea that once a person becomes a soldier, they lose their humanity, they sacrifice their right to be protected against an abusive state, and they can no longer count on an international community to even name that abuse.

The law both shapes and takes shape from a community's perception of right and wrong. And even as the bodies of human rights law, the law of war, and international criminal law have developed in the postwar years to shape understandings of what is permissible and impermissible in war, these bodies have continued to tolerate the idea that states retain certain privileges in war-making—and that the warriors fighting for the state are at the mercy of that state. By expanding our vision of the vast horrors of this war, we might ultimately change how we think about the state's freedom to turn its citizens into instruments of criminal acts. □

FOUND IN TRANSLATION

Words Without Borders
and the reach of literature

by Samantha Schnee

"Not knowing what the rest of the world is thinking and writing is both dangerous and boring."
Alane Salierno Mason, Founder, Words Without Borders

WHEN ALANE SALIERNO MASON founded Words Without Borders (wwb), in 2003, approximately three percent of books published annually in the United States were translated from other languages. In the intervening two decades, this number has grown, but it still falls far short of other countries. Germany, for example, publishes 8,703 translated books each year, nearly 14 percent of total books published.

The Translation Database, launched in 2008 and bought in 2019 by *Publisher's Weekly*, aims to log all original publications of fiction and poetry published in the US in English translation. For the last 15 years, French has been the top language for translated literature in the US, with 1,804 translated titles published between 2008 and 2022. This includes titles not only from France but also from former French colonies. This holds true for Spanish, which comes in second, with 1,300 titles. German takes third with 1,121 titles translated into English during the same 15-year period. There were also 593 titles translated from Italian; 503 from Japanese; 384 from Swedish; 344 from Chinese; and 322 from Arabic, not to mention smaller

numbers of books translated from other languages.

The top three—French, Spanish, and German—all enjoy the benefit of government support for the export of their literature, with Germany arguably the most active. The German Book Office (an outpost of the Frankfurt *Buchmesse*) organizes an annual festival of German literature in New York City, publishes *New Books in German* twice a year to promote new German titles, and offers a translation prize for aspiring translators. The Frankfurt *Buchmesse* has also supported a program that brings editors to Germany to attend the book fair and meet German authors and editors. Less wealthy nations—and language groups within nations—do not enjoy such largesse. Authors not published in the Anglophone world, the lingua franca of the entire industry, have a much harder time accessing other foreign markets.

This is where Words Without Borders enters the picture. Over the years, we have published seven anthologies—the majority of them themed collections of works appearing in English for the first time. Online, wwb has published over 4,400 authors, translated into English from 136 languages, ranging from Amharic (the official language of Ethiopia) to Chavacano Zambagueño (a Spanish creole spoken in the Philippines). Over the past twenty years, thirty wwb

authors have received book contracts from Anglophone publishers, who discovered these authors through wwb. Most of these are available primarily in the US market, but our website is, of course, accessible to anyone with a computer and an internet connection. Over the past two decades, the international readership of wwb's website has outpaced the readership in the US; today, American readers make up only 40 percent of unique annual visitors.

Which publishers are seeking out these authors? They are both few and identifiable. Emeritus Temple University translation-studies scholar Lawrence Venuti wrote in *Lit Hub* in April 2023 that over the past several years "twenty new presses have been launched, vastly different in size, scope, and resources, some non-profit, others trade—[among them] And Other Stories, Archipelago, Fitzcarraldo Editions, New York Review Books, Open Letter, Pushkin Press, Tilted Axis. They join small literary presses that have been publishing translations from earlier in the previous century, such as New Directions (founded in 1936), Carcanet (1969), and Dalkey Archive (1984) [recently purchased by Dallas non-profit publisher Deep Vellum, founded in 2014]."

This flowering of small presses is in part a reaction to the corporatization of publishing over the past decade that has resulted in five megahouses controlled by enormous

media conglomerates, two of which are German: Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, Macmillan, Simon & Schuster, and Hachette. Some of these new indies are registered nonprofits, which gives them an advantage over imprints that belong to for-profit enterprises, focused on the bottom line. In other words, there is a significant incremental cost to publishing translations—paying for the translation itself—which matters a lot in an industry in which profit margins are already low.

Pay rates for translation range wildly from country to country, though translators working into English from any language seem to fare quite well, even in regard to their continental European peers. Anti-trust laws in the US prevent entities such as the American Translators Association from publishing even an “observed” rate, but in the United Kingdom the Society of Authors’ Translators Association

This flowering of small presses is in part a reaction to the corporatization of publishing over the past decade.

currently observes a rate of 100 GBP per 1,000 words. This seems to be the average, with some well-known translators earning much more. Suffice it to say that for a 50,000-word book an editor should expect to pay a translator 5,000 GBP. That’s a lot of money to spend when a publisher can’t expect to sell many books—even the best of them. Venuti’s *Lithub* article notes,

Apart from the rare bestseller, sales of translations have never been especially robust either. In 2004 Christopher MacLehose, who directed Harvill Press from 1978 to 1999, observed that “the majority of even the finest books that are translated find their way to sales between 1,500 and 6,000 [copies].” In 2021 Adam Levy, co-director of Transit Books, which publishes six to eight books a year, said that “a more realistic sales range for a given title might be between 1,500 and 3,000, though

we’ve had books that have sold well above and below.”

Occasionally translations do hit the sales midlist; a few even become bestsellers, propelled sometimes by film and video adaptations. New Directions has built readerships for contemporary fiction writers such as Jenny Erpenbeck and Yoko Tawada, whose new books in translation might sell upwards of 15,000 copies. Elena Ferrante’s Neapolitan quartet of novels, translated between 2012 and 2014, have sold over three million copies for Europa Editions, according to editor-in-chief Michael Reynolds, who calls the figure “an anomaly.”

So, how do we at WWB develop and grow readerships for translated works? The answer is a multipronged approach: through events that attract international audiences; attendance

at literary festivals and conferences; an active social media presence; and via book reviews, interviews, and reading lists that provide the sort of scaffolding needed to support the exploration and appreciation of literature.

Perhaps the most significant initiative, however, is WWB Campus, a program that repackages content from the website into lesson plans for advanced high-school and beginning college students and that connects classrooms and teachers with writers. Since its 2017 founding, WWB Campus has reached more than 40,000 students and educators worldwide and has trained more than 750 educators, providing more than 120 pieces of global literature along with teaching prompts and rich contextualizing materials. We talk increasingly about “training educators to teach with global literature,” and this is how we’ve been most effective at getting teachers to adopt the program.

The WWB Campus program has received incredibly positive feedback from both students and teachers, primarily because translated literature can be both a mirror and a window: a mirror in that it offers students a connection to heritage cultures and languages in the curriculum; a window in that it proffers a connection with the wider world. Given this momentum, I predict that the use of Campus content will eventually outpace the content accessed by our regular readers. When WWB was founded, conventional wisdom held that the average US reader was not interested in translations because they were perceived as too highbrow or difficult. This attitude has changed, particularly among younger readers but also among the agents and editors who act as gatekeepers. Today, many translated books now proudly feature the translator’s name on the cover.

Not only has WWB helped to create new readers of international literature and launched the careers of writers around the globe in the Anglophone market, it has also launched careers of talented translators, such as Anton Hur (from Korean). Venuti again: “In the Anglophone world, the start of the new millennium brought changes in publishing and award-giving that moved literary translation from the shadows, closer to the center of cultural and political debates. As a result, a more public role has been created for translators.” In fact, WWB prides itself on being an incubator of literary talent both on our website and behind the scenes, where we have worked with talented writers and editors such as Noor Naga (*If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English*, winner of the Center for Fiction’s First Novel Prize) and Megha Majumdar (author of *New York Times* bestseller *A Burning*). Former WWB staffers are now editors acquiring literature in translation at publishers such as FSG and Melville House.

Finally, Words Without Borders has highlighted gender bias in English-language publishing and translation, a longstanding problem documented since 2010 in the US by VIDA: Women in Literary Arts. WWB published an article in 2013 by writer and translator

Alison Anderson that asked, “Where Are the Women in Translation?” In response, a number of global initiatives were launched, such as Women in Translation Month—founded in 2013 by Meytal Radzinski and recurring each August—which sees participating bookstores around the world and literary organizations such as PEN America highlight the work of women writers working in languages other than English.

THE TIMES ARE changing, and though this change is not rapid enough for many, WWB is proud to have been a catalyst for that change. As we celebrate our twentieth anniversary and embark upon the next twenty years, we will launch a capital campaign to raise one million dollars to support literature in translation. We will also raise our payments to both authors and translators. In so doing, WWB continues to see itself as a stepping stone to a more global identity for readers everywhere. We will continue to expand our reach to include more endangered and indigenous languages and writers, while continuing to present the world’s most exciting authors to an Anglophone audience. Not long after WWB was

Today, many translated books now proudly feature the translator’s name on the cover.

founded, writer Randall Kenan said that WWB, over time, “will be recognized as a powerful and important archive which will have a vast impact upon literature and upon international relations.” Ultimately, that is our goal.

I live in a part of the United States where some people look askance when you point out that the US has an enormous cultural-trade surplus, as if to say, *What’s wrong with that? Or, Of course; that’s the birthright of a global superpower.* It is at these times I like to mention an important 2018 *Washington Post* op-ed by Pulitzer Prize winner and MacArthur Fellow Viet Thanh Nguyen, entitled “Canon Fodder”:

We must read Shakespeare and authors who are women, Arab, Muslim, queer. Most of the world is neither white nor European. . . . As for literature, the mind-set that turns the canon into a bunker in order to defend one dialect of English is the same mind-set that closes borders, enacts tariffs, and declares trade wars to protect its precious commodities and its besieged whiteness. But literature, like the economy, withers when it closes itself off from the world. The world is coming anyway. It demands that we know ourselves and the Other. □



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TRANSITIONING TO A POSTCARBON FUTURE

Inspiration from the Pacific

by Stuart Kirsch



Photo: Stuart Kirsch



THROUGHOUT the twenty-first century, people in the Pacific have been told that the coral atolls on which some of them live—consisting of a reef surrounding a lagoon—are sinking, their islands becoming uninhabitable, their futures already underwater. This narrative, and the apocalyptic images accompanying it, are circulated by climate-change activists and policymakers who seek to convey the consequences of failing to curb global climate change. Should their homelands become unlivable due to sea-level rise and the intrusion of saltwater into underground aquifers, the populations of low-lying island nations such as Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu would have to find other countries willing to accept them. They would become the world's first nations composed entirely of environmental refugees. How have Pacific Islanders responded to such a grim forecast of their future?

In fact, most political leaders and environmentalists in the Pacific reject this gloomy narrative, as I learned in the fall of 2018, when I traveled to the Solomon Islands, Fiji, and the Marshall Islands to study the impacts of climate change.

During my career as an anthropologist, I have carried out research at multiple scales of analysis, from work with indigenous communities in the rainforests of Papua New Guinea to studying the environmental impacts of transnational corporations. I have analyzed the connections between seemingly incommensurable things, ranging from the different ways people think about nature to corporate strategies that seek to minimize their responsibility for environmental impacts and policy agendas at the United Nations (UN). My research often involves collaborative relationships that extend beyond the academy, working with indigenous leaders, lawyers, and engineers. And so I was intrigued by the rejection of the standard climate change narrative by people living in the Pacific.

Embracing an alternative narrative

MOST PACIFIC ISLANDERS do not deny or dispute the occurrence of anthropogenic climate change; they have already experienced its impacts on their daily lives and livelihoods. Instead, politicians and activists from the Pacific have been instrumental in shaping global debates about climate change by participating in UN meetings at which they introduced a Pacific speech genre known as *talanoa* to encourage inclusivity, participation, and transparency, and called on the international community to accelerate its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Like other anthropologists, I am interested in understanding how ideas move across political scales. It is generally assumed that knowledge about climate change moves from the cosmopolitan centers of the world to its margins, rather than the opposite. But this alternative narrative of how Pacific Islanders have been able to promote greater ambitions in addressing climate change is crucial to understanding why they reject the assumption that nothing can be done to prevent their atolls from sinking, and refuse to accept predictions of a future in which they end up as climate refugees. These commitments have led people from the Pacific to play an outsized role in shaping global policy-regimes on climate change.

The Pacific voice

PACIFIC ISLAND STATES have engaged in climate-change activism for many years. Prior to a UN meeting on climate change that took place in Copenhagen in 2009, delegates from the Pacific held regular press conferences under the banner “The Pacific Voice: 1.5 to Stay Alive,” alluding to the goal of limiting the global temperature increase to 1.5 °C above preindustrial levels. During negotiations leading to the Paris Climate Agreement, in 2015, the participants at the UN had all but agreed to call for an average temperature increase of no greater

than 2 °C, but Pacific leaders and their fellow members of the Association of Small Island States lobbied the other delegates and succeeded in changing the language of the final document, resulting in the pledge to keep the global temperature rise during the current century to “well below” 2 °C, while “pursuing efforts” to limit the average temperature increase to 1.5 °C.

At climate change meetings sponsored by the UN in 2014, then-prime minister of Tuvalu, Enele Sopoaga, argued, “Unless we save Tuvalu, we cannot save the world. Save Tuvalu to save the world.” Similarly, the late Tony de Brum, from the Marshall Islands, told climate change delegates in Lima, Peru, in 2015, “Like other atoll nations . . . we have no higher ground; we have nowhere to go.” Scientists tell our people there’s a risk they will have to leave our country in the future, he continued, “But [our people] refuse to go. I refuse to go. My president refuses to go—no one in the Marshall Islands will go.” Our land is our identity, he explained: “It is [who we are] as individuals [and] as [a] people, and we will never let it go.”

A particularly inspiring form of activism was the introduction of the Pacific speech genre *talanoa* by Frank Bainimarama, the prime minister of Fiji, to the annual Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2018. *Talanoa* is a dialogic style of interaction that encourages mutual understanding and cooperation. Bainimarama hoped that the resulting *Talanoa Dialogue* would help bring “together government, investors, civil society, and ordinary citizens to call for even greater ambition from every nation on earth—ambition we need if we are to spare our planet from the worst effects of our changing climate.” Participants in these discussions praised the *talanoa* format as being essential to “keep the promise of [the] Paris [Climate Agreement].”

Long before these events occurred, people from Rongelap Atoll, in the Marshall Islands, were forced to relocate to other islands due to radioactive fallout from the 1954 test of a

thermonuclear weapon by the United States. They were unable to build and sail their long-distance canoes because their new homes lacked the breadfruit and pandanus trees needed for the boats' construction. Not only did they lose access to these material resources and the means to continue their distinctive style of canoe-building, they were also prevented from sharing their knowledge of celestial and wave navigation with subsequent generations. The impacts from nuclear weapons testing not only affected their health and home atolls, they also jeopardized indigenous ways of knowing and living in the world. Research on their experiences has contributed to ongoing debates at the UN about the responsibilities of "heavy emitters" of greenhouse gases for noneconomic loss and damage from climate change, including indigenous knowledge and culture.

These findings from my work in the Pacific Islands parallel my earlier research in Papua New Guinea with people affected by the Ok Tedi copper and gold mine that polluted local rivers and destroyed two thousand square kilometers of rainforest. In 1994, people living downstream from the mine sued the mining company responsible for the disaster in the Australian courts. Their efforts resulted in a settlement that sought to compel the mining company to reduce its environmental impacts and ultimately cost the company more than \$2 billion (US) in revenue. Their lawsuit also provoked international conversations and commitments regarding the environmental responsibilities of the mining industry, much like Pacific Islander reactions to climate change have influenced international debates.

From insights to transitions

THE INSIGHTS GARNERED from my research in the Pacific have led me to pursue more general questions about the global response to climate change. My current research project, "Transitions: Pathways to a Postcarbon Future," which is funded by the NOMIS Foundation, in Switzerland,

investigates the transformations necessary to limit the harmful impacts of climate change. Addressing the challenges of global warming must occur at many levels of society, and efforts to bring a more promising future into being may be a more powerful motivator for change than the messages of fear associated with climate change, despite the ubiquity of the latter.

The dystopian vision of the future conveyed by contemporary science fiction offers a prominent example.

Reducing the greenhouse gas emissions responsible for climate change extends beyond the most obvious sources of pollution released by smokestacks from power plants and the tailpipes of automobiles.

Accompanying the ubiquitous images of zombies and the annihilation of all human life on the planet beyond a handful of survivors is the concern that it may already be too late to achieve an alternative outcome. The responses to this perspective can be broken down into two competing messages: The first is the conservative view that it is no longer possible to protect the planet from the worst ravages of climate change, which frees one from the responsibility to address the underlying problems. But these stories can also be understood as an omen of a potential future that compels us to take action in the present, which is the second view. By focusing on solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, this position compels us to move beyond doomsday scenarios that dominate contemporary discourse on climate change and to challenge the politics of resignation that results in acquiescence to an undesirable status quo. This is the position my current research aims to support.

Reducing the greenhouse gas emissions responsible for climate change extends beyond the most obvious sources of pollution released by smokestacks from power plants and the tailpipes of automobiles; it also requires solutions for a number

of hard-to-decarbonize sectors of the economy. The initial phase of the Transitions project focused on concrete, which is responsible for 7 to 8 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions, primarily from a single chemical reaction in which limestone is heated to make Portland cement, the material that binds the different materials of concrete together. Between carbon pricing in the European Union and new emissions regulations in California, the concrete industry has strong economic incentives to reduce its

carbon footprint. One pathway for change is to decrease the volume of cement used in manufacturing concrete, which can be achieved through the incorporation of postindustrial waste products with cementitious properties. Venture capital and philanthropic foundations also eagerly back trials to store CO₂ in concrete, albeit at low volumes. Another tech start-up touts the potential to turn new buildings into carbon sinks by producing carbon negative aggregate.

The concrete industry is dominated by a handful of large corporations, which recognize that the company able to reduce its carbon footprint first will gain a significant competitive advantage. These efforts could unleash a cycle of virtuous competition in which innovation leads to substantial declines in greenhouse gas emissions, in sharp contrast to the more familiar race to the bottom in environmental standards.

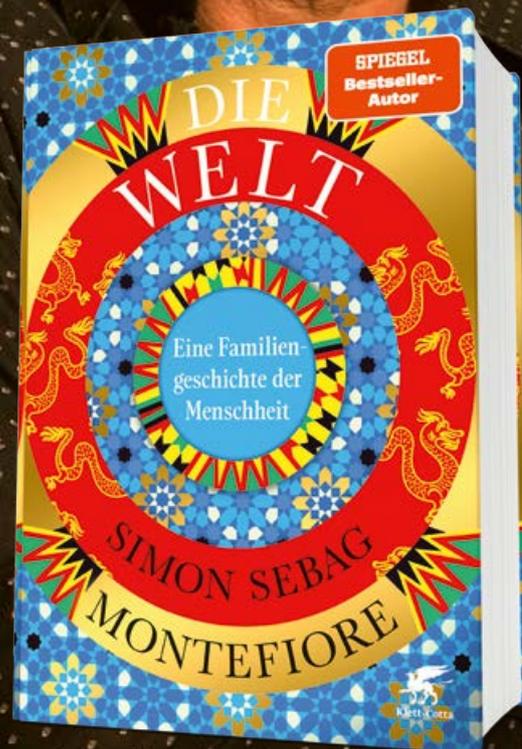
The second phase of the Transitions project examines coastal mangroves as an example of "blue carbon" stored in the ocean, which surpasses the carbon stored in terrestrial forests. Mangroves are also an important form of climate adaptation in the face of increased storm intensity and can also help mitigate the

consequences of sea-level rise. This research has taken me to Guyana, in South America, and includes learning about mangroves in Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cambodia, and northern Australia. The project also investigates global supply chains, responsible for another 14 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. Recent efforts to reconfigure these supply chains include re-shoring, or bringing production back home; near-shoring, which refers to relocating factories to neighboring countries; multi-shoring, in which production is geographically dispersed; and finally, friendly-shoring, in which the choice of production site is influenced by geopolitics. While these changes are driven by multiple causes, they have the potential to reduce the overall footprint of supply chains.

The next phase of the project investigates the system of carbon accounting that undergirds the global apparatus for mitigating climate change. While scientists have been monitoring, measuring, and assigning responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions for several decades, the task has acquired new immediacy in relation to the climate crisis. I will use ethnographic methods and draw on insights from science studies to analyze the assumptions, practices, and emerging standards for tracking and measuring greenhouse gas emissions. This research will take place at climate science institutes, policy think tanks, and consulting companies that offer professional training and carbon accounting services to a variety of public and private clients, including corporations. In the final phase of the project, I will examine the demand for the transition metals needed to build the postcarbon economy. This work focuses on efforts to increase recycling of key materials, including cobalt, copper, lithium, and nickel, that reduce the need for additional mining, which historically has been an environmentally-destructive industry.

Anthropologists are in a unique position to cross the boundaries that have historically divided the natural sciences (e.g., how the chemical reactions involved in producing cement release massive quantities of CO₂) from the social sciences (e.g., how ideas travel across political scales), and the humanities (e.g., how people orient themselves to the threat of environmental collapse), all of which are required to adequately answer questions about the response to climate change. Inspired by the critique of climate change by politicians and others from the Pacific, this research examines the dynamics of the transition to a carbon-neutral economy. □

»Brillant. Selbst den gebildetsten Lesern werden neue und tiefe Einsichten eröffnet.« *Henry Kissinger*



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GOD'S LAW

Islam and politics in the United States

by Mark Fathi Massoud and Kathleen M. Moore

WE MET KAREEM at a local Denny's restaurant just off the freeway in southern California. A progressive Black community organizer in his late forties who runs a nonprofit organization, Kareem told us that he converted to Islam as a young man, calling it his acceptance of "God's will over man's will."

Kareem grew up Protestant in a rough, gang-ridden neighborhood of Los Angeles. As a child, he equated the law with the cops or, more accurately, "grown-ass men wearing badges who'd put you in the back of their car." On the street, Kareem learned to stay away from the law: "Eight times out of ten, you did get your ass whooped if you wasn't fast."

Kareem paused and took a sip from his mug. And then he said this: "The US Constitution is a great document." We invited him to explain. He replied that the Constitution was similar to *sharia*, commonly translated as Islamic law. Both *sharia* and the Constitution create space for "diversity, human rights [and] the freedom to think."

Kareem is not alone. In our research over the past decade with Muslims across California—a place with more Muslims than nearly any other US state—we met many people connecting religious values and American law. They did this to protect rights, not to curtail them.

A GREAT BATTLE exists in American politics between people on the one

side who connect religion and right-wing ideologies in order to deny rights to women, minorities, and queer persons, and people on the other side who argue that, in order to protect civil rights, religion must be kept out of politics.

The eighteenth-century founders, Protestant Christians all, imagined a religiously free United States, but they were ignorant of the fact that some of the slaves they counted as property were Muslims. Nineteenth-century American judges regularly invoked the maxim that Christianity "is part and parcel of our common law" to justify the nation's westward expansion and the associated slaughter of Native American communities. On January 6, 2021, people carried bibles, crosses, and flags that said "Jesus 2020" and "Jesus Saves" as they stormed the US Congress to stop the certification of President Joe Biden's election.

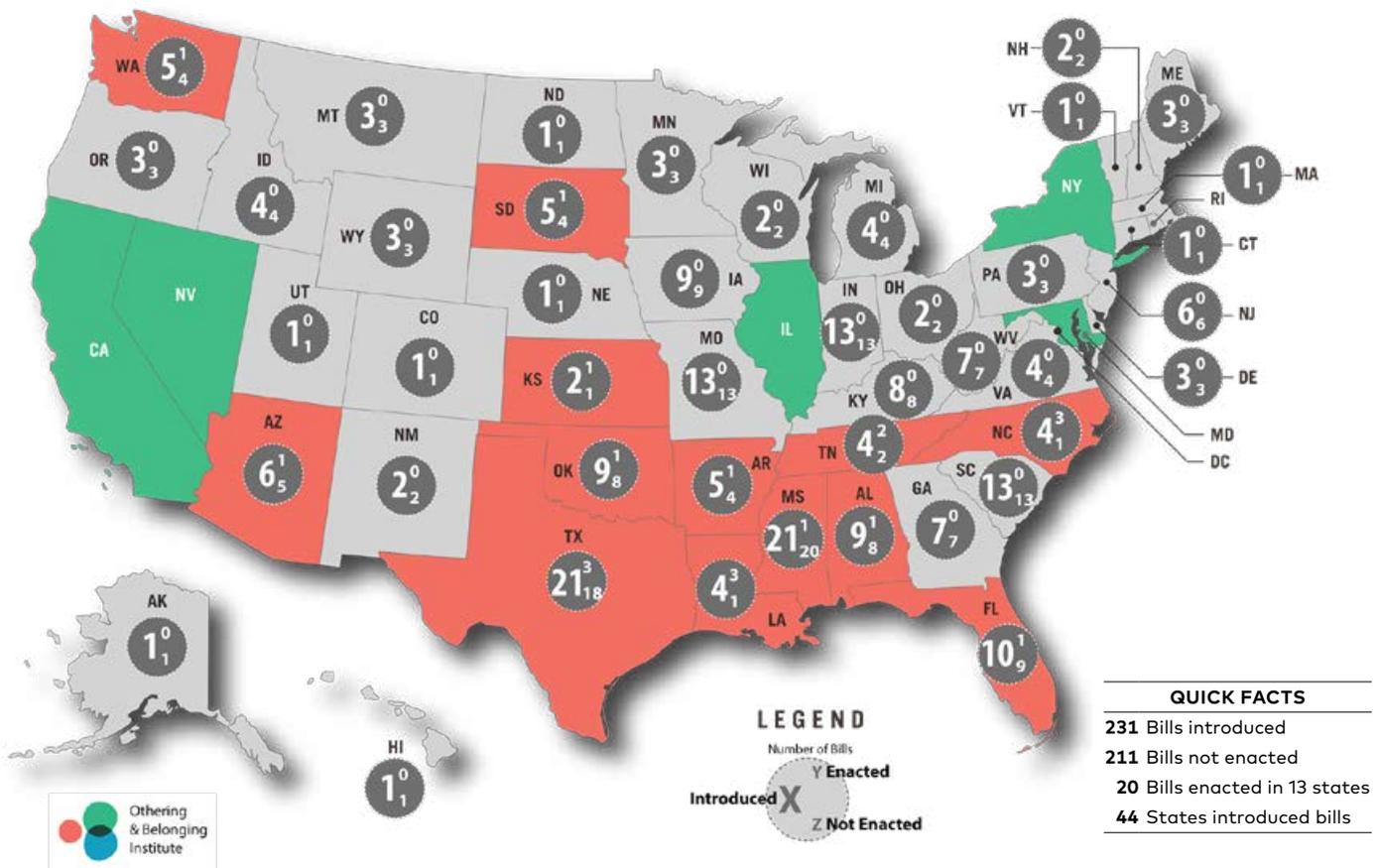
According to a Gallup poll, public confidence in the US Supreme Court reached a historic low after the Court's 2022 decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, which since 1973 had protected a woman's constitutional right to access abortion. Conservative religious groups had been calling for this action for decades, and more Americans began to see the justices of the Supreme Court as political or religious partisans.

The American Civil Liberties Union, a progressive litigation and lobby group, has responded to this legal politics of religion by asserting that "There's no good reason to

abandon the separation of church and state, and every reason to ensure that it remains strong." On the Supreme Court, the reign of the strict separation of religion and state came to an end with the accommodation of religious conservatives. The progressive refrain reasserts the independence of religion and its separation from the state, both enshrined by the First Amendment.

NOT EVERY PERSON in the US believes that either religion should stay out of politics or, if religion enters politics, it ought to align with right-wing values. A third group exists. This group includes people like Kareem who turn toward, rather than away from, religious faith in their struggles against injustice, poverty, and oppression. Their understanding of civil and political rights comes in and through their experience of God through *sharia*. For many Muslims we met, *sharia* enabled humility when they sought to follow God's will. This submission to God became their guide to ethical living and a source of democratic values like freedom.

What is *sharia*? In practice and politics, *sharia* is a contested concept that means different things to different people. It is an Arabic word that generally refers to "the way" or "the path to water." Muslim jurists have drawn on primary sources—the Quran (Islam's holy book) and the Hadith (the words, actions, and tacit approvals of the Prophet Mohammed) to formulate rules based on their interpretations of these sacred texts.



Anti-Sharia Bills Introduced in the US, 2010–20 Source: UC Berkeley Othering and Belonging Institute

However, for many Muslims in the US who are living out their faith as religious minorities, translating sharia as “Islamic law” is not entirely accurate. Broadly understood, sharia is much more than jurists’ rulings. It is “the path” to God that provides ethical principles shaping everyday living, such as honoring one’s parents or feeding the poor.

LIKE PEOPLE OF all religious traditions, Muslims do not always follow the dictates of religious leaders. Instead, some of them create their own interpretations of sharia, even when they are not conscious of doing so. Sharia has thus offered a different discourse, taking on a multitude of context-sensitive meanings related to daily life, religious practice, and politics.

Consider Nargis, a young Californian filmmaker of South Asian heritage. In our interview with her, she admitted, with a nervous laugh, that sometimes she felt challenged by the “progressive” character of sharia. Islam

made her “a lot more liberal than” she wanted to be, she told us. Influenced by sharia’s demands for justice and equality, she voted against California’s Proposition 8, back in 2008. This was a ballot initiative that would have banned same-sex marriage. “I would have voted” against gay marriage, she said, “but then, after I looked more into sharia, I realized that no, Islamically [voting against Proposition 8] is the right thing to do . . . [e]ven though . . . I was doing something too liberal . . . for me.”

We met Muslims who fasted for Ramadan and those who did not. We met Muslims who had engaged in premarital sex, and those who waited until they were married. We met Muslims who had eaten pork and drank alcohol, and others who abstained from both. Tariq, a middle-aged man, told us that he “grew up working class . . . If you didn’t drink, you were weird. And so, I drank.” Recognizing that sharia gave him the “freedom to disobey the law,” he has also come

to seek God’s guidance in the “smaller, day-to-day kinds of things.” He does not drink in excess. He prays regularly. He also attends *jumu’a*, the Friday congregational worship.

KAREEM, NARGIS, AND TARIQ each used sharia as a source for their freedom to choose how to live out their most ethical lives. However, a public perception has emerged that sharia is an unyielding religious law whose tenets are potentially threatening. This perception that Muslims must blindly obey a harsh interpretation of sharia “racializes” Muslims as inferior and suspicious others, by fusing cultural attributes to religious identity and rendering them markers of radicalism. These markers are also gendered—for instance, men with long facial hair being seen as dangerous or women in hijabs as powerless or unreformed. A specific understanding of American law and of sharia as inflexible and incompatible systems is key to producing this racialization.

The result of this racialization has been a public outcry over sharia—in part out of fears of extremism, terrorism, and corporal punishments. This has led US Senators to label sharia “evil,” and conservative analysts to call sharia the world’s “other pandemic,” in a comparison to Covid-19. Most state legislatures have introduced bills to ban sharia, more than 200 of them since 2010 (Figure 1). In 2017, the US Supreme Court partially upheld an executive order denying visas to citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries, giving legal weight to the popular characterization of Muslims as a threat to American security.

THE DEPTHS OF racism and inequality in the US—and the depths of contemporary anti-Muslim hate—cannot be understood without attention to religion and, specifically, to the long history of exclusion of religious minorities.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an intellectual enlightenment took hold of Europe. It was an “age of reason” in which philosophers, jurists, economists, and scientists fundamentally rethought human nature. They connected humanity to higher ideals of rationalism and freedom of thought, a rupture from centuries of political thought drawing from and bounded by religious faith. Organized religion, these intellectuals contended, had been the source of too much political power and too many devastating wars.

The Enlightenment fueled anti-Catholic and anti-Muslim sentiment in northern Europe. This hostility made its way into colonial North America, infusing the founding of the United States. According to the historian Denise A. Spellberg, the founders saw both of these religions as sources of tyranny “antithetical to American ideas of liberty.” For decades after America’s founding on those philosophical principles of liberty, Catholics were systematically denied the right to hold political office, and Muslims were presumed not to exist outside of exotic, faraway lands.

In the 1850s, as the US was headed toward a civil war, a growing

xenophobic or “nativist” movement took hold of lawmakers and state-houses, coalescing into the national Native American Party. Its membership combined anti-Black prejudice with growing Protestant resentments against working-class Catholics, who for a generation had been immigrating to the US from Ireland and Germany.

In Philadelphia, the city where the US Constitution had been written and signed in the 1780s, nativists rioted in 1844 to stop Catholics from voting and from reading their version of the Bible—instead of the King James version that Protestants preferred—in public schools. Anti-Catholic militants also bombed churches and attacked priests, including by tarring and feathering them.

In the twentieth century, American anti-religious extremism found another target. Discriminated against as minorities in Europe, Jewish immigrants to the US faced more barriers to acceptance. To avoid confrontation, some took new names. The social theorist Robert Merton, for instance, was born Meyer Schkolnick; he anglicized his name in the early twentieth century during a time when Jewish immigrants faced systematic exclusion from American universities, businesses, resorts, and other social institutions.

Since the late twentieth century, a religious enemy has cohered in Islam, specifically in the notion that Muslims in America, especially those who immigrate from the Arabic-speaking areas of the Middle East, pose a threat to US national security.

Shortly after taking office in 1969, President Richard Nixon directed the FBI to add Arabs to its counter-intelligence program, COINTELPRO, which had already been surveilling Black American civil-rights activists.

Continued FBI sweeps of Arab communities expanded into Nixon’s 1972 “Operation Boulder,” in which federal authorities tracked down and interrogated every Arab university student in America, to ascertain their possible links to communism and terrorism, as well as their support for Palestine, sometimes handing this information over to Jewish groups.

Other surveillance programs flourished in the early twenty-first century after the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security. Federal authorities, as well as state and local police, targeted terrorists and potential terrorists. However, in practice, these programs over-reached and under-delivered by targeting Muslims and suspected Muslims.

IT IS IN THE CONTEXT of centuries of American racial and religious exclusion that American Muslims find themselves living today. It is also in this context that Kareem, the man whom we met at Denny’s in southern California, came to understand and turn toward sharia.

“God’s permission,” Kareem said, has allowed him to “get out of a state of apathy and helplessness” to help make his community a better place to live. Kareem’s civic activism has focused on empowering youth in urban areas to better their lives through sports, education, community building and awareness. Sharia has taught him to ask himself, “What can you do for yourself [and] how can you contribute to make things better?”

Kareem’s understanding of sharia has led him even further toward a cosmic or universal understanding of life, which “is bigger than the Earth [and] bigger than you and me,” as he put it. He has begun to understand his out-of-placeness in a nation that has long objected not only to his Blackness but also to his Muslimness. Kareem told us how he has come to understand the importance of freedom—a core American value—when he willingly accepted Islam without coercion.

Ending our conversation, Kareem reflected on being American: “I feel good claiming I’m an American,” he said, “because I can contribute to the game and help change it.”

“The greatest thing we’ve got,” Kareem said before we ended our interview, “is to be able to think. The laws of [the United States government] help us to think, and that’s what sharia is. Sharia is the freedom to think.” □

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DIMINUENDO LAGRIMOSO



The 1983 Metropolitan Opera Gala, featuring legendary *spinto* and dramatic singers including Monserrat Caballé, Birgit Nilsson, Jessye Norman, Leontyne Price, Grace Bumbry, Marilyn Horne, Plácido Domingo, José Carreras, Luciano Pavarotti, Renato Bruson, Nicolai Ghiaurov, Sesto Bruscantini, Thomas Stewart, and James Morris. Photo: James Heffernan/© Metropolitan Opera

WHETHER ONE overhears standing-room queue conversations, reads opera critics in the newspaper, or seeks recommendations for recordings, one is struck by the widespread perception that opera is in decline.

Not all opera, of course. The singing of Baroque and contemporary operas, and even those of Mozart or Rossini, remains healthy. Provocative stagings abound. State subsidies, private funding, and the move to watching live operas remotely on video create a workable financial basis. Training has improved, assuring that the average performance even at obscure opera houses is minimally competent—something not true a century ago.

Yet at the heart of the opera world, decline is evident. I am referring to the inability to find singers to cast the mature works of Verdi and Wagner, as well as Puccini, Strauss, and others. These operas require what opera connoisseurs call “*spinto*” and “dramatic” voices. These are the most powerful, expressive and weighty voices in opera, able to project over a massive orchestra for three to six hours at a stretch, while maintaining the sharp edge, dark resonance, and precise diction that convey bold and direct emotions. Over 40 percent of opera performances every year worldwide require them, including for such repertoire classics as *Aida*, *Il trovatore*, *Die Walküre*, and *Tristan und Isolde*. The sad truth is that the very best

opera houses today are unable to cast these works with superstar voices. Singing is certainly competent, but the heights do not approach those widespread fifty years ago and well-documented on recordings.

Conductors and administrators sound the alarm. Riccardo Muti observes: “We have a lot of singers good for Mozart and Rossini, but singers in the heavy repertory are becoming fewer. . . . It’s certainly impossible to cast an opera like *La forza del destino* well.” The late James Levine recalled the “sensationally full-scale” singers he worked with a generation earlier: “In any given Met season now, it’s unlikely we could play *Don Carlo*, *La forza del destino*, *Un ballo in maschera*, and *Aida*. We just don’t have the

Tracing the decline of big opera voices

by Andrew Moravcsik



same density of that kind of singer now.” One American impresario adds: “We all know that no one today can sing better than a B-plus Rigoletto.” The same goes for Wagner. Soprano Nina Stemme, among today’s finest Brünnhildes, echoes many in the business: “Unfortunately we must recognize that Flagstad and Melchior really ruined everything for subsequent Wagner singers. No one today comes close.”

FOR THE LAST DECADE, I have headed a team of researchers, based at Princeton University, conducting the first academic study ever to attempt to measure operatic quality and conduct systematic scholarly research in this area. Does

this decline in world-class superstars really exist? If so, what has caused it and what can we do about it? Though much commentary and considerable debate exists regarding which singers are the greatest, no researcher has ever sought to measure and track the quality of operatic singing systematically over time. We do so in two ways: conducting confidential interviews with opera professionals and analyzing reviews of every extant recording of an opera. Both reveal a marked decline in *spinto* and dramatic singing.

So far we have conducted wide-ranging confidential interviews in nine countries with over 150 opera professionals: impresarios, conductors, coaches, casting directors, critics, scholars, consultants, singers, accompanists, agents, and teachers. Among many questions, we ask them whether they perceived any recent changes in the very best *spinto* and dramatic singing. Over 95 percent spontaneously volunteer that a significant decline had occurred. Almost all date it to the 1960s and ’70s. They single out Verdi as the area of greatest crisis, though Wagner has suffered as well. Moreover, whereas the average singer is better trained, the peaks of exceptionally great singers are disappearing. In sum, as one top consultant put it to me while sitting at a café in Munich, “When a top company asks me to suggest singers for *Aida*, my first response is simply to tell them: ‘Just don’t do it!’”

We also compiled and analyzed a dataset comprising reviews of every extant audio and video recording (since 1927) of any part of two operas each by Verdi (*Il trovatore* and *Aida*) and Wagner (*Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Walküre*). These data confirm precisely what industry insiders report: the quality of the best Verdi singing has dropped markedly, and Wagner slightly less, since the 1960s.

Are such complaints just self-indulgent nostalgia—the grumbling of opera lovers overly attached to youthful memories, scratchy recordings, and aging divas? To exclude such “nostalgia bias,” we also asked interview subjects and examined

reviews about the quality of Baroque, Mozart, and *bel canto* opera, as well as conducting, orchestral playing, and staging. Respondents and critics uniformly agree that the quality of all these things has remained stable or improved—suggesting that the results are not driven by generic cultural or perceptual bias, like nostalgia, or any other such measurement error. The decline seems real.

But what explains this decline? And why do we not see it with regard to other types of opera or instrumental classical music? Opera insiders, who are well aware what is happening, offer many speculations. Many focus on self-interested or ill-informed behavior by some sub-group in the opera business. Yet most lack logical coherence and empirical support.

Some blame teachers and coaches. Contemporary university and conservatory teachers, it is said, lack real-world operatic experience. Yet, historically, most successful teachers have never been retired singers. Moreover, it is implausible that highly professional institutions staffed by teachers who are successfully training young singers to handle fiendishly difficult Baroque, Mozart, *bel canto*, and modern repertoire are inexplicably incapable of teaching them to sing Verdi and Wagner. Finally, if training is poor, why would the average level of performance be rising, even as the number of *great* singers has declined?

Many criticize myopic, musically illiterate, and money-grubbing agents, managers, and opera administrators. Supposedly they tempt singers to sing too much, to attempt big roles too early in their careers, and to jet around the world, thereby ruining their voices before they achieve maturity. Yet our research shows that the average singer tackles big roles later and performs less often than fifty or a hundred years ago, while the modern health risks are, overall, lower.

Others condemn modern acoustics. Many professionals believe that higher orchestral pitch, larger opera houses, and louder orchestral playing place singers under intolerable acoustical stress. Yet since 1970, orchestral pitch

has actually dropped from A448 Hz or more in some places down to A440–443 almost everywhere, while almost all the top houses remain the same ones as existed a half century ago, including venerable theatres in Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Bayreuth, New York, and Milan. While louder orchestras may inhibit singers, the great increase in instrumental volume occurred early, not late in the twentieth century—and, in any case, should not affect recordings.

Still others point to changes in taste, most often the fashionable rise of Baroque and modern opera. Yet the fact that early and contemporary music are “in” doesn’t necessarily mean that Verdi and Wagner are “out”—any more than better violin playing implies worse cello playing. About half of operas performed worldwide still call for *spinto* and dramatic voices.

Finally, some blame underlying cultural and economic trends. Perhaps classical singing has become less fashionable and profitable, which discourages young people from taking it up. Surely this is not the whole story. Unlike their predecessors, contemporary singers receive subsidized training and earn more (both in real terms and as a percentage of the median wage) than in decades past—right up to Andrea Bocelli, today worth tens of millions. And while opera is admittedly less fashionable than pop music, the extraordinary quality of less glamorous and remunerative types of classical music—such as symphonic playing, string quartets and Baroque singing—suggest glamour and money cannot be the decisive obstacles.

IT IS MORE PLAUSIBLE to explain the creation of great musicians as an activity deeply embedded in the broader society and culture. As the saying goes, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Cultivating great opera singers—like great instrumentalists, artists, athletes, and researchers—requires effective social institutions that can perform three critical functions: identify talented individuals, train them for the extended period to maturity,

and then give them an opportunity to practice their vocation. Each step is essential. Decline begins if such institutions atrophy, which is what we have observed over the past fifty years.

The causal chain starts with the identification of young individuals with talent. Most specialized artistic, athletic, and intellectual activities require rare levels of natural ability, passion, and commitment. Finding such individuals is possible only through inclusionary social institutions able to scan the youth population for such potential and to provide sufficiently intense training to confirm its existence. Second, social institutions must encourage gifted individuals to remain committed to further rigorous training until they reach professional maturity. No matter how much talent one has, someone with neither experience nor instruction has next to no chance to embark on the road to a high-level professional vocal career as an adult. Third, the few who emerge as mature and trained individuals must be offered attractive and demanding professional opportunities. After decades of work, if no career options exist, or if society declines to employ the skills of talented and trained individuals, they are unlikely to enter the profession in the first place or to remain in it as adults.

To illustrate how all three institutional functions can work well, consider basketball. The most global of all sports today, it has witnessed an extraordinary improvement in play over the past half century. The foundation of this success has been the development of increasingly universal social institutions to identify, train and employ talent. Almost anywhere on the globe, a tall and fit young person will have a basketball thrust into his (and, increasingly, her) hands. Schools, universities, clubs, associations, family, friends, and even the government will offer encouragement and training, especially in countries with tall populations and a long basketball tradition. Should individuals succeed, they will then be incentivized to play basketball until they prove that they are unable or unwilling to reach the pinnacle: the

National Basketball Association (NBA). And, if they make it, the NBA welcomes them, regardless of background. Since 1950, the number of African Americans has risen from zero to over 70 percent, and since 1995, the number of international players has risen from only 5 percent to 25 percent—with the last five annual Most Valuable Player awards going to non-Americans. Today, this global basketball infrastructure harvests the talent of the entire planet.

Basketball is hardly unique. The wealth, health, diversity, and global links of modern societies allows them to cultivate ever greater excellence across most athletic, artistic, and intellectual activities. Even unfashionable and unpopular sports, or dowdy and obscure areas of classical music—such as the performance of string quartets or contemporary atonal music—spawn effective infrastructures to attract and exploit human potential.

Yet this system has broken down in the creation of *spinto* and dramatic opera singers. Today each of the three steps is dysfunctional.

First, consider institutions to identify young operatic talent. A century ago, singing was a nearly universal social activity in (Western) churches, schools, clubs, homes, theaters, and concert halls. Everyone in a community knew who could sing loudly, sweetly, and on pitch. Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, declining church attendance, shifting educational priorities, and the atrophy of live music (in favor of recorded music) have meant that fewer people sing in public at an early age, if ever. Moreover, as church choirs, youth choruses, Broadway shows, folk and rock music, and public oratory have all “gone electric,” those who do sing are unlikely to perform without a microphone—and, therefore, have developed different skills. The non-amplified voice, produced quite differently, has been relegated to the cultural margins, whereas the fully trained classical voice has become an oddity. The narrowing talent pool affects *spinto* and dramatic opera singers more than any others, because they have always been the rarest.

And those among them who are rarest of all—heavy low voices like contraltos and dark basses—are now close to extinct. In sum, most who possess a genuinely “operatic” voice today never find out.

Second, *spinto* and dramatic singers today find it challenging to remain in the profession and receive training to professional maturity. A century ago, in a world of lower incomes and persistent inequality, music was an exceptionally meritocratic vocation in which a lower-class person would persevere—even if it were a long shot. Today, spending one or two decades to become an opera singer seems a relatively risky proposition when comfortable white-collar jobs for educated individuals abound. Managing the transition has become doubly difficult as vocal style has followed technology, widening the stylistic distance between pop and classical singing and thus making it far more difficult to “cross over” from popular to classical music.

Coping with this transitional period impacts *spinto* and dramatic singers disproportionately, simply because for them it is longer. World-class instrumentalists often emerge as child or teenage prodigies, while Baroque, Mozart, modern, and even *bel canto* opera singers often mature in their early or mid-twenties. For them, family support, formal music training, and opera apprentice studios suffice to tide them over. Yet *spinto* and dramatic singers are nearly unique among athletes and artists in that they typically do not mature until they are in their mid- to late thirties. Not atypical is the early twentieth century Norwegian soprano Kirsten Flagstad—whom most critics consider the greatest Wagnerian soprano ever recorded. She sang lighter fare in provincial Oslo until she was near 40, never suspecting she would become capable of singing Wagner, then emerged overnight as a global superstar. Even those lucky few who establish themselves as successful Mozart, *bel canto*, or Baroque stylists in younger life—a path ever more challenging anyway with the advent of a lighter, specialized approach to

“early music”—struggle to make the transition.

Third, opera houses today hesitate to cast some of the best *spinto* and dramatic singers, even when they are available, because appearance trumps voice. In casting, the power of directors and stage designers has grown; that of conductors and music directors has shrunk. While this is probably the least important factor, singers are increasingly hired as much on looks as on voice—not least in German-speaking countries. Top conservatories now admit 18-year-olds not simply on vocal ability but also on “charisma”—a politically correct code-word for being good-looking and not too heavy. (One long-time admissions officer at a top institution shrugged it off: “Above all, it’s my responsibility to make sure that our graduates work.”) Younger artists complain of always having to be “HD ready,” and of “fat-shaming” by critics and colleagues. Everyone wants to avoid the fate of the soprano Deborah Voigt, who was fired from the title role in the 2004 Royal Opera House production of *Ariadne auf Naxos* because she could not fit into the stage director’s favored little black dress. Voigt responded by having surgery to lose weight, which some observers feel permanently damaged her voice. Again, this trend affects *spinto* and dramatic singers disproportionately, because, as the legendary mezzo Marilyn Horne put it, “Big voices come out of big bodies.”

To illustrate what happens when all three steps on the road to excellence go wrong, consider the case of Italy. The birthplace of opera and long the major singer-producing country of Europe, Italy today produces hardly any major *spinto* or dramatic singers. The reasons lie deep in Italian society. In the late nineteenth century, Caruso, a child of the Neapolitan ghetto, received a scholarship to a private school specializing in choral singing, sang conservatory-level performances in church, busked on the streets of Naples, received years of lessons on credit, avoided military service because he was a singer, and endured nearly a decade as an impoverished

itinerant singer working his way up in small houses. A half-century later and three hundred miles north, in Modena, Luciano Pavarotti sang solos in church (like his father), toured Europe with an award-winning city choir, and spent nearly a decade in unpromising training. Both became the most famous tenors of their times, despite lacking good looks.

By contrast, in Italy today less than 20 percent of the population attend mass, post-Vatican II churches make little use of classical singers, recorded pop has replaced busking, schools are chronically underfunded, the number of opera houses has dropped, and singers need to look their parts. Had Caruso and Pavarotti been born within the last half-century, it is unlikely we would have ever heard of them.

THE DEEPLY SOCIOLOGICAL nature of this tripartite explanation of why *spinto* and dramatic singers are scarce today implies that the decline cannot easily be reversed. Returning to a world in which schools, churches, and choirs teach young people to sing without microphones, creating decades of full and meaningful employment for emerging singers, and transforming our culture so that appearance no longer matters are quixotic aspirations. Still, smaller steps may be worth a try: allowing younger singers to perform Verdi and Wagner, mounting performances in smaller houses, employing acoustically resonant sets, providing “affirmative action” for large-voiced singers, and recruiting more talent from the developing world.

Such reforms are imperative because the future of opera depends on their success. The works of Verdi, Wagner, Puccini, Strauss, and others that require these endangered great big voices capture the popular imagination like few others. They fill houses and introduce new listeners to the art form, cross-subsidizing more adventuresome programming. If *spinto* and dramatic singing is not reimagined, reorganized, and revived, opera itself may not survive the twenty-first century. □

WHO “WE” ARE

A conversation about shifting power and perspectives

by Anne-Marie Slaughter

Academy president Daniel Benjamin spoke with Anne-Marie Slaughter, CEO of the public policy think-tank New America, about how the United States can rise to meet the world’s most urgent political and economic challenges—and how to strengthen democracy at home.

Daniel Benjamin: Some commentators say we live in a multipolar world, citing China’s economic rise, Russia’s continued influence, and the relative size and wealth of the European Union. Yet the United States’ gross domestic product and military spending continue to dwarf those of all other countries and blocs by orders of magnitude. Do you believe that we live in a multipolar world?

Anne-Marie Slaughter: I prefer the formulation used by Indian Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar, who says we live in a “multi-aligned” world, in which countries are free to pursue their “preferences and interests” by engaging and even partnering with others that may be at odds with one another. As an example, India has drawn steadily closer to the US, Japan, and Australia through the increasingly formalized Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, but has also increased its oil imports from Russia, which is now its top supplier.

During the Cold War, India was one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement, a grouping of over a hundred mostly developing countries that focused, as the name suggests, on *not* aligning with either the US or the Soviet Union, or indeed with any

specific power bloc. Multi-alignment is India’s declared policy as a great power, or certainly as an aspiring great power. Retired General David Petraeus recalled that shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he told Jaishankar, who was then serving as India’s ambassador to the US, that as a member of the Quad, India must “make a choice between East and West.” Jaishankar responded, “General, we have chosen. And we have chosen India.”

China would describe its foreign policy in similar terms. It seeks to avoid “Cold-War thinking” and to align with many different groups of nations, including the EU, as its economic, political, and military needs dictate. Turkey increasingly fits into this category as well, even as a NATO member, as do Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Brazil, and even Mexico. These are all nations that the US often needs for various diplomatic purposes, such as the condemnation of Russia for the invasion of Ukraine, and yet has not been able to convince, much less compel, to support Washington’s position on issues ranging from sanctions against Russia to condemnations of China for human rights abuses.

The description of global politics by reference to the number of poles

operating in the “international system” also seems very twentieth, or indeed nineteenth, century. As a measure of military and economic power during an era in which great power war was the chief danger to world security and prosperity, it signaled the relative stability or instability of the system as a whole. It was also the foundation of Kenneth Waltz’s theory of structural realism, with the great social scientific hope, in emulation of the natural sciences, that immutable laws of international relations could be deduced from the basic structure of the system.

Yet where exactly does power in a unipolar system get you—even as the number one nation? It is certainly true that that the US spends three times what China or the EU nations do on its military. Still, the US has not achieved its goals in the last two wars it fought directly, in Iraq and Afghanistan, even against adversaries so much weaker on paper that they would not even be counted in the tabulations of military expenditure. The US, with all of its NATO allies and global partners, is providing indispensable military support to Ukraine to help it push back Russia. But it was unable to deter the invasion in the first place, and a positive outcome for Ukraine will be due as much to the determination and courage of the Ukrainians as to the size of the world’s greatest military arsenal.

On the economic front, the GDP of the EU and of China are roughly twenty-five percent lower than that of the US, hardly an unbridgeable gap. The EU is China’s largest trading partner and the largest export market for some eighty countries. It is also the world’s greatest regulatory power, such that requirements imposed on goods and services for access to the EU market quickly go global, a phenomenon known as the Brussels Effect.

Overall, the complexity of the many global and geopolitical threats and challenges we face means that the measurement of power is often quite nuanced and tailored to a specific issue or set of issues. The US still has many global advantages and can certainly be indispensable in situations that require military might and

technological prowess. The instability of its domestic political system and the ambivalence of many of its people toward global leadership, however, have given pause even to its closest allies in recent years. US leaders in every sector would do best to assume that they are operating in a world in which the outcome of power struggles is simply not predetermined, no matter how many poles there are.

DB: The US has deviated from its free-trade traditions by offering subsidies and tax credits to jump-start a long-overdue energy transition. This has angered European allies, who accuse the US of protectionism. Do you see that response as justified? And are

US leaders in every sector would do best to assume that they are operating in a world in which the outcome of power struggles is simply not predetermined, no matter how many poles there are.

you worried about the growing turn to protectionism as the US and Europe take more restrictive approaches on advanced technologies such as microchips, AI, and quantum computing due to national security concerns?

AMS: Many American trade- and foreign-policy experts are a little bemused to find themselves suddenly accused of protectionism by the EU, which from the US perspective has long fiercely protected its agricultural market and adopted behind-the-border health and safety measures that have effectively excluded US goods and services. That does not make US protectionism right, but it should open the door to dialogue about how best to revise the rules of the global trading system to strike a new balance between free trade, resilience to external shocks, and national security. I understand the disenchantment with globalized free trade that has taken hold on both the right and left in the US; it has sharply widened inequality and discredited the division between allocation and distribution that was

the foundation of classical economics. Markets should not be opened without a strong set of protections designed to ensure that displaced workers not only have a financial safety net but also a real path to new jobs. On the other hand, given the relative wealth of the US and Europe, leaders on both sides of the Atlantic should be thinking hard about a fairer global trading system that continues the advances made by people in developing countries around the world during the heyday of globalization.

Balancing those national and global concerns is a national duty as an American. We proclaim not just national but universal values, a commitment to the equality, liberty,

and rights of all humankind. That is a moral commitment, but also one that is very much in our self-interest. Rather than trading jabs with the EU about protectionism, we should be collectively engaging nations around the world to devise rules and decision-making procedures that work in the service of both trade and national development.

DB: Relatedly, the great energy transformation is underway and will alter our lives dramatically over the coming decades. What changes do you see ahead for society, politics, and economies in the Atlantic North? How will this differ for the Global South? How will adapting to climate change affect foreign policy, for example?

AMS: I honestly think that we are on the brink of an energy revolution that is as great as the discovery of carbon fuel. The combination of new energy technologies—not only those we can see, like hydrogen fuel cells and salt rather than lithium batteries, but also those we can only dimly discern, like

fusion and quantum computing—means that we may be able to avoid the worst impacts of climate change and usher in an age of energy so abundant that projects like desalination at scale, and hence unlimited fresh water, become economically feasible.

But I see horror stories ahead as well. Books like *Uninhabitable Earth* by David Wallace Wells and *Ministry of the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson spell out doomsday scenarios in detail. As foreign-policy experts, we must continually remind leaders and the public that climate change is a greater existential threat to humanity than anything else, particularly alongside the disease, water and food shortages, and massive migration it will bring. Regardless of how bad any particular conflict or interstate rivalry may be, we simply have to keep insisting that global warming is as urgent and important as any war.

Equally important, this is an international problem where the Global North simply cannot go its own way, developing and deploying new technologies decades or even half centuries before the Global South. If we take that approach, as we have in centuries past, we will all suffer the consequences.

We need to focus on new technologies and bring them into use as quickly as possible, and at the same time subsidize or mandate conservation, energy efficiency, and transition to less carbon-intensive energy use now. We should engage mayors, governors, civic groups, corporations—any actors who have the ability to change behavior themselves or the levers to change it in others.

DB: You are working on a project about care and capitalism, asking what would happen if US domestic policy and economics were better able to combine the two. It seems that European countries have been doing this for decades, particularly in removing much of the profit motive from areas such as healthcare, education, and important media outlets. Do you think this is possible in America? What needs to change?

AMS: Europe definitely strikes a better balance than the US between the deep value of human connection and the riches that can flow from individual human striving. Yet even European systems do not start from a point in which connection and separation,

The threat to American democracy is graver today than perhaps at any time since the Civil War.

care and competition, belonging and longing, are treated and valued equally. What needs to change is our conception of human nature, of who “we” are and what “we” want. I think that is possible as long as the “we” who sit around decision-making tables of every kind and at every level, actually reflect the people—of all different backgrounds, cultures, classes, races, ethnicities, and other differentiating categories. I have been thinking and reading about these issues for nearly a decade; my guess is that I will need nearly a decade more before I have more precise and testable answers. But lots of other thinkers are pushing in the same direction.

DB: The past decades have seen a rise in illiberal, antidemocratic movements around the world, and there is a widespread sense that democracy in America is not nearly as secure as it once was. How seriously do you interpret the threat to American democracy? And what do you think the US and international NGOs can do to strengthen democracy globally?

AMS: The threat to American democracy is graver today than perhaps at any time since the Civil War. Politically, we are two nations that are increasingly segregated from one another in the places we live, the schools we attend, the places we worship, and the news we consume. We are also a nation undergoing extraordinary demographic transition. After four hundred years of a dominant white majority, we will become a plurality nation, in which no ethnic or racial group has a

majority, within the next two decades. No democracy has ever experienced such a transformation. The social and cultural turbulence is manifest in our politics, exacerbated by enormous technological and economic upheaval and the realization that we are at the

mercy of global threats that we cannot address by isolation or invasion.

The most important thing that pro-democracy groups can do in the US is to outlaw and prevent political violence and find ways, beginning at the local level, to bring people together around a set of positive aspirations. We will not find our way across current political chasms. But those divisions must be counterbalanced by a renewed sense of common interest and vision for a better future for *all* Americans. We should devote as much energy as possible to structural reform of our electoral systems, at the state and national level, to enable multi-party systems beyond just two dominant parties. That model is increasingly unworkable as we become increasingly diverse. Globally, we should be learning as much as we can from deeply divided polities.

The US has been here before. Indeed, many African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans and others would say that race and ethnicity always dictated the circumstances of their lives and structured politics at every level in ways that white Americans are only beginning to understand. We have a potential future in which we can reflect and connect the world, using the kinship ties and cultural knowledge of our people to create political and economic opportunity at home and abroad. But we could also find ourselves in a second civil war. □



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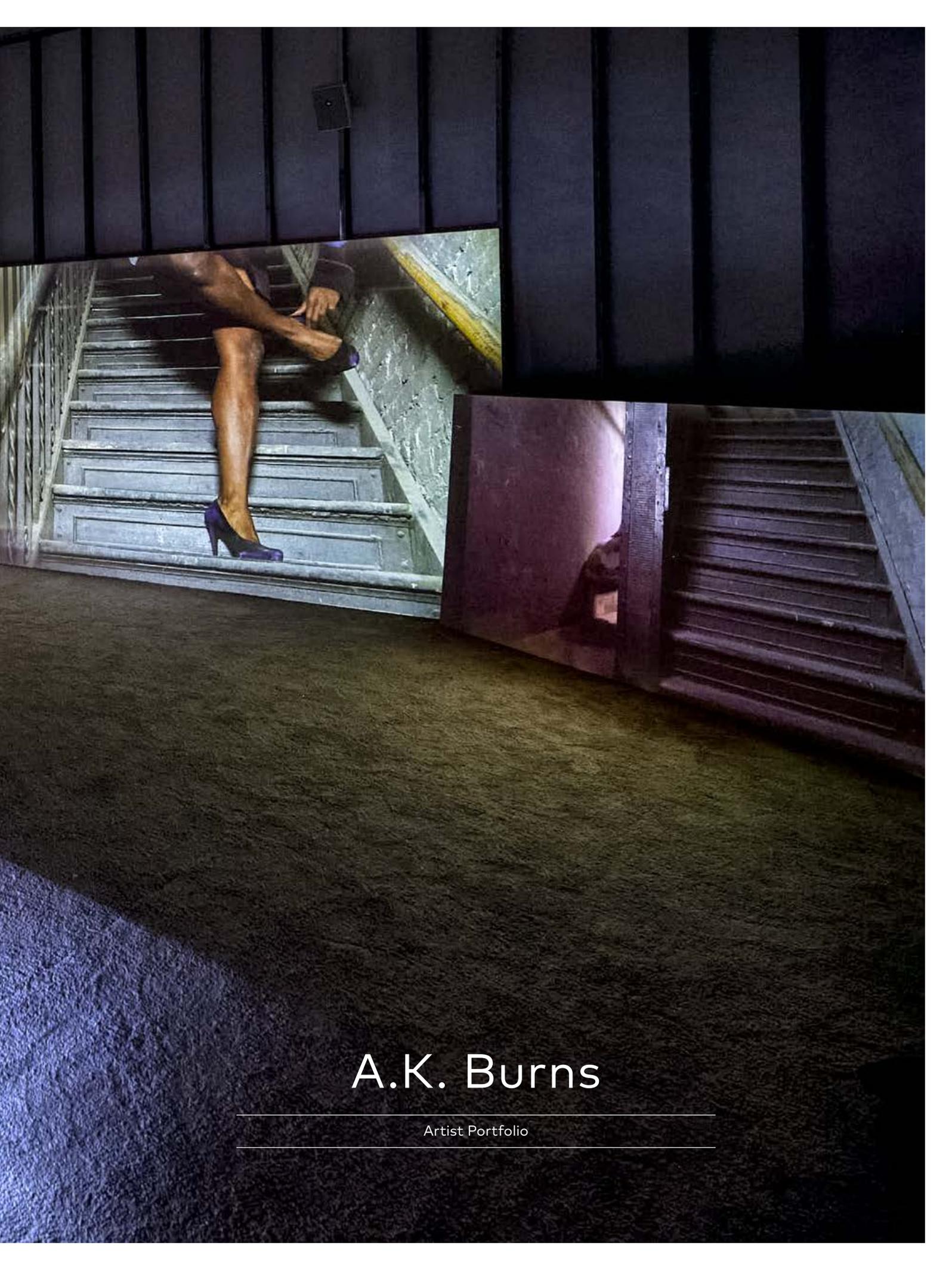
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A.K. Burns

Artist Portfolio





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[6]

On A.K. Burns

by Dean Daderko

UNBOUND BY CONVENTIONS, marginal positions invite invention and exploration. Operating at the edges of culture, and in its cracks, marginal activities can develop independently, eluding surveillance and policing. As bell hooks has written of marginality, it is "much more than a site of deprivation, . . . it is the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance."

It should come as no surprise that A.K. Burns chooses to operate in such cultural margins—metaphorically, materially, politically—and that her art and work are situated in these spaces of potential. If one traditionally thinks of a sculptor as creatively engaged with materials—carving stone, casting bronze, building—Burns's work sidesteps such simplified expectations. She's materially and conceptually drawn to porosity and mutability, picking at the medium's edges. In her studio, and working with craftspersons, she has welded functional gates, cast cement and resin into bodily forms, powder-coated fences, and poured slabs of molten glass. Her gates keep no one in or out; viewers can circulate freely around or through them. Her fence posts bend like pipe cleaners, with chain-link that undulates through space. These barriers suggest aftermaths in which publics could not be contained.

After molten glass has been hand-ladled into rough rectangles, remnants are affixed: a coil of frayed electrical wire, copper mesh, a rock, handfuls of sand. Some additions remain visible, sinking into the glass, but we're left to imagine others, like when a checklist offers up a "dematerialized leather work glove" that presumably disintegrated in extreme heat. Hung on walls for viewing, these works resemble paintings and bas reliefs. Burns selectively coats the glass with silver nitrate, turning these vitreous slabs into rough mirrors. If we can't see ourselves in them, it's because they're not about us. The embedded materials and burn-outs, in Burns's words, "disturb the ability of the mirror to reflect the outside world. Instead they reflect an interior cosmos." What we

encounter are moments of entropy and process. Objects change; objects changing us.

As her sculptures challenge the notion of objects as immutable, Burns's video works also play with and against the medium's regulated codes. In *A Smeary Spot* (2015), one of four video channels continuously loops credits on a boxy monitor. Such a simple move subverts the expectation that there's a beginning or end to the actions projected onto accompanying screens. Wheeled office-chairs allow viewers to be mobile. Characters in the video appear unmoored; some wander through punishing deserts under a blaring sun, dancing in dystopia, and others occupy the no-space/anyplace of the black-box theater. Time is manifold, simultaneously real and proposed, staged and actual. Trash-picking at society's decaying edges, these figures eke out relief and pleasure from its discards; they make life from scraps, they make it matter, and they do it better.

Burns's two-channel installation *Living Room* (2017) implies a psycho-geographic leakiness. Entering an unfinished room, we encounter images projected onto a sheet of drywall propped against bare studs. We watch while sitting on the wooden skeleton of a couch that's been played on and dissembled by youths in the video. Vignettes unfold in a bathroom, a seemingly endless stairwell, and a dank basement. If this house is a body, humans are its antibodies. Burns's cast of characters impresses the precarity of our existence upon us. *Living Room* is by turns humorous, profound, absurd and deeply disconcerting. Burns builds a space where the thinness of the walls that separate fiction and reality dissolve, revealing the flimsy fiction of our creature comforts. □

[OPENING SPREAD]

Installation view of *Living Room (NS 00)*, 2017, exhibited at Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio. Two-channel HD video, color, and sound; 36mins. Dimensions variable. Photo: Stephen Takacs

[PREVIOUS SPREAD]

[1] *The Leak*, 2022. Replica of Chelsea Manning's military jacket, concrete, garment bag, and metal hanger. 157.5 × 60.9 × 45.8 cm

[2] *Query*, 2021. Glass, silver nitrate, sand, carbon, and dematerialized rope. 40 × 50.17 × 5.08 cm

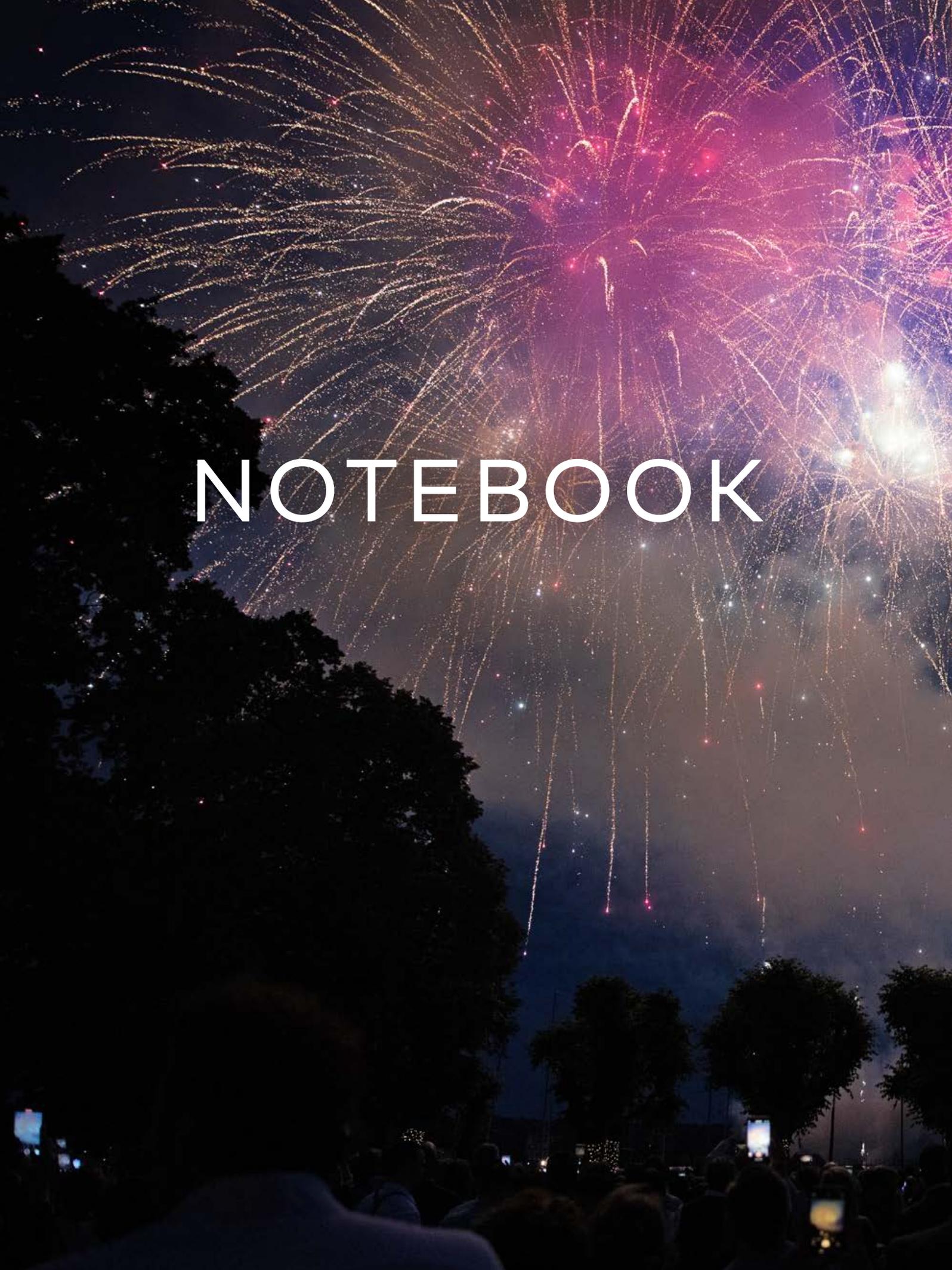
[3] *Sad Eyes*, 2021. Glass, silver nitrate, copper mesh, sand, carbon, and dematerialized bark. 40 × 50.17 × 3.18 cm

[4] Video still from *A Smeary Spot (NS 0)*, 2015, exhibited at Participant Inc., New York, New York. Four-channel video installation. Projected videos 1-3: HD with color and six-channel sound; 53 mins. Box monitor video 4: SD black and white, silent; 4 mins. Dimensions variable.

[OPPOSITE]

[5] *Leave No Trace (NS 000)*, 2019, exhibited at Julia Stoschek Foundation, Düsseldorf. Five-channel HD video, color, and sound; 28 mins. Projection cube, faux skull, used tires, and ratchet straps. Dimensions variable. Photo: Alwin Lay

[6] Production still from *Living Room (NS 00)*, 2017. Exhibited at Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio. Two-channel HD video, color, and sound; 36 mins. Dimensions variable. Photo: Eden Batki



NOTEBOOK



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CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF FELLOWSHIPS

To commemorate twenty-five years of the Academy's fellowship program, the *Berlin Journal* asked a few friends, trustees, and recent fellows and Distinguished Visitors to offer a few words about the Academy, published here alongside testimonials from alumni over the years.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier
President of Germany

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY in Berlin stands like few others for the German-American friendship, for the shared democratic values that unite us, and for the spirit of transatlantic cooperation. If the West is to be more than just a cardinal point, it must remain firm on its principles, yet at the same time be open—open to participation by people from all parts of the world,

including cultures with other histories, other experiences, and other traditions. It must be appealing and have the better solutions to offer for humane, peaceful, just human coexistence. To me, “the West” is not an exclusive club or a rallying cry for geopolitical confrontation. But rather that which we stand for, which our Alliance stands for: an idea, and mainly a promise. *(From the Henry A. Kissinger Prize acceptance speech, November 16, 2022)*

Stefan von Holtzbrinck
CEO, Holtzbrinck Publishing Group; Academy Vice Chairman and trustee

IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE that the founders of the American Academy in Berlin perfectly foresaw in 1998 how different the next quarter of a century was going to be from the previous one, with its huge geostrategic and geopolitical shifts. But clearly they knew that its mission to foster intellectual ties from academia

to policymaking to the arts would always deeply matter, that history was not going to be over. Having created this unique, lively, bipartisan transatlantic bond of soft power is today not only a very precious and enthusing gift; mutual understanding based on truth has become more important than ever in the age of populism. The American Academy has become an outstanding and renowned platform for the most urgent debates about humanism and the values in our societies and systems. It has been a huge privilege for my family to be part of its venerable mission right from the beginning.

Kati Marton
Journalist, author,
and Academy trustee

“THIS IS THE PLACE,” my husband said when he entered the Hans Arnhold villa on the Wannsee. “This is where we will locate the American Academy in Berlin.” Richard Holbrooke and I stood in the dilapidated foyer, its floors covered by frayed linoleum, its walls pockmarked, in close proximity to an open



Hans and Ludmilla Arnhold and their two daughters, Ellen Maria (L) and Anna-Maria (R)

toilet—a snapshot of the layers of history today’s magnificently restored mansion has survived. Richard loved the prospect of giving the Wannsee—with all its terrible symbolism—a fresh, American meaning. Above all, he wanted to plant a permanent, non-military American presence in Berlin, as our troops were withdrawing. Twenty-five years later, his dream has been surpassed by the reality of a thriving artistic and intellectual hub—even more vital in today’s fractured and dangerous world than in those hopeful times after the fall of the Berlin Wall. As Richard Holbrooke’s widow, as trustee, and as an author who has benefited from a fellowship at the Academy, I am proud of what we have achieved in our first twenty-five years—enriched by the many friendships we have forged in the once shabby foyer, transformed into a lively agora for our two homelands.

Leah Joy Zell
 Founder, Lizard Investors;
 Academy trustee

I AM THE DAUGHTER of Jewish refugees who fled Poland when World War II broke out and immigrated to the United States in 1941. I first came to Germany in the mid-1970s as a DAAD/Fulbright scholar, to work on a PhD in German history and search for my European roots. I lived in Cologne and frequented archives up and down the Rhine, from Düsseldorf to Koblenz. We had a coterie of American students at the university, but our numbers were small enough to make us exceptional. American staples such as ketchup and



Academy founder Richard C. Holbrooke and Columbia University historian Fritz Stern, November 24, 2004

Photo: Michael Dames



Founding benefactors Stephen and Anna-Maria Kellen at the dedication of the Hans Arnhold Center, November 6, 1998

Photo: Joachim Schulz



The first class of American Academy fellows, September 26, 1998. Center: playwright Arthur Miller

Photo: Jirka Jansch

peanut butter could not be found in the grocery store, and few Germans traveled abroad or spoke English.

How little I understood that my student years would inaugurate a lifetime of engagement. I subsequently discovered that I was born on the day the Federal Republic was founded. I feel we have grown up together. Throughout my journey, I have witnessed the collective efforts

made by Germans to confront their past. Germany’s remarkable transformation, from pariah nation divided into two mutually antagonistic halves to a unified democracy, stands as a testament to the resilience and determination of its people. Germany’s commitment to promoting remembrance and to building a society based on human rights deeply resonates with me.

The American Academy in Berlin reflects this incredible progress. It serves as a beacon of hope, exemplifying the power of dialogue, scholarship, and artistic expression in bridging divides and fostering mutual understanding. Its fellowship program provides a unique platform for scholars, artists, and writers to immerse themselves in German culture and engage with the local community, while simultaneously promoting the best values of the United States. The Academy’s work is vital at a time when open dialogue and cross-cultural collaboration are more essential than ever. I feel privileged to support its activities and contribute to its future success.

Jeffrey Goldberg
 Editor-in-Chief, *The Atlantic*;
 Academy trustee and
 alumnus, spring 2015

I DON'T KNOW WHY this is precisely—and I’m not sure that science, or my doctor, would corroborate what I’m about to write—but I do believe that my blood pressure dropped whenever I was in residence at the Academy. The quiet of the street, the gardens, the air of hushed concentration, the convivial, pressure-free get-togethers, the placid lake itself—whatever it was, it worked. This phenomenon was surprising. Before I became a fellow at the Academy, Wannsee only meant one thing to me. It still means that thing, of course, but now it also represents its opposite: A place where the hard work of scholarship and humane truth-seeking and democracy and *thinking*—actual bona fide thinking—can be pursued in dignity and freedom.

MY TIME AT the American Academy Berlin was transformative. The physical beauty of the setting, the exceptional facilities, and the commitment to intellectual exchange was a remarkable experience.

– **Deborah Amos**, journalist, NPR; alumna, spring 2022

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY in Berlin is an indispensable institution, crucial not just to the artists, scholars, public policy makers, journalists, and other guests who move in and out of it, but also to the lifeblood of a great and dynamic city.

– **Michael Kimmelman**, architecture critic, *New York Times*; Distinguished Visitor, spring 2022

IT'S A RARE PRIVILEGE to be able to live and work and learn and commune at the

American Academy in Berlin. To get to do it twice feels like dangerously good fortune.

In the focused atmosphere of the Academy I was able to start work on a new book during each stay. Ever since, I've felt a particular closeness to the complex, open, tormented, inspiring city of Berlin. Those months at the Academy, just four in all, were among the most important of my life.

– **George Packer**, staff writer, *The Atlantic*; alumna, fall 2009 and spring 2014

A CONVIVIAL SETTING for interaction with colleagues in different disciplines who draw one another out in ways that cannot be foreseen.

– **Hal Foster**, art critic and theorist, Princeton University; alumna, spring 2011

THANKS TO THE ACADEMY'S hospitality and care, I enjoyed one of the most intense and productive four weeks I can remember.

– **Sean Wilentz**, historian, Princeton University; alumna, spring 2015

MY STAY AT the American Academy in Berlin was a high point of my personal and professional life.

– **Peter Schmelz**, musicologist, University of Arizona; alumna, fall 2017

I LEFT BERLIN and the Academy with deep appreciation of the work done by its highly qualified and dedicated staff, and with a desire to come back to partake in Academy's numerous activities.

– **Serhii Plokhii**, historian of Ukraine, Harvard University; Distinguished Visitor, spring 2023

AT A TIME when the transatlantic relationship has become increasingly fraught, institutions like the American Academy are more essential than ever. We hear a lot these days about *gemeinsame Werte*. The American Academy embodies them every single day.

– **David Barclay**, former executive director of the German Studies Association; alumna, spring 2007

THE OPPORTUNITY to associate with so many diverse scholars while in Germany and yet still connect with current political realities facing us today was truly the successful summation of what was achieved in my residency at the Hans Arnhold Center.

– **Mark Pottinger**, musicologist, Manhattan College; alumna, spring 2017

ALUMNI FALL 1998–SPRING 2023 Hakim Abderrezak Marco Abel David Abraham Michael J. Abramowitz Bruce Ackerman Joan Acocella Samuel Adler Joel Agee Matthieu Aikins Esra Akcan Daniel Albright Robert Z. Aliber Jennifer Allen Hilton Als Karen Alter Nora Alter Laila Amine Deborah Amos Margaret L. Anderson Amanda Anderson Sinan Antoon Molly Antopol Donald Antrim Anne Applebaum Emily Apter JoAllyn Archambault Lawrence (Rick) Atkinson Leora Auslander Ariella A. Azoulay Andrew J. Bacevich Barbara Balaj Jesse Ball Mary Jo Bang Lois Banner Javiera Barandiarán Benjamin R. Barber David Barclay Leonard Barkan Omer Bartov Mark Bassin Mason Bates Sue de Beer David Behrman Daniel Benjamin Lauren Benton Marsha Vande Berg Barry Bergdoll Paul Berman Susan Bernofsky Nina Bernstein J.M. Bernstein Huma Bhabha Sanford Biggers Benjamin S. Binstock Monica Black Allison Blakely Rebecca Boehling Philip V. Bohlman David Bollier Mark Evan Bonds Katherine Boo Daniel Boyarin Dominic Boyer Svetlana Boym Warren Breckman Martin Bresnick Charles Bright James Brophy Hillary Brown Timothy Brown Kate Brown Benjamin H.D. Buchloh Mark Butler Caroline Walker Bynum Joy Calico David P. Calleo Mary Cappello P. Carl Paul Carrington Mary Ellen Carroll Anne Carson Mary Anne Case Raven Chacon Patty Chang Lan Samantha Chang Steve Chapman Carolyn Chen Derek Chollet Alexandra Chreiteh Thomas Christensen Wendy Hui Kyong Chun Timothy James (T.J.) Clark Richard Cohen Roger Cohen Brigid Cohen Tony Cokes Henri Cole Gene Coleman Beatriz Colomina Tom Conley John Connelly Peter Constantine Kathleen N. Conzen Belinda Cooper William Cordova Stanley Corngold Vincent Crapanzano Robyn Creswell Jennifer Culbert Sebastian Currier Aaron Curry Jane E. Dailey Richard Danielpour Gautam Dasgupta Jennifer R. Davis Nicholas Dawidoff Richard Deming Yemane Demissie James Der Derian Kiran Desai Dennis C. Dickerson Edward Dimendberg Martin Dimitrov Mary Ann Doane Michael Dobbs Fred Donner Milad Doueiri Lawrence Douglas Tom Drury Du Yun Leslie Dunton-Downer Leland de la Durantaye Alice Eagly Nicholas Eberstadt Astrid M. Eckert Elizabeth Economy Robin Einhorn Daniel Eisenberg Susanna Elm Johan Elverskog Laura Engelstein Nathan Englander Mitch Epstein Jeffrey Eugenides Kevin Jerome Everson Katherine Pratt Ewing Jared Farmer Heide Fehrenbach Siyen Fei Gerald D. Feldman Damián Fernández Myra Marx Ferree David Ferris Peter Filkins Harvey Fineberg Anne Finger Claire Finkelstein Aris Fioretos Tiffany Florvil Angela Flournoy Juliet Floyd Jonathan Foer Caroline Fohlin Nancy Foner Devin Fore Hal Foster Moira Fradinger George Frampton Tom Franklin LaToya Ruby Frazier Richard B. Freeman Veronika Fuechtner Marianne Fulton Rivka Galchen Catherine Gallagher Alexander Galloway V.V. Ganeshanathan Dilip Gaonkar Adam Garfinkle Gyula Gazdag Thomas Geoghegan Tatyana Gershkovich Michael Geyer Janet Gezari Ela Gezen Christopher H. Gibbs Sander L. Gilman Todd Gitlin Aglaya Glebova Alice Goff Jeffrey Goldberg Francisco Goldman Matthew Goodheart Elizabeth Goodstein Avery F. Gordon Annie Gosfield Monica H. Green Renée Green James N. Green Hugh David Scott Greenway Lauren Groff Kenneth Gross Atina Grossmann Paul Guyer Yaa Gyasi Charles Häberl Joyce Hackett Karen Hagemann Trenton Doyle Hancock James Hankins Miriam Hansen Ann Harleman Mark Harman Joel Harrington Hope Harrison Stephen Hartke Hal Hartley Lothar Haselberger Adam Haslett Richard Hawkins Jochen Hellbeck Linda Dalrymple Henderson Jeffrey Herf Michael Hersch Leslie Hewitt Andrew Hicks Steven Hill Ellen Hinsey Charles Hirschkind Daniel Hobbins Paul Hockenos Peter Holquist Thomas Holt Jenny Holzer Gregg Horowitz Donald Horowitz Susan Howe Cymene Howe Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia Tung-Hui Hu Ladee Hubbard Anne Hull Myles Jackson Tamar Jacoby Martin Jay Ha Jin Kirk W. Johnson Christopher Johnson Adam Johnson Carina Johnson Jason Scott Johnston Betsy Jolas Pierre Joris Branden W. Joseph Channing Joseph John B. Judis Pieter M. Judson Adria Julia Jacqueline Jung Ward Just Ben Katchor Alex Katz Thomas Kaufmann Ellen Kennedy Diana Ketcham Sunil Khilnani Suki Kim Jeremy King Philip Kitcher Jytte Klausen Steven Klein August Kleinzahler John Koethe Howard K. Koh Christopher A. Kojm Donald P. Kommers Claudia Koonz Barbara Koremenos Juliet Koss Robert Kotlowitz

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY is such a rich opportunity. I will always look back on my time there as having helped shape who I am as an artist. – **Mitch Epstein**, photographer; alumnus, spring 2008

MY FELLOWSHIP AT the American Academy served both as a productive retreat and a re-immersion in the best kind of cosmopolitan urbanity. – **Jonathan Lethem**, novelist; alumnus, spring 2014

WE LIVE IN A WORLD where the humanities are fast declining in the university, and intellectuals are increasingly silenced and trivialized in public discourse. In such a world, an institution like the American Academy, which gives financial and

moral support to academics so they can freely and independently advance their studies, is nothing short of an oasis. – **Esra Akcan**, architectural historian, Cornell University; alumna, fall 2016

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY in Berlin is unrivaled in the particulars of the atmosphere it cultivates, the colloquy it invites, and the intersections it arranges. – **Mary Cappello**, writer, University of Rhode Island; alumna, fall 2015

THE TIME SPENT with the diversity of impressive fellows at the American Academy and to the German thinkers I had the opportunity to meet guided me to new ways of thinking about foreign-policy issues. The exposure

to disciplines unfamiliar to me and ways of thinking was the treasure of my time at the Academy. – **Jeffery Feltman**, diplomat; Distinguished Visitor, spring 2023

MY INTERACTIONS WITH German scholars and with German culture more broadly confirm the critical role the American Academy plays in fostering understanding and interchange between Germans and Americans—a connection more vital today than ever. – **Linda Henderson**, art historian, University of Texas at Austin; alumna, spring 2014

THERE IS NO BETTER opportunity to work and understand, anywhere. – **Lawrence Lessig**, legal scholar, Harvard University, alumnus, spring 2007

ONE ENDS AN EVENING at the American Academy feeling the variety and depth of current intellectual life. – **Helen Vendler**, literary scholar, Harvard University; alumna, spring 2006

WE ENJOYED the hospitality of Academy staff, collegiality of the fellows, and fascinating life of one of the world's greatest cities. – **Andrew Nathan**, political scientist, Columbia University; alumnus, fall 2013

IN A WORLD OF increasing provincialism and hostility, the American Academy stands for everything worth striving for: cosmopolitanism based on deep knowledge, close human relations, and a generosity of spirit. – **Ian Buruma**, writer, editor; Writer-in-Residence, spring 2023

Yanni Kotsonis Jane Kramer Nicole Krauss Vladimir Kulic Josh Kun Hari Kunzru Amy Kurzweil Paul La Farge Brian Ladd Charles Lane Jonathan Laurence Priscilla Layne Adrian LeBlanc Kenneth F. Ledford Robert Leiken Wendy Lesser Lawrence Lessig Jonathan Lethem Nathaniel Levtow Evonne Levy David Levering Lewis Tess Lewis Wai-Yee Li Harry Liebersohn Stephan D. Lindeman Peter Lindseth Susie Linfield Brian McAllister Linn Erik Linstrum Beatrice Longuenesse Michèle Lowrie Peter Maass Alec MacGillis Thessia Machado Saba Mahmood Anne M. Maitland Ussama Makdisi Ruth Mandel Norman Manea James Mann Suzanne Marchand Ben Marcus Roxani Eleni Margariti Inga Markovits Anthony Marra Charles Marsh Daniel Joseph Martinez Carole Maso Ayana Mathis Walter Mattli John Mauzeri Richard C. Maxwell David Meyers Colette Mazzucelli Susan McCabe Anthony McCall Elizabeth McCracken Heather McGowan Dave McKenzie Diane McWhorter Mark Meadow Julie Mehretu Michael Meltsner Mitchell Merback Michael Meyer Ralf Michaels Christopher Middleton H.C. Erik Midelfort Arthur Miller Wallis Miller Michael B. Miller Joy Milligan W.J.T. Mitchell Lydia L. Moland Charles Molesworth Virág Molnár Kristen Renwick Monroe Susanna Moore Lorrie Moore Evgeny Morozov Richard Morris Sarah Morris Rosalind Morris Hiroshi Motomura Dean Moyer Jerry Z. Muller Jackie Murray Dominique Nabokov Barbara Nagel Norman Naimark Sylvia Nasar Andrew Nathan Lawrence Nees Dietrich Neumann Jane O. Newman Abraham Newman Andrew Norman Alex Novikoff Sigrid Nunez Geoffrey O'Brien Sylvester Ogbechie Lance Olsen Han Ong Ran Ortner Christian Ostermann Laura Owens Esra Özyürek George Packer Karen Painter Nandini Pandey Spyros Papapetros Susan Pedersen Nathalie Peutz Paul Pfeiffer Phillip H. Phan W.S. Di Piero Jason Pine David Poeppel Adam S. Posen Moishe Postone Mark A. Pottinger Elizabeth A. Povinelli Thomas Powers Martin Puchner Michael Queenland Anson Rabinbach Ronald Radano Paul A. Rahe Claudia Rankine Lisi Raskin Jed Rasula Lucy Raven Alexander Rehding Robert F. Reid-Pharr Paul Reitter Amy Remensnyder Reynold Reynolds Janet Richards David Rieff Cristina Rivera Garza Juana María Rodríguez Kurt Rohde Sophia Roosth Charles Brian Rose Howard Rosen Daniel Rosenberg Alex Ross Adam Ross Jacqueline Ross Bertrall Ross Catherine E. Rudder David B. Ruderman Karen Russell David Warren Sabeen Adam Ehrlich Sachs Özge Samanci Thomas M. Sanderson John Phillip Santos Mary Elise Sarotte Haun Saussy Wolf Schäfer David Scheffer Thomas Schestag Corine Schleif Peter Schmelz Barbara Schmitter-Heisler Gjertrud C. Schnackenberg Collier Schorr Paul M. Schwartz Hillel Schwartz Herman Mark Schwartz Laura Elise Schwendinger Christina Schwenkel Kenneth E. Scott Felicity D. Scott Elizabeth Sears Anthony J. Sebok Laura Secor Mosi Secret Joshua Sellers Azade Seyhan Gavriel Shapiro Elliott Sharp James Sheehan Sean Shepherd Amity Shlaes Donald W. Shriver Gary Shteyngart Amy Sillman Steven Simon Prerna Singh P. Adams Sitney Tom Sleigh Julianne Smith Henry E. Smith Helmut Walser Smith Jeffrey Chipps Smith Stephanie Snider Lynn Snyder Brent W. Sockness Naghmeb Sohrabi Etel Solingen Allen Speight Alexander Star Ronald Steel Michael P. Steinberg A.L. Steiner Alma Steingart George Steinmetz Angela Stent Brenda Stevenson Susan Stewart Sidra Stich Celina Su Ezra N. Suleiman Ronald Grigor Suny Roberto Suro Stephen F. Szabo Michael Taussig Kendall Thomas Kira Thurman Daniel Tiffany David Treuer Kerry Tribe Aili Tripp Francesca Trivellato Katie Trumpener George Tsontakis Jonathan Tucker Margarita Tupitsyn Laura D'Andrea Tyson Ken Ueno Ioana Uricaru William Uricchio Hans Rudolf Vaget John van Engen Tomas Venclova Camilo José Vergara Dana Villa Daniel Visconti Michael Wachtel Tashi Wada Anne M. Wagner Frederic Wakeman Amy Waldman Louise Walker Peter Wallison Lu Wang Rosanna Warren David Warsh Michael Watts Anna Webber Judith Wechsler Ruth Wedgwood Sheila Faith Weiss Liliane Weissberg Paul Werth Eric Wesley Hayden White James Q. Whitman Robert Sean Wilentz Charles Kenneth Williams Thomas Chatterton Williams Mary Elizabeth Wilson M. Norton Wise Alan Wolfe Christoph Wolff Geoffrey Wolff Christopher S. Wood James Wood Marjorie Woods Peter Wortsman John Wray Bing Xu Joshua Yaffa Karen Yasinsky Dimitrios Yatromanolakis Tara Zahra Philip D. Zelikow Ying Zhang Daniel Ziblatt



Elke Büdenbender, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Sandra E. Peterson, Daniel Benjamin



Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Sandra E. Peterson



Condoleezza Rice

THE 2022 HENRY KISSINGER PRIZE

Honoring President Frank-Walter Steinmeier

On November 16, 2022, the American Academy in Berlin awarded the Henry A. Kissinger Prize to German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier for his extraordinary career in public service and lasting contribution to the transatlantic relationship. The ceremony took place in New York City for the first time, with a laudation by Condoleezza Rice and remarks from Academy founding chairman Henry Kissinger, both former US secretaries of state.

“President Steinmeier has used the authority of his office to remind us of our commitment . . . to our values and . . . to those who cannot speak for themselves and

need us to stand beside them as they simply seek to have the very rights and the very liberties that we enjoy and that, sometimes, I think we take for granted,” Rice said.

One of Germany’s longest-serving foreign ministers, President Steinmeier is credited with strengthening the country’s reputation as a champion of the global rules-based order. Throughout more than three decades of dedicated public life, and despite moments of genuine bilateral disagreement, he has been an unfailing champion of the US-German relationship as an anchor of transatlantic peace and security.

“This prize is special because of the figures who have

been honored with it before me,” President Steinmeier said in his acceptance speech. “Each and every one of them shaped a period of history, each and every one of them sought security and peace, stability and justice, understanding and cooperation. And I cannot deny that I feel rather proud to now number among their ranks.”

In his remarks, Henry Kissinger said that transatlantic partners now face the new challenge of restoring peace in Europe after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. “In all of this, Frank-Walter Steinmeier will play an important role,” he said. “We respect his conduct in the past, we have faith in his

views and his representation for Germany and for the future, and in this manner, this occasion is a tribute to the Bundespräsident and an expression of our faith in the future.”

The American Academy thanks Bloomberg Philanthropies, Deutsche Bank, Linde plc, and Schmidt Futures for sponsoring this event, in addition to generous support by American Express, BASF, Bayer, Cerberus Deutschland Beteiligungsberatung, Deutsche Post DHL Group, Fresenius Kabi, Holtzbrinck Publishing Group, Microsoft, Porsche, PwC, Robert Bosch GmbH, The Brunswick Group, and White & Case. □

INDEPENDENCE DAY WITH THE UNITED STATES EMBASSY



Photo: Annette Hornischer

Ambassador Amy Gutmann

After a decade away, the US Embassy once again marked Independence Day at the American Academy. The celebration took place on June 29, 2023, opening with the performance of both the American and German national anthem by the Diplomatic Choir of Berlin and the presentation of colors. US ambassador to Germany Amy Gutmann then welcomed the 1,300 guests, and in her opening remarks emphasized the importance of transatlantic friendship. “The relationship between the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States is a story of courage and commitment to the values of freedom and democracy—

all that we celebrate on our Independence Day,” she said, reaffirming both countries’ support for Ukraine.

Gutmann’s speech was followed by a rousing musical lineup hosted by US Embassy outreach coordinator Jesse George: singer Kirk Smith and his band got the dancefloor moving, later relieved by an energetic ABBA cover band who kept the mood upbeat—and nostalgic for the 1970s. Hungry and thirsty guests sampled a rich offering of typical American fare provided by sponsors. The beautiful summer evening concluded with a spectacular traditional fireworks display over the Wannsee. □



View from the Academy's living room over the Wannsee



An ABBA cover band keeps the mood upbeat



US Embassy guests mingle, dance, and dine on the lakeside grounds of the Hans Arnhold Center

Photos: Annette Hornischer

ASPEN LITERARY SUMMIT

On August 1, 2023, Academy trustee Leah Joy Zell hosted a special reception at her Aspen, Colorado, mountain residence, featuring Academy president Daniel Benjamin in conversation with writer and alumna Lauren Groff. The two discussed Groff's award-winning work, which includes four *New York Times*

bestselling novels and two short-story collections. Groff was the spring 2023 Ellen Maria Gorrissen Fellow at the Academy, where she worked on her new novel, *Doom Eager*. Following *Matrix* (2021) and *The Vaster Wilds* (September, 2023), it will complete a triptych that grapples with themes of religion, violence, and nature. □



Writer Lauren Groff and Academy president Daniel Benjamin

Photo: Hal Williams

WELCOMING NEW TRUSTEES



Photo: Annette Hornischer

Members of the American Academy's board of trustees at their May 2023 meeting

The Academy is pleased to welcome three new members to its board of trustees. **Johannes P. Huth** is a partner of global investment firm KKR and chairman of KKR Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. He is also chairman of Hensoldt AG and a board-member at Axel Springer SE, Northumbrian Water, and Coty Inc. His cultural and academic engagements include

serving as president of the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris, emeritus trustee of the Design Museum in London, trustee of the Staedel Museum in Frankfurt, council-member and chairman of the Audit Committee for the London School of Economics, and member of the Global Advisory Board of the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

Tess Lewis is an award-winning writer and translator of French and German. She serves as co-chair of the PEN America Translation Committee and an advisory editor for the *Hudson Review*. Since 2019, she has curated the Festival Neue Literatur, New York City's annual celebration of German-language literature in English. She holds

a fellowship at New York University's Institute for the Humanities and was a spring 2022 Berlin Prize fellow at the American Academy. Her work has been supported by PEN USA and PEN UK, a Max Geilinger Translation Grant, the ACFNY Translation Prize and 2017 PEN Translation Prize, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Endowment of the Arts.

Carol Kahn Strauss is the former executive director of the Leo Baeck Institute, an archive and research library for the history and culture of German-speaking Jews. Prior, she was an assistant book editor for the Council on Foreign Relations, a senior editor at the Hudson Institute, and President of the Congregation Habonim, a synagogue in New York City. In 2010, Kahn Strauss presented the Leo Baeck Medal to German Chancellor Angela Merkel. A renowned figure in German-Jewish relations, she was awarded the German Federal Order of Merit by Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer in 2005, and the Commander's Cross of the German Federal Order of Merit by Consul General Brita Wagener in 2015. □

BERNINI IN BERLIN



Photo: Kristen Allen

L-R: Lisa Ellis, Jane Bassett, Enrico Fontolan, Józef Grabski, and Evonne Levy with Bernini's medallion of Pope Clement X

Spring 2002 fellow Evonne Levy returned to the Academy in July 2023 to investigate the hidden mysteries of a bronze medallion by seventeenth-century sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The University of Toronto art historian and a team of researchers transformed the Hans Arnhold Center library into a laboratory for the technical study of the work, brought to Berlin on loan from an anonymous collector in Poland.

It was just one stop on their international tour for what Levy called "an ambitious unicorn of a project" to evaluate Bernini's complete corpus of bronze works, the "most neglected" of his

creations. The data that the team collects using state-of-the-art instruments and imaging methods will explore for the first time foundry-workshop practices, illuminating the culture of Baroque artisanship and layers of collaboration in evidence in the works themselves.

"Art historians have traditionally emphasized the artist-genius and until recently the maker has not been much discussed," Levy said. "But these new data points can disrupt the hierarchies that have been in place without much study behind them, generating data persona for anonymous workers and their embodied knowledge." □

RÜCKBLICK 2022-23

Impressions from the past academic year



Former White House National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy and Academy president Daniel Benjamin



Head of Digital Global Public Health at the Hasso-Plattner Institute, Lothar Wieler



Musicians Coreena Brown, Kirk Smith, and Tracey Duncan



Artist Haley Mellin and trustee Klaus Biesenbach, director of the Neue Nationalgalerie



Trustee Leah Joy Zell



Writer Ian Buruma and New York Times Berlin correspondent Valerie Hopkins



Harvard University historian of Ukraine Serhii Plokhii



Writer Lorrie Moore



Writer Alexandra Chreiteh and classicist Jackie Murray



Poet Eileen Myles



Musician and composer Tashi Wada at Emmaus-Kirche



Poet and playwright Claudia Rankine and Berlin Journal editor R. Jay Magill



Spring 2023 fellows Mary E. Wilson (L) and Harvey Fineberg with Academy Vice President Ana Ramic



Elizaveta Zoueva, historian Paul Werth, and foreign policy expert Jeff Feltman



Academy COO Christian Diehl and VP Ana Ramic with Vanessa and Marcus Wachtmeister (BMW Group) at the Independence Day reception



Spring 2023 fellows historian Tiffany Florvil, writer Lauren Groff, historian Ela Gezen, with singer and musician Julia Holter



Theater and film director Julie Taymor

PROFILES IN SCHOLARSHIP

2023-24

AMERICAN POLITICAL ECONOMY FELLOW

Margaret Weir (Spring 2024)
Wilson Professor of International and Public Affairs and Political Science, Brown University
Weir is completing a book project entitled “The New Metropolis: Political Power and Spatial Inequality in Twenty-First Century America.” With a focus on Chicago, Atlanta, and Houston, Weir’s study examines the political conflicts that have defined new patterns of exclusion and opportunity in the American metropolis over the past three decades.

ANNA-MARIA KELLEN FELLOWS

Saira Mohamed (Fall 2023)
Professor of Law, University of California, Berkeley
In her Academy project, “Cannon Fodder: The Soldier’s Human Rights,” Mohamed examines the durability of the idea of soldiers as resources; that idea’s relevance to legal rules on conscription and the obligation of subordinates to disobey illegal orders from superiors; and the failure of international human rights law to adequately address the treatment of service members by the states they serve.

Leigh Raiford (Spring 2024)
Professor of African American Studies, University of California, Berkeley
Raiford is completing a book entitled *When Home Is a Photograph: Blackness and Belonging in the World*, (forthcoming from Duke), which examines how a handful of Black American artists and activists has used photography to imagine and visualize home in the world. In Berlin, she’s examining photos of the Black feminist poet

Audre Lorde taken by Dagmar Schultz, housed at the Freie Universität’s JFK Institute for North American Studies.

AXEL SPRINGER FELLOWS

Holly Case (Fall 2023)
Professor of European History, Brown University
Case’s Academy project, “Tracing Taint,” seeks to derive methodological lessons from an in-depth exploration of symbolic WWII politics as they relate to the war in Ukraine and the 1990s wars in Yugoslavia, alongside taint-tracing claims as they relate to the WWII history of cybernetics and the problem of “dirty data” in computer science and machine learning.

Mark Copelovitch (Spring 2024)
Professor of Political Science and Public Affairs, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Copelovitch is working on a project entitled “Dollar Signs: US Financial Dominance and the Future of American Power, Prosperity, and Democracy,” which explores the causes and consequences of the US dollar’s continued dominance in global finance and the international monetary system.

BAYER FELLOW IN HEALTH & BIOTECH

Albert Hofman (Spring 2024)
Stephen B. Kay Family Professor of Public Health and Clinical Epidemiology, T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Harvard University
Hofman is exploring the reasons why major epidemics, in particular of chronic diseases, are often recognized only after a long delay, and why the early response to infectious disease epidemics is often wrong. In short, he asks, “Why are epidemiologists so bad at epidemics?”

JOHN P. BIRKELUND FELLOWS

A.K. Burns (Fall 2023)
Artist; Associate Professor of Art, City University of New York
While in Berlin, Burns is researching and developing new video work and related sculptures.

Johannes von Moltke (Spring 2024)
Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures, and of Film, Television, and Media, University of Michigan
Von Moltke is further researching right-wing “metapolitics,” or the ways in which the new right on both sides of the Atlantic wages cultural wars to advance authoritarian populist agendas. He is particularly interested in understanding the right-wing appropriation and weaponization of cultural formations previously associated with a progressive, countercultural left—from identity politics to aesthetic and media activism, from social critique to the Marxist notion of “metapolitics” itself.

CAROL KAHN STRAUSS FELLOW IN JEWISH STUDIES

David H. Price (Fall 2023)
Professor of Jewish Studies, Religious Studies, History, and Art History, Vanderbilt University
Price is studying the expansion of religious toleration in Europe from roughly 1600 to the French Revolution (1789) for his book-in-progress, “Listening to Jewish Voices: The Impact of Jewish Writing on Religious Toleration and Social Justice in Early Modern Europe.”

GERHARD CASPER FELLOW
James Shapiro (Spring 2024)
Larry Miller Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University

Shapiro is completing *Playbook: The Creation and Demise of a Theater for All Americans* (forthcoming from Penguin and Faber), about the rise and fall of the Federal Theatre, a venue attended by thirty million Americans from its creation, in 1935, until 1939, when the first House Un-American Committee targeted its plays as “un-American,” leading to its defunding.

DEUTSCHE BANK FELLOW IN MUSIC COMPOSITION

Camila Agosto (Fall 2023)
Composer, Columbia University
At the Academy, Agosto is developing new works, including electroacoustic pieces for mixed instrumentation that incorporate her research in somatic experiences and sound healing, custom instrument design and fabrication, and eventual VR installation.

ELLEN MARIA GORRISSEN FELLOWS

Jorge Coronado (Fall 2023)
Professor of Modern Latin American and Andean Literatures and Cultures, Northwestern University
Coronado is researching a body of texts authored by Indigenous peoples in Latin America in the early twentieth century to demonstrate how Indigenous subjects employed and reconfigured modern ideologies such as anarchism, Marxism, and feminism alongside Native worldviews.

Mark Fathi Massoud (Spring 2024)
Professor of Politics and Director of Legal Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz
Massoud is studying the history of religious exclusion in the United States and

the ways that Muslims turn to *sharia* law as a guide to ethical living and a source of democratic values. This lived experience stands in contrast to the monolithic projection of *shari'a* as a threat to Western political liberalism and rule of law.

RICHARD C. HOLBROOKE FELLOWS

Andrew Moravcsik
(Fall 2023)

Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Princeton University
Moravcsik is working on a project entitled “More Bark than Bite,” which investigates the impact of extreme-right populist parties on the foreign policies of advanced democracies.

Anne-Marie Slaughter

(Fall 2023)

CEO, New America; Bert G. Kerstetter '66 University Professor Emerita of Politics and International Affairs, Princeton University
Slaughter is at work on a project entitled “Care and Capitalism,” which asks what it would mean to value care, connection, and community equally with competition, separation, and individual success in our economic, social, and political systems, both domestically and internationally.

HOLTZBRINCK FELLOWS

Liana Finck (Fall 2023)
Cartoonist, The New Yorker; Visiting Professor of English, Barnard College

At the Academy, Finck is completing her sixth book, *What to Do When* (Penguin Random House, 2025), a tongue-in-cheek instruction manual for living in human society. Half self-help book, half poetic parody, *What to Do When* will offer advice on subjects ranging from how to react when your doorbell rings unexpectedly to eating a messy sandwich in public to gracefully exiting a party, among much more.

Michael Meyer (Spring 2024)

Writer; Professor of English, University of Pittsburgh
Meyer’s book project is entitled “Taiwan Rising,” a biography of the island combining archival research with immersive reporting. Focusing on Taiwanese history before, during, and after colonial and Chinese arrivals, Meyer explores how contemporary Taiwanese see their palimpsest home and which historical narratives and characters are today commemorated, ignored, or forgotten.

DIRK IPPEN FELLOW

Samantha Schnee

(Spring 2024)

Translator; Founding Editor, Words Without Borders
Schnee is completing an English-language translation of Berlin-based Spanish author Irati Elorrieta’s novel *Winter Lights*, a polyphonic and cinematic story set in Berlin that illustrates how the fabric of the city’s cosmopolitan metropolis is woven together daily by its inhabitants.

BERTHOLD LEIBINGER FELLOW

Mabel O. Wilson (Fall 2023)

Nancy and George Rupp Professor of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation; Professor of African American and African Diaspora Studies, Columbia University

Wilson is writing an architectural and cultural history of racial difference during the early years of the United States. Focusing on select buildings, institutions, and sites in the Mid-Atlantic region, her project explores how the emerging modern discourses of architecture, nationalism, and race influenced the creation of civic spaces from 1783 to 1858.

MARY ELLEN VON DER HEYDEN FELLOWS

Brian Evenson (Spring 2024)

Writer; Professor of Critical Studies, California Institute of the Arts

Evenson’s Academy book project, “Handbook for a Future Revolution,” expands upon the investigation of schizophrenia, violence, and religion found in his 2005 novel *The Open Curtain*, exploring the collision of Mormon ideas and ideals with European culture.

Heidi Julavits (Spring 2024)

Writer; Associate Professor of Writing, Columbia University

In her nonfiction project “Altitude Sickness,” Julavits investigates how humans interact with nature as land artists, tourists, educators, cultural critics, and adventurers. The book weaves together a menagerie of ideas and stories as vehicles to ponder if and how people will develop more socially and legally acceptable ways to die, especially given “the looming threat of human mass-extinction.”

MERCEDES-BENZ FELLOW

Stuart Kirsch (Fall 2023)

Professor of Anthropology, University of Michigan
Kirsch is researching the subject of carbon accounting, examining the assumptions, practices, and standards for monitoring greenhouse gas emissions responsible for global climate change. His work is part of a multi-year project on the post-carbon transition.

NINA MARIA GORRISSEN FELLOWS

Mariana P. Candido

(Fall 2023)

Professor of History, Emory University
Candido is at work on her new book project, “Beyond Queens and Captives: Women in Angola, 1500–1880s.” Departing from a binary understanding of African women as either queens or captives, Candido’s study examines their multiple roles as leaders and commoners, free and enslaved, during the era of the slave trade and European imperialism.

Noam Lupu (Spring 2024)

Associate Professor of Political Science, Vanderbilt University

Lupu is completing a co-authored book entitled *Children of Violence: Victims in the Shadow of Conflict*, which explores how experiences of violence shape the political identities of victims and their descendants in order to understand what kinds of political violence have lasting intergenerational effects.

PRESIDENTIAL FELLOWS

Michael W. Doyle

(Fall 2023)

University Professor of International Affairs, Political Science, and Law, Columbia University
Doyle is revising his book *Ways of War and Peace* to include new chapters on “Post-Colonial Independence and Industrial Development” (Nehru); “Third World Global Socialism” (Senghor); and “The Impact of Race and Racial Consciousness” (Biko).

Adam D. Weinberg

(Spring 2024)

Alice Pratt Brown Director, Whitney Museum of American Art
Weinberg is drafting the first-ever volume devoted to artist-conceived and designed “sacred spaces”—chapels, churches, synagogues, Quaker meeting houses, and non-denominational indoor and outdoor meditation sites—created in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These range from chapels by artists such as Henri Matisse, Jean Cocteau, José Orozco, Mark Rothko, Sol LeWitt, and Louise Bourgeois to projects by living artists such as Frank Stella, James Turrell, Anish Kapoor, Maya Lin, and Laura Owens.

BOOK REVIEWS



EVANGELICAL ANXIETY: A MEMOIR BY CHARLES MARSH

HarperOne

June 2022, 256 Pages

A review by Scott Stossel

The most devoutly religious person I've ever known was also the least anxious person I've ever known. Sargent Shriver, with whom I spent time while writing his biography 25 years ago, had a deep Catholic faith that seemed to lend him an unshakable serenity. Traveling the world to launch the Peace Corps for John F. Kennedy, Shriver would sometimes find himself on little rattletrap planes in Africa, heaving violently through storms. While everyone else was terror-stricken, Shriver would seem placid, even content. I asked him how this could be so. He explained that he believed whatever happened—crash or not, live or die—was God's will, something he accepted that with complete equanimity, even a kind of joy.

For me—neurotic, plagued by sometimes debilitating clinical anxiety (and I *hate* flying)—this seemed evidence of a link between deep religious faith and existential comfort in the world. In Shriver's presence I felt keenly that my reluctant agnosticism, my inability to access the consolations

of faith, excluded me from the kind of deep, almost-metaphysical ease Shriver possessed. If only I could give myself up to God, believe that whatever happened was his will and that whatever was his will was okay, I thought, my anxiety might lift.

Well, Charles Marsh's *Evangelical Anxiety*, published last year, makes clear what I sort of already knew: that the relationship between faith and anxiety is a lot more complicated than that. In this fascinating, provocative, remarkably candid memoir, Marsh, who grew up in the evangelical tradition and is an academic theologian who remains a practicing Christian, tells the story of his own struggles with anxiety, depression, and nervous breakdown. Only, in his case, his religious beliefs were for many years less a balm for his anxiety than a principal cause of it. The book details Marsh's careening between religious and psychotherapeutic approaches to his anxiety, and it vividly details how his lusty body—the place where the welling force of erotic desire and the quelling strictures of Southern Baptist doctrine clash—becomes the site of his anxiety's most awful torments.

Marsh grew up the son of a (white) Baptist pastor in segregated Alabama and Mississippi, where the death of MLK in 1968 was met by the cheers of his grade-school classmates at Mason Primary, and where his grandmother tells him that “no matter what he thinks about all God's children, white people are the superior race.” Marsh transcended his upbringing among conservative Baptists and segregationists to become liberal in his political and policy convictions, without ever yielding his faith in God.

A more difficult struggle to overcome was with his own concupiscence. As a boy, he would sit in church on Sundays, pulsating with desire and fear. “How hard it is to bring erections

under the Lordship of Christ,” Marsh writes, describing the improvised chastity belts he would fashion using jock straps. So terrified was he of transgressing God's will, he fears “if I let my guard down and fornicated with Marcia, Linda, or Sharon—I'd have to kill myself.” He describes spending the first year of his PhD program in Philosophical Theology alternating between looking at purloined porn magazines and reading the fifty-first Psalm and Kant's writings on ethics, praying for God's forgiveness.

Marsh then suffered a series of nervous crises as an adult. His descriptions of panic attacks—the bone-deep dread, the racing thoughts, the revolt of your own body against you—are (this panic-attack sufferer can tell you) spot-on. At first, Marsh tries to combat these bouts of anxiety using the tools of his faith. He tries to embrace his anxious suffering as a Godly gift, to see his pain as the route to purity and transcendence. In the Evangelical tradition, he writes, anxiety and other mental illness “is all demonic activity (principally, possession).” Nearly half of evangelicals believe that “conditions like bipolar disorder and schizophrenia can be treated with prayer alone,” according to a Southern Baptist Convention survey. So-called Bible-based counseling, the closest thing to psychotherapy allowed among Evangelicals, is grounded in a “sin-based explanation of mental illness.” A prescription consists not of medicine or cognitive therapy but of “a cleansing dive into the Psalms.”

For Marsh, this didn't cut it. “Of course I needed Jesus,” he writes. “I also needed professional help.” Beset by panic attacks and depression while pursuing a PhD at the University of Virginia, he finally seeks help from a psychologist. Doing so “was a recognition that the paradigm of Christian self-help, of getting deeper in the Word

as a cure for psychic anguish, was exhausted. And it was a recognition that I didn't want to kill myself."

Far from finding psychotherapy to be alienating to his religious self, Marsh discovers it to be "like prayer reciprocated." The therapy works. But after graduate school, while teaching in Baltimore, he suffers another breakdown. He talks a psychiatrist into giving him a course of psychoanalysis four days a week for a mere five dollars an hour, which is all he can afford on his teaching salary. Dr. Lieber helps Marsh to understand that "desire is the human situation," and he becomes more comfortable talking about "the ferocity of my desire to dive headfirst into the thighs of every interesting woman who caught my attention." His anxiety relents again, and he becomes a better husband and a better father, determined not to use the "Bible as a bludgeon" on his children as it was used on him. ("You will be constantly under assault by Satan," his own father had written to Marsh as a young man. "You must maintain constant vigilance.")

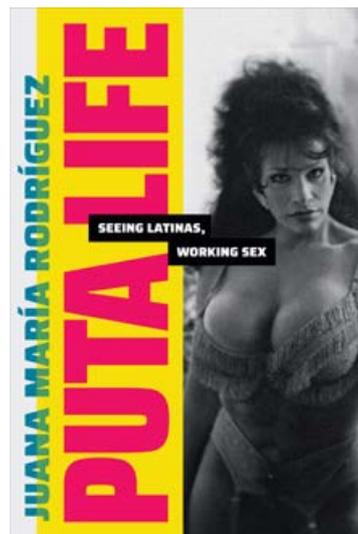
Back at UVA, in a tenure-track job, a deeper depression descends, one that forces him to reckon finally with "the biochemistry of my brain." He goes on antidepressants. "Trusting the Lord with all my heart now meant accepting advice that I should take the pills," which eventually steady him. They also lead him to the conclusion that "trying to chase away madness with the petitions of faith is a recipe for disaster." God does not want you "wasted and bare," he argues, citing Virginia Woolf's famous description of the soul afflicted with mental illness. "Don't believe the grace pimps when they tell you otherwise," Marsh writes. "There is no sermon in the suicide."

None of this causes his Christian faith to waver (though he does drift from Evangelicalism), nor does he think psychiatry alone can relieve the suffering endemic to being human, to having a desiring body with the propensity for sin. Moreover, a psychoanalyst can't give you the freedom to sin, or to "bank recklessly on grace" (as Martin Luther once advised a

young monk who wanted to sleep with a peasant girl). God can.

I did finish the book wondering if Marsh's encomium to "strong sin" as a "propaedeutic to joy" was simply license to misbehave, or a retroactive justification of his wayward sexual adventuring. But then I also wondered if this was another thing my agnosticism robs me of: the ability to sin and be forgiven.

Ultimately, Marsh settles upon the realization that both psychoanalysis and faith use language and narrative to provide healing and hope; they "follow parallel tracks into the mysteries of being human, where all truth is God's truth." Marsh has used his own narrative talents to provide readers—those both anxious and not—with a gritty and profane book full of wisdom and honesty and gratitude and grace. □



PUTA LIFE: SEEING LATINAS, WORKING SEX BY JUANA MARÍA RODRÍGUEZ

Duke University Press
April 2023, 288 pages

A review by Emma Pérez

The accomplished Latinx bisexual scholar Juana María Rodríguez begins

her monograph *Put a Life: Seeing Latinas, Working Sex* with an autobiographical recognition of her own *puta* life. Not as a sex worker herself, but rather as a feminist who affirms how sex work, sexuality, queerness, and otherness is fundamentally everywhere, affecting everyone, whether we admit to it or not. "The truth is, I have been called *puta* more times than I remember," she writes. "I have been called *puta* because of how I look and where I wander, because of who and what I desire, and because of who and what I refuse. And I have answered, cultivating an aesthetic and an attitude from the impossibility of being otherwise." Rodríguez offers that it's time we honor the sex workers on whose backs our open (and barred) sexualities rest upon. While the book is not her own erotic archive, it is one in which she seeks to appreciate and esteem the lives of sex workers.

It's important to note how Rodríguez's scholarly trajectory prompted this latest publication. I have followed her career and anticipated her writings, which are unswervingly daring, creative, and queerly sexy. In her first book, *Queer Latinidad* (2003), its cover featuring a stunning red-hued image of a ripe, bared open, sumptuous papaya, she surmises that identity is not static, not uniform, not without its contradictions. In her words, "My experience does not authenticate me." I must admit I developed a steadfast intellectual crush when I assigned to my graduate class her second book, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (2014). In the book she urges us to imagine "another kind of sexual future," one of utopian longings, one that incites and submits willingly to consensual, playful couplings, such as "butch and femme, top and bottom, husband and wife, master and slave, sugar daddy and baby boi, or any other form of sexualized corporal performance."

In many ways, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures* is a precursor to *Put a Life*, a book that delves deeper into Rodríguez's archive of desiring subjects. I would even claim that her

third book acts as a prequel to twenty-first-century sexual futures, the “not-yet-here” queerness to which Latinx scholar José Esteban Muñoz professed in his study *Cruising Utopias: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. Rodríguez takes Muñoz seriously when he argues that we must be future-bound in our desires. However, unlike him, she actively pursues a crucial backstory to sex and sexuality, perhaps taking a page from Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*. She ferrets through boxes of archival photographs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to prove her point—that historically tracking female-presenting sex workers, we can better understand the legacy of sex work and our sexual futures.

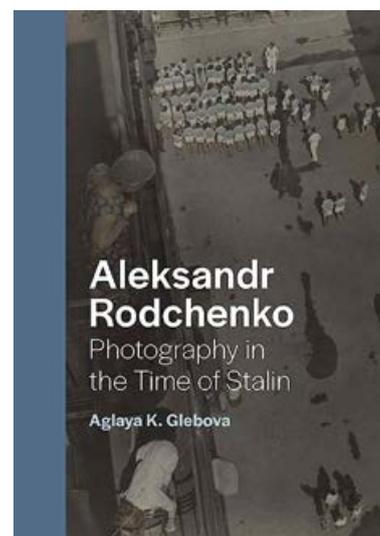
A two-part book with five chapters, *Put a Life* ranges over a trove of assorted documents, from nineteenth-century archival daguerreotypes to contemporary photographs and visual media from the twentieth century. Throughout, Rodríguez tracks the political, cultural, and systemic representations of sex workers. Her approach to visual culture broadens the scope of the traditional historian’s archive and generates fresh ways of seeing the unseen. In this way, the text entertains cultural archives and affect by considering the relationship between photography, documentary film, and oral history. Whether examining the day-to-day life of porn star Vanessa del Rio or providing first-person narrative accounts of aging Latina sex workers living in Mexico City’s Casa Xochiquetzal, Rodríguez demonstrates the perils and pleasures of this kind of livelihood. She also reinterprets visual accounts to illuminate how women are coveted when young, but once old, they are tossed aside, only to be forgotten. These are among the touchingly human narratives of subjectivity that complicate the more conventional interpretations of sexuality, pleasure, and violence that permeate our culture.

In chapter two, “Colonial Echoes and Aesthetic Allure: Tracking the Genres of Put a Life,” Rodríguez “uncovers the ways visual access and sexual

access become collapsed through the anonymous erotic labor of the women who serve as the subjects of the photographer’s intention.” She posits that the medium of photography, “under the sign of ethnographic documentation or journalistic exposé,” principally serves to offer the “visual evidence of the deviance that condemns the sex worker to her fate as a stigmatized social outcast.” Rodríguez closes the chapter with a critique of coloniality—and its instruments of surveillance—alerting us to “the new digital tools of empire and globalization.” Google Street View, for example, snaps photographs of brothels and red-light districts worldwide to compile a visual archive of real women who are “hunted,” “captured,” and “pinned” to a location. As “another kind of colonial expedition,” Rodríguez provides the usernames from a website called DoxySpotting.com who post and label the female-presenting subjects as “whores, skanks, fattys.” By providing these sex workers’ exact locations, retaliatory users such as “BitchHunter” actually endanger their lives. These “Doxy spotting” voyeurs vilify women generally, labeling anyone a puta simply because they are walking on a street. This chapter evidences the ease with which Rodríguez traverses the centuries to show how women, whether sex workers or not, continue to be judged by a colonial masculinist gaze.

I have had the privilege of a front-row seat to Rodríguez’s conceptualization of this pathbreaking book. We corresponded, discussed, and exchanged ideas as it progressed over the years. Most queer/trans scholars excavate their own lived experiences and translate those daily practices into their scholarly works; I have witnessed the manner in which Rodríguez has scrutinized her own life to be true to her academic writing. And thus my only critique of this impressive volume is that I want *more* of her life documented, not just the few pages we glean in the introduction. We deserve to know more about this custodian of the disheartened and dejected, this creator of foundational

communities, queer and otherwise. Rodríguez continues to be a scholarly architect of Black, Brown, Indigenous, white queer/trans familias who create intimate friendships. Her powerful prose frames the pleasures, crescendos, and erotica of puta life. This vital study of sex workers foreshadows, I hope, a forthcoming memoir of her own. □



**ALEKSANDR
RODCHENKO:
PHOTOGRAPHY IN
THE TIME OF STALIN**
BY AGLAYA K. GLEBOVA

Yale University Press
January 2023, 256 pages

A review by Susie Linfield

There are times in history when—for reasons no one can completely explain—a critical mass of interrelated artists, writers, intellectuals, or activists emerges and then transforms their discipline, their politics, their nation, or, even, the world. Think of the artists of the Renaissance; of the Enlightenment thinkers; of the German philosophers who emerged in the 15 years after 1795 (Schiller, Fichte, Goethe, Schelling, Hölderlin, Hegel); of the critics and philosophers of the Weimar Republic (Arendt, Horkheimer,

Marcuse, Adorno, Krakauer, Benjamin, Heidegger); or of the young Black activists of the Civil Rights movement (Moses, Nash, Lewis, Carmichael).

The early years of the Russian Revolution were another such period. It saw a veritable explosion of revolutionary writers, poets, photographers, filmmakers, painters, and graphic designers. They sought to create new forms of art, new relationships to time and to nature, new men and women—indeed, a new society. They succeeded in their first goal. But their fates were often grim, ranging from censorship and pariahdom to imprisonment and execution.

Aleksandr Rodchenko was one of the most imaginative, prolific, and influential members of this cohort. When Alfred Barr, the first director of the Museum of Modern Art, visited Rodchenko's Moscow studio in 1927, he remarked on the “appalling variety of things” Rodchenko displayed—from paintings and photographs to linoleum cuts, posters, and woodcuts. There is a tendency to see Rodchenko as in some sense an oppositional artist; MOMA (which owns some of this work) describes him as “depicting the disparity between the idealized and lived Soviet experience” and as the creator of images that “contrasted with socialist realism.” But this is too simple, and displays a deep ignorance about Stalin's Russia. As Aglaya K. Glebova's elegant study *Aleksandr Rodchenko: Photography in the Time of Stalin* makes clear, Rodchenko's attitudes toward the state and the revolution cannot be framed within a Manichean framework of “opposition or subservience.” Indeed, the book raises, albeit sometimes indirectly, a profoundly disquieting question: What does it mean for an artist to serve a project that is both genuinely utopian and criminal?

Rodchenko was born in St. Petersburg in 1891; his father had been born a serf, and his mother was a laundress. In 1910, he began studying at the Kazan Art School, where he met his lifelong love and artistic collaborator, Varvara Stepanova. Unlike many of their friends and colleagues, they

survived the purges (and the Second World War). Rodchenko died in 1956, Stepanova in 1958.

Rodchenko began as a painter but soon jettisoned painting as bourgeois, as did his “motley crew” of colleagues in the Left Front of the Arts (LEF). Indeed, Rodchenko wrote that one had to “wage war against art [by which he meant painting] as against opium.”

In Soviet Russia of the 1920s and 1930s, the eye was an ideologically charged organ, and vision the most politically fraught of the senses.

It was photography—the epitome of modernity—that captivated and challenged him. “It was precisely the speed . . . of photography that mattered,” Glebova writes. “The medium belonged to a fast-paced era in which . . . no eternal truths were possible and snapshots were as old as yesterday's newspaper.” The revolutionary gaze resolutely, indeed adamantly, looked forward: in 1919, Rodchenko and Stepanova proclaimed the “future as our only goal.” And the glorious future could be—must be—created *now*. Stalin shared this view; he described the first Five-Year Plan as a “war against time” in which Russia would travel “full speed ahead” to crush the old Russia (and Russians) and create the new one.

This is not to say that Rodchenko's art was “Stalinist,” whatever that might mean. One of the themes that emerges in Glebova's account is the ways in which modernists could serve totalitarianism, not out of fear, but because, far more disturbingly, they sometimes shared certain values. Take, for instance, the question of visual perception. “In Soviet Russia of the 1920s and 1930s, the eye was an ideologically charged organ, and vision the most politically fraught of the senses,” Glebova writes. “Distrust and watchfulness were part of the vocabulary called on by the avant-garde. [Dziga]

Vertov . . . compared the mission of his [film] group . . . to that of the secret police, writing that the two shared a mission . . . and a methodology.” Concepts of unmasking, of “watchfulness and recording,” of seeing below and through surfaces, were celebrated by revolutionary filmmakers and photographers. All these practices could, of course, be easily incorporated

by a surveillance state that depended on a fearsome secret-police apparatus and untold millions of informers. “In the 1930s, the kind of constant, observant alertness initially promoted by the avant-garde turned into omnipresent suspicion,” Glebova argues. “Stalinist vision was defined . . . by ‘vigilance.’” In 1933, Stalin “called for a deep distrust of surface appearances” to ferret out class enemies.

In May 1928, Rodchenko designed the cover for a book called *Wrecker-People: The Shakhty Case*. The cover displays a documentary photograph of several seated men, in profile; the photograph is intersected by a strident red stripe, a red triangle, and two black stripes bearing lettering—a typical Constructivist image, perhaps. But what it shows is horrifying. The Shakhty affair was the first of the major show trials, in which 53 engineers who had been trained in the pre-revolutionary era were accused of “wrecking” socialist production. The trials were extensively photographed and filmed, and witnessed by an estimated 100,000 people. (What good is a show trial without an audience?) Rodchenko's cover shows five of the men as their death sentences were announced; two cover their faces with their hands, “the archetypal gesture of a man in despair.” There is no getting around the terror and cruelty

of this image, and it is impossible to read Rodchenko's book cover as undermining, or critiquing, either the photograph (which he did not take) or the event.

In the early 1930s, Rodchenko found himself in a bit of hot water, which in Stalin's Russia could quickly reach boiling point. He was expelled from the October Group, and his early

be executed three years later); Rodchenko's fifty-page photo-essay appeared in the December 1933 issue of *USSR in Construction*. (Though Glebova does not mention it, 1933 was also the year that the Nazis constructed Dachau, their first concentration camp. It, too, was publicized.) Glebova tries to interpret some of Rodchenko's images as subtly undermining the project,

of the revolution. (Perhaps the hand—the human—was superior to the machine?) In addition, in this period, Rodchenko and Stepanova were forced to rub out, in harsh black ink, the faces of the many disgraced (i.e. executed) revolutionaries who had appeared in their photographs—surely a degrading task. (The best book on this phenomenon of photographic “forgetting” is David King's *The Commissar Vanishes*.) Even after Stalin's death, Stepanova was careful to present only the “carefully edited” versions of her and Rodchenko's works: “evidence [of] the long afterlife of terror.”

Glebova interprets Rodchenko's disillusion with photography as a metaphor for political disenchantment. She writes that, in the early 1930s, Rodchenko had been haunted by the photographs he took of his dear friend Vladimir Mayakovsky after the latter committed suicide. But in the years of the Great Terror, “the nightmare had been reversed: . . . The photographer would be forced to submerge one face after another in ink, moving . . . history out of view. Photography's documentary powers, which made it ‘cruel but necessary’ in 1930, made it not only cruel but untenable by 1938.” □

Even after Stalin's death, Stepanova was careful to present only the “carefully edited” versions of her and Rodchenko's works: “evidence [of] the long afterlife of terror.”

paintings were derided as examples of “dead end” formalism, as were those of Kazimir Malevich and Vasily Kandinsky. (Rodchenko's 1930 photograph “Pioneer Girl,” an extreme closeup that is now considered a classic of modern photography, had been assailed as ugly and insufficiently happy.) Perhaps to provide himself with “political armature,” he undertook an enormous job: photographing the construction of the White Sea–Baltic Canal. This was an ambitious—indeed insane—project of the first Five-Year Plan, in which hundreds of thousands of laborers worked to construct a gigantic dam, clawing through the unforgiving terrain “almost by hand.” The workers were political prisoners (as were most of the engineers); the inmates toiled in appalling conditions, and more than 25,000 died. This was, in fact, one of the early gulags, which the government “framed as a humane project to rehabilitate criminals and ‘class enemies,’ a reeducation project known as ‘reforging.’”

Far from secret, the camp was documented in films, newspapers, magazines, postcards, a play, and a four-hundred-page book. Rodchenko spent months at the site and took thousands of photographs (overseen by Genrikh Yagoda, head of the country's secret police, who would

though this seems to be a stretch. She also admits to, and we can clearly see, the celebratory aspect of many photographs and layouts; Rodchenko would later boast of this work. And though Glebova is an extremely astute critic, there is something jarring about analyzing a gulag from a formalist perspective.

Rodchenko's canal photographs revived his career. But in the late 1930s, Glebova writes, he became increasingly disillusioned with photography and turned away from “the documentary, the serial, the dynamic, and the unposed,” which represented “a shift away from representing, reflecting, and instantiating everyday contemporary life.” He began over-painting some of his photographs, and even returned to painting, which she sees as “a counterpoint to . . . the staggering technological violence”



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