Bernie, the anti-greedy geezer
U.N. calls for reparations

IS YOUR WATER SAFE?

Radical solutions to our nation's water crisis
BY LAURA ORLANDO

PLUS
Rick Perlstein on Trump, Sady Doyle on Clinton and Joel Bleifuss on Sanders
Interesting analysis that the unifying force of the “Christian Right” isn’t Christianity itself, but a type of addiction to the prophetic style of storytelling. This makes a lot of sense—I’ve long thought that Christianity should align more closely to socialism than fascism. But it hugely depends on your definition.

Brian Reindel
Via InTheseTimes.com

This article helps explain so much that those of us in the reality-based world find so baffling and appalling about Trump’s intense level of support among his followers. But even after reading it several times, I still cannot fathom why so many “good” Christians would support a man whose vile behavior and foul words they would never countenance from their own family members. I suppose Trump’s supporters will stand behind him as long as they are satisfied that he continues to be “their” bully.

Mike Fitzgerald
Via InTheseTimes.com

We encourage readers’ thoughts. Send your letters to Letters@InTheseTimes.com. Please include your city and state.

Flint justice

Susan J. Douglas’ article (“Trump, Flint and Black Lives Matter,” March) examined the impact of the transfer of government to “wealthy venture capitalists” because they self-describe as people “who get things done” and solve problems that public servants are unable or unwilling to achieve. The “Rick Snyder model” proved just the opposite in Michigan, and so would a “Donald Trump model” for this country.

The catastrophe in Flint was a wholesale poisoning of the water supply of a city of 100,000 people. It occurred for over a year, and it was done on purpose. Residents will suffer long-term, irreversible harm. Shouldn’t the U.S. government remove Gov. Snyder from office and place him and those who helped perpetuate this heinous crime in prison for life? Or are he and his venture capitalist confidants “too big to fail”?

Enrique Gentzsch
Minneapolis

Democratic barriers to change

This is a well-written article and makes some great points (“Out of Jail, Sentenced to Life,” March). However, things will not change in the United States for sex offenders unless it comes from the Supreme Court. The democratic process will never produce any significant loosening of sex offender requirements.

Owen Michaels
Via InTheseTimes.com

Trump’s true believers

Theo Anderson’s article “Why Evangelicals Flock to Trump” (March) is a fine analysis, exactly the sort of thing that makes In These Times such a salutary antidote to corporate media crapola.

But to label Trump’s paranoid rhetoric as “the prophetic style” is a rather grave insult to Amos, Micah, Jeremiah et al. They are still read and revered thousands of years later exactly because their message is one of regeneration through self-examination and moral accountability, a spiritually humbling insight 180 degrees removed from the fearmongering of the Republicans.

What is needed is a prophetic, spirit-stirring call from the Left attacking not just the symptoms of bigotry and inequality, but the fundamental evil and injustice woven into our dog-eat-dog system. Fire must be fought with fire.

Hugh Iglarsh
Skokie, Ill.
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The Future Belongs to Bernie

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) has a tough row to hoe if he is going to overtake Hillary Clinton and become the Democratic nominee. The margins of her victories have been larger than his. As In These Times Deputy Publisher Christopher Hass, a veteran of Obama’s two presidential campaigns, has reported, it is the size of the margins that determine the Democratic standard bearer.

But this primary is more than a contest between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders. It is the venue for competing aspirations for the future of the Democratic Party—can the party be a vehicle for social democracy or will it be the party of technocratic, gradual improvement, operating within the context of an unquestioned neoliberal consensus?

Again and again we hear measured caution from candidate Clinton and her cheerleaders in the liberal corporate media: Eschew radical solutions (no matter how well-reasoned or established in other industrial societies) and support doable, commonsense alternatives.

Not everyone on the Left, however, has a bleak view of the Democratic frontrunner. On page 20, staff writer Sady Doyle makes a “full-throated” progressive case for Clinton. And on page 8, Moe Tkacik and Amanda Marcotte debate the candidates’ positions on banking reform, sexism and racism.

In These Times has covered Sanders’ political career since March 1981, when the 39-year-old, Brooklyn-born, In These Times—reading democratic socialist was elected mayor of Burlington, Vt. And in the 35 years since, we have continued to report on his political initiatives. Sanders, for his part, has supported this magazine and its mission, including by providing testimonials like the one from 1983 that is reproduced on page 30.

As we see it, the choice before Democrats is between a feast of radical change or some morsels of incremental reform.

Sanders has staked out a maximalist position; on the stump in Fort Collins, Colo., he framed his demands as follows:

I believe that if you start your campaign and run on a platform calling for a full loaf, at worst you’re gonna get a half loaf. If you start your campaign talking about a need for a half loaf, you’re gonna get crumbs. And the American people today do not want, do not need, crumbs. They need the whole loaf.

In the short term, with Clinton inching ever closer to the nomination, we face the prospect of a pretty lean victors’ banquet. Where is “change” on the menu? Next to “crumbs”?

Sanders is thinking beyond where the next meal is coming from. Refusing to be fenced in by election year cycles, he is putting ideas on the table that transcend the status quo.

Which brings up the point: Who is the real winner of Super Tuesday?

Sanders won some states—including that fabled liberal stronghold Oklahoma—but in terms of pledged delegates, Hillary Clinton came out ahead. That being said, in one state after another, Sanders has won a majority of Democratic voters under the age of 30.

Clinton and Sanders offered America’s millennials two futures. They made their choice. The future of the Democratic Party belongs to democratic socialism. The present, for the moment, appears to belong to Clinton.

—JOEL BLEIFUSS
MIXED REACTION

The whole thing taken together is called magic.
— EPA CHEMIST ALAN RUBIN EXPLAINING THE TERM “SLUDGE MAGIC,” WHICH HE COINED TO JUSTIFY THE EPA’S RULE ALLOWING DANGEROUS SEWAGE SLUDGE TO BE APPLIED TO FARMS, GARDENS AND EVEN SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS

JUST THE FACTS

9 Number of pollutants that wastewater treatment plants must test for, out of 80,000 that may be present in sewage sludge

10 Number of people who have died from Legionnaires’ disease in Flint, Michigan

335 billion: Estimated cost, in dollars, of necessary investments in the U.S. water infrastructure for the period 2007-2027

8 Percentage of needed investments that will be funded by Congress by 2027, at current appropriations levels

A. Philip Randolph organized African-American railroad porters into a union, spearheaded the March on Washington, pushed for civil disobedience and draft resistance, and in doing so, changed the face of black radicalism in America. David Cochran interviews Clarence Lang, co-author of Reframing Randolph: Labor, Black Freedom, and the Legacies of A. Philip Randolph.

VISIT WORKING IN THESE TIMES TODAY: InTheseTimes.com/Working
DEAR ITT IDEOLOGIST,

Though you write with boyish brio, I understand you are actually a decrepit duffer. Assuming the volumes in your cranial hard disc covering the 1960s are still retrievable, let me ask if you are finding any similarities between politics way back then versus right now?

—Abby Reefer, Death Valley, Calif.

Dear Mr. Reefer,
The most obvious déjà vu all over again I’ve noticed are the arguments by some putative progressives and limp liberals that the proposals by Bernie Sanders for honest banking, clean elections, single-payer healthcare, tuition-free college and such are all fine and dandy in theory but are, in fact, idealistic, impractical and impolitic. As I recall, exactly the same was said in the ‘60s about advancing civil rights and ending the war in Vietnam. Yes, it would be great if all Americans were treated equally, but the civil rights marchers must be patient and limited in their demands. Likewise, it would be good to resolve the Vietnam conflict but pulling our troops “Out Now!” as the peaceniks were demanding would send the wrong signal to our enemies. What happened, of course, was that the impatient prevailed and the irresolute failed. In a peaceful revolution, legal segregation ended in the United States, while in a violent one, the Vietnamese kicked us out and regained control of their country.

Dear Ideologist,

As the spoiled scion of one of the richest families on earth, I never lacked for ridiculously expensive luxuries. I moved to the United States because it was the wealthiest country in the world and therefore compatible with my circumstances. I have lived in many countries and was therefore surprised that yours, the richest nation, lacked universal healthcare, childcare, free college education, a modern transportation system and other social and civic benefits common to capitalist countries. Politicians tell me that, despite your wealth, these things are unaffordable. How can that be?

—Reginald Flush III, Golden, Colo.

Dear Mr. Flush III,

Being a greenhorn, you have yet to master our political code words. In discussions of public policy, the word “unaffordable” sheds its dictionary meaning and is used instead to obviate any effort to improve the lot of the working and poor classes. By contrast, “unaffordable” is never used to describe initiatives to make the rich richer. Such measures are always called “incentives” or “necessary to national security.”

—PETE KARMAN

PIRAEUS, GREECE—A group of refugees and migrants seeks temporary shelter in a port warehouse on February 29. They constitute only a fraction of the 30,000 people stranded in Greece since November 2015, when several Balkan nations along a main migration route closed their borders to all except those fleeing war. On March 2, the European Union proposed a 700 million euro aid program to help Greece house the trapped migrants. (Photo by Panayotis Tzamaros/AFP/Getty Images)
ON FEBRUARY 13, ABC reporter Liz Kreutz tweeted a snippet of a Hillary Clinton speech and promptly sent the Internet into a frenzy of debate:

Clinton: “If we broke up the big banks tomorrow…would that end racism? Would that end sexism?”

“No!” crowd yells out

NBC later supplied a lengthier version:

“No!” the audience yelled back.

Clinton continued to list scenarios, asking: “Would that end sexism? Would that end discrimination against the LGBT community? Would that make people feel more welcoming to immigrants overnight?”

破行

To discuss the quote and its context, In These Times invited Moe Tkacik, a former Wall Street Journal writer and the author of an essay in the forthcoming collection False Choices: The Faux Feminism of Hillary Rodham Clinton; and Amanda Marcotte, who writes for Salon on politics, feminism and culture, and in November 2015 wrote a column titled, “Let’s get excited about Hillary Clinton: She’s not a savior—but she is exactly what we need.”

MOE: When I saw this quote on Twitter, I just stared for a few minutes, as if into the abyss or at a really gross zit under a magnifying glass. I didn’t want to know the “context” because the statement itself defecated all over the very idea of context.

Obviously, no one ever promised a piece of legislation would “end” hate and injustice. Anyone even notionally sincere about battling the prejudices and cognitive dissonances that oligarchs and overlords have forever promulgated to divide and conquer humanity understands that “racism” and “sexism” are not forces you can arrest with a pen.

Then there are the banks, the biggest and rottenest of which have been with us for more than two centuries. To want to see them curtailed is to have absorbed more than enough history to understand that such things don’t happen “tomorrow.”

When I finally caved and read the full speech, I found a veritable orgy of straw men, each catering to some crucial segment of the Democratic coalition. It wasn’t just racism and sexism that would persist in a landscape of smaller banks, according to Hillary Clinton. “Gerrymandering and redistricting” would also persist, as would discrimination against immigrants and gays.

Something about the line just
screamed “Bill.” Not shit-eating-grin President Bill Clinton at the height of his virility/virulence, but the Clinton of today who is occasionally given to weirdly bitter rants that are simultaneously nonsensical and illuminating, like a warped decoder ring for understanding how the Democratic Party could maintain its monopoly on self-righteous rhetoric while selling short the New Deal and Great Society constituencies that got out the vote all those years: Just remind Democratic voters that Republicans want to outlaw affirmative action and abortion and quarantine everyone diagnosed with AIDS.

The thing is, we were never dumb enough to sign on to this gutted, soulless, leveraged-buyout version of the Democratic platform. Bill Clinton eked out a White House win with only 43 percent of the popular vote. His triumphant job performance as president is a fiction in which Democrats have been inculcated because his surrogates have so effectively marginalized anyone who dares acknowledge history.

But when the going gets tough, as it conspicuously has, Hillary (like Obama in 2009, alas) falls back on what worked for Bill, the old New Dem coalition strategy: getting the black community leaders and abortion lobby to get out the vote, the bank lobby to pay for the ad buys, and the eternal GOP majority to prevent anything from transpiring that might alienate the bank lobbyists.

Today, as in 1992, this strategy only works by sacrificing a thing that Hillary now maligns as eggheaded “economic theory” but what Sanders supporters see as coherence. 

AMANDA: We’re in the thick of primar-y silliness when a supporter of Bernie Sanders—Bernie Sanders!—feels entitled to accuse anyone of hyperbole. Not picking on the Bern, to be clear. Like his fellow career politicians, Bernie has a shtick that works for him. But glass houses, stones, all that.

And poor Hillary Clinton! Dinged repeatedly for an uninspiring nuts-and-bolts approach, only to get dinged again when she tries her hand at the same grandiose rhetoric her opponent is applauded for. She can’t win. And we wonder why so many women see their lives in hers.

Setting aside the debate over whether Hillary Clinton should be permitted the use of the over-simplified, revolutionary rhetoric her opponent is allowed by birthright, it’s quite clear to me that Clinton is arguing that Sanders’ single-minded focus on Wall Street isn’t going to be enough to deal with the nuanced problems of racism, sexism—all the -isms, really.

No need to blame Bill Clinton, or to treat Hillary like she’s an extension of her husband. (Though the way she’s treated as her husband’s puppet is a nice reminder to me why I will never get married.) Clinton picked this talking point up from anti-racism activists who have been critical of Sanders for his dodgyness on any race issue that can’t be reduced to “income inequality.”

David Freedlander of the Daily Beast interviewed black leaders from Sanders’ home state of Vermont and found that Sanders had a habit of “benign neglect” on any race-based issue that wasn’t about generic “income inequality.” Curtiss Reed Jr. of the Vermont Partnership for Fairness and Diversity told Freedlander that Sanders “was just really dismissive of anything that had to do with race and racism, saying that they didn’t have anything to do with the issues of income inequality.”

Under pressure from anti-racism activists, Sanders has gotten smarter about this sort of thing, but he still does things like dismiss reparations as a pipe dream. The fact that Sanders loves pipe dreams—like free college—when white voters are in the imagined group of recipients is not something that is unnoticed. Clinton, a politician, pounces. If Sanders wins the nomination, his supporters, as David Roberts of Vox said, “should get a thicker skin, quick,” because the Republicans aren’t going to be as gentle as Clinton.

MOE: If it felt a bit hyperbolic to identify Hillary’s true nemesis as “coherence,”

BREAKING UP WITH FOSSIL FUELS

2015 was the hottest year in recorded history. It was also the year world leaders convened in Paris to collectively address climate change, ultimately agreeing to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. That may sound like a big step but, as many point out, without concrete measures in place, the lofty plan will likely be torpedoned by the financial interests of coal, oil and gas corporations. The Paris climate deal may signal the world’s desire to act, but it will take radical efforts by policy leaders and activists on every continent to force it to do so.

Break Free 2016, a coalition of international, national and local organizations, from Greenpeace to 350.org to Bold Nebraska, is coordinating a wave of actions across the globe from May 7 to May 14. The week will include local actions and more than a dozen major protests “targeting some of the world’s most dangerous fossil fuel projects.” The goal? To make sure 80 percent of the Earth’s fossil fuels remain in the ground—which scientists believe will be necessary to prevent climate change of more than 2 degrees Celsius.

Details of U.S. actions will be posted on usa.breakfree2016.org.
well, it wasn't. The Clintonists don't want the electorate to make sense of the world—or to link cause and effect. If they did, they might begin to see breaking up massive unaccountable money syndicates as a vital step toward achieving racial tolerance and gender equality.

At some point between the financial crisis of 2008 and the rise of Occupy in 2011, Americans began to understand that predatory lending was the cornerstone of modern finance. Usurious interest rates, extortionate fees and vicious cycles of ever-inflating indebtedness were a phenomenon that united black retirees in Detroit with Mexican day laborers in Hollister, Calif.; underemployed Vassar grads with underemployed University of Phoenix grads; the evaporating coffers of Jefferson County, Ala., and Harvard's $36 billion endowment. The mechanics and fine print might differ case to case, but the business model was identical, needing two critical ingredients to thrive: a culture efficient at dehumanizing victims, and legal impunity.

First, at Washington Mutual—picked off for pennies on the dollar in 2008 by TBTF bank JPMorgan—subprime mortgage salesmen who didn't sell enough predatory negative-armorization mortgages were assigned “trainers” whose first words were, “Do not feel sorry for ‘these’ people.” At Wells Fargo, where mortgage executives called minorities “mud people” and “niggers,” salesmen were directed to solicit new customers at African-American churches. Sexual harassment was indisputably rampant in the industry. “Mortgage sluts” peopled a 2008 Business Week cover story. Is there a more vivid embodiment of rape culture than the photos of the 2010 Halloween party held by staffers of the Steven J. Baum foreclosure mill?

Second, no major financial institution is as singly responsible for the “mainstreaming” of predatory lending as Citigroup. No other institution has employed as many veterans of the Clinton administration. Merely listing the relevant names could fill the better part of a book, but here are three: Peter Orszag, Jack Lew and Michael Froman. By 2007, Citi’s balance sheet was the biggest on Wall Street—when you included all its off-the-books assets, in any case—and in 2008 Citi became the recipient of the single biggest bailout.

If any corporate monstrosity was worthy of a breakup, it was Citi. Celebrated analyst Meredith Whitney said so, FDIC chairman Sheila Bair said so, TARP overseer Elizabeth Warren said so and former Citi exec Sallie Krawcheck said as much after she was fired by (serial sex-discrimination lawsuit defendant) Vikram Pandit.

No one listened. Warren and Bair were marginalized—dismissed for failure to be seen as “team players” by the Clinton/Citi alums who infested the Obama White House. Nevertheless, a lot of powerful men came around, including Larry Summers and then (unbelievably) former Citi CEOs Sandy Weill and John Reed, both of whom wrote op-eds arguing that Glass-Steagall needed to be reinstated and their old bank broken up.

Hillary thinks otherwise—that we have not yet reached the hypothetical in which “they deserve it.” Could that be because Citi, in its current and apparently invincible state, is the second biggest donor to her campaign?

AMANDA: I was just sitting around thinking about how I’m going to miss Jeb Bush and his desire to convince us that Bill Clinton was president on 9/11, but I shouldn’t have worried! Now I get to enjoy Sanders’ supporters telling me that Hillary Clinton was president from 2000 to 2008, during which time I was under the impression she was the queen of Fillory. Why shouldn’t I vote for her now, seeing as she was the power behind Bush all that time? She is clearly a witch and she won't just know that you voted against her, but will secretly curse you with her sorceress powers.

The efforts to lull Clinton supporters...
into defending the “big banks” have failed, for good reason. There’s no evidence of a semi-secret conspiracy of Democrats that fucked up our economy out of the evilness of their traitorous hearts. Do they listen too much to people who are inside the industry? Sure. Is Larry Summers a dick? Absolutely. Do I think that Democrats got lulled into believing they could win over some Republican votes by embracing conservative deregulation schemes? The record shows they did. But I also think the Democrats, including Hillary Clinton, have embraced reining in Wall Street and protecting financial consumers. Read the White House summary of how effective the Dodd-Frank bill has been, which has included creating the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau in order to protect consumers from predatory banking practices. (Sanders fans might look into the role Elizabeth Warren played in that, because I’ve been assured that they really like her.) If Clinton had some secret agenda to undo all that, I doubt Barney Frank would be advising her on this front.

**Electoral Justice for Laquan McDonald**

On February 24, youth organizers disrupted a fundraiser at the City Club of Chicago for Cook County State’s Attorney Anita Alvarez, linking arms and blocking entry into the formidable building with a banner reading, “#ByeAnita.”

Alvarez is seeking a third term as Chicago’s top prosecutor. She won her last re-election campaign handily, but this November could be different. In the past four months, she has faced a chorus of calls to resign over the fatal police shooting of Laquan McDonald, which detractors believe she tried to hide from the public. In a sign of the growing power of the Black Lives Matter movement, activists have effectively turned the prosecutor’s race into a referendum on policing and criminal justice in Chicago.

They also helped propel the candidacy of a progressive challenger in the March 15 Democratic primary. Kim Foxx’s campaign slogan struck an unusual tone for the office: “It’s time to restore fairness and credibility to our criminal justice system.” In addition to her 12 years as an assistant state’s attorney (five under Alvarez), Foxx pointed to her own life experiences as qualifications for the job—she grew up in a Chicago public housing project and has been the victim of crime, as well as seen family members incarcerated.

After leaving the state’s attorney’s office in 2013, Foxx became the chief of staff for Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, a political foe of Alvarez. Preckwinkle’s advocacy helped launch Foxx’s campaign in summer 2015, which then gained momentum in the fallout from the Laquan McDonald scandal.

The results of the March 15 primary race were not yet known as In These Times went to press.

According to a February poll, 71 percent of registered Democrats in Cook County disapprove of how Alvarez handled McDonald’s October 2014 killing. She waited 13 months to file murder charges against Jason Van Dyke, the police officer who shot the 16-year-old teenager.

**Detroit Teachers ‘Sick’ It to Emergency Manager**

On February 29, education activists cheered as Darnell Earley officially stepped down from his position as emergency manager of Detroit Public Schools (DPS). His departure came after thousands of teachers staged rolling “sickouts” to protest his role as the unelected head of the school system.

Stikes by teachers and other municipal employees are illegal under Michigan law, but more than a dozen times this winter, groups of teachers called in sick to protest frozen wages, ballooning class sizes, decaying buildings and other conditions they say are the result of state-imposed austerity.

The largest such action, on January 20, forced the temporary closure of 88 of the district’s 104 schools. Photos shared by teachers of the hazardous conditions inside their classrooms—black mold, rodents and roaches—went viral.

Earley has an ignominious résumé: Before he began managing DPS in January 2015, he was the emergency manager of Flint, Mich., when the city infamously switched water supplies, eventually exposing its residents to lead-contaminated water.

Teachers say that Earley’s reign in Detroit, likewise, made a bad situation worse. The Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT), which filed suit against Earley and DPS in February, accused him of allowing the schools to “deteriorate to the point of crisis.”

While the union didn’t endorse the sickouts, its leaders put to good use the momentum created by the actions. In January, DFT successfully negotiated a letter of agreement with the school district on staff-meeting time limits, paid sick leave, and a joint labor-management committee.

Earley’s resignation, announced in early February, is a victory for the rank-and-file activists who organized the sickouts. But many say the larger problem is Michigan Governor Rick Snyder’s appointment of all-powerful emergency managers in cities like Detroit and Flint, which effectively disenfranchises citizens in largely black jurisdictions.

Teachers are still gearing up for a larger fight against a bankruptcy-style restructuring of Detroit’s schools that Snyder hopes to push through the state legislature. But they point to the success of the sickouts as a lesson in how to push back against state-imposed austerity: “Having none of the usual forms of democracy ... this is what we have to do,” says Nicole Conaway, a DPS teacher in the East English Village neighborhood. “Mass direct action.”
Kim Foxx is challenging state’s attorney Anita Alvarez in a race centered on Chicago police accountability.

Black teenager 16 times. A graphic dashcam video of the killing was kept under wraps for more than a year; its release in November 2015 triggered street protests and demands that Alvarez and other top officials resign.

Alvarez said in February that she didn’t “believe any mistakes were made.” But both Foxx and Donna Moore—a former federal and state prosecutor who also challenged Alvarez for the nomination—say they would have acted differently.

“The truth of the matter is she had determined he was a murderer and allowed him to go to work every day, to walk amongst us every day,” said Foxx in a February debate. Critics have asked whether the state’s attorney would have pressed charges at all had the city not been compelled by court order to release the video of McDonald’s killing.

Alvarez defends her actions, saying she was waiting for a federal investigation to conclude before pressing charges.

In a sign of shifting political winds, Foxx picked up key endorsements from Cook County’s Democratic Party and former Illinois Governor Pat Quinn, as well as both the Chicago Tribune and Chicago Sun-Times. Her campaign focused on diverting low-level offenders into treatment programs, reforming the juvenile justice system and prosecuting wage theft and other workplace abuses—positions that also won her an unprecedented endorsement from the Chicago Teachers Union, and the backing of other labor groups. Foxx also said she would appoint an outside prosecutor for all future police-involved shootings.

Alvarez continues to oppose this move, but has been quick to insist that she’s not afraid to go after law enforcement—her office has charged 96 police officers since 2008, according to a campaign commercial. Nevertheless, the McDonald case suggests “a relationship between the police and the state’s attorney where law enforcement is always right,” says Cook County commissioner and 2015 Chicago mayoral candidate Jesus “Chuy” Garcia, who endorsed Foxx in February.

In December 2015, Salon reported on a case in which Alvarez had refused to prosecute a police officer who admitted to committing perjury, vetoing decisions made by her subordinates and quashing further investigations. And some critics believe Alvarez deliberately bungled the prosecution of police officer Dante Servin, who walked free after he shot and killed 22-year-old Rekia Boyd while off duty in 2012.

Then there’s Chicago’s ignominious distinction as the nation’s wrongful conviction capital. Alvarez created a conviction integrity unit in 2012 that has reviewed more than 350 cases, vacating 13. But she has drawn fire for filing hefty
Worker Co-ops?
There’s an App for That

For many labor activists, “tech” has become a dirty word. While Silicon Valley extols the virtues of the “sharing economy,” critics argue that platforms like Uber and Airbnb allow investors to reap profits by circumventing labor law and ripping off workers.

But what if workers owned the apps? A new movement called “platform cooperativism” hopes to harness the power of tech to democratize the economy and advance labor rights.

In response to the proliferation of app-based services, some unions have begun trying to make inroads with Uber drivers and other gig workers. Platform cooperativism embraces a different principle, articulated by movement advocate and New School professor Trebor Scholz: “It’s too hard to fix what you do not own.” Instead, Scholz explained in a January overview of platform cooperativism, workers can embrace the kinds of technologies that have emerged from Silicon Valley and put them to use “with a different ownership model, adhering to democratic values.”

Platform cooperativism comprises a variety of businesses, ranging from media platforms like Stocksy (a cooperative that provides stock photography) to online marketplaces that hope to offer alternatives to tech-giant Amazon and its ilk. Though many of the businesses emerged independently of one another, they are united by common principles rooted in equality and transparency.

Some platforms are already proving that they can give traditional Internet companies a run for their money. Stocksy is a particularly successful example: Started in 2013, it has a collection of 500,000 photos and has paid out over $4 million to its 900 artist-members.

Here’s how it works: Publications that want to use an image from Stocksy pay a fee ranging from $10 –
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Stocksy has more than 500,000 photos—and 90 percent of the profits go to artists.

$500. Fifty percent of that goes directly to the photographer. That’s a much fairer commission than the 20 percent paid out by the corporate service Getty Images, according to photographer and Stocksy member Thomas Hawk. That’s not the only reason Hawk left Getty for Stocksy in 2013. “The exciting part,” he writes on his personal blog, is that “the members of Stocksy actually own the agency.” Stocksy reflects this by distributing 90 percent of its profits—which are handled separately from commissions—directly to artists.

Membership is automatic for all Stocksy photographers, and additional community members are carefully selected on the basis of what their work will add to the company. A staff of 25 is responsible for day-to-day business operations, and founders and advisers help make important business decisions ranging from pricing to community growth strategies.

All these groups participate in elections for Stocksy’s board, and can submit and vote on resolutions. Democracy also works in the other direction: As Stocksy photographer Kara Riley puts it, “before they make any decisions high up, they pose questions and let all of us members give our input … the ideas of the members end up being what happens in the company.”

While all platform co-ops adopt some form of member ownership, their models for democratic decision-making differ. Take, for instance, Berlin-based co-op Fairmondo, which aims to emulate digital marketplaces such as Amazon and eBay while promoting sustainable and fair-trade products. Membership is open to anyone who buys a €10 share in the company, and individuals can control multiple shares. But founder Felix Weth says that the maximum number of shares per person is capped at 2,500 and there is a strict “one member, one vote” rule to maintain internal democracy.

That deliberately prevents anyone from getting rich from Fairmondo. “We need to find a way to address the problem of inequality on our planet,” says Weth, “I don’t think it helps if we have businesses that are designed to make certain people very rich.”

Fairmondo’s vision of a more equitable society has attracted more than 10,000 users since 2013, who have flocked to the site to buy and sell goods ranging from ethically produced smartphones to fair-trade coffee. The company got there with the help of some of the largest crowdfunding drives Germany has seen, raising roughly €350,000 over the course of two campaigns in 2013 and 2014. Weth hopes that one day the company will be able to supplant traditional digital marketplaces, which he sees as corrupt and socially destructive.

But Weth acknowledges that growth is still a challenge for Fairmondo, which has had to make some tough personnel cuts in order to shore up finances. Crowdfunding has been a remarkably effective way of attracting members and capital, but Fairmondo will need to scale its business up dramatically if it is to cover costs, let alone compete with Amazon.

This points to a larger difficulty for platform cooperatives: They reject venture capital and typical private investors, and without traditional sources of startup money these businesses must create and adopt new models of financing. The music-streaming service Resonate (which is currently in development), for instance, may begin issuing a type of non-voting share to investors that the co-op can later buy back.

To truly transform the tech landscape, platform cooperatives will also have to expand into the low-wage service sector. The TransUnion Car Service is a good example: Launched last year in Newark, New Jersey, the company offers riders an Uber-like app but is owned by unionized drivers. San Francisco-based Loconomics, meanwhile, hopes to create an alternative to TaskRabbit, a sharing-economy giant that allows users to outsource miscellaneous tasks such as assembling IKEA furniture or doing the dishes. While “Rabbits” often lack job security and benefits, Loconomics will be owned by the service professionals who work on it and offer access to benefits and career development.

Advocates hope that the old platforms will be “deleted” as users embrace new, more equitable ones. Janelle Orsi, director of the Sustainable Economies Law Center, has a name for the end-goal of this process. Dislodging the corporate giants that control the tech industry at present would be “the opposite of an apocalypse,” she said at a November 2015 conference billed as a “coming out party for the cooperative Internet. It would be a “co-opalypse.”

—TOM LADENDORF
WHY HAS DONALD TRUMP BEEN SO SUCCESSFUL?
Matt Taibbi, in Rolling Stone, thinks he has the answer.
He writes, “Reporters have focused quite a lot on the crazy/race-baiting/nativist themes in Trump’s campaign.” Taibbi, though, will not be bamboozled: “These comprise a very small part of his usual presentation. His speeches increasingly are strikingly populist in their content.” Trump’s pitch, which Taibbi seems at least partially to accept: “He’s rich, he won’t owe anyone anything upon election, and therefore he won’t do what both Democratic and Republican politicians unfailingly do upon taking office, i.e. approve rotten/regressive policies that screw ordinary people.”
Taibbi should clean out his ears.
I attended the same Trump rally in Plymouth, N.H., and heard the crazy and the race-baiting and the nativist themes raining down like dirty dollar bills at a strip joint.
But leave aside that Mexicans and Syrians are also “ordinary people” who struggle in the modern economy. And that you can't trust anything Donald Trump says. No, the core insanity cuts much deeper. It’s an ignorance of a simple historical fact: Every fascist achieves and cements his power by pledging to rescue ordinary people from the depredations of economic elites. That’s how fascism works.
Read, for instance, this article from a Nazi-friendly website on “How Hitler Defied the Bankers”:
When Hitler came to power, Germany was hopelessly broke. … Germany had no choice but to succumb to debt slavery under international (mainly Jewish) bankers until 1933, when the National Socialists came to power. Hitler began a national credit program by devising a plan of public works that included flood control, repair of public buildings and private residences, and construction of new roads, bridges, canals and port facilities. … Within two years, the unemployment problem had been solved. … Germany’s economic freedom was short-lived; but it left several monuments, including the famous Autobahn, the world’s first extensive superhighway.
And, for what it’s worth, it’s true! Hitler built the Autobahn! He conquered inflation! (It’s not hard, if you can shoot people who raise prices.) Unemployment plummeted! You might even say that for “ordinary Germans” struggling in the modern economy, things got pretty good.
But guess what? Under fascism, economic protection for the goose accompanies dispossession of the gander. White people prosper in part because minorities suffer—whether, under Hitler, by taking away property from Jews, or as Herr Trump expects, by taking back “our” jobs from “them,” whether the them is immigrants or our supposedly duplicitous trading partners.
There’s even a sociological term for it: herrenvolk republicanism. We’ve had it here, too, if in milder form.
George Wallace said to William F. Buckley Jr. in 1968 that the state of Alabama “had five generations of people who didn’t go to school because there were no schools for black or white.” Then he became governor and—he claimed—turned Alabama into an educational paradise. Like all authoritarians, he lied: Education stayed plenty awful, especially for blacks in segregated schools.
And, like all authoritarians, the bedrock of his appeal was his hate. As one voter in Massachusetts asked Wallace’s aide Tom Turnipseed in 1968, “When Wallace is elected president he’s going to round up all the niggers and shoot them, isn’t he?” Turnipseed assured him, “We’re not going to shoot anybody.” To which the voter responded, “Well, I don’t know whether I’m for him or not.” Which sounds a whole lot like what Trump fans told The Nation’s Sasha Abramsky. “I’d give ‘em a choice,” said one un-cherrypicked voter, concerning Muslims in America. “A trench on one side or a ticket out of here.”
Build infrastructure, jail banksters: Hell, I’m for all that, too. It shouldn’t take electing thugs to do it. There’s a reason the saying “anti-Semitism is the socialism of fools” made so much sense in Weimar Germany: Socialism and barbarism can look very similar in their surface appeals. The real fools are the media sophisticates who don’t bother to look a bare inch underneath.
HOW IS IT THAT A 74-YEAR-OLD MAN HAS INSPIRED
the loyalty and devotion of thousands of twentysomethings? Aren’t millennials supposed to resent older people, seeing them as demanding “seniors” who have greedily attached themselves to the auricles and ventricles of every government-provided social service available and thus are gleefully and selfishly sucking their children and grandchildren dry? In 2012, former Republican Sen. Alan Simpson (then 81) infamously called older people “greedy geezers,” and numerous pundits have flogged this notion of generational warfare, with older people cast as the clear villains. Washington Post columnist Catherine Rampell, bemoaning college students’ “misdirected” activism around the need for more cultural sensitivity on campuses, suggested that young people focus on “one of the greatest injustices they face: the huge and growing intergenerational wealth transfers away from them and toward their parents and grandparents.” Insisting that “young people have been done wrong by their elders,” she deplored the “generous benefits that those older people have not paid for and never will.” Who will pick up the tab? Her answer: Millennials.

Another typical “warfare” story, in the conservative blog Hot Air, said older Americans are “content” to use their grandchildren as “ATMs.” So what gives with these same young people flocking in droves to the Sanders campaign? Sanders has tapped into the overwhelming sense of injury, frustration and anger at the toll that market fundamentalism has exacted on Americans, especially the young. And in defiance of the “greedy geezer” stereotype, Sanders personifies the fact that older people—the parents and grandparents of millennials—actually care deeply about the financial struggles of young people and know something about the ravages of market fundamentalism themselves. During the Great Depression and the post-WWII period, there was a general acceptance that the state has a responsibility to mitigate inequality, provide basic services and even out capitalism’s boom-bust cycle.

Older Americans saw the dismantling of that acceptance and the rise of free-market fundamentalism. What followed was an era of “trickle down” economics, efforts to limit or eliminate the government’s role in redistributing wealth, tax cuts for the wealthy, deregulation of corporations and of finance, and widespread privatization of things the government used to run, such as schools, prisons and hospitals.

To justify this, the mantra of market fundamentalism glorifies individual responsibility as if it were a sacrament. We allegedly create our own circumstances by the choices we make. There are no structural, institutional obstacles that might thwart such choices, and thus, no need for any notion of collective responsibility or the common good.

Millennials have been hit especially hard by this ideological shift. The massive defunding of public universities and federal grants and loans has led to the tripling of student loan debt since the 1990s. More than three-quarters of renters between the ages of 18 and 24 spend more than they earn every month, and they are racking up credit card debt at a faster rate than other age groups. One in 5 twentysomethings have more credit card debt than savings, and the usurious interest rates and late fees are more burdensome when you’re just starting out. At least 8 million didn’t have health insurance as of 2014.

So when Sanders says that “it’s time to make college tuition-free and debt-free,” that the big banks should be broken up, that health insurance is a human right, and that the minimum wage should be increased to $15 an hour, no wonder young people cheer for him, pack his rallies and donate to his cause. He may have lost Super Tuesday, but he won the youth vote. His relentless focus on income inequality has constructed an intergenerational bridge around a wholesale rejection of a government by elites, for elites. One of his many great contributions during the campaign has been to show that such a bridge can be built.

As Hillary Clinton moves closer to the nomination, she ignores this lesson at her peril. At stake is the overthrow of this bankrupt ideology, and the need to celebrate Sanders’ vision of a social solidarity that puts the lie to media-promoted generational “wars” and unites the young and the old around an emphatic repudiation of market fundamentalism.
No, We Can’t—Without a Revolution

“I BELIEVE THAT, AS HARD AS IT WILL BE, THE CHANGE we need is coming, because I’ve seen it, because I’ve lived it.”

“We can seize this future together.”

“If you are willing to work with me ... then I promise you change will come.”

President Barack Obama said these things on the campaign trail in 2008 and 2012. His stance didn’t waver; his hope didn’t crumble. President Obama truly believed in “Yes, we can.” And he brought us with him.

He brought us as far as he could, anyway.

Obama believed we would close Guantanamo Bay; he believed we could make college affordable. He believed he could close the tax loopholes that benefit huge corporations at the expense of individuals, that he could push through universal healthcare with lower premiums.

Obama believed we could do all of these things within the system we gave him. He thought he could create change by working inside the establishment, changing the policy that sits atop the current structure of our democracy.

Obama believed in us, as we are. He was a young candidate. His tenure in politics had been relatively short. He had a revitalizing naïveté about him. “Yes, we can” stood for: Yes, we can make our politics work. Yes, we can work inside this box to make them happen together.

It was a powerful message, and it was necessary to pave the way for Bernie Sanders’ message, which is, “No, we can’t. Unless we transform the system.”

Sanders, unlike Obama, is bluntly calling for a political revolution. He is not working around the faults in our system, but laying them bare. The type of change Sanders is using to woo voters doesn’t stay inside our current political box. It is appealing because it tosses that box in the dumpster. And it would not have resonated without Obama’s “Yes, we can” going first and showing us the limits of what is possible within our current constraints.

We look back at that refrain and think, “Well, we tried.” We tried, and we’ve been in gridlock financially and politically for seven years. But we tried. The voter base that leans progressive now has viable proof that we have done everything we can within our system. Congress is in such gridlock that Republican leaders are refusing to hear nominations for a Supreme Court Justice. Because of this, voters are ready for the bold statement, “No, we can’t.”

Bernie Sanders has surprised the country and the mainstream media with his persistent popularity, shooting up from “protest candidate” (as rival Martin O’Malley initially dismissed him) to Hillary Clinton’s only threat.

Having been in politics for decades upon decades, Sanders has no illusions about the presidency or the Congress. As he said on CNN back in 2012:

I think that many people have the mistaken impression that Congress regulates Wall Street. ... The real truth is that Wall Street regulates Congress.

He reiterated that sentiment in a Democratic debate in October 2015:

We need to raise the public consciousness. We need the American people to know what's going on in Washington in a way that today they do not know.

Bernie Sanders came to the campaign trail effectively screaming, “No, we can’t.” No, we can’t—unless we break the corporate chokehold on our democracy. No, we can’t—unless we muster a popular uprising strong enough to transform the structure of our government.

If voters heed this call, if we elect Bernie Sanders as our next president, we know it must also go beyond “the Bern.” A president cannot overthrow core tenets of rotten policy without the political muscle of Congress. As we gear up to vote, we must remember that we’re voting not for one day, or for one year. We tried to let a president do it by himself. This time, we need to give the president not only the White House but a Congress to work with. Because no, we can’t. Not right now.

Sanders is of course no shoo-in for the White House, or even the nomination. But even if we get a President Clinton (or, heaven forbid, a President Trump), we’ve acknowledged how deep our problems run and how we indeed need nothing short of a political revolution.
THE CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSION ON REPARATIONS for African Americans was instigated by Ta-Nehisi Coates in an award-winning essay in the June 2014 issue of The Atlantic. Reparations were also the most salient recommendation of a United Nations working group that recently toured the United States to assess the condition of black America. At the end of its fact-finding mission, the group concluded it was “extremely concerned about the human rights situation of African Americans.”

The United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent was established in 2002. The group delivered its assessment at a January 29 news conference in Washington, D.C., following an 11-day tour that included stops in Baltimore, Chicago, New York City and Jackson, Miss., where the delegation met with community organizers, law enforcement officials and victims of police violence.

Chairperson Mireille Fanon-Mendès France, a French human rights activist (and daughter of the writer and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon) summed up the working group’s preliminary findings: “Despite substantial changes since the end of the enforcement of Jim Crow and the fight for civil rights, ideology ensuring the domination of one group over another continues to negatively impact the civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights of African Americans.”

I spoke with Mendès France during the group’s visit to Chicago. She expressed disappointment at finding so little progress on racial issues. “These police killings, especially the case of Eric Garner and Laquan McDonald, remind me of the lynchings of black men in the South,” she said. “It’s shocking that these kinds of abuses persist.”

She added that the history of the United States makes it obvious that the legacy of enslavement is an ongoing problem for black Americans, and that “the need for reparatory justice is very apparent to anyone who really cares to look.” For example, the fact that American policing evolved partially from slave patrols helps explain the anti-black attitudes endemic to police departments and other institutions with a similar paternity.

The Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign was the primary organizer of the Chicago visit, with help from groups like the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N’COBRA), The National Conference of Black Lawyers and Fearless Leading by the Youth. People traveled from St. Louis, Ferguson, Flint, Madison and Minneapolis to testify before the U.N. group on topics that ranged from employment discrimination and the wide-scale closures of majority-black schools in Chicago, to police brutality.

Noting the “the excessive control and supervision targeting all levels of [black] life” and the “persistent gap in almost all the human development indicators, such as life expectancy, income and wealth, level of education and even food security,” the group concluded: “Past injustices and crimes against African Americans need to be addressed with reparatory justice.”

The group also recommended erecting monuments, markers and memorials to acknowledge that “the transatlantic slave trade was a crime against humanity,” accompanied by education and acts of reconciliation. In addition, it suggested establishing a national human rights commission with a division dedicated to monitoring the rights of African Americans, repealing all state laws restricting voting rights, and passing all pending criminal justice reform legislation, as well as the H.R. 40 bill for a Commission to Study Reparations Proposals for African Americans Act. Since 1989, at the start of every Congress, Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) has fruitlessly re-introduced this legislation to acknowledge slavery and racial discrimination, study their impact and propose remedies. H.R. 40 is numbered in recognition of the unfulfilled promise to freed slaves of “40 acres and a mule.”

The group’s findings will be presented in a report to the U.N. Human Rights Council in September. The information will then be grist for whatever mill that best uses it. Past delegations’ reports on Ecuador, Brazil, Panama, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Sweden and the Netherlands have influenced the national discourse. At the very least, this report will boost the argument of reparations advocates.
In our Hillary vs. Bernie roundtable last July—oh, what a faraway, innocent time July was—I was aware that I was making nice rather than making my case. My reticence was due to a fear that I voiced at the end of the conversation: that “Sanders vs. Clinton will become ugly, and we’re going to get to the finish line unable to get behind the nominee, and then I am going to wake up one day and Ted Cruz will be president.”

Now, the ugliness has arrived. So here comes my full-throated case for Hillary Clinton for president of the United States.

First, it is impossible to analyze Clinton—her policies, her career path, her hair—without understanding how gender bias operates. Bias plays a role in all of our reactions, no matter how feminist we are. As progressives, it is our duty to resist these stereotypes, and, if we are journalists, to help our readers understand how gender bias operates at an unconscious level.

When you hear that Hillary Clinton is unlikable, be aware of the study that shows competent women are generally seen as unlikable; when you hear that Hillary Clinton is dishonest, know that this same study shows women in power are generally seen as dishonest. And know that when the same imaginary job candidate is presented to two groups, with the only difference being a male or female name at the top of the résumé, the female candidate is seen as less trustworthy than the man. In each study, these biased reactions were found in both women and men.

And realize that when women seek power—for example, by running for the nation’s highest office—a Yale study reports that “participants experienced feelings of moral outrage (i.e. contempt, anger, and/or disgust) towards them” and that “women were just as likely as men to have negative reactions.” In the very same Yale study, when “participants saw male politicians as power-seeking, they also saw them as having greater agency (e.g. being more assertive, stronger and tougher) and greater competence.”

That is not to say that there cannot be specific, convincing arguments against Hillary Clinton, or that there are not arguments against her. It is to say that people who criticize Hillary Clinton, especially from the Left, should be aware of how these stereotypes may distort our perceptions, and how we can frame criticisms without feeding into the very real misogyny that has dogged Clinton throughout her career—an antipathy once expressed in a “Hillary Clinton dismemberment doll,” complete with detachable limbs.

Once one cuts through that misogyny, one is forced to confront the reason the GOP has fostered hatred against her: For much of the early portions of Clinton’s career, beginning when she arrived on the national stage in 1992, Hillary Clinton was presumed by the Right (and many Democrats) to be too far left to be in politics. She was Bill Clinton’s left-wing liability, a Saul-Alinsky-hugging, Children’s-Defense-Fund-working, non-cookie-baking,
mouthy feminist, attacked on the stage of the Republican National Convention for supporting "radical feminism" and "homosexual rights."

It was in part because of this hatred that Hillary Clinton became the person we know today: a candidate defined by her caution and her frustrating self-contradictions, seemingly torn between challenging the power structure and gaining enough credibility within that power structure to survive. Clinton believes that you need to be in the system in order to change the system, and I think that is true. Clinton's path has given her tremendous impact, and in many ways, her politics—left sympathies combined with a survivor's instinct for using the system, and a lawyer's love of the fine detail—are reminiscent of Obama's. While leftists have critiques of Obama, too, I think he's been the best president in my lifetime, which started with Reagan. I also remember that second Bush a little too well to ever believe that the two parties are "basically the same" (though I have been told this many times).

When I hear claims about Hillary Clinton, the money-grubbing shill for Wall Street who thinks just like a Republican, I don't recognize the woman who once snapped at her husband for not fighting hard enough for universal healthcare, telling him, “You weren't elected to do Wall Street economics.” Similarly, I see no shifty dishonesty in the Hillary Clinton who, in 2005, pushed for a 9/11-style commission to investigate the Bush administration's failure to respond to Hurricane Katrina, and who today is the woman making the administrative negligence in Flint, Mich., central to her campaign.

Similarly, the Hillary Clinton who traveled to Beijing in 1995 against the wishes of her husband's administration to declare that "women's rights are human rights" is entirely recognizable as the Secretary of State who helped to create the Office of Global Women's Issues and declared that “the United States must be an unequivocal and unwavering voice in support of women's rights in every country on every continent.” In short, this is the same Hillary Clinton who is today stressing equal pay for women as a racial justice issue, given that the women who are most penalized by the pay gap are black women and Latinas.

And the Hillary Clinton who is "Republican lite,” “more like Reagan than FDR” and "to the right of Nixon" does not seem remotely the same Clinton whose votes aligned with Sen. Bernie Sanders' 93 percent of the time during the two years they overlapped in the Senate. They famously parted ways on the 2002 decision to authorize the war in Iraq—a vote that Clinton acknowledges was a mistake. That doesn't undo the war, or make her right in retrospect, and it doesn't even defuse the idea that she voted for the war specifically to protect her reputation; many Democratic politicians with presidential aspirations, from John Kerry to Joe Biden, made that same vote. I respect that for a serious and thoughtful person, the Iraq vote might rule Clinton out; it ruled her out for me in 2008. But this is not 2008, and this year, her opponent's lack of interest or expertise in foreign policy worries me more than her record. We got into Iraq—a quagmire that has lasted, literally, for my entire adult life—not only because of U.S. interventionism, but because the commander in chief didn’t understand the region well enough to know how profoundly we would destabilize it, or how that would trap us in a conflict that would last for generations. I may not always agree with Clinton, but at least I believe she knows her stuff.

So, yes. There are problems with her record, and I recognize them. I could also criticize Sanders. I could go on about, for instance, his tendency to bring every single question back to economic inequality (an outdated, single-axis analysis that, as Andrea Plaid noted in these pages, is as myopic as #whitefeminists trying to make everything "all about gender"). But I won't.

I want to talk about the woman who has survived 25 years of misogynist hatred and GOP attacks, and came out unbroken and unbowed. I want to talk about the woman who, knowing full well how bad it gets, signed up for anywhere between a few months to another decade of hideous treatment. It doesn't hurt that she was the first candidate to advocate overturning the Hyde Amendment on the campaign trail, or that she has been vocal and insistent on equal pay and reproductive rights, or that she has responded to pressure for her campaign to demonstrate a serious commitment to racial justice by reaching out to women affected by police brutality and giving lengthy public statements about the need for white people to recognize their own privilege and take part in resisting and ending racism.

I do not believe she would do all this if she simply wanted personal power. We've seen what a candidate who wants personal power looks like: Donald Trump. If you are a narcissist, ways exist to make people like you; a lifelong career as a highly visible feminist is, I am a progressive. I like Hillary Clinton and I do not feel remotely conflicted. The qualities she's exhibited over her long career—practicality, resilience, the ability to use the system to improve the lives of the least powerful within it, the ability, above all, to survive—are not just admirable. They're exactly what progressives need if we are to carry the White House.
When Barack Obama ran for president in 2008, he marshaled his supporters under the banners of “change” and “hope.” “Change We Can Believe In” was the 2008 campaign slogan. “Hope,” the one-word promise of the Obama presidency.

For many, that hoped-for change fell short. In 2009, President Obama appointed Wall Street friendly Timothy Geithner to succeed Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, a former chair and CEO of Goldman Sachs. Geithner had been head of the New York Federal Reserve and was a protégé of Robert Rubin, the former co-chair of Goldman Sachs and Treasury secretary in the Clinton administration. The disillusionment continued with the 2013, when Obama appointed Wall Street attorney Mary Jo White to head the Securities and Exchange Commission, in which capacity she (inspired perhaps by Citizens United) decided not to require all publicly registered corporations to make their political donations public.

Today, Bernie Sanders’ supporters are rallying behind the banner of “A Future to Believe In”—a future that Sanders is leading a “political revolution” to create. This call to revolution is being endorsed by an overwhelming majority of Democratic voters under the age of 30. And that is shaking up a Democratic establishment that has put its chips on Hillary Clinton.

Clinton is a candidate who, from 2013 to 2015, earned $2.9 million by giving 12 speeches to financial institutions, including Bank of America, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Deutsche Bank, UBS and Ameriprise. We will never know what she said to those banking industry executives, as she is refusing to release the transcripts of any of her private speeches to corporate interests. It’s doubtful, however, that she called for political revolution.

Similarly, Clinton has yet to fully explain why she actively supported the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, aka “welfare reform,” that President Bill Clinton triangulated through the Republican House and Senate in 1996.

When Clinton graduated from law school, she went to work—as she never fails to mention—for Marian Wright Edelman at the Children’s Defense Fund, an anti-poverty nonprofit in Washington, D.C., that Edelman founded in 1973. When Bill Clinton moved into the White House, he appointed Edelman’s husband, Peter, assistant secretary for planning and evaluation at the Department of Health and Human Services. After Bill Clinton signed the landmark welfare reform bill, Peter Edelman resigned in protest. As he explained in an Atlantic article titled “The Worst Thing Bill Clinton Has Done”:

The bill that President Clinton signed is not welfare reform. It does not promote work effectively, and it will hurt millions of poor children by the time it is fully implemented. What’s more, it bars hundreds of thousands of legal immigrants—including many who have worked in the United States
for decades and paid a considerable amount in Social Security and income taxes—from receiving disability and old-age assistance and food stamps, and reduces food-stamp assistance for millions of children in working families.

Like the $675,000 in speaking fees from Goldman Sachs, Hillary Clinton’s support for welfare reform has become a campaign issue. Sanders, who voted against the bill, said while campaigning in South Carolina:

What welfare reform did, in my view, was to go after some of the weakest and most vulnerable people in this country. And, during that period, I spoke out against so-called welfare reform because I thought it was scapegoating people who were helpless, people who were very, very vulnerable. Secretary Clinton at that time had a very different position on welfare reform—strongly supported it and worked hard to round up votes for its passage.

Clinton is running on the slogan “fighting for us.” But that raises a question: Who is the “us” she is fighting for?

Is it the party of Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chairperson Debbie Wasserman Schultz? The Florida congresswoman is a member of the “New Democratic Coalition,” the congressional affiliate of the pro-corporate Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), which disbanded in 2011. To no one’s surprise, she announced in March that she was co-sponsoring legislation that would eviscerate the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau’s planned regulation of the predatory pay-day loan industry.

Wasserman Schultz has told Politico that she and Clinton have “a special relationship.” And her favoritism toward Clinton during the campaign has riled some of her fellow committee members. After all, the DNC charter charges the chairperson with exercising “impartiality and evenhandedness as between the presidential candidates and campaigns,” a task at which Wasserman Schultz has failed.

This failure is most visible in her decision to schedule only six Democratic debates, three of them on weekends when the least number of people would see them—a move calculated to appease the Clinton campaign, which had argued against even six debates. (In 2008, there were 26.)

When DNC Vice Chair Tulsi Gabbard, a U.S. representative from Hawaii, criticized the lack of debates and the way the decision was made, Wasserman Schultz responded by revoking Gabbard’s invitation to attend the CNN debate in Nevada in October 2015.

In response, DNC Vice Chair R.T. Rybak, the former mayor of Minneapolis, went on the record: "The person who is leading us is not leading us." Massachusetts Democratic Party Vice Chair Deb Kozikowski accused Wasserman Schultz of "establishing a full-fledged dictatorship at the DNC."

On July 28, either Sanders or Clinton will give an acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia. The next day, Wasserman Schultz will be tasked with asking their supporters to come together under the big tent of the Democratic Party. Will they heed her call?

Surely, Clinton’s supporters would vote for a Sanders presidency. But would Sanders’ political revolutionaries be willing to brook political compromise and make common cause with those with whom they differ on issues like single-payer healthcare, breaking up banks like Goldman Sachs, trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, and the bloated size of the Defense Department budget? Would they be willing to vote for Clinton?

Could good, principled people be dumb enough not to? Look no further than the 2000 candidacy of Ralph Nader, which was embraced by many on the Left who saw no difference between Al Gore and George W. Bush, and consequently had no problem casting a vote for Nader—which had the same effect as abstaining and thus passively voting for Bush.

Having a politics that makes the perfect the enemy of the good or holding to the silly notion that things must get worse before they can get better, what the French call le mal politique, are both well-traveled dead ends.

As MoveOn put it when announcing its endorsement of Sanders, supporters of both Clinton and Sanders share the common goal of helping “the Democratic nominee win and keep a Republican out of the White House in November.”

But is the tent big enough to ensure everyone inside is a happy camper? Sanders is thinking long-term. Maybe he will win the nomination. Maybe he will not. The nomination is not his end game.

Sanders has made no secret of his political agenda. Speaking to supporters in Essex Junction, Vt., on Super Tuesday, he said:

This campaign is not just about electing a president. It’s about transforming America. It is about making this great country the nation that we know it has the potential to be. It is about dealing with some unpleasant truths that exist in America today and having the guts to confront those truths. … We are not going to allow billionaires and the super PACs to destroy American democracy.

How receptive will the Democratic Party establishment be? Will they open their arms to legions of young people who have no compunction talking about democratic socialism, breaking up the banks and dismantling the health insurance industry?

Or will we all get trumped?
Is Your Water Worse Than Flint’s?

Our nation’s water crisis requires radical solutions

BY LAURA ORLANDO

Flint residents knew there was a serious problem with their water when it came out of the tap brown and foul-smelling after the city of Flint changed its source from Lake Huron to the Flint River two years ago. They didn’t know, however, that lead levels were so high that the Environmental Protection Agency could classify it as hazardous waste. It took Michigan Republican Gov. Rick Snyder and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality more than 17 months to acknowledge the problem. As a result, tens of thousands of Flint residents have been—and continue to be—poisoned.

The names of the people who made the decisions behind the poisoning are known. Snyder set the wheels in motion with a scheme that sacrificed the health of the people of Flint on the altar of austerity. In 2011, he ended public oversight by appointing his own man—an “emergency manager”—to cut costs and run the city. Flint went through a series of four emergency managers in as many years. When the extent of poisoning was known, Snyder did nothing. He failed to warn people against drinking the water and he failed to provide a safe alternative.

It’s infuriating. But anger is not action. What can we do to prevent the next municipal drinking water disaster? It is already here, flowing into the water glasses of millions of Americans. Chicago, Philadelphia and hundreds of other cities with old pipes have a lead problem. And that’s just the start of the municipal water pollution crisis. In most of the country, once-clean drinking water...
sources are now profoundly polluted—by treated and untreated sewage, by chemical-intensive agriculture, by waste from confined animal feeding operations and by industrial discharges. Even in Flint, the story begins not with lead pipes but with failed attempts to “treat” the source of the city water supply: the open sewer that is the Flint River.

Pipes and fixtures can be replaced, drinking supply either from industrial or wastewater-treatment discharges or, more commonly, because it leaches out of lead pipes, solders and brass fixtures in the distribution network.

Some conditions make the lead leach faster. This is what happened in Flint when, under the control of an emergency manager, the city switched its water source from Lake Huron to the Flint River and then added chemicals that made the situation worse.

It’s not that the Flint River has elevated levels of lead in it. The trouble—besides the high bacteria levels and untold number of harmful chemicals—is that its water is corrosive. Depending on the rainfall conditions at the time of measurement, as much as half of the river is made up of wastewater from the city’s sewage treatment plant. Before it’s released into the river, the wastewater is treated with chlorine.

Pulling drinking water from a river of treated sewage is not unusual. A 1980 EPA study (the most recent one conducted) indicated that more than 24 major public water utilities got their water from rivers in which sewage treatment plant discharges constituted over 50 percent of the flow during low-flow conditions. In 1985, there were about 6,700 municipal wastewater treatment plants. Since then, an additional 10,000 have been built, which collectively disgorge 33,657 million gallons per day of effluent into rivers, lakes, streams and oceans. To give you an idea of how that compares to public water use, 23,800 million gallons per day are used for drinking water, landscaping, toilets, showers and sinks, and another 18,200 million gallons per day go to industry and commercial businesses.

The Flint sewage treatment plant, located on the banks of the Flint River, keeps 20,000 pounds of chlorine on hand. The wastewater leaving the plant—which averages 32 million gallons per day, but can be as high as 75 million gallons per day—is chlorinated before being dumped into the Flint River.

Disinfecting wastewater with chlorine is a common practice in wastewater treatment that helps the effluent stay below regulatory levels for coliforms—an indicator of fecal contamination. (This does not mean the Flint River is without coliform bacteria. Tests published by the city of Flint show high coliform levels in the river. Sewage treatment overflows, leaks and illegal sewer pipes dumping into the river could be the cause of this.)

Adding chlorine to water is an effective way to dramatically reduce pathogenic bacteria. But chlorine solves one problem only to create another: It helps
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create the chemical conditions that free up lead from pipes, solders and fixtures. The city could have lessened the corrosion by adding a corrosion inhibitor, such as orthophosphate, to the water—a measure that would have cost just $100 a day—but chose not to.

However, the city had another problem that couldn't be so easily ignored. Chlorine mixed with water creates a class of chemicals called disinfection byproducts (DBPs). There is epidemiological evidence of a close relationship between DBPs and cancer. The EPA regulates just four of the more than 500 known DBPs, one of which, trihalomethanes (THMs), was already in the Flint River at concentrations in violation of EPA drinking water standards. The city needed to lower bacteria levels in its water, but couldn't add more chlorine without raising concentrations of THMs, so it switched to chloramine (chlorine plus ammonia), which solves the problem of THMs but leaches lead even faster than chlorine. (Chloramine also creates its own DBPs, but these are not regulated.)

Chloramine’s highly corrosive effects are well-documented. In 2001, after a switch from chlorine to chloramine, tests showed Washington, D.C., water was leaching lead from the distribution system. Civil engineering professor Marc Edwards of Virginia Tech, an expert on water treatment, sounded the alarm. Just like the whistleblowers in Flint, the municipality and the EPA ignored him. It took two years for the D.C. water authority to notify the public about high lead levels in the water. Then the city began partial lead pipe replacement—a solution that has been shown to, counterproductively, “result in significantly elevated levels of lead in tap water ... for weeks and months,” as EPA chemist Michael Schock told Environmental Health Perspectives in 2010. (Scientists are still trying to figure out why this happens.)

The D.C. case was widely publicized. But if the city of Flint was to continue using Flint River water, it had to address the immediate problem of the cancer-causing THMs, the chlorine by-products. So the city made the switch from chlorine to chloramine.

Flint, like all cities in the United States with pipes over 30 years old, has lead in its distribution system. The same story of chloramine corrosion unfolded in Flint as it had in D.C. In summer 2015, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, a Flint-based pediatrician, got a tip from a friend at the EPA that Flint might have a leaching problem, and began studying hospital blood samples. A paper she co-authored in the February 2016 issue of American Journal of Public Health showed that incidence of elevated blood lead levels in Flint children doubled, and in some neighborhoods nearly tripled, after the city began using water from the Flint River.

**Trickle-down poisoning**

Water distribution pipes in the United States were initially made of wood, then iron, then lead. Lead pipes, first manufactured in the mid-1800s, had almost completely displaced iron by the turn of the 20th century—they lasted longer and were easier to work with. But lead is also poisonous, especially to children, who absorb more lead than adults and are more susceptible to its irreversible health effects, such as nerve and brain damage.

It didn’t take long for press accounts of lead poisoning to surface. In 1890, the Massachusetts State Board of Health advised the state’s cities and towns to avoid the use of lead pipes. By the 1920s, cities across the country had banned them. But the lead mining and manufacturing industries pushed back, establishing the Lead Industries Association in 1928, which aggressively advocated for the continued use of lead solder and pipes. Against the mountains of data on illnesses and deaths, industry prevailed. It wasn’t until 1986 that federal regulations banned lead in new drinking water distribution systems.

But much of the old lead piping still remains. In the post-Reagan era, local governments pay for 95 percent of sewer infrastructure and 99 percent of public water infrastructure. Municipalities with money are slowly replacing pipes and investing in their water supply systems. The city of Madison spent $19.4 million to replace its lead pipes over an 11-year period, beginning in 2001. Flint, one of the most economically depressed cities in America, couldn’t afford new pipes. Reaganomics failed cities like Flint. Today, the city has 8,000 poisoned children to show for it.
EPA gone MIA

Where is the EPA in all of this? Eviscerated. It started when Reagan took office in 1981 and appointed Anne Gorsuch, a Colorado state representative who vocally opposed federal regulation of energy and the environment, as administrator. She cut the budget by 22 percent, hired people representing industry while firing long-time EPA staff, relaxed existing regulations and resisted new ones. She was cited for contempt of Congress in her involvement in the misuse of over a billion dollars in Superfund money. Her deputy, Rita Lavelle, went to jail over the scandal. The agency has been under assault by industry-friendly Democrats and Republicans ever since.

Current drinking water regulation has little to do with the realities of what is actually in our drinking water. Like all chemical regulation in the United States, regulatory responses happen—if at all—decades after health threats are documented. Regulators turn a blind eye to problems that can only be remedied through radical changes in how we do things (for example, where we source our drinking water or how we grow our food). As a result, drinking water regulations are inadequate, and those on the books are not being competently monitored or properly enforced.

Regulations to protect public health are set within the boundaries of what water treatment plants can do to address the many toxins in public drinking water supplies, like perfluorinated chemicals, herbicides, lead and DBPs. Most municipal water departments in the United States work very hard to keep the water coming out of the tap as safe as possible, but they do not have the authority or money to change pipes and fixtures or stop the more than 23 billion pounds of toxic chemicals generated annually by U.S. industry from entering their water supplies. The federal rules are meant to accommodate those limitations: Look at a few things, don’t look at many others, and set the thresholds at levels the treatment plant operators can consistently meet.

The stated regulatory goal for lead in drinking water is zero, but since the EPA doesn’t think water treatment authorities can meet this level, it set the acceptable concentration at 15 parts per billion. Test below that and you are not in violation of the drinking water regulations, but you are still poisoning children.

In Kirkwood, Mo., a leafy suburb of St. Louis that gets its drinking water from the Missouri River, people who drink tap water are drinking 2,4-D and atrazine—carcinogenic herbicides applied on farms located in the river’s watershed—every day. “Safe” is a moving target in the water business, though your body has some fixed ideas about it.

So who is tasked with protecting the public water supply? The EPA’s Office of Water oversees two deeply troubled divisions—the Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water (OGWWDW) and the Office of Wastewater Management (OWM)—both of which act to undermine U.S. drinking water safety. The Office of Water’s obfuscation, arrogance and anti-science orientation is documented by David Lewis in the book Science For Sale. When a California farmer questioned the EPA’s decision to allow disposal of sewage sludge on farms and public lands, OWM chemist Alan Rubin reportedly harassed her, writing in a note to her, “Ask not for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee!”

The Office of Water is responsible for “biosolids”: sewage sludge that is dried or otherwise “treated.” The word biosolids was coined as part of a public relations effort to rebrand sewage sludge, a product of wastewater treatment, as safe for disposal on farmland. Hundreds of peer-reviewed papers show its toxicity, but the OWM continues to promote its use on farms, public land and in sludge-containing “compost,” which is sold at Home Depot and other garden supply centers.

Like the Lead Industries Association’s adamant support for lead pipes in the face of evidence of harm, the OWM uses every trick in the PR handbook to support the disposal of sewage sludge on farms and gardens. Why? The same reason Flint’s water was poisoned: It saves municipalities money to dump sludge on land rather than treat it as a hazardous waste.

Marc Edwards, the Virginia Tech professor who studied D.C.’s water, wrote in a blog post on January 22, “When we exposed cheating in Washington D.C., New Orleans, Durham and elsewhere, OGWWDW officials stabbed us in the back, and supported wrongdoers in every single case.”
We might begin cleaning up our water by cleaning house at the EPA. Departments like the Office of Water are often controlled by the industries they’re meant to regulate. Lock the revolving doors and give voice to the people who really care about environmental protection. Build a culture in the U.S.—and in the EPA—that supports biocompatible practices: chemicals and techniques that are in harmony with life. The developing field of “green chemistry” is looking for ways to do just this; but we need the public will and the policies to help put these ideas into practice.

Pollution is everywhere. Where do we start? How about the pollution sink for our discarded human and chemical wastes: the sewer. The more than 85,000 chemicals we use daily in our homes, hospitals and industries find their way to the sewer, making wastewater treatment plants sentinels for harm.

Go up the sewer pipe to stop toxic discharges. Then rethink the entire sewer juggernaut. It’s only 150 years old. We don’t use horses anymore to carry our goods into the city, maybe we should stop using water to carry our wastes out.

Privatization: The wrong solution

Of course, a systemic approach would involve fundamental changes that corporate capitalism will resist. Why not control the conversation—and the assets—by owning the water? In a 2007 paper, University of Minnesota sociologist Michael Goldman explained how the World Bank has changed the discourse on water privatization from nonexistent to the global status quo. Today, a country cannot get a World Bank loan unless it submits a plan for privatizing its water system. In 2008, Goldman Sachs called water “the petroleum for the next century” and estimated that it is a $425 billion “industry.”

Here in the United States, a Wisconsin bill was defeated earlier this year that would have made it easier to privatize water services. It was introduced at the request of Aqua America, a Pennsylvania company that owns water utilities in eight states.

Privatization could be on the horizon for Flint. The city went through what was essentially a dry run when citizen oversight was removed. Things didn’t work out so well. But at the right price, a private corporation might step forward to “rescue” the failed government effort.

The privatization narrative goes like this: The municipality fails at providing clean water in the necessary quantity, so the water service—along with its infrastructure—is sold, often at yard sale prices, to a private company. But the failure of the municipal water system was caused by the same people selling off the water authority. The best-managed utilities have strong citizen oversight and an administration acting for the public good.

We’ve been down this road before. Private water companies date back to at least 1652, when “The Water Works Company” incorporated in Massachusetts. It is not a new idea, but it is one that has failed to provide safe and plentiful water to the public. Private companies come and go. They also are not compelled to provide services to those who cannot pay. The best example of a water privatization failure is in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Protests erupted in 2000 when the government privatized the city’s water, selling it to a private consortium dominated by an American company, Bechtel, and the cost of water skyrocketed. One person was killed and after three months of violence, Bechtel was sent packing and the privatization was reversed.

For inspiration on how to demand investment in public water, we can look to 19th-century Boston. In his 1826 inaugural address, Mayor Josiah Quincy III, namesake of Boston’s Quincy Market, said this about the city’s then-private drinking water:

If there be any privilege which a city ought to reserve exclusively in its own hands, and under its own control, it is that of supplying itself with water. ... No private capitalists will engage in such an enterprise without at least a rational expectation of profit. Besides, it being an article of the first necessity, and on its free use so much of health as well as comfort depends, every city should reserve in its own power the means, unrestrained, of encouraging its use, by reducing as fast as possible, the cost of obtaining it, not only to the poor but to all classes of the community.

Shortly after Quincy’s son, Josiah Quincy, Jr., became mayor of Boston in 1846, the city’s water became public.

The antidote to toxins

Unimaginable quantities of toxins, in immeasurable combinations, have become part of our environment and part of us. Chronic disease is the leading cause of death and disability in the United States and accounts for 86 percent of our healthcare costs.

One of the illnesses seems to be political paralysis. Sandra Steingraber, in her book *Raising Elijah*, addresses the subject of “well-informed futility”:

Ironically, the more knowledgeable we are about such a problem, the more we are filled with paralyzing futility. Futility, in turn, forestalls action. But action is

Protests erupted in 2000 in Cochabamba, Bolivia, when the government privatized the city’s water and the cost of water skyrocketed.
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exactly what is necessary to overcome futility. Just down the street from well-informed futility resides denial. ... In the face of knowledge too upsetting to bear, there is nothing to do but look away.

Her antidote to futility and denial? “To rise up in the face of the terrible knowledge and do something.” In other words, to act like “a member of the French Resistance.”

Since Flint, there’s been a new spotlight on lead in drinking water. But children in minority neighborhoods have been exposed to lead from water and other sources, like peeling lead paint, for a long time. The Centers for Disease Control consistently reports that black children have the highest risk of lead poisoning in the United States, sometimes two or three times more likely than white children to have elevated lead levels in their blood. It’s been this way for decades. Lead mitigation is well understood. Pipes can be changed. Filters can be used. Water authorities can influence how much lead is leached from pipes by influencing the chemistry of the water, by choosing safer water sources and by protecting those sources from contaminants like herbicides and pesticides from farm runoff and sewage outfalls.

What would it take to change our water supply lines? A New Deal for water infrastructure. Every four years the American Society for Civil Engineers issues a “Report Card for America’s Infrastructure.” The last grade for drinking water, in 2013, was a D. The report said it would take $2.1 trillion to replace the nation’s aging pipes. The EPA has identified $335 billion in water supply infrastructure needs over a 20-year period. Whatever the number, it is going to be high. So, too, will be hopes for new and improved technological fixes at water and wastewater treatment plants.

But Flint serves as a warning that trying to “clean” polluted water will only take us so far. The demand should be for chemical policy reform that gets rid of harmful chemicals and invests in a new generation of biocompatible chemicals.

It should include a radical shift in agricultural policies that support organic practices. And if there is to be a New Deal for water infrastructure, let it be for ecological infrastructure that is built on a framework of prevention.

Boston and New York are examples of cities that have gone to extraordinary lengths to get their water from clean sources, and it shows at the tap. Boston gets its water from the Quabbin Reservoir, 65 miles west of the city. The 39-square-mile public water supply was created in the 1930s. Development around it is restricted by the state. No industries and no sewers discharge into its waters. New York, for its part, has two massive tunnels, with a third almost completed, that bring in water from reservoirs and lakes on protected land in upstate New York. Both cities discharge their wastewater far from their drinking water sources: Boston’s treated sewage goes 9.5 miles out into the ocean. New York’s outfall pipes are closer to shore, but the state is trying to raise the capital to build an extended ocean outfall pipe. These are not ecological solutions for the disposition of wastewater, but it is safer than dumping it into drinking water. The disposal of wastewater and sewage sludge will cause pollution problems wherever they go, but keeping them out of our drinking water and food while we back off of their production is fundamental to protecting human health.

Technological responses to the ecological catastrophe in Flint and in scores of other cities, like replacing lead pipe supply lines, are necessary, but palliative. Technology should be the servant of prevention.

Resistance to the systemic poisoning we are experiencing in the U.S. begins with saying: Enough! We are hearing this in Flint. Town halls and community meetings are filled with people raising their voices and demanding change. In February, Flint residents Beulah Walker and Justin Wedes went to the United Nations to talk about Flint and ask for a fact-finding mission from the U.N. to come to the beleaguered city.

Forging our connection to each other is as important as disconnecting our sewers from our drinking water. Water pollution at the scale we have in America feels insurmountable, and it will be if we do not organize for fundamental changes in where we get our water, what we put into it, and where it goes when we are done with it. Nobody lives upstream anymore.
In February, Republican presidential hopeful Sen. Ted Cruz (Texas) signed on to a call for a constitutional convention to help defeat “the Washington cartel [that] has put special interest spending ahead of the American people.”

Cruz, along with fellow Republican presidential aspirants Sen. Marco Rubio (Fla.) and Gov. John Kasich (Ohio), has endorsed an old conservative goal of a Constitutional amendment to mandate a balanced federal budget. The idea sounds fanciful, but free-market ideologues associated with the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a secretive group of right-wing legislators and their corporate allies, are close to pulling off a coup that could devastate the economy, which is just emerging from a recession. Their scheme could leave Americans reeling for generations. A balanced budget amendment would prevent the federal government from following the Keynesian strategy of stimulating the economy during an economic depression by increasing the national debt. (Since 1970, the United States has had a balanced budget in only four years: 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001.)

Article V of the Constitution lays out two routes for changing the law of the land: An amendment can be proposed by Congress or by a constitutional convention that is convened by two-thirds of the states (34). Either way, three-fourths of the states (38) have to ratify it. Previously, changes to the country’s founding document have been achieved by the first process. But as of today, 27 states—seven shy of the two-thirds threshold required by Article V—have passed resolutions calling for a constitutional convention to consider a balanced budget amendment.

The ALEC-affiliated Balanced Budget Amendment Task Force (BBATF), which proffered the pledge signed by Cruz, is hoping to meet that 34-state threshold by July 4. BBATF is one player in an astroturf movement backed by the billionaire Koch brothers and embraced by right-wing state legislators.

A balanced budget amendment has long been a holy grail for the Right since the 1930s. In the 1980s, conservatives made a push for a balanced budget constitutional convention and, 20 years later, the idea was resurrected as part of the Tea Party platform. That’s when BBATF was formed to carry the movement forward. With 16 resolutions held over from the previous wave of conservative activism, BBATF has since passed resolutions in Alabama (2011), New Hampshire (2012), Ohio (2013), Georgia, Tennessee, Florida, Michigan, Louisiana (2014), South Dakota, North Dakota and Utah (2015), bringing the total to 27. This year, BBATF is targeting 13 states: Arizona, Idaho, Kentucky, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming. In six of these states Republicans control both legislative bodies and the governorship, making passage a real possibility and leaving BBATF one state shy of the magic 34.

**Domino effect**

While the BBATF’s 27 resolutions are tied specifically to the balanced budget amendment, a group called Citizens for Self-Governance launched a project called Convention of States, whose proposal for a constitutional convention has also been adopted by ALEC as a model policy. Convention of States has passed resolutions calling for a convention in Florida, Georgia (2014), Alabama, Arkansas (2015) and Tennessee (2016). Convention of States advocates a constitutional convention to not only pass a balanced budget amendment, but also to curtail the “power and jurisdiction of the federal government.” What precisely this means and how it would be accomplished is not clear. This uncertainty at once whets the appetite of anti-government zealots while raising serious concerns about a “runaway” convention that could make drastic changes to the Constitution.

Both BBATF and Convention of States have struggled to address worries of a runaway convention. What would stop it from turning out like the Philadelphia Convention of 1787, which led to the scrapping of the Articles of Confederation and the drafting of an entirely new U.S. Constitution?

To address these concerns, a group called Compact for America, which has passed resolutions in Alaska, Georgia, Mississippi and North Dakota, has proposed that states combine their calls for a constitutional convention with the final ratification process. This would mean states attending the convention would propose the amendment and ratify it in one fell swoop, which would require the 38 states needed for ratification under Article V, not just the 34 needed to call a convention.

Convention of States and BBATF have tried to quell fears of a runaway convention by saying the convention
would be bound by the subject matter of the resolutions, and that the convention only has the power to propose amendments, which then must be ratified by the required 38 states.

That the subject matter of the resolutions will prevent a runaway convention may make sense in reference to the BBATF, whose resolutions focus specifically on the balanced budget amendment, but when applied to the Convention of States’ agenda, the argument fails, as the subject of their resolutions includes broad language to curb the power and jurisdiction of the federal government. Convention of States spokesman Michael Farris has written that, “It is relatively certain that there would be at least a few amendments proposed, perhaps as many as 10 to 12.” In other words, if Convention of States has its way, there could well be a runaway convention.

**Within striking distance**

Arn Pearson at the Center for Media and Democracy, a watchdog group based in Madison, Wisc., is closely tracking the movement. He describes the campaign for a constitutional convention as “a very live threat.” “If between the groups they get to 34 states,” he says, “there is really nothing preventing them from aggregating those calls even if they’re not identical, and pushing for a convention.”

Another uncertainty, Pearson notes, is the controversy over whether the 16 resolutions left over from the effort in the 1980s can still be counted. There is no precedent to lean on. Pro-convention advocates maintain that Congress, which is tasked with processing the states’ applications, may not meddle with the process. If a state doesn’t want a convention, they argue, it can rescind its application. Pearson suspects the Supreme Court would get involved.

“There are a lot of different parts of the Koch machine pulling on this oar,” says Pearson, “from their think tanks up through their elected officials, they’re pushing on it. They’re pushing on it hard.” And, given how red BBATF’s 2016 target states are, says Pearson, “it’s within striking distance. If [ALEC and the Koch brothers] get a convention,” says Pearson, “they get to lock in their conservative supply-side policies for the next generation or more. That’s where they’re going.”

The Kochs and company, with their gridlock of Washington, have bred a type of discontent that has made once unimaginable change possible.

Tugging on citizen discontent, Convention of States’ propaganda highlights the 2013 government shutdown, creeping NSA surveillance, Gallup polls showing Americans’ dissatisfaction with “government” and tales of federal bureaucratic waste.

But such a convention is not the tonic to satiate this discontent. Democratic control is what the American people yearn for, but that is not what the convention would offer.

Maybe the alternative is the revolution Bernie Sanders is envisioning: Electing insurgent candidates to Congress, state and local office; strengthening and expanding direct democratic institutions like the ballot initiative process; making constitutional changes that elevate democratic decisions above corporate personhood; and building a movement that engages the thousands of communities where democratic governance has been all but quashed by ALEC-endorsed legal doctrine and legislation.
In a dispatch from Paris for Harper’s, writer and activist Rebecca Solnit called the recent climate agreement negotiated there “miraculous and horrible.” This tension between the exciting and the awful, the transformative and the terrifying, motivates her book Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities. Initially written in response to the Iraq War, the book will be re-released this month with a new section on climate change.

Solnit’s numerous books and essays cover a wide array of topics from environmentalism to feminism (famously, “Men Explain Things to Me” helped inspire the concept of “mansplaining”). Her history of activism includes Nevada's anti-nuclear testing movement in the 1980s and the protests around corporate globalization of the 1990s.

Today we see another corporate trade deal—the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)—on the table, American bombs falling across the Middle East and climate change accelerating. In These Times sat down with Solnit in Berkeley to discuss the hope found in uncertainty, her experience in Paris, the role of the writer and more.

What are your thoughts on the election?
The current hate-fest on the Left is just… kind of sad. The Left is famous for tearing itself apart. I’m not sure the purpose of that exercise. Hating on people has never been a great form of social change, so far as we know.

I have preferences and they’re probably not that hard to guess. But with Obama, people so completely put their faith in: “Oh, we’ll elect this magic, amazing super-human and then we’ll all go home and do absolutely nothing.” The movement that put Obama in office was powerful enough to make really profound change, but everyone went home because they thought he’d do it.

That’s what you see with Bernie Sanders: this infatuation with an almost savior-like figure who will do it all. No, actually, massive grassroots movements need to exist the day after the election. Electoral politics are dismal; I’m more interested in grassroots power, popular power.

How has your activism influenced how you think about social change?
I’ve had a front-row seat in how change gets made, and I’ve seen that it’s often slow, indirect, unpredictable and sometimes incredibly wonderful. But I’ve also seen people who don’t perceive it if it’s not quick and direct. The incredible nuclear freeze movement in the early 1980s was driven by fear of Armageddon. I remember one guy being like, “I went to a rally and it didn’t change anything and I didn’t do anything more.” Really? You thought the Kremlin was going to fall to its knees because you went to an upstate New York rally? But the movement had tremendous power. When the Soviet Union collapsed there was this incredible moment where powerful movements could’ve pushed forward total disarmament, but there were no powerful movements. It’s sad.

Six years ago, the climate movement decided to stop the Keystone pipeline. As David Roberts at Vox has said, it was not just about changing one pipeline but changing the culture. Watching that process take place up close is boring. There were bad meetings and demonstrations that aren’t always triumphs.

But then you pull back and, oh my God, six years later, we defeated the northern stretch of the pipeline and we’re in a completely different place with the climate movement. A lot of people don’t have the long-term memory to see that—not that six years should even count as long-term. Also, hanging out with people who are passionate idealists and deeply devoted has made my life incredibly richer—this heroic sense of what it means to be a member of civil society, a person with a commitment that’s bigger than themselves.

There’s this idea that political engagement is some sort of horrible, dutiful thing you do, like cleaning the toilet or taking out the garbage. But it can be the most fantastic thing you do. It can bring you into contact with hope, with joy, with a sense of deep connection, with what Martin Luther King called the “beloved community.”
Disconnection from a larger sense of purpose and agency, from community and civil society, and from hope are huge factors in unhappiness. 

**How do you keep hope amid climate change?**

It’s tough because we know terrible things are happening and are going to happen. Hope is that we can steer toward the best-case scenarios instead of the worst. Hope is not like saying, “Let’s pretend I don’t have cancer.” It’s saying, “Let’s hope this treatment has survivability. Let’s work for the best-case scenarios.” Things are changing fast. If you said three years ago that Congress was going to introduce a bill to prevent all fossil fuel extraction on public land, people would be like, “You’re out of your mind,” and that just happened. The science is changing, politics are changing, technology is changing, and we don’t actually know what they’re going to look like in three or 10 years.

**The proposed solutions for climate change require large-scale state planning, but you’re very sympathetic to a local or anarchistic approach.**

Paris was about nation-states, and they have a role. But at the same time, San Diego decided to go 100 percent fossil-free by 2035 and San Francisco finally implemented its clean-power program. Things are happening on a lot of scales. We do need legislation and agreements. As Naomi Klein points out, one of the reasons the Republicans are furious about climate change is that it does require large-scale cooperation and regulation. But a lot of the systems are on smaller scales. My solar roof. Your transit alternative. Our statewide building code. New York’s fracking ban.

**In *Hope in the Dark* you argue that the environmental movement should reach out and form alliances with rural communities.**

It’s really funny talking just after Cliven Bundy got arrested and charged. He represents the far-right fringe of rural culture. A lot of what rural people who were suspicious of big government think isn’t that different from what radicals on the Left think, but right-wing outreach was awesome and left-wing outreach was somewhere between pathetic and nonexistent. How do you convince them that the world government they should fear is not the U.N., it’s the TPP? How do you get outside the stereotypes where people assume, “Oh, I have nothing in common with feminists or labor organizers”? We have a lot of divides that are artificial or not carefully examined. People on both the Right and Left are operating with a lot of stereotypes about each other.

**What do you think of the argument that we need more women and people of color in power?**

In a culture dominated by white men, often people succeed through allegiance to that white, male worldview, to those priorities. Thus: Margaret Thatcher, Clarence Thomas and so forth. I am not sure we will see what might be different about non-white and non-male governance until it’s more than a minority in a white-male system. I loved it that Ruth Bader Ginsburg, when asked, “Do you think there should be more women on the Supreme Court?” said there should be nine.

**Can writing drive social change?**

It’s important not to be prescriptive and say all writing has to have a political or practical end. Something I recall often is Lawrence Weschler’s *Vermeer in Bosnia*, about a human rights tribunal judge dealing with Bosnian war criminals. Weschler asks how he can bear to listen to stories of horrific atrocities day after day. The judge pauses for a moment and then his face brightens and he says, “After work I go to the museum and I go to the Vermeers.” That’s the best and most succinct description of how beauty, pleasure and joy help people do really difficult things. They often get dismissed as not part of the revolution. But I do believe that writing has and does and can change the world in direct ways, too.

**You write a lot about walking, and about past writers like Thoreau and Woolf walking. Do you walk a lot?**

Yes. Part of the solution to climate change is that we don’t need to rush around, we don’t need to consume as much, we don’t need to move around as much, because what’s up close can be pretty magnificent. I’ve been in San Francisco since 1980 and I still discover things all the time. A sense of wonder can be a revolutionary tool.
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Since joining In These Times, I’ve been blown away by your dedication to independent journalism and your commitment to the social, economic and environmental justice issues that have always been the cornerstones of In These Times’ mission. You also support an independent, nonprofit organization that practices what it preaches and takes care of its small staff.

I accepted my dream job at In These Times in August—at the same time that I found out I was expecting my first child. That same month, In These Times published Sharon Lerner’s gut-wrenching story, “The Real War on Families,” which illustrates the appalling lack of postpartum options available to most working women. (One in four women returns to work within two weeks of giving birth.) A transition to most other organizations would’ve been fraught with concerns about lapsed insurance coverage, abbreviated maternity leave and limited childcare. But In These Times offered stability and flexibility for my growing family with 100% coverage of insurance premiums, paid family leave and the flexibility to bring my baby to work when I return. How’s that for living up to our values?

When I get back to the office, I’ll connect with more of you—at the upcoming 40th anniversary gala, at our issue release parties, over coffee or online. Together, we will shape the next 40 years of a singularly courageous, independent, progressive and values-driven publication.

Thank you,

Allison Rickard
Development Director

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The Secret History of Coal

John R. Leifchild, author of *Our Coal and Our Coal-Pits; The People in Them, and the Scenes Around Them* (1853), saw in the unassuming black rock the underpinnings of Britain’s economy: “But could they filch our mines of coal / They’d steal our bodies, selves, and soul. / ’Tis COAL that makes our Britain great, / Upholds our commerce and our state.”

Today most of us are less enamored with coal. Miners still count on it for work, but at the cost of horrific lung damage. The specter of climate change looms over us, largely driven by carbon dioxide emissions from coal burning.

In *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*, Andreas Malm seeks to determine how and why coal came to uphold “our commerce and our state.” If we understand how the fossil economy came into being, he suggests, we might be better prepared to end it.

The conventional explanation, Malm writes, draws from classical economists like David Ricardo, Thomas Malthus and Adam Smith: A growing population and limited land meant that only technological advance could sustain economic growth. A contemporary take is what he calls the “Anthropocene narrative,” the notion that human activity has pushed Earth into a new geological epoch.

Karl Marx, instead, theorized that technological change drove social relations, not the other way around: “The hand-mill gives you society with the
feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist.”

Malm argues that all of these views rely on some combination of the following premises: Industry at the time must have been held back by environmental scarcity; steam power must have been more efficient than its predecessors, and thus the more rational choice; the transition must have been embraced across the globe, and its benefits shared by the species at large.

None of these, says Malm, is backed up by the historical record. Rather, the transition to fossil fuels was rooted not in technological superiority or environmental scarcity but in old-fashioned class conflict.

The modern coal economy began in 19th-century Britain, where James Watt’s steam engine competed with water wheels to be the primary power source for cotton mills. At first, this wasn’t much of a competition: Water was significantly cheaper and real estate along rivers remained plentiful.

But there were two major problems: unruly rivers and unruly workers.

First, water was inconsistent: Floods or droughts constrained when the mill could operate. Mill owners had a simple strategy to deal with this: To make up for lost time, laborers were made to work overtime. But the Factory Act of 1833 limited the workday to 12-hours for laborers aged 14 to 18 and effectively limited overtime to half an hour per day. Because most mills relied in part on adolescent labor, this constrained their entire operations.

To keep water flow steady throughout a region, mechanic Robert Thom devised a system of dams, reservoirs, aqueducts and sluices. His system, implemented in 1824, worked, but failed to take off. Here the villain was not labor unrest. People of property feared the working classes, and building mills in cities offered a means of control.

Another drawback of waterwheels was the fact that they must remain along rivers, and most of the available land was in rural areas. Coal was mobile. But that would not have become such an advantage if it weren’t for labor unrest. People of property feared the working classes, and building mills in cities offered a means of control.

Rural areas lacked a ready supply of strikebreakers. Also, housing, schools and churches had to be built from the ground up, generally at the mill owner’s expense. Cities had ready-made infrastructure and people looking for work.

Malm hints that the steam engine also allowed for a break with the physical world of seasonal cycles and a topographical landscape. Coal must be mined and transported, but it lacks the autonomy of a river; it does not dry up or flood the factory. A steam engine, unlike a river, can run faster or slower at the boss’s discretion. The conquest of human labor went hand in hand with the liberation from uncontrollable ecological processes.

Men like Leifchild sang the praises of coal, but workers called it “a ruthless king,” “a tyrant fell.” They wrote dystopian fiction in which “vegetable nature had ceased to exist” and “animal life appeared to be extinct.” Prophetic themes of air pollution and heat were common: steam-powered machines blacking out the sun with smoke.

Labor uprisings targeted steam engines, sabotaging them to bring industry to a halt. During the 1842 general strike in Britain, a placard directed workers: “Stop getting Coal, for Coal supports the money-mongering Capitalists.”

Coal triumphed, fueling an economic expansion in Britain and elsewhere. When urbanization occurred in the United States in the late 19th century, the steam engine followed.

Today, with developed nations phasing in gas or renewables, China has become the new “chimney of the world,” writes Malm. Coal power blossomed in China because foreign corporations took their manufacturing there, motivated by cheap, plentiful labor. Once again, the desire for controllable workers led to a fossilized economy.

During Britain’s 1842 general strike, one placard directed workers: “Stop getting Coal, for Coal supports the money-mongering Capitalists.”

The blame is not all China’s. It may be the largest emitter, but much of those emissions are from making goods for export to developed nations. That lets the United States and Europe limit their manufacturing and look like they’re getting a handle on emissions. Meanwhile, China appears the climate culprit and its people suffocate in smog.

Malm sees history repeating itself elsewhere: Sun and wind, like water, are inexhaustible and available to all. Their power can be intermittent. The large-scale renewable energy projects that might provide something steadier are difficult to organize, evoking the kind of inter-capitalist squabbling that doomed Thom’s sluice schemes.

If the primacy of fossil fuels, Malm argues, is rooted in power over labor and disjuncture from the earth’s ecology, then the solution might be something more communal, less beholden to the ethos of competition.

He offers no blueprint for change—yet there are grounds for hope. Labor groups and (increasingly) entire communities recognize the disproportionate environmental impacts faced by the poor and people of color. And coalitions have sprung up to block pipelines, fracking and arctic drilling, as well as build renewable infrastructure.

Malm leaves us with an injunction—one borrowed from rioting laborers of two centuries ago who almost stopped the fossil economy before it had even begun: “Go and stop the smoke!”

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World cinema grows and seethes outside of our American dome; if a movie doesn't adhere to a particular narrative and formal structure, Americans will not pay it much mind. (It's like many other things in this way.)

At the world's film festivals, however, anything is possible, and that's where new films by Alexsandr Sokurov and Apichatpong Weerasethakul are newsmaking events. Sure, their films get small arthouse releases here, and may even show up on Netflix (as has Weerasethakul's mesmerizing 2010 masterwork Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, presumably to the baffled chagrin of the average Netflix and chill viewer). Nevertheless, their films are strange-smelling hothouse flowers lost in a landscape of industrialized corn fields and feedlots.

Russian-born Sokurov is one of the globe's most protean voices: In a 40-year career so far, his films range from 10 minutes to over five hours, from unearthly phantasias to psycho Flaubert adaptations to gritty documentary. 

Francofonia is a ruminative essay about the Louvre, which to Sokurov isn't merely the center of Paris but the center of the world. Sokurov is a historian for whom art and museums are essential to our awareness of our past and our cultural selves. The moment for him here is the 1940 German occupation of Paris, and the face-off between Nazi commander Franz von Wolff-Metternich, commissioned to safeguard the art, and Louvre director Jacques Jaujard. Wolff-Metternich, a sympathetic aristocrat and art expert who presents an elegant foil to the working-class bureaucrat Jaujard, both seen in archival photos and embodied by actors.

Sokurov doesn't dramatize the story. He folds into his collage first-person revery (a friend Skypes him from a storm-beset freighter carrying art), a visit from Napoleon (“C'est moi!” he exclaims before various portraits), drone shots over Parisian rooftops, the ghosts of Messerschmitts flying past windows, and archival footage, from Chekhov's death bed to Hitler eyeballing the Eiffel Tower to the building of the Louvre Pyramid. And then there are the paintings, into which Sokurov falls, changing the light on them and seeming to give them three-dimensional life.

"Who would we be without museums?" he asks, making Francofonia a semi-documentary, not only a companion piece to his Hermitage Museum epic Russian Ark, but also recent paens to museum-ness like Jem Cohen’s Museum Hours (2012) and Frederick Wiseman’s National Gallery (2014).

The one-man meta-New Wave from Thailand, Weerasethakul may be the most original working filmmaker alive, which is to say that his gentle, ironic, magical-realist idylls are radically different from both mainstream multiplex fare and Euro-Asian “art films.”

His latest, Cemetery of Splendour, is a poetic tissue of tropical moments, haunted by the irrepressible past. The setting is a country hospital set up inside an old school—and, we learn, atop an ancient burial ground for Thai kings. Occupying the beds are dozens of young soldiers beset by sleeping sickness, which does not prevent them from waking and then passing out again, mustering erections, or having their dreams plumbed by a young psychic. Volunteering at the hospital is an aging woman on crutches (the filmmaker's go-to favorite, Jenjira Pongpas Widner), who bonds with one sleeping soldier and accompanies him when he wakes into the world outside.

Are dead souls keeping the soldiers dozing? Could be. The sleepers are equipped in their beds with therapeutic columns of changing light; later in the film, entire scenes start to change color, too, suggesting that we're in a dream that has infected reality—a dream of psychic memories of demolished palaces to a playground made of dinosaurs to tsunami rings on a banyan tree.

At one point, a giant paramecium crawls across a clear blue sky. Goddesses appear at picnic tables. On the soundtrack, chirring jungle insects and windy rumbles roll on unabated.

“What happens next”—the be-all and end-all for American movies—is not a concern. Instead, the tenderness of the present moment, however bizarre and bewitching it may be, is the meat of the matter, in fine Buddhist tradition. “Life is like candlelight,” someone says deep in, and it feels just about right.

Weerasethakul explores dreams and reality through young Thai soldiers in an endless slumber.
OF ALL THE MANY PUZZLEMENTS surrounding the meteoric rise of Donald Trump, perhaps the greatest is that the GOP’s leadership caste should regard it as a puzzlement at all.

Ever since Trump’s decisive thrashing of his GOP rivals in South Carolina and Nevada, we’ve seen no end of breast-beating displays of bewilderment from conservatives. Neocon hawk Robert Kagan took to the Washington Post op-ed section to pronounce Trump a “Frankenstein monster”—and concluded by endorsing Hillary Clinton. The New York Times’ David Brooks bewailed the rise of Trumpism as a “cancer” and a worrisome lurch into barbarous “antipolitics” and European-style authoritarianism. Brooks’ conservative colleague, Ross Douthat, glumly concurred—but ingeniously found a way to blame Trump’s rise on Barack Obama.

And Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, the grand architect of the scorched-earth assault on all Obama-backed legislation, is reported to have fumed at a GOP power luncheon that if Trump’s candidacy threatens the Republicans’ narrow Senate majority, “We’ll drop him like a hot rock.” When the Trump phenomenon is too much for a procedural nihilist like McConnell to stomach, you know the Republican Party is in near-complete meltdown.

It’s also lying to itself, in a big way. Anyone paying even cursory attention understands that antipolitics, far from being a Zika-style virus smuggled into the vulnerable GOP host organism by a single “outsider” populist presidential hopeful sporting a Chia Pet pompadour, has been the very lifeblood of the Republican political class since the great Tea Party uprising of 2010.

There was the pointless litany of 60-plus votes on repealing Obamacare, which served no other purpose than to allow Tea Party incumbents to pretend they were advancing the agendas they ran on (or any legislation at all). There was the GOP’s ritual sacrifice of John Boehner’s speakership on the altar of ideological purity. There was Ted Cruz’s equally empty—though immensely mediagenic—filibuster designed to provoke a (yes, again) government shutdown bid over (yes, again) Obamacare.

Looking back at this parade of confrontational nothingness, it’s hard to fathom why the Trumpist movement, or something like it, didn’t happen sooner. The Tea Party phase of the GOP detonated the cynical social contract struck at the outset of the Reagan revolution, in which the business wing of the Right found symbolic common cause with an evangelical grassroots and, once in power, duly ignored it. (Actual progress on the Christian Right’s wishlist would make it that much harder to mobilize in gospel fury each election cycle).

But a Tea Party electorate took vengeful note of all the perceived betrayals by D.C. insiders. Soon enough, the simple threat of a primary challenge from the Right was enough to dispel any grown-up compromise in the halls of Republican power. Meanwhile, the Tea Party uprising provided ample play for ugly shows of nativism and bigotry on the newly revived grassroots Right.

These are all the woeful internal GOP dynamics we can now see converging in the outsized, orange-hued figure of Donald Trump. Rather than encouraging marginalized, white, middle Americans to dress up as colonial patriots, Trump encourages them to attack non-white protestors, unleash displays of religious bigotry and otherwise rudely defy the behavioral canons of “political correctness.” His genial showman’s mien permits him to opportunistically make get-out-the-vote robocalls on his behalf, or play dumb before the cameras while being repeatedly pressed to disavow his endorsement by former Klan wizard David Duke, or have a group of peaceful black students forced out of a campaign rally.

Trump’s deft culture-war shtick also permits him to short-circuit expectations of simple ideological consistency, let alone purity. He’s been a pro-choice, big-government liberal, and seems unto this day a more consistent supporter of single-payer healthcare than Hillary Clinton.

How the Trump insurgency plays out within the now-deranged coordinates of Republican electioneering is anyone’s guess, but leftists shouldn’t be too quick to gloat. Donald Trump is everyone’s problem now.
I’VE A FEELING WE’RE NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE

In Listen, Liberal: Or, What Ever Happened to the Party of the People? (Metropolitan Books), Thomas Frank asks, “What’s the matter with the Democratic Party?” He then provides some answers, including:

As the [Democratic Leadership Council] DLC saw it, whenever Democrats lost an election, it was because their leaders were too weak on crime, too soft on communism and too sympathetic to minorities.

The DLC had a single-factor theory of politics: that voters had grown disgusted with the cultural liberalism of the post-McGovern era. Why did Carter lose in 1980? Too damn liberal. Why did Mondale lose in 1984? Still too liberal. Why did Dukakis lose in 1988? Liberal again. The DLC also had but a single prescription for this malady: The Democratic Party could only win if it moved to “the center,” severing ties with its constituent groups and embracing certain free-market policies of the right. ...

What made the DLC succeed where others had failed were the contradictions it managed to juggle. It was a bluntly pro-business force—friendly with lobbyists and funded by corporate backers—that nevertheless proclaimed itself as a warrior for the working class. It was a strictly inside-the-Beltway operation that presented itself as the champion of “forgotten Democrats.” One of its early manifestos, for example, berated “higher socioeconomic status Democrats” for antagonizing working-class voters both culturally and economically ...

Why working-class voters were supposed to pine for balanced budgets, free-trade treaties and the rest of the items on the DLC wish-list was a mystery. The answer, it would soon become clear, was that the DLC didn’t really care all that much about working people in the first place. The aim of the group was to capture the Democratic Party for its lobbyist supporters by whatever means were at hand, and in the 1980s, claiming to represent the overlooked middle American probably seemed like a good gambit.

But the real question driving the film is why government leaders and economists seem to chronically forget the harsh lessons learned during those bitter busts. Unsurprisingly, the blame falls on classical economics and its myopic focus on free market competition as an engine of growth, while simply ignoring the built-in tendencies toward instability and crisis. Encouraged to mistake the map for the territory, generations of economists cling to their models regardless of real-world economic upheavals. Thus Alan Greenspan, Federal Reserve chairman from 1987 to 2006, finally admitted, after failing to predict the disastrous 2008 collapse, that his model might have some slight imperfections—only to later take back his temporary mea culpa.

The film argues that such denial persists because classical economics dovetails disarmingly with certain tendencies of human nature. In situations of relative safety and stability, such as those careful, highly regulated interludes that often follow busts, people become universally inclined toward euphoric risk-taking and the irrational desire for more that leads to further financial bubbles. Proof for this human nature claim is offered in the most bizarre section of the film, involving a behavioral study at Monkey Island in Puerto Rico, which is supposed to demonstrate fundamental primate irrationality.

In lab tests, Technician #1 repeatedly offered monkeys one grape, then gave them two. Technician #2 offered three grapes, then also gave out two. The monkeys all preferred to deal with the first technician. The answer, it would soon become clear, was that the DLC didn’t really care all that much about working people in the first place. The aim of the group was to capture the Democratic Party for its lobbyist supporters by whatever means were at hand, and in the 1980s, claiming to represent the overlooked middle American probably seemed like a good gambit.

But the real question driving the film is why government leaders and economists seem to chronically forget the harsh lessons learned during those bitter busts. Unsurprisingly, the blame falls on classical economics and its myopic focus on free market competition as an engine of growth, while simply ignoring the built-in tendencies toward instability and crisis. Encouraged to mistake the map for the territory, generations of economists cling to their models regardless of real-world economic upheavals. Thus Alan Greenspan, Federal Reserve chairman from 1987 to 2006, finally admitted, after failing to predict the disastrous 2008 collapse, that his model might have some slight imperfections—only to later take back his temporary mea culpa.

The film argues that such denial persists because classical economics dovetails disarmingly with certain tendencies of human nature. In situations of relative safety and stability, such as those careful, highly regulated interludes that often follow busts, people become universally inclined toward euphoric risk-taking and the irrational desire for more that leads to further financial bubbles. Proof for this human nature claim is offered in the most bizarre section of the film, involving a behavioral study at Monkey Island in Puerto Rico, which is supposed to demonstrate fundamental primate irrationality.

In lab tests, Technician #1 repeatedly offered monkeys one grape, then gave them two. Technician #2 offered three grapes, then also gave out two. The monkeys all preferred to deal with Technician #1, which, according to the behavioral scientists in charge, is irrational, since they get two grapes regardless. The explanation is that the monkeys are irrationally fixated on the lure of getting more than initially expected.

Somehow, what monkeys will do to get grapes in lab conditions is supposed to be proof positive of what humans will do in speculating for profit.

If that isn’t rotten logic, I don’t know...
art space

what is. Just for starters, it’s pretty clear that the monkeys might very well have a whole different take on the grape situation, one that is perfectly rational. I call it “The Asshole Inference.” Once they figure out they’re going to get two grapes either way, the monkeys would far rather deal with the honest and generous broker who gives what he offers plus a little extra, rather than the jerk who promises more but doesn’t deliver.

They’re avoiding the asshole, you see. A very useful behavior when dealing with human beings!

For Boom Bust Boom, however, primate irrationality is the problem, humans’ idiotic approach to the economy is a manifestation, and better education is the answer. The film touts a student group participating in the organization Rethinking Economics, “an international network of rethinks” that is challenging economic dogma. One of their goals is, ultimately, better trained economists.

It’s a small, shaky solution to a problem of such magnitude, which befits this little hodgepodge of a film, clocking in at a mere 74 minutes. Perhaps the short and sketchy nature of the film is due to the filmmakers’ strange disinclination to delve into such economically related categories as “politics” or “ideology” when considering the workings of capitalism. Even as the film accuses economists of ignoring obviously pertinent phenomena, it ironically ignores the complex history of human development that lies between our primate ancestry and the dominance of global capitalism, including centuries of shifting political-economic systems. Fortunately, there are other documentaries that demonstrate a richer understanding of what’s so disaster-prone about our economic system, including Collapse, Inside Job, Capitalism: A Love Story, Overdose: The Next Financial Crisis, and The Shock Doctrine.

As for Boom Bust Boom, treating our historically specific economic system as an extension of human nature, one which can be diagnosed by studying incipient monkey-capitalists, isn’t much of an analysis. But at least it will fit into a barely feature length—running time, with several minutes to spare for a John Cusack interview.

IN BED WITH THE NSA

Filmmaker and reporter Laura Poitras, best known for her Oscar-winning documentary about Edward Snowden, Citizenfour, has a new exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Poitras uses her first foray into fine art to create intimate encounters with our post-9/11 surveillance state. The installation “Bed Down Location,” for example, encourages the viewer to lie on a soft, raised platform and stare up at projections of the dark night skies of Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan—places where the U.S. military conducts nighttime drone strikes. Near the exhibition’s exit, a digital screen with thermal imagery shows that you have been surveilled from above while laying in this piece—a palpable moment of vulnerability that brings home the reality of our new culture of everyday spying.

Astro Noise runs through May 1.

—LIZ PELLY

In Boom Bust Boom, animations enliven the grim realities of capitalism.
To Brexit or Not To Brexit

We are to have a referendum June 23. We’ll be asked whether we want to stay in the European Union or leave it, and we’re told that this is going to be the most important decision of our lives. The irony for some of us is that, in wanting the United Kingdom to remain in the European Union, we find ourselves on the same side as David Cameron, the prime minister. He has just screwed some meaningless—and mean—concessions out of the other 27 EU countries in order to deal with a long-standing and destructive dispute within his own Tory party over whether to remain in the European Union.

It is an irony with which we’re familiar. The first U.K. referendum on whether we should stay in or leave the European Economic Community, the precursor to the EU, was in 1975, and it, too, arose out of a split, within Harold Wilson’s Labour government. Those wanting to stay won, with more than two-thirds of the vote. Now, those Tories who want to leave the Union—or “Brexit” supporters, as they’re known—invoke their somewhat mythical “special relation” to the United States as part of their determination to get out, just as the Left of the Labour Party in 1975 saw Europe as a distraction from our historical relations with the Commonwealth, which were also shot through with a certain amount of fantasy and denial.

The U.K. has never been an enthusiastic or committed member of the European Union. General de Gaulle famously turned us down twice in the 1960s, fearing that we’d seek to dominate things and serve as a conduit for U.S. influence. Tory Prime Minister, Edward Heath took us in in 1973, and we’ve never ceased to realise de Gaulle’s suspicions. We’ve been a perpetual irritant, always negative, always insisting on our “special status,” refusing to join the Euro or be part of the Schengen Agreement that abolished border controls—we have the easiest border, after all, in the sea that surrounds us.

In the current debate, members of the government are being allowed by the prime minister to campaign on either side, and several have declared their willingness to vote against the government’s recommendation that we stay. Though Cameron’s offered slogans include “safer, stronger and better off” (“in” rather than “out,” that is) and the warning that leaving would be a “leap in the dark,” some of us fear that it is harder to stir up excitement about remaining and the status quo than about change.

There are serious problems with the European Union. It is undemocratic and bureaucratic in ways that invite corruption. It has grown fast and perhaps awkwardly, so that its member countries differ hugely in their politics, their economies, their histories and their cultures. Our lukewarm membership has left us unable or unwilling to address these issues. In our semi-detached relation, we have only argued for changes that are thought advantageous to the United Kingdom. In fact, there has been almost no mention of how the minor concessions involving migrant workers and financial regulations that Cameron has exacted from the EU might affect other countries in the European Union. And in his insistence that as non-Euro members we should be excused from bailing out countries like Greece, or from taking in refugees according to an EU system of quotas, we have been seen as embarrassingly self-seeking. Other EU countries are exasperated by our demands.

Cameron is right about one thing: We need to stay in the EU. People old enough to have lived through the Second World War feel relief that most European countries are able to collaborate. We need the EU as a check on our right-wing government’s undermining of the welfare state, particularly the National Health Service, education and legal aid. We need its scrutiny of workers’ rights and pay and jobs. We need its financial market for investment and trade. Perhaps we need it most because the chances are that if we vote to leave Europe, European-looking Scots will vote to separate from the insular English (despite hints that some Scottish National Party members will vote “Brexit” simply in order to hasten Scottish independence). We are in for a bumpy few months.
for many American Muslims as we go through different stages of life: school, college, work, relationships, family.

When I was in elementary school, there was a Pakistani girl in my brother’s class who wore shalwar kameez to school every day. She was teased relentlessly. I was regularly asked about “Gandhi dots.” When the Gulf War broke out, kids at school asked me if my family owned oil wells “back home.” But that struggle was supposed to end with our generation. We told ourselves that it would be easier for our kids.

And then Donald Trump came along.

In December, when I saw a story about a sixth-grade Muslim girl who got beat up in school in the Bronx by three boys who hit her because she was Muslim, it tore me to pieces and made me worry about my nieces and nephews.

Racism and bigotry have a long history in this country, and my experiences with bigotry growing up are far from unique and are actually pretty tame compared to those of many other people, Muslim and non-Muslim. Attacks against Muslims were widespread before Trump came along. Hell, our country has been at war with Muslims for nearly half my life. I have heard my share of ignorant, bigoted comments. In college, a classmate penned an op-ed in response to something I wrote, suggesting that I should smile politely when airport security takes a second look and warning me that I’d have to deal with a lot worse if there were another attack like September 11.

During the Illinois Senate primary in March 2004, then-state Sen. Barack Obama was running in a competitive seven-way race. Home for spring break, I worked with a group of Asian American community organizers on Election Day to turn out voters for Obama from the heavily Pakistani and Indian neighborhood on Chicago’s far North Side, near where I grew up. When we knocked on Muslim families’ doors, we made a point to tell them that Obama’s grandfather had been Muslim. It wasn’t just a “nudge nudge, wink wink.” It was an important fact, because even that tenuous kinship helped us feel like we belonged here.

Fast forward to November 2008, when I was knocking on doors for Obama in North Carolina. I had to explain to a woman that, “No ma’am, he’s not [Muslim]. I am, but he’s not.” She didn’t immediately respond, but later, as she was about to walk away, she said, “Well, you seem nice enough. I’ll think about it.” By then it was already clear that electing Obama wasn’t going to be our redemption in this country.

Vile as he was, even George W. Bush drew a nominal distinction between terrorists who happened to be Muslim and the Muslim people more broadly. But Trump doesn’t even bother with those niceties. He doesn’t just seek to “other” us; he seeks to get rid of us. And he is giving permission to other people who feel the same way to say so out loud.

CNN reported last December that a 68-year-old military veteran at a Trump rally in South Carolina said, “Islam is not a religion. It’s a violent blood cult. OK?” A February poll by Public Policy Polling found that 56 percent of Trump supporters in South Carolina either believe Islam should be illegal in the United States or are not sure.

The reason Trump’s plan to ban all Muslims bothers me is not because I think it will ever happen. It won’t. But as these kinds of ideas become part of the acceptable discourse, people are emboldened to act on them.

Just this past weekend, three Muslim men were found dead in Fort Wayne, Ind. According to Vox, they had been “shot multiple times in what police, on Friday, called ‘execution style’ murders.” Although the motive has not yet been determined, many Muslims fear it was the victims’ religion. Whether or not that’s the case, we now live in an environment in which it very well could have been, and I believe it is reasonable to say that Trump has contributed significantly to that environment.

Trump has condoned violence against people of color by his supporters. After a mob at one of his rallies in Birmingham, Ala. beat up an African-American Black Lives Matter activist, Trump remarked, “Maybe he should have been roughed up because it was absolutely disgusting what he was doing.” When two of his supporters in Boston urinated on and assaulted a homeless Latino man while he was sleeping, he sent a tweet condemning the attack but defended the attackers, saying, “They love this country and they want this country to be great again. They are very passionate.”

It has been said that when Trump says, “Make America great again,” he really means “Make America white again.” I don’t think that’s true, because “white” is too inclusive a term for Trump’s America. Trump has already told us he doesn’t want Muslims in his country. He’s talking about getting Mexicans to build a wall to keep themselves out. He is openly flirting with the Ku Klux Klan. It would be an understatement to say that Trump is unwelcoming of people of color. But Trump’s America also has no place for white people who happen to be Jewish or LGBTQ. It doesn’t value white women except as objects. In other words, Trump’s America would expel or marginalize an overwhelming majority of Americans. That’s the bad news. The good news is, if most Americans are getting the boot, then maybe I do belong here, with them.
BY SAQIB BHATTI

Donald Trump Sends a Chill Through My Muslim-American Body

The Huffington Post adds a disclaimer to nearly all of the articles it publishes about Donald Trump:

Editor's note: Donald Trump is a serial liar, rampant xenophobe, racist, misogynist, birther and bully who has repeatedly pledged to ban all Muslims—1.6 billion members of an entire religion—from entering the U.S.

As an American Muslim, I deeply appreciate that disclaimer. Trump thrives on media attention. His entire campaign is based on saying outlandish things that will get him free press coverage, and this disclaimer helps contextualize any coverage the Huffington Post gives him.

But every time I read it, it sends a chill through my body. Every single time. Trump has said many offensive things about Latinos, African Americans, Jews, Asian Americans, women and the LGBTQ community, to name a few. But of all the bigoted statements he has made, the one that hits me the hardest—perhaps the only one that hits me at all any more—is his call for a Muslim ban.

I don’t think Trump is spreading bigotry and racism in this country; I think he is unleashing it. He is saying the things that a lot of people already believed but were too polite or afraid to say in public. But there is a flip side to that. He is also telling Muslims something that deep down many of us have long feared but were afraid to say out loud: We don’t belong here. There is something very unsettling about it, like someone peeking into your deepest, most personal insecurity and shining a bright light on it.

American Muslims are not monolithic, and I cannot claim to speak for everyone. I am an American-born son of Pakistani Muslim immigrants. Like many other people, I live in between two cultures and don’t feel like I fully belong to either. Navigating that space is a big part of the struggle...