

A UNION OF *Their Own*

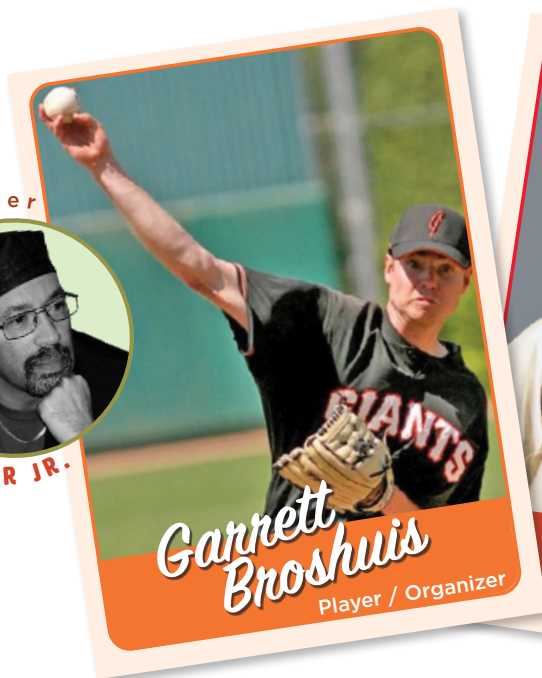
BASEBALL'S MINOR LEAGUERS
STEP UP TO THE PLATE.

BY
KELLY
CANDAELE
AND PETER
DREIER



Organizer

BILL FLETCHER JR.



Garrett
Broshuis

Player / Organizer



Harry
Marino

Player / Organizer

THE
CRUELTY
OF FORCE-
FEEDING
AVIVA STAHL

BECOMING
A BALLET
DANCER
GLORY LIU

OVID

WHEN LIFE NEEDS A DIFFERENT LENS



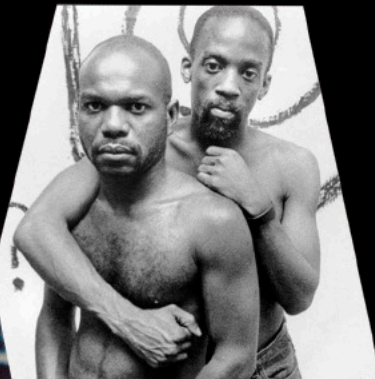
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YOUR HEART AND
MIND EXPAND."**

—SLASHFILM



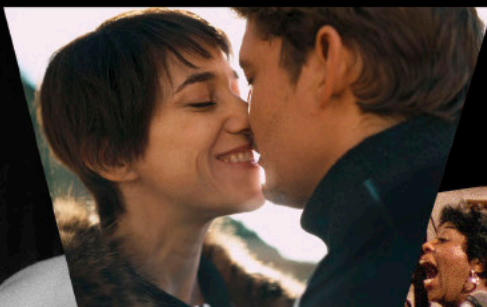
**"A CORNUCOPIA OF INTERNATIONAL
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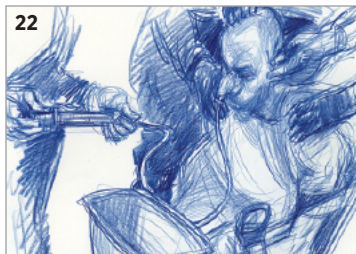
Dancing in the street: Feminists celebrate the first anniversary of Colombia's decriminalization of abortion in Bogotá on February 21.

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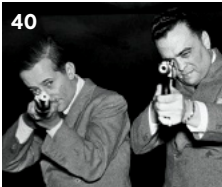
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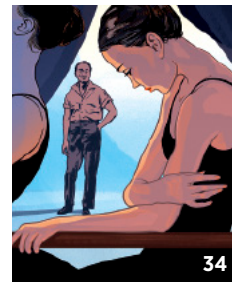
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NUMBER
6

MARCH
20-27,
2023

The Nation (ISSN 0027-8378) is printed 26 times a year (two issues in January, February, March, April, June, July, August, September, November and December; and three issues in May and October) by The Nation Company, LLC © 2023 in the USA by The Nation Company, LLC, 520 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10018; (212) 209-5400. Washington Bureau: Suite 308, 110 Maryland Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20002; (202) 546-2239. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Subscription orders, changes of address, and all subscription inquiries: *The Nation*, PO Box 69, Lincolnshire, IL 60069-9815; or call 1-800-333-8536. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to Bleuchip International, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2. Canada Post: Publications Mail Agreement No. 40612608. When ordering a subscription, please allow four to six weeks for receipt of first issue and for all subscription transactions. Back issues available online for \$9.99 plus S&H from: shop.thenation.com. If the post office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. *The Nation* is available on microfilm from: University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Nation*, PO Box 69, Lincolnshire, IL 60069-9815. Printed in the USA.

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EDITORIAL / JOHN NICHOLS FOR THE NATION

The Critical Race

WISCONSIN SUPREME COURT JUSTICE REBECCA DALLET, WHOSE 2018 ELECTION TO what may be the most contentious state court bench in the country was a breakthrough win for the state's progressives, minced no words in explaining why she showed up to celebrate the February 21 primary election victory of another liberal, Judge Janet Protasiewicz. Speaking to a cheering crowd of abortion rights, labor rights, and voting rights activists, Dallet declared, "I'm here because, instead of dissents, I want to be writing majorities."

That will happen if Protasiewicz beats former state Supreme Court justice Dan Kelly, a controversial conservative who worked as "special counsel" for the Republican Party during the 2020 fight over certifying the presidential election results, and who is supported by the state's most ardent foes of abortion rights in Wisconsin's April 4 spring election. A Protasiewicz win would tip the balance of control on a court that currently has a 4-3 conservative majority. The conservative judicial activists who have dominated the court for more than a decade have established a record of siding with the right-wing Republicans who control the Legislature to upend labor rights, sustain GOP power grabs in the state Capitol, reject safety protections during the Covid-19 pandemic, undermine standards for fair elections, and gerrymander district lines so radically that even when Democrats win a majority of the vote statewide, Republicans retain overwhelming control of the legislative chambers. A liberal majority could potentially revisit all of those issues. It could also overturn an 1849 law that effectively bans abortion in the state, even though polling indicates that an overwhelming majority of Wisconsin voters want to protect reproductive rights.

There are plenty of debates about whether states should elect jurists. But in the vast majority of American states, justices on high court benches are chosen either through direct election or through increasingly contentious—and expensive—judicial retention elections. In Wisconsin, a closely divided state with a Democratic governor and a Republican-controlled Legislature, GOP strategist Mark Graul notes that "over the last decade, I can't think of a major public policy decision that didn't end up at the Supreme Court."

This has made the state's judicial contests fierce battles that are awash in special-interest money—much of it coming from out-of-state right-wing donors who in the 2000s and 2010s supercharged efforts by Republicans, such as former governor Scott Walker, to secure a court that would prop up their conservative agenda. In recent years, especially since Dallet's 2018 win, liberals have closed the fundraising gap and developed winning

strategies for contests that, although they are officially nonpartisan, have come to resemble races for the governorship or US Senate seats. With the stakes higher than ever, Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul, a Democrat, says, "The race for Wisconsin Supreme Court is the most important election in the country this year." That's a view now commonly held not just in Wisconsin but nationally. "It's impossible to overstate the importance of the April 4 vote in Wisconsin," says Transformative Justice Coalition president Barbara Arnwine. Norman Ornstein, a senior fellow emeritus at the American Enterprise Institute, who has been sounding the alarm for years on threats to fair elections in the states that decide presidential elections, agrees: "This race is absolutely critical for the future of democracy."

Ornstein is right. Wisconsin is a classic battleground state, where four of the last six presidential contests have been decided by less than 25,000 votes, and where former president Donald Trump pressured the Legislature and the courts to overturn the results of the 2020 election, in which he narrowly lost the state. It's also a state where fair and competitive maps could create an opening for Democrats to pick up two US House seats. The political consequences would be profound. A high court that defends fair elections and that releases the state from the iron grip of gerrymandering could dramatically shift the trajectory of fights for control of the White House and Congress in 2024. "If we don't flip this seat, the Wisconsin Supreme Court will keep seizing every

A high court that defends fair elections in the state could dramatically shift the trajectory of the 2024 presidential election.

available opportunity to act as an extension of the GOP-run state Legislature—including, potentially, interfering with the 2024 presidential election,” says Ben Wikler, the high-profile chair of the Democratic Party of Wisconsin, which on primary night endorsed Protasiewicz. The veteran prosecutor and Milwaukee County judge won 46 percent of the vote in that initial contest. Another liberal, Dane County Judge Everett Mitchell, who promoted a thoughtful criminal justice reform agenda, won almost 8 percent, meaning that liberals won 54 percent of the overall vote in a primary that saw almost 1 million ballots cast—far more than in the 2020 spring primary election, which featured a free-spending Supreme Court contest. The loser of that 2020 race was Dan Kelly, who in January’s primary election made a comeback, narrowly prevailing over another conservative. The Kelly win delighted progressives, who quickly noted that the last time the Republican-aligned jurist faced Wisconsin voters, he fell short by more than 150,000 ballots. The winner of the 2020 race, liberal Justice Jill Karofsky, immediately endorsed Protasiewicz after the primary, saying, “Wisconsinites need a Supreme Court justice who will always uphold the Constitution, rather than promote a right-wing political agenda.” Her dig at Kelly highlighted his long record as a doctrinaire ideologue. Kelly was born in California and graduated from Virginia’s Regent Law School, a conservative institution founded by the televangelist Pat Robertson that has ties to a number of high-profile legal advisers to former president Trump. In Wisconsin, Kelly made a name for himself representing prominent conservative clients as a private lawyer. He also represented legislative Republicans in lawsuits over their gerrymandering schemes in the early 2010s.

Appointed to the Wisconsin Supreme Court by Walker in 2016, Kelly joined conservatives in supporting controversial Republican efforts to take powers away from Tony Evers, the Democrat who beat Walker in 2018. In 2017, Kelly wrote a majority decision that blocked efforts by the city of Madison to bar passengers from carrying guns on city buses. Swept from office in the 2020 election, Kelly went back to work that year for right-wing interests, including the Republican Party of Wisconsin and the Republican National Committee. Paid nearly \$120,000 by the party organizations, Kelly was hired to “advise on election law” at a time when Wisconsin Republicans were conspiring to get fake presidential electors—who pledged to support Trump—certified, even though Joe Biden had won the state. According to former Wisconsin GOP chair Andrew Hitt’s testimony to the US House committee investigating the January 6 attack on the US Capitol, Kelly had “pretty extensive conversations” about the scheme.

That might be disqualifying in some judicial contests. But in Wisconsin, a battleground state that once sent red-baiting Republican Joe McCarthy to the US Senate and that just last

year reelected scandal-plagued Republican Senator Ron Johnson for a third term, no one is assuming that the April election will be easy for Protasiewicz. The candidate, who worked her way through Milwaukee’s Marquette Law School before joining the Milwaukee County district attorney’s office and eventually winning election to the circuit court in the state’s most populous county, has been open throughout the race about fundamental issues. “I value a woman’s freedom to make her own reproductive health care decisions,” she explained on the night of the primary. “Your vote matters. Everybody’s vote matters. And the Constitution, our Constitution, guarantees the right to vote and to have

a representative democracy in this country. I’ll be running against someone who doesn’t share my value[s].” At another point during her victory celebration, she added, “I’ll be running against someone who doesn’t think women in Wisconsin should be able to make their own health care decisions, someone who could threaten our

democracy, and someone who won’t hesitate to put extreme, partisan beliefs ahead of the laws of our state.”

The judge’s bluntness about where she is coming from—not stating how she would rule in specific cases, but leveling with voters about her values—has made her the target of cynical attacks by Kelly. And there will be plenty of money to amplify those attacks in what is widely expected to be the most expensive judicial contest in the nation’s history. More than \$9 million was spent on television, radio, and digital advertising before the primary. And even Kelly is predicting that out-of-state spending in the race will top \$20 million, with much of it expected to come from right-wing funders such as Illinois’s Richard and Elizabeth Uihlein, Republican mega-donors who have spent close to \$230 million supporting conservative candidates nationwide in the past decade. Anti-abortion groups have also signaled that they will make the race a top priority. But so, too, have abortion rights groups, which see an opportunity to mobilize young voters in particular with messages that highlight the stark differences between Protasiewicz and Kelly. That’s a smart bet in a state where close to 60 percent of voters believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases—and where young voters played a critical role in reelecting the pro-choice Tony Evers as governor in 2022.

“This is our referendum on abortion,” says Margaret Keuler, a University of Wisconsin–Madison junior who is the chair of College Democrats of Wisconsin. “Others states, like Michigan, have had actual referendums. This Supreme Court race is our referendum.”

Flipping a seat on the state Supreme Court will stop it from serving as an extension of the GOP-run Legislature.

COMMENT/YUH-LINE NIOU

Political Fashion

There is always a politics to clothing choices—especially if you're a political figure subject to media scrutiny.

ALL OVER TWITTER AND SOCIAL MEDIA, PEOPLE posted about Marjorie Taylor Greene's State of the Union outfit, which looked like a Cruella de Vil costume. There were articles about it in news outlets from *The Washington Post* to *The Guardian*. People wondered if it was real fur, what she meant by it, and whether she was just, as usual, promoting white...ness?

Apparently it was a comment on President Biden and the Chinese balloon, but her obvious goal was to get media attention, and it worked.

Is there always a political statement in what a politician or political figure wears? Why did they wear *that*? What are they trying to say? Why can we not stop talking about it? Is it wrong for us to talk about what someone wears? Why does what someone wears even matter?

There is the never-ending commentary on Ilhan Omar being the first Congress member ever to wear a hijab on the floor. Her hijab is often mentioned in articles about her policies. When Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez first took office, the topic of what she was wearing often turned into sexist and classist commentary trying to shame her.

Everyday fashion choices become sensations—or scandals—if you're a political figure. Nowhere is that clearer than in the tempest around the tan suit President Barack Obama wore in 2014 to a press conference about the US military's response to the Islamic State in Syria. Conservative commentary claimed the color was inappropriate given the gravity of the situation. The tan suit "scandal" became such media catnip that the incident has its own Wikipedia page.

"I think people are getting it now: Politics isn't binary," the late Virgil Abloh of Louis Vuitton and Off-White was quoted as saying in a 2020 *Vogue* article. "It's this system we're in and all the ways it manifests. There's the politics on your phone and the politics on your street. And, yeah, there's the politics of your clothes."

I remember thinking about that Abloh quote when I was sitting and freezing on the floor of the New York State Assembly. Like many workplaces across the country, it is kept at a ridiculously low temperature—a conscious choice made in the name of "protocol" and "decorum." Men are required to wear a full suit and tie when voting on the floor. Jackets are mandatory. (There is an actual rulebook.) The temperature is adjusted to ensure that men wearing suits are comfortable.

The chamber's temperature hasn't been changed to accommodate the women members or staff who work on the floor. Because the rules haven't been updated to meet the times we're in, our views are not considered in the thermostat fight, despite the fact that we tend to "feel the cold" more than men. So women working on the legislative floor have become used to bringing an array of accessories with them, from blankets and fleece sweaters to full outdoor winter coats.

There is the politics of our clothing: where it comes from, how it is made, what in our history or our environment (like the temperature of the legislative floor) makes it the apparel we choose to wear on a

given day. But there is also the conversation about clothes as a political statement.

When I was in office, I was hands down one of the most stylish members ever to walk the halls of Albany. (I won't allow arguments at this time.) I represented Lower Manhattan, and I know I looked like I represented Lower Manhattan. I was always running from events to meetings to committees or voting on the floor. Even in my busiest moments, though, I still knew that everything I did—not just what I put on that day—was a statement. Even if the statement was simply "I'm working so hard for you, I don't do anything else. Ever."

Fashion and political advocacy go hand in hand, and that's always been true. Think about the change in fashion during the women's suffrage movement,

coupled with women's tireless fight for the right to vote. Or during the 1960s and '70s, when the anti-war movement adopted a look that remains iconic half a century later, while Black civil rights activists wore their "Sunday best" to promote dignity. Unions wear their colors at

Fashion and advocacy go hand in hand. Consider how color choice has become a means to display solidarity.

rallies; the Women's March popularized the pink pussy hat; and the LGBTQ movement has adopted the rainbow flag. For social movements, color choice has become a means to display solidarity.

Political figures are asked to make statements all the time. Sometimes we do it with our clothes. I am an immigrant, and I have been the recipient of endless amounts of racism and xenophobia. I chose to wear a white dress, a collared long navy jacket, and matte red lipstick for my debate when I ran for Congress—the colors I chose for my campaign literature, and the colors of our nation's flag. With her outfit, Greene achieved her goal of being splashed everywhere in the media evoking whiteness. Likewise, with her hijab, Omar is inspiring a conversation that confronts rampant anti-Muslim sentiment. Ocasio-Cortez is effectively speaking out about the vitriol she's experienced and showing people exactly how hard it is to be a young woman of color in office.

And, yes, political statements are being made, in true political fashion. **N**

Yuh-Line Niou served as a member of the New York State Assembly for the 65th District and was the first Asian American to represent Lower Manhattan in the New York State Legislature.

Back Talk Alexis Grenell



“Jewface” Strategy

The GOP is running candidates who have figured out the advantages of faking a Jewish identity.

THE GEORGE SANTOS SAGA IS A MULTILEVEL MASTERPIECE of lies, singular in its excesses but for the recent entry of Florida Representative Anna Paulina Luna into the GOP Hall of Identity Hoaxer Fame. The two spun themselves into a Fox News fever dream to own the libs: Gay! Latino! Hispanic! A woman! With an added twist: Jewish!

It's fascinating what this strategy reveals about perceptions of Jewish identity and its value within the party of white supremacy (compared with its near-total lack of value on the left).

On a practical level, claiming to be Jewish makes sense when you're trying to appeal to Jewish voters and an affiliated donor base. Like any marginalized group, Jews tend to lean on a kind of survivalist, tribal kinship, the same way the LGBTQ Victory Fund, EMILY's List, and others organize to get more members of their in-group elected to office. It's why, in the recent New York primary between Carolyn Maloney and Jerry Nadler, Nadler highlighted that if he lost, it would mean that New York City would no longer have a Jewish member in the House. He won handily against a candidate with a similar record, in large part thanks to his heavily Jewish, Upper West Side electorate.

For non-Jewish Republican candidates who are running against actual Jews, as Santos and Luna did, pretending to be Jewish is a great way to divide a highly active and overwhelmingly Democratic voter base. There's also the added benefit of laundering the right's anti-Semitism. When asked by *Jewish Insider* to explain how she could accept the endorsement of Marjorie “Watch Out for Jewish Space Lasers” Taylor Greene, Luna had the ultimate comeback: “I was raised as a Messianic Jew by my father. If [Taylor Greene] were antisemitic, why did she endorse me?” Santos used his alleged Judaism to excuse his own trafficking in stereotypes about Jews and money: A former roommate reported that “he'd always say that it was okay for him to make those jokes because he was Jewish.” And he weaponized it to police anti-Semitism in others, tweeting remarks like “wow you pulled the Nazi card on the grandson of Holocaust refugees.” Notably, we don't see any white, Christian candidates like Lauren Boebert—who also ran against a Jewish opponent—trying to claim membership in the tribe.

This is where the phenomenon that David

Baddiel calls “Schrödinger's whites” comes in: Jews are white or nonwhite depending on the politics of the observer. Baddiel is a British comedian and the author of *Jews Don't Count*, an extended essay about all the ways in which—consciously or unconsciously—anti-Semitism is seen as a lesser racism on the left, which categorizes Jews as white and privileged, and therefore outside “the sacred circle” of protected peoples. For white supremacists, on the other hand, Jews are explicitly not white—though the ideology is also founded on a notion that Jews are privileged and that, in fact, there is a vast conspiracy of Jewish puppet masters manipulating other nonwhite peoples against the white race. In this scenario, commonly called the Great Replacement, people of color are pawns of the Jews, allowing any racism directed at Jews to be construed as a kind of punching up against power. But in the US context, Jewish descendants of European immigrants are generally racialized as white, further conflating them with a ruling class. Think of Whoopi Goldberg's claim that the Holocaust wasn't about race because it involved “two White groups of people.” Then consider that the Black comedian's name used to be Caryn Johnson.

Here's where the left's concept of Jews syncs up with the right's tendency to run candidates of color like Santos and Luna in Jewface: Inherent in their performance of Jewface is the assumption that Jews are de facto privileged, meaning that claiming Jewish identity is a pathway to whiteness.

The Harvard historian Noel Ignatiev described this “strategy” in his 1995 classic *How the Irish Became White* as a way “to ensure an advantage in a competitive society.” The Irish were eligible for whiteness in the United States, but it was not guaranteed, and they had to pursue it directly by making common cause with pro-slavery Southerners and expressing anti-Black sentiments. Eastern European Jews in America have also been eligible for whiteness. Ignatiev himself was the child of Russian Jewish immigrants who named him Noel! But Ignatiev was adamant that whiteness is a choice, and one he rejected throughout his life. According to *The Washington Post's* exposé of Luna, she haphazardly claimed either

a Jewish or a Hispanic identity before running for office. She'd mostly chosen whiteness, even though her mother is Mexican American. However, there's no evidence that her father—descended from German immigrants—was a Messianic Jew, making her choice read like an

Anti-Semitism is seen as a lesser racism on the left, casting Jews outside the “sacred circle” of protected people.

awkward and ignorant attempt to balance out a new Brown identity. Mainstream Jews abhor the Jews for Jesus crowd, so there's little currency in it (although clearly it got her far enough). Santos committed to a better pantomime, at least, padded with other plays for whiteness like his hedge-fund uniform of three-quarter zips and prep-school blazers.

So what are Jews supposed to do? Gatekeeping can be a dangerous game, and few of us want to be in the business of declaring someone "not Jewish." That same reticence is apparent among other minority groups, allowing impostors like Jessica Krug, Rachel Dolezal, and Raquel Evita Saraswati

Jewface is now a pattern on the right, and Speaker McCarthy and the RNC couldn't care less.

to get away with their respective cons for decades, despite massive red flags. But some people just aren't members of the groups they claim to be a part of; they're simply seeking benefits through a cynical and racialized theater. For actual gatekeepers like AIPAC, which welcomed Santos after he touted himself as a "proud American Jew," it's entirely appropriate for them to up their screening game. Jewface is now a pattern on the right, and Speaker Kevin McCarthy and the Republican National Committee couldn't care less. They're happy to exploit anti-Semitism when it suits them while carrying on with white supremacists and fake Jews. The rest of us should be very skeptical. **N**



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Getting to Contract

More than half of workers who vote to join a union still don't have a contract a year later.

DO A QUICK SCAN OF THE MAJOR NEWS SITES RIGHT NOW, and you'll see headlines like "Starbucks Illegally Refused Union Contract Talks at 21 Cafes, NLRB Says" and "Trader Joe's Accused of Bad Faith Bargaining by Union," along with "Amazon Could Stymie Unions for Years by Going to the Courts." Fifteen months after the first successful National Labor Relations Board

election at a Starbucks, in Buffalo, N.Y.—a shot of adrenaline for the lethargic US labor movement—and almost a year after the shocker in Staten Island, where workers defeated Amazon's union-busting and voted yes on a union at the company's JFK8 warehouse, neither of these efforts has produced a first collective bargaining agreement. Amazon even refuses to accept that the JFK8 workers voted for a union. On its website, Starbucks Workers United has posted 15 noneconomic demands under the heading "What Are We Fighting For?" Yet the coffee chain's management still won't meaningfully engage with workers in any of the 280 stores unionized since December 2021, deploying a predictable arsenal of stalling tactics.

There's nothing surprising about today's ferocious union-busting. The litany of ominous headlines might be an education for younger Americans about the scale of this long-running class war, but workers form unions to win respect and material gains, not to learn about yet another way their bosses exercise too much power. Employers understand that they always get two chances to destroy a unionization effort. The first is to terrorize workers so they won't vote yes in the first place. The second is to creatively refuse to negotiate. Workers can't begin the process of realizing the concrete gains that will lead to a better life—from ending torturous scheduling to achieving real cost-of-living wage increases to obtaining the health care and retirement plans everyone deserves—until they secure a first union contract. For two decades, research showed that over 52 percent of workers don't have a contract within a year of winning unionization. Unfortunately, the feisty new unions have also not been able to force their employers to seriously negotiate, let alone win a first contract. Apple and Microsoft have taken a slightly less aggressive stance than most companies by recently agreeing to talks, but it's not yet clear how these tech giants will approach their newly unionized employees either.

The question for today's new unions—as well as for workers hoping to rebuild established ones—is: Can they learn the lessons that most legacy unions have failed to understand? The most important of these is that the high-energy organizing work never stops, from the first conversations among workers considering a union all the way to winning the

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Dr. Sears is the author of over 500 scientific papers on anti-aging and recently spoke at the WPBF 25 Health & Wellness Festival featuring Dr. Oz and special guest Suzanne Somers. Thousands of people listened to Dr. Sears speak on his anti-aging breakthroughs and attended his book signing at the event.

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generators begin to malfunction and die off as they age. In fact, the Mitochondria Research Society reports 50 million U.S. adults are suffering from health problems because of mitochondrial dysfunction.

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"Imagine 5,000 times more efficient energy," says Dr. Sears. "PQQ has been a game changer for my patients."

"With the PQQ in Ultra Accel II, I have energy I never thought possible," says Colleen R., one of Dr. Sears' patients. "I am in my 70s but feel 40 again. I think clearer, move with real energy and sleep like a baby."

It works right away

Along with an abundance of newfound energy, users also report a sharper, more focused mind and memory, and even younger-looking skin and hair. Jerry M. from Wellington, Florida, used Ultra Accel II and was amazed at the effect.

"I noticed a difference within a few



NASA-discovered nutrient is stunning the medical world by activating more youthful energy, vitality and health than CoQ10.

days," says Jerry. "My endurance almost doubled. But it's not just in your body. You can feel it mentally, too," says Jerry. "Not only do I feel a difference, but the way it protects my cells is great insurance against a health disaster as I get older."

Increase your health span today

The demand for this supplement is so high, Dr. Sears is having trouble keeping it in stock. "My patients tell me they feel better than they have in years. This is ideal for people who are feeling or looking older than their age... or for those who are tired or growing more forgetful."

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To secure the hot, new **Ultra Accel II** formula, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-830-5038** TODAY. "It's not available in retail stores yet," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer." Dr. Sears feels so strongly about **Ultra Accel II**, all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. "Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I'll send you all your money back." The customer is responsible for the return shipping.

Call NOW at **1-800-830-5038** to secure your supply of **Ultra Accel II**. Use Promo Code **NATUA323** when you call. Lines are frequently busy, but all calls will be answered!

hard fight for a first contract. Until last year's revival, the most recent reform movement among unions (the "New Voice" program that began in the mid-1990s) blundered big-time on this front: Not only did the unions fail to continue the high-participation approach that won their unionization elections, but they often explicitly deprioritized the fight to secure a first contract. Instead, they left that effort to inexperienced, newly organized rank-and-file workers—or to less-than-competent staff representatives who weren't intent on teaching workers what it takes to win and how to build workplace power and organization during the campaign for a first contract.

There are worrying signs that some newly unionizing workers are slipping into "lawfare," in which lawyers are allowed to make the decisions, when what's urgent is the kind of rank-and-file organizing that brings the entire workforce and the workers' communities into the fight to beat back union-busters. Many of the recent, exciting

Like nearly every aspect of the debate about the best way forward for unions, how to negotiate, and how to get to the bargaining table, are strategic choices.

campaigns rushed forward quickly, without giving workers time to build organizations resilient enough to win sustained battles. Which means the approach that workers choose for getting to negotiations is especially critical.

In the initial unionization election, workers learn to overcome adversity, but it's in the campaign for the first contract that they learn to build governing power. To do this, workers must sustain high levels of participation in the negotiations process itself by being fully transparent in constructing their demands, by electing large and representative committees that develop proposals, and by allowing all workers who will be covered by the contract

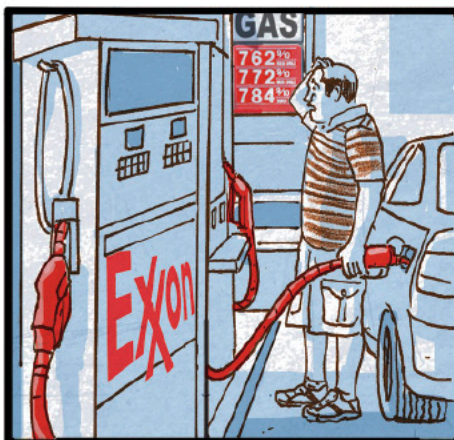
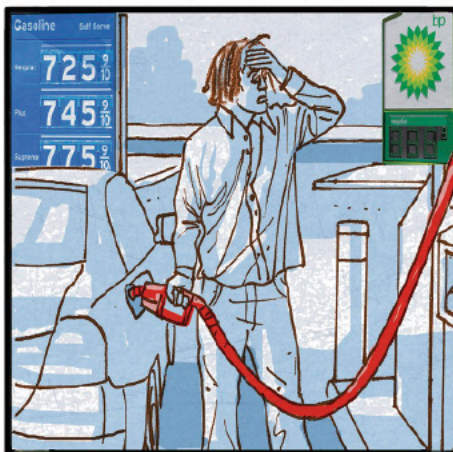
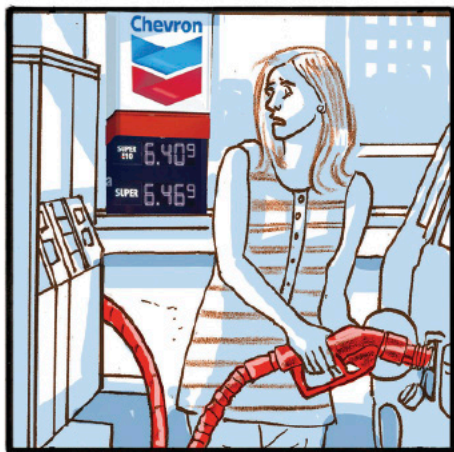
to engage directly in the negotiations. How workers approach negotiations is crucial to whether they succeed in getting the bosses to show up at the table. If workers choose the high-participation path, they can build governing power.

What is governing power? The ability of workers to self-govern—which requires the kind of high-participation,

workplace-based, bottom-up organization that can enforce the achievements won in the eventual first contract. Why? Because while the ink has yet to dry on the new agreement, union-busting managers will set out to violate the contract immediately. If workers fail to fight back collectively, they risk becoming a grievance-heavy, customer-service-style union—which will eventually stunt the organization.

For detailed examples of workers using a high-participation approach and winning, see my forthcoming book with Abby Lawlor, *Rules to Win By: Power and Participation in Union Negotiations*. Whether a union is new and independent or long-established, the questions of how to negotiate, and how to get to the bargaining table, represent strategic choices. Framed as such, more unions need to embrace a high-participation approach, which leads to high-powered negotiations. It's power that workers and their communities absolutely need to win the real improvements that propel yet more workers to take the risk of unionizing. **N**

OPPART/PETER KUPER



Town Called Malice

CHRIS LEHMANN

The Governing Gap

The Biden administration's policies have effectively implemented popular reforms. But have voters noticed?

FRESH OFF A SURPRISINGLY SUCCESSFUL AND CONFRONTATIONAL State of the Union address that doubled as a preview of his reelection campaign, President Joe Biden launched a national tour to tout some signature projects in his landmark infrastructure bill. He presided over ribbon-cutting ceremonies for multimillion-dollar initiatives to restore

bridges and highways and to phase in fleets of electric buses. All the while, he chided Republican political leaders for blocking progress on these key arenas of national economic renewal.

The only trouble was, Biden's galvanizing message didn't seem to leave much of an impression on its intended audience. Correspondents for *The Washington Post* following him on the Wisconsin leg of his tour reported that many voters there weren't even aware that the president was in their midst; the events were closed to the public and hadn't been advertised beforehand. They'd only found out about Biden's appearances when, to their irritation, traffic had been diverted and photo-op sites cordoned off.

There's a deeper irony here than the *Veep*-like spectacle of a nationwide program to streamline infrastructure snarling up commuters' schedules. In making his reelection pitch, Biden has set a challenge for himself that few recent incumbent presidents have faced: He's betting that he can defy the overall trend of public opinion and demonstrate that government can actually work, delivering material improvements in the everyday lives of Americans.

On paper, that shouldn't be a tall order for a president who has a battery of ambitious economic achievements to promote—not only the infrastructure package but the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS Act's many subsidies to the tech sector, not to mention an economy performing close to full employment. But American politics has long pivoted on a wholesale distrust of government—or, perhaps more accurately, a commitment to divert it to blunter ideological aims, such as the great rolling hellscape known as Ron DeSantis's policy agenda, or Donald Trump's own fledgling reelection crusade to marshal federal resources behind right-wing education demagoguery. In a political era of movement-baiting viral memes, Biden's infrastructure tour felt a bit like a civics class filmstrip.

Still, there are potential hidden strengths in Biden's focused appeal to government-directed enterprise. "I think he's savvy enough to know the traditional paradox that Americans complain about government and don't trust it, but they like its specifics," says Julian Zelizer, a

historian at Princeton University. "I would think that an effective strategy is to keep telling people what he's given them. I don't know if he'll do it, though. Democrats are still nervous about playing in the shadow of Republican presidents."

Indeed, going back to the Reagan era, Democrats have been frightened of Republican shadows even more than their own—hence the long, glum drumbeat of neoliberal capitulation to right-wing policy frameworks stretching from Bill Clinton to Barack Obama. That posture of learned policy helplessness was grimly aligned with the party's generally bumbling economic messaging over those years. Whereas George W. Bush and Trump both made a point of sending physical checks to recipients of federal stimulus funds, Obama elected to forgo that vulgar spectacle, and structured his stimulus as a payroll tax cut turning up in unobtrusive stealth fashion in their financial statements.

So Biden's reelection bid will mark a new moment in our political lifetimes: an incumbent Democratic president promoting genuinely life-changing measures that have the potential to reach all Americans. It's a record that should be an easy sell for a party serious about real economic populism—and in many ways, Biden is ideally positioned to make the pitch. "Biden is different from his predecessors in three ways," Zelizer says. "Having been vice president when Obama pushed a big stimulus program and didn't get credit for it—or even take credit for it—is on his mind. Second, I think he saw how, with the Affordable Care Act rollout, the more people experienced the benefits, the more popular it became—to the point that Republicans didn't want to cut it. And finally, his age puts him in an era when that's what you did: You boasted about what you did. That was just politics. He's a different generation."

Michael Kazin, a historian at Georgetown University and the author of *What It Took to Win: A History of the Democratic Party*, notes that Biden is old-school in another way: He's a devoted party man—and has changed his platform and messaging to reflect an emerging policy consensus among Democrats. "The left of the party has been on the march and growing, and he's got his finger in the wind," Kazin says. "He always has. He was against busing when he started in the Senate, and now he's Mr. Black Lives Matter. He was also a DLC [Democratic Leadership Council] person—briefly, but he was."

But even if Biden is the man for this particular message, it's still far from clear that the

In an era of movement-baiting viral memes, Biden's infrastructure tour felt a bit like a civics class filmstrip.

message will resonate in this historical moment. Despite his record, polling consistently shows that the public is underwhelmed by Biden's Oval Office tenure so far, with more than 62 percent of Americans agreeing that he's done little or nothing over the past two years. Especially troubling is the steady stream of polling indicating that majorities don't think Biden has performed well in precisely the sort of economic initiatives that he's going to run on—measures like infrastructure renewal and job creation.

Of course, this is also what political campaigns are for—to

hammer home achievements and policy agendas across the national landscape—and the 2024 cycle has yet to begin in earnest. At the same time, that landscape is fragmented as rarely before by negative partisanship and information distortion on a massive scale. “We haven’t had a majority party for 50 years,” Kazin says. “It’s a hard pattern to break. Since Nixon resigned, there have been 12 presidential elections, and each party has won six. That kind of partisanship, it takes something like the Great Depression to break that up.” **N**



SNAPSHOT
Michael Swensen



Troubled Waters

Petroleum-based chemicals float on the Leslie Run creek in East Palestine, Ohio, more than two weeks after the derailment of a Norfolk Southern train carrying toxic chemicals on February 3, 2023.

By the Numbers



38

Number of train cars that derailed in East Palestine, Ohio, 11 of which contained hazardous materials

4.7k

Number of people who live in East Palestine

9

Number of toxic chemicals found near the crash site, most notably vinyl chloride, which is used in PVC plastic manufacturing

21M

Number of tons of PVC produced globally each year

100k

Minimum number of gallons of chemicals that the derailment spilled into the air and water

20

Number of days after the disaster it took for Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg to visit the town

\$0

Amount of relief funds from FEMA that East Palestine has received to date

CALVIN TRILLIN DeadlinePoet



Mike Pence Resists Grand Jury Subpoena

Pence guards his White House prospects, hence

He's planned resistance that's intense.

He wouldn't want to give offense

To MAGA types. That makes no sense—

Though, purely by coincidence,

They're folks who chanted “Hang Mike Pence.”

Should the Labor Movement Prioritize the Push for Sectoral Bargaining?

Yes!

LARRY COHEN

No!

ERIC BLANC

SECTORAL BARGAINING MEANS LOOKING for labor power not solely in individual workplaces but in entire industries. Compared with workers in other wealthy countries, few American workers are in unions, and they have lower standards of living, less employment security, and fewer organizing rights. Elsewhere in the world, sectoral bargaining has allowed labor movements to help more workers, more quickly, than by relying on the shop-by-shop organizing strategy common in the US. The labor movement here should look for inspiration to the African National Congress in South Africa, which legislated sectoral bargaining after smashing apartheid; the striking Amazon workers in Italy two years ago; the 2018 mass strikes against fascism in Argentina; and even its own history.

From 1935 to 1955, the CIO rooted its work in sectoral organizing—in contrast to the AFL's craft unionism, which excluded most low-wage workers. The more radical CIO organized industries, which meant that each union could win higher wages for hundreds of thousands of auto, steel, and telecom workers in one go. Nearly 80 years ago, after a decade of fierce organizing, the United Auto Workers bargained on behalf of all auto workers. Typically, the union targeted one of the big three automakers: General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler. A labor win at one employer would almost immediately improve conditions across the industry, as the same contract was extended to the other firms' workers. In the coal and steel industries, sectoral bargaining was more formal, with multiple employers bargaining at the same time. These efforts expanded the share of unionized workers in the private sector from about 13 percent in 1930 to more than 35 percent by 1955. But after that, industry-wide bargaining in the US declined, partly because of anti-union trade policies. Congress never codified sectoral bargaining, nor did it extend it to new enterprises, as happened in most other democracies. The result: Only 6 percent of workers in the private sector are in unions today.

In our current political context, sectoral approaches can seem bureaucratic. The California law AB 527, for instance, is set to establish a fast-food worker council, which will cover more than 500,000 workers, mostly women of color. The council will have worker representatives as well as employer and government members and will have the power to set

SECTORAL BARGAINING IS A DESIRABLE goal, but prioritizing this fight puts the cart before the horse. The labor movement currently faces a far more urgent task: organizing unorganized workers into unions.

Increasing employees' collective power on the ground is the most realistic path to bringing bosses from across an industry to the bargaining table. US labor leaders too often treat sectoral bargaining as a strategic alternative to the daunting work of organizing workers shop by shop. But hoping for a quick policy fix overlooks the fact that centralized negotiations in Europe largely arose as a response from employers hoping to tame powerful local unions and strike militancy. And once European labor movements found themselves on the retreat in the 1990s, centralized bargaining was often either scrapped or came to serve as a mechanism to impose austerity and deregulation.

Without a bedrock of worker associational power, sectoral bargaining is unlikely to get widely implemented—at least not in a manner favorable to working people.

Fortunately, we're living in one of the ripest moments for workplace organizing in decades. Young, radicalized workers are overwhelmingly pro-union and eager to take on the billionaire class. Their ability to do so has been boosted by a tight labor market, the spread of digital technologies, and a new Biden-appointed National Labor Relations Board that is aiding unionization for the first time in decades.

Unfortunately, even last year's string of high-profile unionization victories—from Starbucks to Amazon to media outlets to retail stores and beyond—has not yet proved sufficient to snap the leaders of most national unions out of their defensive posture. Instead, the AFL-CIO's June 2022 convention set a far-from-ambitious goal: 1 million new members over the next 10 years. Achieving no more than this would result in a drop in union density, since the total workforce is set to grow at a faster pace than the AFL-CIO's organizing goal.

The stumbling block is not a lack of resources. The US labor movement's assets total \$35.8 billion, a third of which is "highly liquid," according to recent research. These funds nearly doubled from 2010 to 2020, a period when the number of union staffers dropped by 19 percent.

It is true that investing in new organizing is risky

The Debate

The Debate

wage floors and rules about scheduling and other issues. This approach makes sense, because our legal structure fails to effectively support organizing and bargaining. Such councils are not substitutes for unions, but they cut against the bifurcated workplaces with contractors, franchises, and part-time workers. If the council system is implemented—and companies are spending millions on a ballot measure to prevent its adoption—it could encourage a mass movement of fast-food workers that would further reinvigorate labor.

Similarly, last year, more than 5,500 minor league baseball players—most receiving starvation wages, and many of whom are Spanish speakers from the Caribbean and Central and South America—won recognition for a union covering more than 120 teams. They are bargaining now, and the outcome will almost certainly be better than it would have been if they had organized one team at a time.

In 2022, heroic workers—from video game designers and Amazon warehouse employees to journalists and baristas—broke through the gauntlet of US organizing and won recognition. But in each case, negotiating a strong contract has been incredibly difficult. Even last year, when the labor movement gained such momentum, the percentage of work-

ers in a union declined. In my decades of global union work, not once did I hear workers in a nation with sectoral bargaining say they'd swap it for the atomized framework of the US.

Finally, workers don't have to make a single choice. We should organize at every level: workplace, employer, and sector. Autoworkers in Germany, trash

pickers and recyclers in Argentina, telecom workers in Norway, and metalworkers in South Africa know that their nation's version of sectoral bargaining starts with workplace solidarity, but the sectoral frame gives them a floor on which to build that solidarity. It's much easier to start there than at the beginning of the long, difficult road to a union contract in the US.

Workplace organizing alone will not be sufficient to initiate or sustain sectoral bargaining in the US. The pro-union messaging from Biden is nice, but we need economic policies that encourage bargaining and organizing rights. Both the electric-vehicle and chip sectors, for instance, receive billions in federal funds. Imagine if the White House required employer neutrality and sectoral bargaining to occur in order to receive any government money. Reforms to our labor system are not enough. We can't just support workers at a particular worksite or employer. We must build solidarity across millions of workers in an industry or sector, and we should demand, at a minimum, the same kind of foundation for unions that workers have won in most other democracies. **N**

Larry Cohen is the board chair of Our Revolution and was the president of the Communications Workers of America from 2005 to 2015.

and expensive, which is why unions have tended to focus on legislative fixes. Workers face a broken labor law system, merciless opposition from employers, and a ruthless "union avoidance" industry. And as advocates of sectoral bargaining correctly point out, the fissured nature of many businesses today has further undermined the effectiveness of shop-by-shop organizing, since employees in many industries now nominally work for themselves or for subcontractors.

These are formidable obstacles. Willpower and good organizing methods alone will not be sufficient to win a union for every worker who deserves one. But it would be a tragedy to let the current opening slip away.

Worker-led unionization efforts with few resources have racked up some impressive victories over the past year, but imagine how far things might be able to go if the campaigns at Amazon, Trader Joe's, Starbucks, Apple, and elsewhere were backed by the full firepower of organized labor.

Advocates of sectoral bargaining are correct that workers will likely need an assist from lawmakers. But labor's big breakthrough in the 1930s demonstrates that the best way to pressure politicians to pass—and employers to accept—comprehensive labor reforms is by creating crises for ruling elites and keeping inspirational workplace organizing in the headlines.

Doing so, however, will require that unions stop deferring to Democratic leaders. Though President Biden has taken some pro-union steps, he has so far refused to use his bully pulpit or his power to withhold federal contracts against the union-busting wave sweeping the country. Lots of this employer intimidation is legal. But some of it is blatantly against the law, including the firing of worker organizers by Starbucks and its decision to withhold benefits from unionized stores, which has had a chilling effect on momentum at Starbucks and beyond.

Unions should not expect Democratic politicians to seriously defend workers' right to organize, let alone pass major labor law reform, unless the labor movement initiates an escalating campaign of protest and disruption to pressure the federal government to start treating the systematic suppression of employees' voices at work as an intolerable national scandal. A useful start for such a campaign would be an all-hands-on-deck blitz supporting the heroic efforts of Starbucks baristas to overcome Howard Schultz's illegal "scorched earth" campaign against their right to organize.

Only by unionizing new workplaces, together with a campaign in defense of workers' right to organize, can labor start building the power necessary to eventually win transformational legal reforms—including sectoral bargaining. **N**

Eric Blanc is the author of Red State Revolt: The Teachers' Strike Wave and Working-Class Politics.

We can't just support workers at one employer. We must build solidarity across millions of workers.

Only by unionizing new workplaces can labor start building the power and momentum to win legal reforms.

PHOTO ESSAY

Across the Tracks

In the San Joaquin Valley, one of the world's most productive agricultural areas, poverty is endemic. Fresno is the valley's working-class capital and the largest city.

In 2022, 55 percent of unhoused people in Fresno and in neighboring Madera were "unsheltered"—that is, sleeping in places the government calls not suitable for human habitation.

The banks and growers and theater owners of the valley once built ornate buildings and movie palaces. As developers flee for the suburbs, the theater entrances and building doorways have become sleeping spaces and refuges from the

rain. Bisecting downtown are the railroad tracks and the old Highway 99, a defining geography for the settlements of unhoused people.

People try to survive no matter their circumstances. Activists and the unhoused themselves have pressured Fresno's government to provide at least enough housing to keep the dream of life off the streets alive.

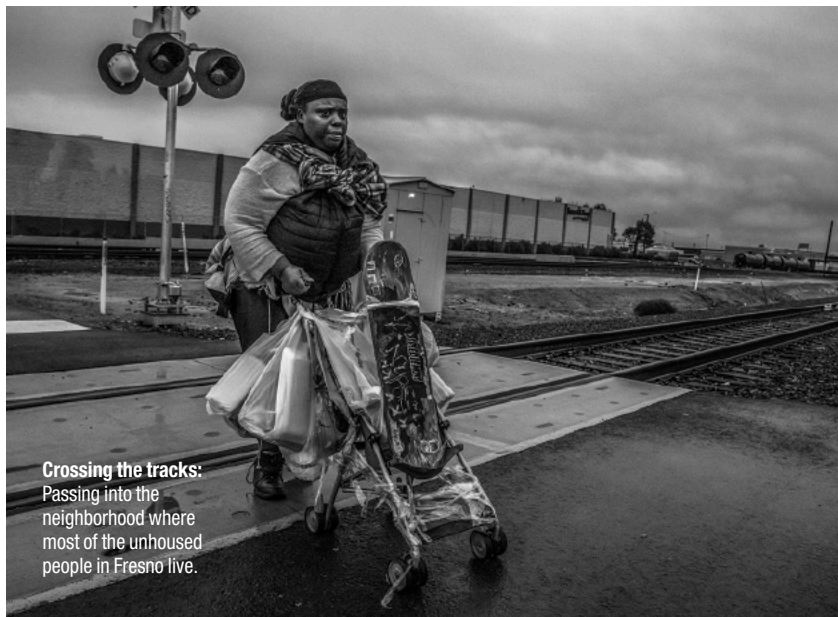
These photographs are a reality check. They tell a story of poverty and migration, of life on the other side of the tracks. They force acknowledgment of real conditions and show survival itself as a form of resistance.

—David Bacon



The journey back: Two unhoused people pass under the SR 99 freeway, the central artery of the San Joaquin Valley.

Lucking out: Larry Collins was an unhoused activist. He got a home when public pressure led to the building of a small new complex.



Crossing the tracks: Passing into the neighborhood where most of the unhoused people in Fresno live.

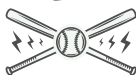


Shelter from the storm: Joseph and his partner made a home out of the rain in a boarded-up downtown doorway.

David Bacon is a photojournalist and author. His latest book, *More Than a Wall / Más que un muro*, about the US-Mexico border, was released in 2022. This story was supported by a grant from the Economic Hardship Reporting Project.

A UNION

OF
Their Own



BASEBALL'S MINOR LEAGUERS
STEP UP TO THE PLATE.

BY
KELLY
CANDAELE
AND PETER
DREIER

Organizer



BILL FLETCHER JR.



*Garrett
Broshuis*

Player / Organizer



*Harry
Marino*

Player / Organizer



REVOR HILDENBERGER IS A 32-YEAR-OLD PITCHER FOR A MINOR LEAGUE affiliate of the San Francisco Giants. He was used to spending his days thinking about balls, strikes, and fielding errors, but helping organize a union with his fellow ballplayers taught him a lot about political psychology.

“When I started to talk to players about how collective action could make things better for us, I had those conversations during batting practice, on the buses, or in the clubhouse,” Hildenberger remembers. “I always spoke loud enough so that it didn’t seem like I was whispering secrets to them, as if I was afraid that what I was asking them to do was dangerous.”

Hildenberger, whose parents are active in a Northern California nurses union, believes that his efforts are simply a matter of dignity, fighting for what is fair for himself and the 5,500 other minor league players.

“My parents are proud of what I’m doing,” he says.

Since the early 20th century, thousands of young athletes have endured low wages, overcrowded housing, indifferent medical care, and all-night rides in uncomfortable buses in order to play in baseball’s minor leagues, hoping to eventually make it to “the show”—the major leagues. These players have long complained about their working conditions, but rarely in public. Many were grateful just to be paid to play baseball—a step up from working on farms or in factories back home. They also knew that players who grumbled about their circumstances could quickly lose their jobs or even get blacklisted by professional teams. So they kept quiet.

Now the decades of whispering have ended.

In mid-September, a majority of minor league players signed cards stating their desire for the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA) to represent them through collective bargaining. Baseball’s 30 team owners, 24 of whom are billionaires, immediately recognized the union as the minor leaguers’ representative—meaning that when play resumes in March, baseball’s entire player workforce will be unionized.

The fall announcement shook up the baseball world. Many sportswriters claimed that the union came out of nowhere. That’s because the players had kept the organizing efforts quiet—despite the many phone calls, e-mails, and one-on-one meetings they employed to spread the word.

A union for minor league players was considered a pipe dream only a decade ago. One major stumbling block was the players’ reluctance to take on the team owners. Even Marvin Miller, the MLBPA’s legendary first executive director—who negotiated the first collective bargaining agreement in professional sports in 1968—believed that minor league players, who had “stars in their eyes” about making the major leagues, would never unionize.

“The notion that these very young, inexperienced people were going to defy the owners—it’s just not going to happen,” Miller told *Slate* in 2012.

But in the past few years, a group of minor leaguers had begun organizing to change the conditions that they once believed were unchangeable. Like any organizing drive against a powerful and implacable employer, it’s impossible until it’s not.

And as with any social movement, the minor leaguers’ success depended on a combination of harsh conditions, missteps by baseball’s owners, and the presence of a handful of agitators and organizers who persuaded competitive and individualistic ballplayers that only by joining forces could they improve the

conditions of their work and not jeopardize the slim chance they had to climb the ladder to the big leagues. What follows is an exclusive, inside account of just how that was accomplished.



STANDING IN THE DODGER Stadium dugout before a game against the Arizona Diamondbacks this past September, Gavin Lux, the Los Angeles Dodgers’ second baseman, reflected on his experiences in the minor leagues.

“In Rancho Cucamonga, where it’s as expensive as shit, we were living five or six guys to an apartment and sleeping on blow-up mattresses,” he recalls. (The LA suburb is home to a Dodgers Single-A minor league team.) “When I moved to Oklahoma City [the Dodgers’ Triple-A affiliate], I had to pay for

“WE WERE LIVING FIVE OR SIX GUYS TO AN APARTMENT AND SLEEPING ON BLOW-UP MATTRESSES. IT’S A GRIND.”

—Gavin Lux

my new place plus an apartment that no one was living in anymore.”

The conditions Lux describes are typical for the over 5,000 minor league ballplayers who, in any given year, are employed by one of the 30 major league teams, which collectively own 120 minor league franchises. For decades, the players accepted that “grind”—low salaries, poor living conditions, no power or voice in their professional careers—as the sacrifice required to make the big leagues. Only about 10 percent of minor leaguers eventually play in the majors.

In 2022, players in Triple-A leagues, one step below the majors, made a weekly minimum of \$700—but only

Kelly Candaele produced the 1987 PBS documentary *A League of Their Own* and wrote the story for the 1992 Hollywood film of the same name.

Peter Dreier is a professor of politics at Occidental College and a coauthor of *Baseball Rebels: The Players, People, and Social Movements That Shook Up the Game and Changed America*.

“TEAMS ESSENTIALLY PREY ON GUYS’ DREAMS. ONLY 10 OR 20 PERCENT OF THEM WILL EVER PLAY IN THE BIG LEAGUES.”

—Walker Buehler

Out in deep left field: Organizer Bill Fletcher Jr. heard about the players’ predicament from his wife, who told him, “These guys need a union.”

“I thought it was a little crazy how teams essentially prey on guys’ dreams,” says Dodgers pitcher Walker Buehler, lounging on a couch in the Dodger Stadium clubhouse before an afternoon game in September. “Only 10 or 20 percent of those guys will ever play in the big leagues, maybe,” says Buehler, who studied political science and sociology at Vanderbilt University, “so being part of a union will give them more leverage to help get the pay they deserve for being professional athletes.”

His teammate, future Hall of Fame pitcher Clayton Kershaw, says, “I got paid a lot of money when I signed out of high school...but I understand there are a lot of guys who didn’t get that kind of signing bonus or make a lot of money in the minors. So having a union would be really awesome for those guys.”

“I was in the minor leagues for five years, and I remember my first paycheck was \$353,” Dodgers manager Dave Roberts says. “We talk a lot about the value of the farm system, but the compensation or how the players are taken care of is not reflective of that value. It’s been a long time coming.”



ARRETT BROSHUIS GREW UP IN THE SMALL TOWN OF ADVANCE, MO., graduated from Advance High School as class valedictorian with a perfect 4.0 GPA, and went to the University of Missouri on both an academic and an athletic scholarship. In his senior year, the 6-foot, 2-inch pitcher was 11-0, earning All American honors.

After he graduated in 2004, Broshuis was drafted by the San Francisco Giants into their minor league system. For the next five seasons, he played for four

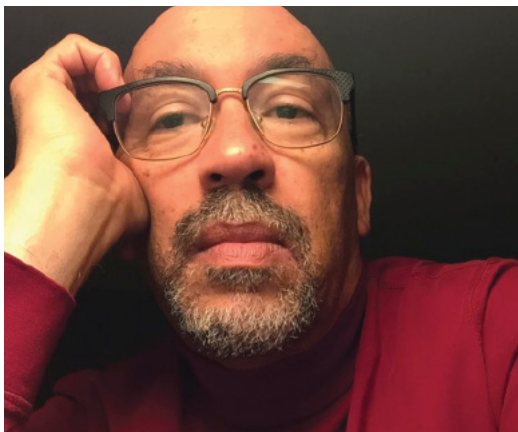
during the baseball season. Double-A players made a minimum of \$600, and Single-A players \$500. Minor leaguers didn’t get paid at all for the weeks they spent at spring training. Most minor leaguers made less than \$15,000 a year, which means they had to take second and third jobs during the off-season to pay for rent, food, and other living expenses.

Caleb Joseph, who spent parts of seven seasons (2014 to 2020) in the majors with the Baltimore Orioles,

Arizona Diamondbacks, and Toronto Blue Jays, vividly remembers his seven years in the minors. “One peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a banana between games of a double-header was very common,” he recalls. Fifteen years ago, Joseph made \$350 a week—before taxes—playing for the Orioles’ Single-A affiliate in Aberdeen, Md. “When you’re looking at \$2,000 a month in rent, and you’re not even making \$1,500 a month in salary, those numbers just don’t add up,” he says.

“I lost money playing baseball every year until I got called up to the big leagues,” Joseph says. “If you are married, which I was when I was 26 years old in Triple-A, you are absolutely behind the eight ball, because you can’t shack up with a bunch of other guys to make the rent.”

“I’ve seen teammates who were homeless and guys who had families who couldn’t pay for diapers for their kids,” says Dominic Pipkin, a pitcher for the Jersey Shore BlueClaws, the Philadelphia Phillies’ High-A affiliate. “You wouldn’t want to wish this on anyone.”



teams, rising to Triple-A but never advancing to the major leagues.

“Once I got into minor league baseball, it seemed like a step down from college baseball,” Broshuis says. “The talent was better, but in terms of how players were treated, it was much worse. In college, I had my own apartment with two friends. But in the minors, I shared an apartment with five other players, and we all slept on air mattresses on the floor. It was even worse for players from Latin America, who were sending money back to their families on their meager paychecks. We were playing in front of five or six thousand fans, but we weren’t getting paid a living wage.”

“A roommate of mine wouldn’t eat breakfast, and sometimes skip lunch, when we were on the road.... He told me he couldn’t afford it,” Broshuis says. “He racked up a credit card debt.... The whole time, he had debt-collecting companies going after him. He made it to Triple-A, but never to the majors.”

The Giants didn’t pay minor league players during the off-season, so Broshuis took on several jobs—as a personal trainer, giving pitching lessons, and in a cognitive-psychology lab at St. Louis University. Late at night, he lifted weights and ran to stay in shape.

“I was working from 8 AM until 9 or 10 o’clock at night. I was always exhausted. My wife worked full-time as a physical therapist, but we still couldn’t make ends meet.”

Broshuis began writing articles for *The Sporting News* and *Baseball America* about the life of a minor league player. When it became clear that he wasn’t going to make the majors, he decided to go to law school. He studied for the LSAT during the long bus rides between games and was accepted at St. Louis University’s law school.

He went into private practice with a St. Louis firm—but he didn’t leave his baseball career far behind. One of his first cases, in 2014, was a class-action lawsuit against Major League Baseball, its 30 owners, and former commissioner Bud Selig on behalf of several minor league players. Eventually, more than 20,000 players and ex-players joined the suit, which claimed that MLB failed to pay minor leaguers the federal minimum wage and did not compensate them for overtime hours.

The same year that Broshuis filed the lawsuit, Matt Paré, a Boston College graduate and minor league catcher who was earning \$7,500 during the 22-week baseball season, started a

Throwing strikes: Garrett Broshuis spent five seasons in the minors before going to law school. One of his first cases was a class-action suit against Major League Baseball.



blog called *Homeless Minor Leaguer*. It featured videos about players, including Paré himself, who hoarded free clubhouse food, often resorted to couch-surfing during the off-season because they couldn't afford an apartment, and accumulated huge debts in order to pursue their baseball dreams.

Broshuis's lawsuit and Paré's blog triggered news stories about the minor leaguers' predicament, including a lengthy article in *The Washington Post* in August 2016. Candice Cason, a psychologist living in Maryland, read the article, gave it to her husband, Bill Fletcher Jr. (a *Nation* editorial board member), and told him, "These guys need a union."

"She wasn't simply informing me," recalls Fletcher, a veteran union organizer, civil rights activist, and former assistant to the president of the AFL-CIO. "She was giving me my marching orders."

Fletcher, a baseball fan, contacted Broshuis, who had been mentioned in the article. They quickly hit it off and began talking regularly about how to bring a union to the minor leagues. At the time, Fletcher says, the Major League Baseball Players Association indicated that it didn't think that was even possible, so Fletcher reached out to other unions—including the United Steelworkers and the Communication Workers of America—but those discussions didn't pan out. Broshuis and Fletcher quickly concluded that no union drive could succeed without the MLBPA's support, so they developed a strategy that they hoped would gain enough momentum to persuade the MLBPA to jump on board.



UNION ORGANIZERS OFTEN SAY "A BAD BOSS IS THE BEST ORGANIZER."

In 2016, in response to Broshuis's lawsuit, the MLB team owners—who are big donors to both Republican and Democratic politicians—persuaded Representatives Cheri Bustos (D-Ill.) and Brett Guthrie (R-Ky.) to introduce the Save America's Pastime Act. The bill purported to protect teams in financial peril by exempting MLB from the federal minimum wage and overtime laws—but only for minor league players. Facing criticism, Bustos dropped her support and the bill quietly died, but MLB didn't give up. In March 2018, Congress incorporated the provisions into a 2,232-page omnibus spending bill, which President Trump quickly signed.

The bill mandated that minor leaguers need not be compensated for more than 40 hours of work a week, even if they actually spend 60 or 70 hours a week practicing, playing, and traveling with their teams.

Minor league teams—many of which are partially owned by the parent organization—provide only the ballparks, equipment, travel, and hotels when teams are on the road. It's the major league parent clubs that are responsible for minor leaguers' pay, health care, and pensions.

The 30 MLB teams hardly need a financial bailout. They are currently worth an average of \$2.07 billion—an all-time high and an increase of 9 percent over last year. The value of the teams ranges from the Miami Marlins' \$990 million to the New York Yankees' \$6 billion. In the 2022 season, MLB set a revenue record of \$10.8 billion from ticket and concession sales, parking fees, corporate sponsorships, and TV contracts to broadcast games.

When Congress passed the omnibus spending bill, including provisions of the Save America's Pastime Act, Trevor Hildenberger was in his first year in the majors, after being promoted to the Minnesota Twins in 2017. "Major League

"WE SACRIFICE WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS AND BIRTHS TO BE HERE, AND THEY DON'T EVEN WANT US TO MAKE MINIMUM WAGE."

—Trevor Hildenberger



In contrast, Fletcher, Broshuis, Marino, and a few other ex-players began talking to minor leaguers to test the organizing waters. They were careful at first not to broach the idea of forming a union. Instead, they talked to players about how to apply for unemployment, cataloged the complaints about housing, and kept track of which teams were providing stipends to help players navigate the pandemic.

"It wasn't necessarily about talking union all the time," Marino says, "but just how collective action and sticking together works."

A New Jersey native, Marino pitched for Williams College, a Division III school. After his graduation in June 2012, he signed a contract with the Arizona Diamondbacks as an undrafted free agent. He spent the 2012, 2013, and 2014 seasons in the low minor leagues, but after three years he reluctantly acknowledged that he wasn't going to make it to the major leagues. Instead, he went to law school at the University of Virginia, where he wrote a law review article analyzing the flawed theory of democracy underpinning the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision. Marino graduated in 2017 and, after serving as a clerk to two federal judges, spent a year working for the powerful D.C. law firm Williams & Connolly.

In 2020, Broshuis and Fletcher set up a nonprofit, Advocates for Minor Leaguers, and recruited other players and ex-players to join the board. To avoid the impression that the group was linked to the class-action lawsuit, Broshuis resigned from the board and was replaced as chair by Fletcher. Marino gave up his big law-firm salary to volunteer for Advocates. Soon the MLBPA took notice and provided the nonprofit with some seed funding, which along with a grant from the Ford Foundation allowed Advocates to hire Marino as a full-time executive director and, later, to hire several organizers.

"Harry took off like a bat out of hell," Fletcher says. "He started plotting out how to spread the word."

The pandemic also gave these athletes a chance to view their jobs and futures in a different light. "Early on, there was a justifiable amount of fear...knowing they might be jeopardizing their future careers and their major league aspirations," Marino says. "It took a great deal of courage for them to stick their necks out."

There were also logistical challenges. "You have 120 teams scattered throughout the

Baseball argued that we were 'seasonal apprentices.' That was inflammatory," says Hildenberger, who attended the University of California, Berkeley. "We sacrifice weddings and funerals and births to be here, and they don't even want us to make minimum wage. That was a big eye opener for me and many other players."

The players' anger was compounded when, in November 2019, MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred announced that he was shutting down 42 minor league teams, eliminating one-quarter of all positions for minor league players in one fell swoop.

"More than a thousand minor leaguers lost their jobs overnight," says Harry Marino, a former minor league pitcher who was an early recruit to the players' crusade. "It reinforced a sense of powerlessness, but it also provided an incentive to fight back."

Then, in early 2020, Manfred and the owners canceled the minor league (but not the major league) season when the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Suddenly, more than 5,000 players were out of work—and out of money. The MLBPA and some major league players provided some financial support, but it didn't replace the minor leaguers' lost salaries.

Talking union: When MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred shut down 42 minor league teams in 2019, it gave players an incentive to fight back.

IN 2018, JEREMY WOLF (A FORMER MINOR LEAGUER), SLADE Heathcott (who'd spent 10 years in the minors and part of one season with the Yankees), and Simon Rosenblum-Larson (a former Harvard pitcher then playing in the minors for the Tampa Bay Rays) started More Than Baseball. Rather than organize players, the group would help them pay their housing, food, equipment, phone, and medical bills and offer financial guidance and emotional support. During the canceled 2020 season, More Than Baseball provided over \$1.3 million in direct aid to 1,300 players, money raised from major league players, fans, and businesses. (After an injury-riddled 2021 season in the minors, Rosenblum-Larson expected to play for the Rays' Double-A team, but last June, a few weeks after he wrote a *Washington Post* op-ed about minor league working conditions, the Rays released him).

**"A ROOMMATE OF MINE
WOULDN'T EAT BREAKFAST
WHEN WE WERE ON THE
ROAD. HE TOLD ME HE
COULDN'T AFFORD IT."**

—Garrett Broshuis

country, in big cities and small towns, with the teams on the road half the time,” Marino says. And many minor leaguers don’t play on the same team for the entire season. They get promoted or demoted to other teams; a handful will spend part of the season in the majors.

Over the next year, Advocates recruited a core of players to spearhead the effort, focusing on improving pay and living conditions. Through Zoom calls, texts, and phone conversations, Marino and the player-organizers personally recruited more than 1,000 players, who in turn reached out to their teammates, quickly gaining momentum.

Hildenberger, who spent part of the 2022 season with the Giants’ Triple-A affiliate in Sacramento, says that social media was a powerful tool: “Players were sharing their living and working conditions with thousands of fans, what food they were eating, where they were sleeping.”

Kieran Lovegrove, a veteran of nine seasons in the minors with several teams, was an early recruit. He decided to help with the organizing effort after Marino contacted him about his housing situation in May 2021. At the end of spring training in Arizona, the Los Angeles Angels told him he’d be playing for the Rocket City Trash Pandas in Madison, Ala.—a Double-A team. According to Lovegrove, the Angels gave him a list of possible housing options 36 hours before he left.

“A group of us players started calling the numbers on the sheet, and we found there were no viable options,” says Lovegrove, who is now retired from baseball. “Some of the apartments were far above our price range, unavailable, or not even built yet. I was furious, and we ended up renting hotels or Airbnb for a month.”

According to Marino, housing was the top issue for many minor leaguers, including high rents, overcrowding, and forfeited security deposits when the players were moved from city to city.

“The Phillies want to treat their players well,” says Craig Stein, a co-owner of the Philadelphia Phillies’ minor league clubs in Reading and Allentown, Pa. “[The Phillies] don’t want to see players sleeping in their cars.”

Such words of sympathy, however, didn’t help players pay the rent.

In September 2021, players for the Jersey Shore BlueClaws and the Brooklyn Cyclones—affiliates of the Phillies and the New York Mets, respectively—wore wrist bands during a game with “#FairBall” printed on them

to protest their wages and living conditions. In a statement, they explained: “Minor League baseball players have been severely underpaid and silenced for decades. It is time for every Minor Leaguer to be paid a living wage.”

Some major leaguers—including Andrew McCutchen, Jason Heyward, David Price, Chris Taylor, and Trey Mancini—expressed solidarity by also wearing the wrist band.

Three days after the minor leaguers made their public statement, MLB announced that the owners had agreed to provide free housing for minor league players starting in 2022.

That victory was crucial for showing skeptical or fearful players that progress was possible if they spoke out and stuck together. The organizing drive was also bolstered in May 2022, when Major League Baseball settled Broshuis’s lawsuit, which had been winding its way through the courts since 2014. MLB agreed to pay \$185 million to minor league players, which proved to them again that the owners were not invincible. MLB is expected to start allocating the settlement money this year, according to Broshuis.

“These victories really ignited a fire,” Lovegrove says. “The owners saw fans and the media supporting us.”

Many major league players were angered when Manfred orchestrated a lockout—an owners’ strike—in December 2021. It quickly became clear to most players that MLB was trying to weaken or even destroy their union. The lockout ended in March 2022, after 99 days, when the two sides reached an agreement, but it left a bitter taste in the players’ mouths.

That experience gave the MLBPA leaders an additional incentive to embrace the minor leaguers’ organizing drive. Tony Clark, a former player and MLBPA executive director, recognized that having minor leaguers in the same union

“KNOWING THEY MIGHT BE JEOPARDIZING THEIR FUTURE CAREERS...IT TOOK COURAGE FOR THEM TO STICK THEIR NECKS OUT.”

—Harry Marino

No viable options:

When Kieran Lovegrove was transferred from Los Angeles to Madison, Ala., he was given 36 hours to find a place to live.



would make it easier for the MLBPA to inculcate a sense of union solidarity long before players reach the major leagues.

The union also made a special effort to reach out to Latino and Latin American players—who make up close to 30 percent of minor league rosters. Jose Brizuela, originally from Venezuela, who played for parts of five seasons in the minor leagues, was hired by Advocates for Minor Leaguers as an outreach coordinator.

“The first thing I did was to explain that as a human being, you have rights, and this is what we are fighting for,” Brizuela says. “If we raise the salaries of players, the economic impact back in

their home countries can be big. I’ve had teammates where their whole paycheck would go back to the Dominican Republic or Venezuela to take care of not just wives or kids but Mom, Dad, Grandma, and Grandpa.”

“Many of the players didn’t know what a union was,” Brizuela adds, “but I found guys that other players listened to. Those are the natural leaders who players trust.” He explained to their teammates that having a union meant “you have to have each other’s backs.”

(continued on page 33)



THE CRUELTY OF FORCE-FEEDING

MOHAMMAD SALAMEH ISN'T GOING ANYWHERE. Two straps crisscross his abdomen, pinning his shoulders to the chair. Each ankle has its own restraint, and another strap is buckled across his thighs. His handcuffed wrists rest in his lap. His body is limp. A week earlier, Salameh was so weak that when guards came to remove him from his cell, he couldn't walk to the door. (He got a disciplinary ticket for this "offense.") Still, as the force-feeding is about to begin, three men dressed in black riot gear encircle him. They grasp Salameh's head and shoulders as the physician assistant inserts a nasogastric tube into his nostril. Then the PA puts a carton of nutritional supplement and some sterile water into a feeding bag. The fluid starts flowing into Salameh's body.

"My stomach has shrunk a lot," Salameh pleads. He has been on a hunger strike for 34 days and lost 31 pounds, about 18 percent of his body weight. The PA ignores him and adds more water, then appears to milk the bag to speed up the flow of the liquid. "I have pain in my stomach, man, I swear to God," Salameh says. It feels "very, very painful." His breathing grows heavier and faster until, suddenly, he vomits into a bin on his lap. A few seconds later he vomits again, and the bin, which his handcuffed hand can barely grasp, slips out of his fingers and clatters to the floor. He turns to the guard and apologizes.

"You need to control yourself, Salameh," the PA says as he refills the bag. "This is for your own good." Salameh shakes his head and denies the vomiting was intentional. "No, I swear I did not!" He again asks the PA to slow down the feed, and again the PA ignores him. After a few minutes, as the PA begins

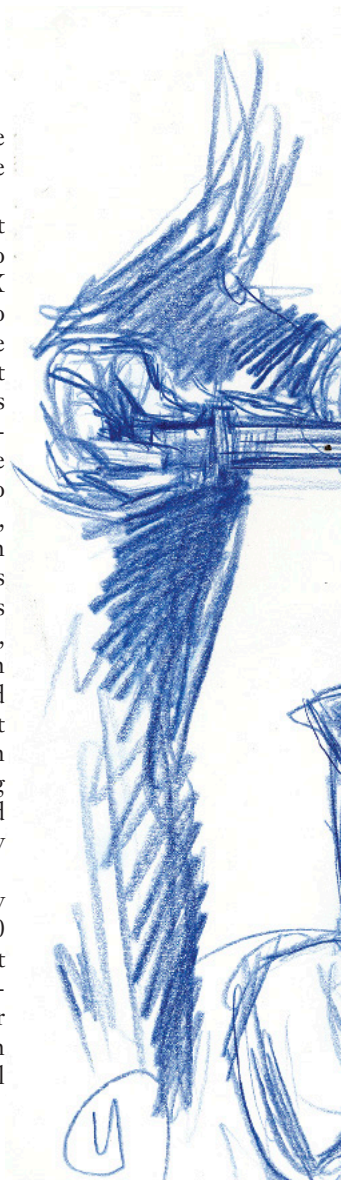
to take down the bag and remove the feeding tube, Salameh vomits until the tube is pulled out of his nose.

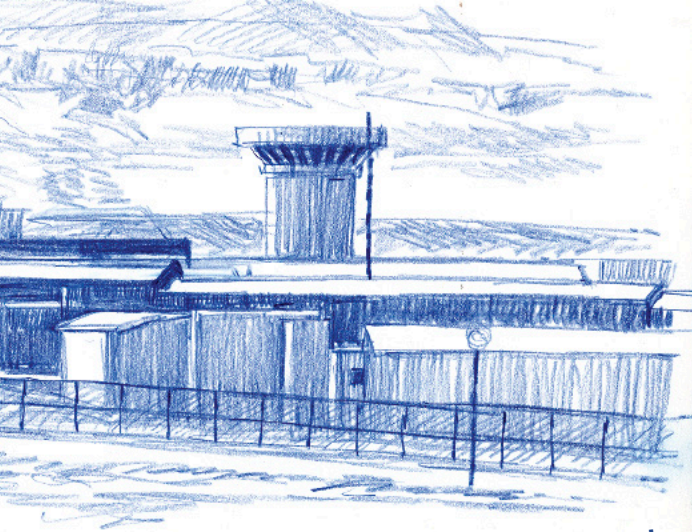
The video footage of this scene isn't from a movie, or from Guantánamo Bay, but from a 2015 incident at ADX Florence, a federal prison in Colorado that houses one of the most restrictive units in the country. The government bars the prisoners in H Unit, the ADX's highest-security wing, from communicating with almost anyone in the outside world, including the press. Guantánamo is transparent by comparison. At Gitmo, the public could almost always learn about hunger strikes and force-feedings as they occurred—but legal restrictions called special administrative measures, or SAMs, prohibit the prisoners in H Unit, as well as their families and attorneys, from telling others about the protests in real time. A person can face criminal prosecution for repeating something a SAMs prisoner has told them, even if it's as trivial as what they had for breakfast.

According to the data gathered by CBS's *60 Minutes* team, there were 900 force-feedings conducted in H Unit between 2001 and 2007. To my knowledge, the most coordinated hunger strike in H Unit occurred in 2009, when dozens if not hundreds of additional

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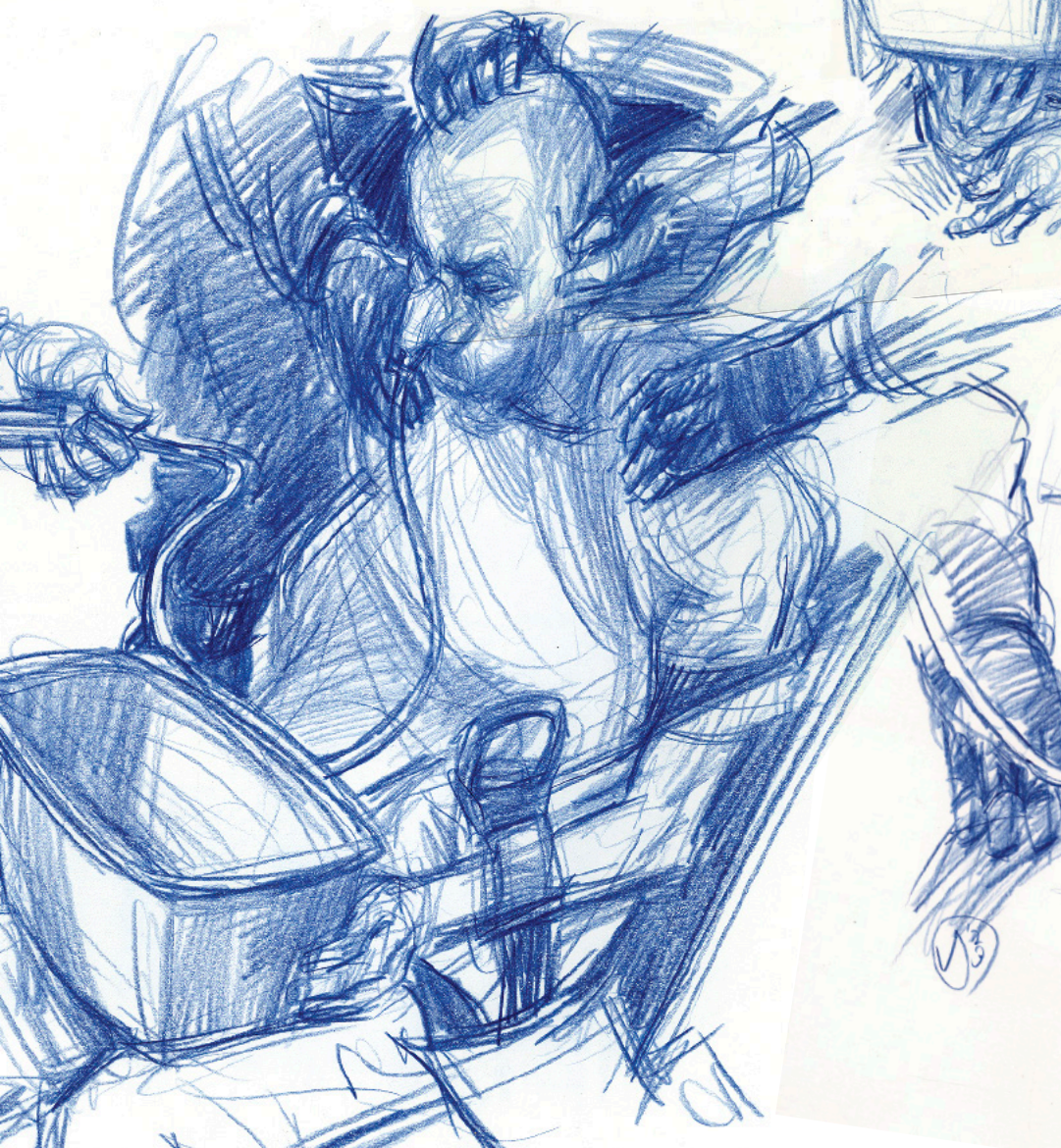
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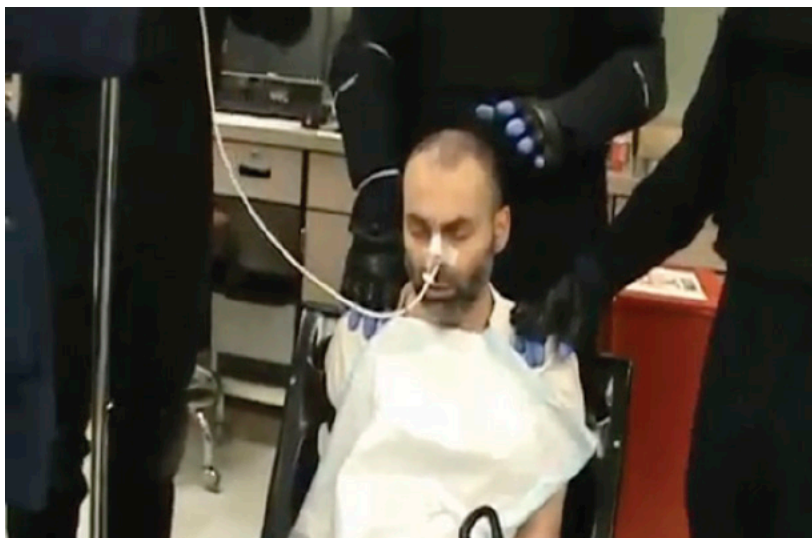




After years of litigation, *The Nation* and Type Investigations have acquired footage of a force-feeding at a federal prison. It shows treatment that may amount to torture.

BY AVIVA STAHL





force-feedings took place. I asked the US Bureau of Prisons for data on the number of force-feedings conducted at the ADX from 2002 to 2022. It gave me data for the years 2010 to 2022. According to the Bureau of Prisons, only 84 force-feedings were conducted at the ADX in those 12 years. If true, that would indicate a sudden, unexplained drop in force-feeding at the ADX, but given the difficulty of obtaining information about what goes on inside H Unit, it's impossible to know whether this data is accurate. If SAMs prisoners were undergoing force-feedings right now, we would have no way of knowing.

The men in H Unit don't easily elicit sympathy. It has held individuals convicted of the highest-profile terrorism offenses, including Salameh, who was found guilty of participating in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing; Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, a leader of the Sinaloa drug cartel; and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who was convicted for his role in the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing.

The federal government did not want the public to see these videos. In early 2023, after nearly three and a half years of litigation and with assistance from the Civil Rights Clinic at the Cardozo School of Law, the Department of Justice finally released them. The footage depicts two instances of medical treatment forced on Salameh: one rehydration by IV and one feeding by nasogastric tube. After receiving the videos, I shared them with medical and human rights experts as well as individuals with knowledge of the ADX. Human rights experts told me there is no doubt that the Bureau of Prisons violated medical ethics and international law in providing forced medical treatment to Salameh. Two physicians told me that the force-feeding by nasogastric tube was conducted in a manner far outside of medical norms, causing significant discomfort to Salameh and potentially endangering his life.

Malpractice: Instead of a feeding tube, the physician's assistant apparently used a suction tube, which is more painful to insert.

"Sometimes the unit feels like a graveyard. There is no sound, and everyone is in his grave."

—a former H Unit resident

Although Salameh is no longer being held in H Unit, he is still in the custody of the Bureau of Prisons and was unable to review or provide detailed comments on the videos. Still, this footage is being released with his permission. "The whole effort in court is to get them in order to be published, not to keep them inside a closet or a locker," he told me in a letter. "These videos are part of history."

Reporters have obtained footage of prisoners and detainees in federal custody in the past, but the public

has never seen how the Bureau of Prisons responds to hunger strikes. What's depicted in these exclusive videos reveals how correction officers and Bureau of Prisons medical staff operate when they have no fear of public scrutiny.

People understand the relationship between government secrecy and government misconduct, especially in prisons, said Jeanne Theoharis, a political science professor at Brooklyn College who has visited the ADX and written about SAMs. For the public, she continued, learning how hard it was to obtain this footage should make clear how successful the Bureau of Prisons has been in walling off H Unit from the outside world. "We didn't even know this was happening," Theoharis said. "We couldn't even know this was happening. And that should scare you."

THE RELEASE OF THE VIDEOS COMES more than three years after I published a cover story in *The Nation* in collaboration with Type Investigations that examined the hunger strikes and force-feedings that took place in H Unit between 2005 and 2016. In 2017, 51 prisoners in the US were subject to SAMs. Given that there are about 150,000 people in federal prisons, this may seem like a small number. But for those living under the restrictions, the isolation can be excruciating. People can go months with almost no communication with anyone, even in writing. The rules and security requirements mean that it can take as long as six months for Salameh to write his mother a letter and receive one back. Reading material is also severely restricted. For years, Salameh could only receive newspapers 30 days after publication. The men in H Unit were refused books on security grounds for baffling reasons, including *The 2008 CIA World Factbook* and Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope*. At times, they were not allowed even to speak to one another. Some grew so desperate that they'd shout to each other by putting their faces in the toilets. "Sometimes the unit feels like a graveyard," one former prisoner wrote. "There is no sound and everyone is in his grave."

In 2017, I started reaching out to people I knew who had served time at the ADX and asked them to connect me to someone who had been force-fed there and was willing to speak. If writing about what was currently happening in H Unit was impossible, I thought, at least I could write about what had happened in the past.

It wasn't long before I heard from Salameh. He wrote to me that he had been under SAMs continuously from 2005 to 2016. During that time, Salameh said, he spent 428 days on hunger strike, sometimes in coordination with other H Unit prisoners. Typically, they would demand improvements in their living conditions—two phone calls per month instead



of one, having their shackles removed during no-contact visits with family, more recreation time, fewer restrictions on news access and reading material. Over the course of his eight hunger strikes, Salameh said, he was force-fed more than 200 times. (One man was force-fed more than 400 times during his time in H Unit, according to two former residents.)

In 2018, I got Salameh's written permission to obtain copies of his medical records and any existing footage of forced medical treatment. I received his medical records relatively quickly, but the Bureau of Prisons did not want to relinquish the handful of videos of Salameh that it had not yet destroyed. The agency's protocols require it to keep use-of-force videos for two and a half years, so by the time I'd filed my records request, only the videos from 2015 remained.

Based on Salameh's medical records and our extensive conversations, I already knew some details about the 2015 hunger strike. When Salameh stopped eating in the fall of that year, he did so alone. He said that several years earlier, in order to sustain a healthy weight, he'd been granted permission to have double-portion meals, and he'd become accustomed to the additional food. But in October 2015, the prison suddenly halted his double portions. To an outsider, it may have seemed like a trivial issue, but to Salameh it was another indignity after more than a decade of deprivation and isolation. On October 9, he began declining his meals. On November 4, a forced-extraction team took him out of his cell, and he was forcibly rehydrated by IV. A week later, he was again extracted from his cell and force-fed.

Salameh had told me what it was like to be force-fed, but I wanted to see what it looked like and find out how it appeared to medical professionals and experts in international law. In July 2019, the Cardozo Civil Rights Clinic filed a lawsuit against the Department of Justice and the Bureau of Prisons on my behalf after the government denied my initial Freedom of Information Act request for the footage.

According to Betsy Ginsberg, a Cardozo law professor who founded and directs the clinic, it was the first time the Bureau of Prisons had been sued under FOIA to gain access to videos of force-feedings. The government argued that releasing the footage could reveal sensitive "law enforcement techniques and procedures" and could "reasonably be expected to endanger the life or safety of BOP staff." In one declaration, a Bureau of Prisons official argued that there was no such thing as a peaceful

hunger strike by a prisoner. These actions demand staff time and resources to address, he said, and they seek to "upend the system of authority and rules in the institution," which means they "pose as much, if not more, of a security risk as do other types of inmate resistance."

When it came to Salameh, the official said, hunger strikes constituted an even greater threat, since what he really wanted was to get his SAMs lifted, resume contact with international terrorists, and endanger American lives. Elsewhere, the federal government has argued that the hunger strikes in H Unit come "out of the al-Qaeda playbook"—that refusing to eat is "consistent with the actions of a committed jihadist." Department of Justice officials later cited Salameh's hunger strikes as evidence that he was dangerous and therefore a reason to renew his SAMs.

In March 2021, Judge Brian M. Cogan ruled that there was a legitimate reason to withhold the footage of Salameh being extracted from and returned to his cell, concurring with the government's claim that it would undermine the security of the institution. Yet he disagreed with the government that a FOIA exemption should prevent the release of the videos of Salameh's forced medical treatment. He ordered the Bureau of Prisons to turn over the footage after redacting the faces and voices of any guards or medical professionals.

AFTER WATCHING THE VIDEOS, I PASSED THEM ALONG TO TWO PHYSICIANS with expertise in forced medical treatment: Dr. Matthew Wynia, an internist and the director of the Center for Bioethics and Humanities at the University of Colorado, and Dr. Steven Miles, a professor emeritus of medicine and bioethics at the University of Minnesota. Both emphasized that providing medical treatment to a competent patient against their will—including IV rehydration and feeding by nasogastric tube—was a violation of medical ethics. (The American Medical Association and the World Medical Association have been unwavering in their condemnation of force-feeding.)

The two doctors expressed concern that the procedures were conducted in a way that caused unnecessary pain. Although the size of the tube isn't noted in Salameh's medical records, Wynia said it appears that instead of using a feeding tube, the PA used a nasogastric suction tube, which is larger and less flexible, and therefore more painful to insert. Despite Salameh's pleas, the PA opted to feed him rapidly. Wynia and Miles say the feeding was obviously causing Salameh distress and discomfort, and since he vomited almost everything he was given, Wynia noted, it provided only marginal nutritional benefit. This was a "brutal procedure that was a violation of his right to express himself by

refusing food," Miles said.

Not only did the force-feeding cause Salameh needless suffering, the physicians said, it also endangered his life. If someone who's been extremely malnourished suddenly increases their carbohydrate consumption, the shock can trigger "refeeding syndrome," resulting in a drastic drop of potassium, phosphate, and magnesium in the bloodstream and potentially fatal cardiac arrhythmias.

Wynia described a patient he'd treated recently who had been admitted to the hospital for a parasite and failure to eat. After giving her nutrition by IV for

This was a "brutal procedure that was a violation of his right to express himself by refusing food."

—Dr. Steven Miles

Out of sight: ADX Florence, a federal prison in Colorado, houses H Unit, one of the most restrictive lockups in the country.



"If you look at the environment here, it's coercive from A to zed. And it is torture."

—Gerald Staberock,
secretary general of the World Organization Against Torture

Abusive intent? A human rights expert says the footage of Salameh being force-fed is evidence that the Bureau of Prisons is torturing people.

a few days, Wynia started feeding her through a nasogastric tube at a rate of 15 milliliters per hour, which he gradually increased over a few days. In H Unit, by contrast, the PA appears to attempt to feed Salameh water and three cartons of nutritional supplement in about 20 minutes, or more than 1,400 calories and at least 700 milliliters of fluid. There is no indication in the records that Salameh's electrolyte levels were tracked.

According to the medical literature, Wynia said, Salameh was at "high risk" of refeeding syndrome. "He survived... so they got away with it," he told me. "But that is way outside of normal practice."

That's not all. Under current medical norms, Wynia and Miles said, an X-ray is used to check the nasogastric tube placement. The H Unit footage and medical records show no evidence of an X-ray. Instead, the PA relies on the outdated "whoosh test," listening to Salameh's abdomen with a stethoscope as he injects air into the tube. Without an X-ray, medical providers run a higher risk of directing nutritional supplement into the trachea or lungs—which can lead to aspiration, pneumonia, and death.

For Wynia, the footage raises the question of whether the Bureau of Prisons was acting to protect Salameh's well-being. "The pretense that this is about health is a little hard to keep up," Wynia said, adding that it seemed like the aim of this treatment was: "We want to make this hunger strike as uncomfortable as possible to break the strike."

After asking medical experts to evaluate the videos, I turned to human rights experts, including Joanna Naples-Mitchell, an international human rights lawyer at Physicians for Human Rights. She told me, "What we're seeing is an illegal act under international law, unequivocally."

Force-feeding is considered banned by the United Nations Convention Against Torture. It's also prohibited by law in several countries, including the United Kingdom, where it had been used on striking suffragists and Irish republican prisoners. In Israel, where Palestinians have used hunger strikes to protest detentions without a charge or trial, force-feeding is legal, but the national medical association forbids physicians from participating.

For an act to constitute cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment under international law, it must cause serious pain or suffering and be conducted with the consent or acquiescence of a public official. Given Wynia's and Miles's analyses of the force-feeding, however, the incident may rise to the level of torture, which the UN defines as an act committed with the intent to coerce, punish, or intimidate.

Gerald Staberock, an attorney and the secretary general of the World Organization Against Torture, pointed out that whether or not an act of force-feeding legally constitutes torture, it still violates international law. "If you are a prisoner, you still have the right over your body; you have the right to take a decision not to eat, and that needs to be respected," he said. But after reviewing footage of Salameh's force-feeding, Staberock told me that he believed the video revealed an abusive intent: "If you look at the environment here, it's coercive from A to zed. And it is torture."

An official from the Bureau of Prisons' Office of Public Affairs had little to say when I asked for a response to the opinion of medical and human rights experts

that the procedure shown in the footage violated international law and threatened Salameh's life: "We appreciate the opportunity to comment, however, we respectfully decline."

Salameh may have been tortured as defined under international law, but that doesn't mean much in the US, where courts have consistently found that the force-feeding of prisoners and detainees is legal. Unlike in Israel, at least two US courts have ruled that state medical and nursing boards cannot penalize providers—for example, by suspending their licenses—for engaging in clinical conduct that is sanctioned by the state.

Given that there are few avenues for holding the Bureau of Prisons accountable, I was baffled that the Department of Justice was investing so many resources to fight me in court. It could be that the footage forces prison officials themselves to see the abuse. "The importance of what you're doing here is showing [the videos], because when you speak about 'torture,' it sounds very abstract," Staberock said. "If you watch this and think that way, no matter who you are—no matter whether you are a prison [warden], whether you are a criminal defense lawyer, whether you are a prosecutor—you have to say, 'This is inherently abusive.'"

For Staberock, the footage is evidence that the Bureau of Prisons is secretly torturing people on US soil. And what we see on camera is just a sliver of what happens in H Unit. SAMs make transparency and accountability all but impossible. The videos may not change the conditions in H Unit—and we likely wouldn't know for years if they had. But the legal fight to release the videos has set important legal precedents: At least one


other federal prisoner has been able to obtain footage of her force-feeding. A ruling was also cited in *The Intercept's* successful litigation to obtain footage from an ICE detention center.

Laura Rovner, a professor at Sturm College of Law in Denver who has represented individuals in H Unit, told me that the videos are a window into a facility otherwise shrouded from public

view. "I think we owe it to these men to bear witness to these force-feedings when they're being conducted by our government, in our names," Rovner said. "These videos, however painful they are to watch, make that possible." **N**

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Sence repeating itself.

W

HEN THE NEWS BROKE IN EARLY February that Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. had struck a deal allowing the United States to

dramatically expand its military presence on the archipelago, many people reacted with surprise. After all, the US military's relationship with the Philippines is a politically sensitive subject, and Marcos had made noises about staying out of the rapidly escalating conflict between the US and China that is fueling Washington's buildup in the region. The announcement of the deal—in which the United States will be allowed to occupy four military bases in addition to the five it already operates—also came just a month after what was touted in the Philippines as a triumphant visit by Marcos to Beijing, where he reportedly secured \$22.8 billion in investment pledges and exchanged warm words with President Xi Jinping.

But those who have followed the Marcos family's relationship with the United States—or, indeed, the long saga of American intervention in the Philippines—were hardly surprised. The deal was less a bold break with the status quo than a reminder of a colonial relationship—first explicit, and then implicit—that has existed now for over a century.

When the US annexed the Philippines at the end of the 19th century, it was mainly because of the opportunity provided for projecting American naval power onto the vast Asian land mass. The military bases Washington established there became the most visible evidence of a continued US presence after the Philippines became nominally independent in 1946, and their unwelcome existence spawned a nationalist movement seeking US withdrawal from the islands, which eventually came about in the early 1990s. Ever since then, the US has been finding new ways to maintain its influence, and with this deal it is announcing that it is back—with a vengeance. It all amounts to nothing less than the American repossession of the Philippines, nearly 125 years after the US first took control of the islands.

The deal also heralds the return of another long-running thread in Philippine history: the close and complex ties between the US state and the Marcos family.

For reasons personal, political, and financial, Marcos has a strong stake in not alienating Washington—even if that means giving the Pentagon an even greater ability to run the show in his country.

IT IS JUST THE PHILIPPINES' BAD LUCK THAT MARCOS IS president at a time when Washington is intent on maximizing the country's strategic value.

If geography is indeed destiny, the Philippines is Exhibit A. Perhaps no one captured its enduring geopolitical value better than Gen. Arthur MacArthur (father of the more famous Douglas), who led the American expedition that subjugated the country in 1899. The Philippines, the elder MacArthur wrote,



Handshake deal: US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin meets Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in Manila in February.

is the finest group of islands in the world. Its strategic location is unexcelled by any other position in the globe. The China Sea, which separates it by something like 750 miles from the continent, is nothing more nor less than a safety moat. It lies on the flank of what might be called several thousand miles of coastline; it is the center of that position. It is therefore relatively better placed than Japan, which is on a flank, and therefore from the other extremity; likewise India, on another flank. It affords a means of protecting American interests which with the very least output of physical power has the effect of a commanding position in itself to retard hostile action.

The Philippines is once again a key pawn in Washington's military strategy to contain China.

These words have a very contemporary ring as the Philippines once again becomes a key pawn in Washington's increasingly militarized strategy to contain China.

Both Manila and Washington maintain the fiction that the recently announced deal does not create US bases but rather provides Washington

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The establishment of new foreign bases has puzzled many who remember the hasty US exit in the early 1990s.

Visiting forces: US Marines with their Filipino counterparts during a joint military exercise in 2022.

at Subic Bay and Clark—both of which were located quite close to the volcano. Another was the collapse of the Soviet Union that same year, which led to the removal of the Soviet Pacific fleet as a major competitor to American naval power in the area. A third was the de facto alliance between China and Washington, a key element of which was Deng Xiaoping's policy of adopting a low military profile and focusing on economic development with the help of American capital. These considerations

with “access to Philippine bases.” (The five bases that the US already controls are also administered under this technicality.) This charade is necessary because Article XVIII, Section 25, of the Philippine Constitution, which was adopted in 1987 following the ouster of the elder Marcos, states that “foreign military bases, troops, or facilities shall not be allowed in the Philippines except under a treaty duly concurred in by the Senate.” Moreover, cloaking the bases in Philippine clothing means the US does not have to pay for them, bringing the country back to the early 1970s, when Washington maintained the sprawling Clark Air Force Base and the strategically located Subic Bay Naval Base, along with a number of smaller military facilities, without compensating the Philippines.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF several new foreign bases has puzzled many who still have vivid images of the hasty US exit from

the massive Subic Bay and Clark bases in 1991 and '92. While that departure—which supposedly marked the end of the American military presence in the region—has been largely attributed to the Philippine Senate's rejection of the basing agreement negotiated between Washington and the administration of President Corazon Aquino, three other factors played a role. One was the eruption of the Mount Pinatubo volcano in 1991, which Washington saw as severely disrupting operations

all contributed to Washington's decision to put a cap on the rent it was willing to pay to retain the bases, leading many Philippine senators to reject the deal out of national pride.

It was during this same period—the early 1990s, which were marked by Washington's complacency toward the Philippines—that China began to make its moves in the South China Sea. The most significant step was the creeping occupation of Mischief Reef, which lay within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Philippines, under the pretext of building “wind shelters” for Chinese fishermen. It was most likely the increased Chinese activity in the area, along with the sharpening of the China-Taiwan conflict in 1995 and '96, that motivated the US to reestablish an active military presence in the Philippines.

In 1998, the US and the Philippines signed a new Visiting Forces Agreement, which provided for the periodic deployment of thousands of US troops to participate in military exercises with their Filipino counterparts. This was followed by what eventually became a permanent deployment of US Special Forces in the southern Philippine island of Basilan as part of President George W. Bush's War on Terror. Like foreign bases, foreign troops were constitutionally banned from being permanently stationed in the Philippines; so to get around the ban, the Special Forces and other US troops were portrayed as being in the country on a “rotational basis” in order to engage in exercises with Filipino troops and provide them with “technical advice,” and without the authority to use firearms except in self-defense.

China's territorial incursions became bolder and more frequent in the 2000s, and in 2009 it submitted its controversial Nine-Dash-Line map to the United Nations. The map claims as Chinese territory some 90 percent of the South China Sea, including significant sections of the EEZs of five Southeast Asian states: Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines. Things came to a head during the administration of President Benigno Aquino III, who served from 2010 to 2016. Chinese Coast Guard vessels began aggressively driving off Filipino fishermen from their traditional fishing grounds. One of the richest of these was Scarborough Shoal, some 138 miles from the Philippines—in other words, firmly within the country's 200-mile EEZ. After a two-month-long confrontation between Chinese and Philippine vessels in 2012, the Chinese ended up seizing the shoal.



Aquino's response was two-fold. The first was to elevate the issue to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague, which eventually declared China's claims invalid. Not surprisingly, China did not recognize the court's ruling. The Aquino administration's more consequential move was to enter into the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the Obama administration. The agreement—using the now-standard workarounds to evade the prohibition on foreign bases—places no limits on the number of bases, weaponry, or troops that the US can have in the country, although it explicitly bans bringing in nuclear weapons. Presented as an executive agreement and not as a treaty, the deal drew anger from Philippine nationalists, who demanded Senate concurrence. The Supreme Court sided with the government, however, ruling that the deal was not a treaty and thus did not need Senate approval.

President Rodrigo Duterte's election in 2016 was heralded as bringing about a major shift in relations between the US and the Philippines. Duterte moved closer to China, downplaying the significance of the ruling in the Hague and refusing to take up the cudgels for Filipino fishermen chased off their traditional fishing grounds by Chinese Coast Guard vessels. He also successfully promoted a populist anti-American image by harnessing the undercurrent of resentment at colonial subjugation that has always coexisted with admiration for the United States in the Filipino psyche.

For all his anti-American posturing, though, Duterte was more bark than bite. He did not interfere with the close relationship between the US and Philippine militaries, which came into play when US Special Forces assisted Philippine troops in the bloody retaking of the southern city of Marawi from Muslim fundamentalists in 2017. Nor did he ever follow through on his 2020 vow to abrogate the Visiting Forces Agreement. Indeed, by the end of his term Duterte was extolling the VFA; voicing approval of the AUKUS security pact joining Australia, the United Kingdom, and the US; reestablishing the Philippines-US Bilateral Strategic Dialogue; and launching expanded joint military exercises with the United States. While not repudiating his close relationship with China, Duterte ended his presidency in June 2022 on a cordial note with Washington that contrasted sharply with the bitter row with Barack Obama that launched his term.



CHIEF AMONG THE ISSUES FUELING THE AMERICAN BUILDUP IN THE Philippines is the unresolved status of Taiwan, at the northern edge of the South China Sea.

While the United States recognized Beijing as the sole government of China in 1979, it nevertheless committed itself to continue arms sales to Taiwan—and left deliberately (or, as some put it, “strategically”) ambiguous what the US would do if China were to forcibly assert its sovereignty over the island.

While Beijing considers its sovereignty over Taiwan nonnegotiable, its strategy has been to promote cross-straits economic integration as the main mechanism that would eventually lead to reunification. In Taiwan, however, being tough on Beijing plays well with voters, and nothing plays better than the threat to declare formal independence or assume the trappings of a sovereign power. Whenever Taiwanese leaders display such behavior, Beijing has felt compelled to put them in their place. In certain circumstances, Beijing has gone beyond words and resorted to sending missiles to the waters around Taiwan. Taiwan President Lee Teng Hui's visit to the United States in 1995 was one such occasion, as was, more recently, then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022. While both events created diplomatic crises, the first had momentous strategic consequences.

In 1995, China launched missile drills to teach Taiwan a lesson following Lee's US visit. It did so again in 1996 after Taiwan held its first democratic presidential election. The Clinton administration responded by sending two supercarriers, the USS *Independence* and the USS *Nimitz*, to the Taiwan Straits in March 1996. This was the biggest display of US power in the region since the Vietnam War—and it was intended to underline Washington's determination to defend Taiwan by force.

Imperial beginnings: The Spanish-American War of 1898 led to the US colonization of the Philippines.

Chief among the issues fueling the American buildup is the status of Taiwan at the northern edge of the South China Sea.



Client state: Ferdinand Marcos Jr. meets with Joe Biden at the United Nations in 2022.

Washington's intervention was cold water splashed on Beijing's face, for it revealed just how vulnerable the coastal region of eastern and southeastern China, the industrial heart of the country, was to US naval firepower.

It was this realization that prompted the change in China's strategy that has been unfolding over the past two decades. As analyst Gregory Poling notes, "One can draw a straight line from the [People's Liberation Army Navy's] humiliation in 1996 to its near-peer status with the US Navy today."

Overall, China's strategic posture remains defensive, but in the East and South China Seas, the country began a "tactical offensive" aimed at enlarging its defense perimeter against US naval and air power. Defense analyst Samir Tata writes: "As a land power, the Middle Kingdom does not have to worry about the unlikely possibility of a conventional American assault on the mainland via amphibious landing by sea, parachuting troops by air, or an expeditionary force marching through a land invasion route. What it is vulnerable to is US control of the seas outside China's 12-nautical-mile maritime boundaries. From such an over-the-horizon maritime vantage point, the US navy has the capability to cripple Chinese infrastructure along the eastern seaboard by long-range shelling, missiles, and unmanned aerial bombing."

In response to this dilemma, China has evolved a strategy of "forward edge" defense consisting of expanding the country's maritime defense perimeter and fortifying islands—and other formations in the South China Sea that it now occupies or has seized from the Philippines—with anti-aircraft

and anti-ship missile systems (A2/AD, or "anti-access/area denial" in military parlance) designed to shoot down hostile incoming missiles and aircraft in the few seconds before they hit the mainland. Though A2/AD is defensive in its strategic intent, what has enraged China's neighbors is the unilateral way that Beijing has gone about implementing it, with little consultation and in clear violation of such landmark agreements as the

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

BEIJING'S UNILATERAL ACTS IN the South China Sea have provided ammunition for the US containment strategy toward the country, which has been operative since the Obama years. But Washington's rhetoric is now eliciting worries among some governments in ASEAN, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, that they are being drawn into a regional confrontation that is not in their interests. Particularly alarming has been the recent leaked memo from Gen. Mike Minihan, who leads the US Air Mobility Command, declaring, "My gut tells me [we] will fight in 2025." Minihan, it bears noting, is not the first member of the US command to predict conflict with China in the near future.

Adm. Michael Gilday, chief of naval operations, said in October 2022 that the United States should prepare to fight China either sometime that year or in 2023. Even earlier, the head of the US Indo-Pacific Command, Adm. Philip Davidson, said that the Chinese threat to Taiwan would "manifest" in the next six years, by 2027.

Even without such statements, the level of hostile activity from all sides in the South China Sea dispute has been alarming. During a visit to Vietnam that I made as a Philippine congressman in 2014, top Vietnamese officials expressed concern that, owing to the lack of agreed rules of engagement, a collision by American and Chinese warships "playing chicken"—according to them, a common occurrence—could immediately escalate to a more intense level of conflict.

Like the Philippines, Vietnam has criticized Beijing's moves, and its vessels have traded water-cannon fire with Chinese Coast Guard ships in the South China Sea. The aggressive posture of the Biden administration, however, has led Hanoi to assume a posture of neutrality in any brewing superpower confrontation. In a recent visit to Beijing, the secretary general of the Vietnamese Communist Party, Nguyen Phu Trong, assured Chinese President Xi Jinping that his government would continue to hew to its "Four Nos" approach to foreign policy in the region: that is, that Vietnam would not join military alliances; would not side with one country against another; would not give other countries permission to set up military bases or use its territory to carry out military activities against other countries; and would not use force—or threaten to use force—in international relations.



Washington's rhetoric is eliciting worries among ASEAN governments about a regional confrontation.

BUT THE PHILIPPINES IS NOT VIETNAM, and Marcos has no record of discerning the national interest in his years as a politician, much less advocating or standing up for it. On that front he falls short even of Duterte, who claimed he became a nationalist while in college in the 1960s.

What Marcos is very conscious of, though, is how high the stakes are for himself and his family should he make the wrong decision in the intensifying conflict between Washington and Beijing.

Members of the Marcos dynasty are said to have been apprehensive about visiting the United States ever since they last left it in the early 1990s, after coming there as exiles following the uprising that ousted Ferdinand Marcos Sr. in 1986. The reason is a standing \$353 million contempt order against the younger Marcos related to a US court judgment awarding financial compensation from the Marcos estate to victims of human rights violations under the dictatorship. Marcos has avoided complying with the contempt order, which was issued by the US district court in Hawaii in 2011. A new judge extended the order to January 25, 2031, which would render Marcos vulnerable to arrest anytime he visits the United States during his term, which ends in 2028.

Marcos also cannot be unaware of how the US, with its global clout, has often been able to freeze the assets of people linked to regimes it considers undesirable, the most recent example being the holdings of Russian oligarchs connected to President Vladimir Putin in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Marcos family has \$5 billion to \$10 billion in landholdings and other assets distributed throughout the world, in places such as California, Washington, New York, Rome, Vienna, Australia, the Antilles, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, Switzerland, and Singapore. Being on the wrong side of the United States, especially in a dispute as central as the US-China conflict, could have devastating financial consequences for the Marcos family.

With this veritable sword of Damocles hanging over him, Marcos is not someone who would dare cross Washington. Indeed, when it comes to negotiating an independent path between two superpowers, he is the wrong person at the wrong place at the wrong time—which is another way of saying that from Washington's point of view, he's the right person at the right place at the right time. Nearly 125 years after Adm. George Dewey made his grand entrance into Manila Bay, unleashing a chain of events that ended with the colonization of the country, the Philippines—thanks in no small measure to Marcos—has returned to its unenviable status as a strategic possession of the United States. **N**



(continued from page 21)

SINCE THE MLBPA DECIDED TO FULLY EMBRACE the minor leaguers' efforts last August, it took only 17 days to successfully complete the organizing campaign. Since Major League Baseball did not demand a secret-ballot election (which it could have done under National Labor Relations Board rules), the union won its victory after a majority of players simply expressed their desire for union representation by signing cards affirming their support for joining the MLBPA.

Major League Baseball didn't oppose the unionization effort because, insiders noted, the minor league players had generated so much sympathy from the public and from their major league counterparts. Nor, after the lockout battle, did the owners have the appetite for another protracted fight with players. MLB was also worried about the Senate Judiciary Committee's plan, announced in July, to hold hearings on its exemption from federal anti-trust laws, particularly with regard to the minor leagues.

Once the MLBPA joined the fight, Marino and his colleagues disbanded Advocates for Minor Leaguers and joined the MLBPA's staff. Negotiations began in November. MLB Deputy Commissioner Dan Halem heads the owners' negotiating committee, along with Colorado Rockies owner Dick Monfort, who was virulently anti-union during his days as owner of a family cattle and meatpacking company. Bruce Meyer, the MLBPA's deputy director, is heading the players' bargaining team along with Marino. Minor league players have been present at the negotiations, either in person or by Zoom.

The players union put several proposals on the table dealing with housing, minimum salaries, food, transportation, health care, pensions, and grievance procedures. Both sides say they want to finalize the first collective bargaining agreement in minor league history by the start of this season, which begins at the end of March. It isn't clear how far apart the owners and players are.

In September, the MLBPA joined the AFL-CIO—the labor movement's umbrella federation—and its newly formed Sports Council, comprising unions of professional football and soccer players.

"There's been a reawakening to the power of collective bargaining sweeping the country," says the MLBPA's Tony Clark, "and it's being driven by those who, like our players, have a heightened sense of fairness and equity and are determined to effect positive change in the workplace."

"Organizing is clearly contagious," says AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler, referring to the recent nationwide surge of worker activism. "Workers, including minor league baseball players, are desperate for change—and the best way to achieve that change is through a union."

In 2018, during postseason games in Boston, some major league teams reserved rooms for players in hotels where the workers were on strike. After the teams refused to switch hotels and players crossed the union picket lines, labor activists cried foul. Now that the players' union has joined the AFL-CIO, employees who are organizing in their own workplaces could reap the benefits. Major leaguers could support these rank-and-file efforts by making statements of solidarity or even showing up on the picket lines and at union rallies.

Trevor Hildenberger is optimistic.

"We now know what can be done," he says. "We have power as workers, we understand the power of collective action, and we have a vision for what we can accomplish in the future."

"ORGANIZING IS CONTAGIOUS. WORKERS, INCLUDING MINOR LEAGUE BALL PLAYERS, ARE DESPERATE FOR A CHANGE."

—AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler



Mind and Body

The domineering logic of ballet

BY GLORY LIU



IN DECEMBER OF 2017, A #METOO SCANDAL rocked the ballet world. Peter Martins, the artistic director of New York City Ballet, stepped down from his position amid allegations of sexual harassment and physical abuse from within the company. The accusations included incidents that dated back to early in his tenure as director in the 1990s: Martins was alleged to have physically assaulted one dancer onstage in front of the whole company, exposed himself to another in his dressing room, and misused his position of power to receive sexual favors. After a two-month investigation, New York City Ballet and its affiliated institution, the School of American Ballet, issued a statement that

ILLUSTRATION BY LILY QIAN

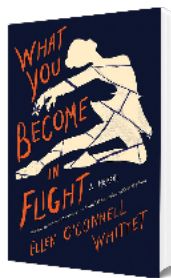
their findings “did not corroborate the allegations of harassment or violence” against him. By then, Martins had quietly exited the scene after announcing his retirement early in the new year.

Within months, the reverberations were being felt across the dance world. In March 2018, Kenneth Greve, the director of the Finnish National Ballet, was removed from his managerial position over accusations of inappropriate conduct. The following month, in an anonymous internal survey at the Paris Opera Ballet, 77 percent of its dancers said they’d been the object of verbal harassment or had witnessed a colleague being verbally harassed, and 26 percent reported either being the victim of or a witness to sexual harassment at work. In the fall of 2018, Alexandra Waterbury, a former student at the School of American Ballet, filed a suit against New York City Ballet and Chase Finlay, one of the company’s principal dancers and her former boyfriend. Waterbury accused Finlay of sharing sexually explicit photos of her with other male dancers, and she accused the company of not only encouraging a “fraternity-like atmosphere” that “permeates the Ballet and its dancers” but failing to protect her and other women. In 2020, her claims against the company and the school were dropped, though in April 2022 a New York appellate court reinstated New York City Ballet as a defendant in the case.

As much of the outside world looked on with shock and dismay, many dancers—including myself—looked on with a combination of relief and regret. Relief because accountability appeared to be at hand for things that we knew were all too pervasive; regret because we wondered why it had taken so long.

As a ballet dancer for almost 30 years, I am intimately familiar with the expectation of suffering in silence. We smile while bearing the full weight of our body en pointe for hours. “Blood builds character,” one of my teachers said when he noticed a dancer’s toes beginning to bleed through her shoe. Yet ballet isn’t training to endure sustained agony in the body alone; it is also training to endure it in the mind. We learn to accept, even with gratitude, one of the most valuable currencies of the trade: relentless criticism of our technique, our bodies, our entire selves. And we all have stories of that one person we encountered at some point—the teacher wielding a cane, the choreographer who slapped a dancer so hard it left a welt on her skin, the ballet mistress who made you balance a cup of water on your head to correct your posture, the ballet master who held a lit cigarette under a dancer’s leg to get her extension higher. It took *#MeToo* for many of us to recognize that these were more than just familiar stories; they were symptoms of an institutional and cultural disorder that we repeatedly ignored.

Glory Liu is a lecturer in social studies at Harvard University. She is the author of Adam Smith’s America.



What You Become in Flight

A Memoir

By Ellen O'Connell Whittet

Melville House.

240 pp. \$17.99

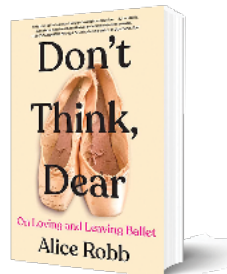
Don't Think, Dear

On Loving and Leaving Ballet

By Alice Robb

Mariner Books.

304 pp. \$29.99



Ellen O'Connell Whittet's *What You Become in Flight* and Alice Robb's *Don't Think, Dear* are two memoirs that tell of the costs and contradictions of being a ballet dancer and also reflect more broadly on the difficulties of reconciling feminist ideals with a culture that glorifies hyperfemininity. In charting their paths through ballet and ultimately to careers as writers, the authors of these two books offer complementary approaches to the subject. *What You Become in Flight* is Whittet's debut book and the bridge between her careers as a dancer and as a writer. Her conventionally structured memoir chronicles the beginnings of her dance training in London, the intensification of her career at various schools in California and across the United States, a career-ending injury, and her path to physical and emotional recovery in a post-ballet life. Journalist Alice Robb has written numerous articles on psychology,

mental health, and ballet culture, and her first book, *Why We Dream*, examined the phenomena of lucid dreaming and overcoming trauma. *Don't Think, Dear* (the title comes from an oft-cited remark by the famed 20th-century choreographer George Balanchine) echoes these themes by blending dance history, sports psychology, and meditations on her ballet training, including three years at the School of American Ballet. Robb not only excavates her relationship with the art form but also grapples with the moral ambiguities surrounding ballet icons and the hidden ways that ballet training carries over into one's life beyond the studio.

Read together, the two books do more than pull back the curtain on ballet as a technique and an institutional culture. They also reveal the construction of a ballerina's psyche and the challenges of learning and unlearning the physical and mental habits that ballet teaches women: to endure pain as a virtue, to wholly submit their bodies to the art, and to accept their pain and submission as normal.

Learning the formal codes of the technique dominates a ballerina's early training. “All art demands our time and bodies,” Whittet writes, “but unlike other art forms, like writing, dance allows someone to devote themselves to it as soon as she can walk.”

A young dancer will spend an entire 60-to-90-minute class repeating the basic positions and foundational vocabulary: first position, second position, third, fourth, fifth; pliés, tendus, jetés, ronds de jambe. Within a matter of years, the dancer is able to translate a verbal sequence into a physical motion picture; mind and body work simultaneously to decode language in one form and recode it in another. The sequence of the barre warm-up, the position of the legs and corresponding position of the arms, the grammar of steps, the etiquette of finishing a combination using one side of the body and then starting a new side—these codes are chiseled into the dancer's body and etched into the mind. They are legible in the dancer's carriage, the space between the fingertips, the gait that yields to the earth while also pressing away from it.

Ballet is full of contradictions. The dancer must take every effort to make everything look effort-

less. Repetition and ritual are, as Robb notes, the source of an extreme sense of escape and sense of control. “Even as the trappings of ballet—the competition, the impossible physical standards, the punishing hours—can be a source of profound anxiety and distress,” she writes, “ballet itself—the movement, the music, the choreography—is simultaneously a salve for these emotions.”

The discipline required of ballet is more than just a source of tension or admiration. Discipline is productive: It quite literally creates the dancer. Reading these two accounts of the rituals of training, it is hard not to think of Foucault’s notion of discipline in *Discipline and Punish*, which “produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile bodies.’” Discipline seeks to enhance the dancer’s body as a set of capacities and aptitudes—sharper dégagés, higher extensions, loftier grand jetés—while simultaneously rendering a form of power and control over its subject.

Ballet’s disciplinary power over the body and the mind, and the dancer’s role in relationships of subjection and submission, are among the unifying themes in these two books. Surveillance and self-scrutiny are central to their narratives as well as to a ballet class. Dancers are taught to constantly check their bodies, to “self-correct,” as Robb recalls of her years in ballet class; they are taught to “look in the mirror and scan for flaws,” and through their own surveillance and self-scrutiny conform with the expectations and wishes of others. Robb recalls how even as a young dancer, she became obsessed not only with her reflection in the mirror but with an internal perception of her body. Training a dancer to understand her body and ultimately control it requires not sterile anatomical labels but “luscious metaphors of food and everyday life.” Robb “imagined tea cups on my shoulders; how my legs felt light if I lifted from underneath.” Other features of a typical ballet class reinforce the dynamics of surveillance. An instructor paces alongside the students, an omniscient giver and reminder of countless corrections. The form-fitting uniform of a leotard and tights forgives nothing, and the mir-

rors serve as a reminder that the dancer is always exposed to someone’s watchful eyes, whether the teacher’s, the audience’s, her classmates’, or, eventually, her own. This kind of power, Foucault writes, “has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes.” The dancer subjects herself not just to the domination of another person but to a tradition and the discipline it requires.

To learn ballet, therefore, is to learn to embody this form of power. There is power in creating new physical capacities, of course. There are few things that make me feel as powerful as when

I am taking off for a grand jeté or finishing a series of turns. There is nothing that compares to what Robb describes as the feeling of “every nerve and joint and tendon...alert, alive.”

But ballet’s other power is in how these physical techniques, rules, and habits are inscribed in the mind and soul of the dancer through constant surveillance, silence, and submission. It is a power that the subject does not possess per se. It is a discreet, omnipresent, anonymous, and automatic power that shapes a dancer’s beliefs about beauty, the “correct” body, and the kind of treatment their bodies and minds deserve.

Among the most prominent features of these modes of power is the revaluation of pain. Pain, of course, is not the same thing as effort. Biologically, “pain is the body’s warning system,” Robb observes, but dancers “are inducted into a perverse relationship with pain.... [I]t’s a source of pride, a sign of progress—something to be ignored, if not outright relished.” Pain is not only inevitable; when it is endured silently, it is virtuous. The pain that Whittet encounters throughout her training as a young dancer is a harbinger of injuries to come, but it feels necessary in order to become a dancer, to perform to her fullest potential. What is more, pain becomes a currency of validation; it signals that one belongs “in that circle of hot teenage girl bodies,” Whittet writes. Swallowing one’s pain becomes a way of gaining favor with teachers and choreographers. Ballet relies on this economy of pain: The ability to withstand pain, both physical and emotional, is not only a badge of honor

rewarded within the studio and the school; it is the spectacle that draws audiences in the first place. “It is impossible to look at a dancer’s body,” Robb writes, “without thinking of the discipline and pain involved in shaping it—and that is part of the pleasure of looking.”

At a certain point, however, this economy of pain betrays the dancer. By age 15, Whittet tells us, she had already endured a sprained hip flexor, a dislocated pelvis, and a broken foot (and this is before she suffered the career-ending injury of ruptured discs in her spine). When she finally sees an orthopedic surgeon, she recalls her stubborn ability to minimize the pain; but after hearing her discuss her various maladies, the doctor, unsurprisingly, tells her not to dance. Robb relates a similar story, of a childhood friend and fellow trainee at the School of American Ballet who, in her striving to become a dancer, learns not only to swallow her pain but to blame herself for it. Another classmate sprains her ankle in class and experiences her injury as a punishment: She must sit at the front of the room, “watching and worrying as her classmates pulled ahead.” Later, Robb’s friend will suffer labral tears, stress fractures, herniated discs, and a broken toe, all while pushing the extremes of restrictive dieting to achieve and maintain the thinness prized by company leaders.

Even the choice of pointe shoes—perhaps the most defining object of the ballerina—is subject to this hierarchy of aesthetics and stoicism over health and longevity. When a new pointe shoe brand, Gaynor Minden, entered the market in 1993, it sparked a debate (still ongoing as far as I know). Gaynor’s modernized shoes are made with flexible polymers and offer shock-absorbing foam, in contrast to traditional shoes made of layers of cardboard and leather. The new shoes were designed to increase their longevity, but also for the comfort of the dancer. And it was this last part that led many in the ballet world to disdain them. “Ballet isn’t about health. It’s an art form,” Suki Schorer, a former Balanchine dancer and current teacher at the School of American Ballet, told *The New Yorker* in 2002. Robb even recalls her own longing for the “shocking” pointe-shoe-induced pain as evidence of her commitment to the art. “If I was supposed to feel pain, then I didn’t want to

The dancer subjects herself not just to the domination of another person but an art form.

skimp on it. I wanted bunions, blisters, bleeding toenails.... If my feet looked whole, I felt like a fraud.”

Both Whittet and Robb reveal another aspect of how pain is mixed with power in ballet. Because part of its allure is to make pain invisible, ballet teaches “the value of keeping stories secret,” Whittet writes. As an adolescent, she had begun to wear a brace for her back pain, which served as a constant (but invisible) reminder that with just a little extra support, she could persist. Throughout the book, Whittet confronts a tangled family history of desire, addiction, pain, grief, and the loss of a beloved cousin. At this point in her life, her body had been stretched, starved, and broken, physically and figuratively, in more ways than one. Ballet had taught her that she would be rewarded only if she pretended she was not broken. Similarly, as adolescent dancers, Robb and her classmates learned to withstand “emotional pain, even humiliation,” as a badge of honor, while rarely enjoying their accomplishments. As both writers show, in ballet, pain, injuries, eating disorders, self-deprecation, and the denial of one’s accomplishments all become a source of camaraderie among dancers—a tiny revolution of speaking up even when the art form demands silence.

Yet despite this camaraderie, “ballet logic” and its disciplining mechanisms persist. When I ended up in the emergency room as a young dancer after an ankle sprain so severe that the doctor said I’d have been better off breaking the bone outright, I remember thinking, “It’s because I’m not strong enough”—not “Am I past the point of fatigue? Was I pushed too hard?” It simply never occurred to me that dancing en pointe for hours at a time or launching into a tour jeté might be the slightest bit risky, dangerous, even damaging. Many years later, as I received treatment for a nerve issue in my hip, my physical therapist told me that a ballet-style jump puts roughly twice the amount of force on one’s knee joint that running does. The demands of ballet’s technique—such as keeping one’s hips externally rotated—also come with risks and can lead to injuries in those with structural predispositions. When I was diagnosed with moderate to severe tendinopathy in one of my ankles, the message from the orthopedic surgeon was clear: My tendon was fraying not because I was weak but because three decades of ballet had pushed it to the point of degeneration. My body wasn’t flawed; the logic of ballet was.

Ballet is woman” are the apocryphal words of George Balanchine, considered by many to be the father of ballet as we know it today. For Balanchine, women’s bodies were not merely his “object of concern,” as the dance historian Jennifer Homans writes in her recent biography, *Mr. B*; they were the primary medium of his art. Those women had to be fashioned, honed, and molded to Balanchine’s liking. Fat, curves,

any excess flesh, were considered obstructions. Extreme dieting, taking pills, and excess exercise were common strategies among dancers who wanted to earn or stay in his favor. And yet “at some level,” Homans writes, the dancers “accepted it all,” for without him, what were they? What would ballet be?

For both Whittet and Robb, Balanchine’s ideas represent the extremes of the physical, mental, and emotional transformations a woman must undergo to become a ballet dancer. A woman learns that her body is not her own, but rather the object of the audience, her male partners, or her choreographers, “who told it what to do and how.” Whittet and Robb both learn to adhere to ballet’s punitive beauty standards, regardless of whether they were in the studio or not. In her early twenties, after she quit ballet, Robb develops problematic habits around food and an “overwhelming fear of gaining weight.” She relishes being rewarded for her thinness, of being “approvingly called a waif.”

Both Whittet and Robb learn to fear puberty’s threat of widening hips, while also tacitly agreeing to male physical touches and the surveilling eyes of teachers, no matter how uncomfortable they might be. In short, they learned that “self-objectification is the price of admission” in ballet, as Theresa Ruth Howard, another former dancer and educator, explained in a speech, “Deconstructing the Anatomy of Culture and Leadership in Ballet.”

Yet while Whittet and Robb acknowledge the high price of admission, they remain somewhat ambivalent about it. On the one hand, the demands of ballet leave

no other option for dancers but to consent. If you don’t want another person’s hands around your ribcage and inner thighs, don’t be a ballerina. If you don’t want to do another person’s bidding, don’t be a ballerina. If you don’t want to change your body, don’t be a ballerina. Whittet, for instance, writes that “at no point in any ballet class I ever took was there a chance to revoke or rethink my implicit consent to teachers, choreographers, and partners who must, for the aesthetics of ballet, touch women’s bodies to perfect positions or movement—either directly or by encouraging us to dance even when our bodies felt very, very wrong.” On the other hand, as Robb notes, there is still some space for agency, ambition, and expression even within the constraints and discipline that ballet places on women. It matters, she writes, that many of Balanchine’s muses “were willing and enthusiastic subjects,” even if they were underage or economically vulnerable. Robb is in no way diminishing the downright creepiness of the cult-like following around Balanchine (at one point drawing a comparison to the psychological manipulation techniques of Keith Raniere, the leader of the sex cult NXIVM). But she also refuses to erase any of the agency that the dancers themselves have. Robb acknowledges that for some dancers, submitting to another person (in this case,

the Balanchine figure) can be necessary to achieve a higher form of empowerment, a way of transcending their bodies. Balanchine’s legacy is thus one of possessiveness and tyrannical power

over women, but it also includes “the pieces he left behind”: the ecstasy of watching or performing his ballets, where some women find their strength and self-expression even as they submit.

Why would a young woman choose, as it so often appears, to submit herself to a situation that mingles pain and pleasure, self-destruction and power? While neither Robb nor Whittet cite her, the work of the feminist philosopher Manon Garcia offers a useful answer. Submission is not mere passivity; nor is it natural or innate to women. Rather, it is prescribed and expected behavior under male domination. They can refuse an action or behavior—say, refusing to diet, or refusing the sexual advances of

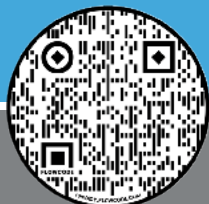
After years of ballet, one realizes that one’s body isn’t flawed; the logic of ballet is.



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their boss—and suffer the repercussions. They can also choose a certain action and maybe even find power and pleasure in that choice.

The ambiguity of submission, therefore, is precisely that dancers must choose to conform to standards in a patriarchal society. There is a larger force of power at work. Ballet's environment and template for womanhood—one that enables dancers to feel ambitious and powerful but nonthreatening, strong but still effortlessly feminine—is perhaps one of the most visible and exaggerated examples of the forms of patriarchal domination that exist throughout society.



ne thing that is unambiguous, however, is that the body has its limits. Whittet was rehearsing the iconic Balanchine ballet *Serenade*

when she fell to the floor, injuring her lumbar spine and tearing her sacroiliac ligaments. She ends up in another back brace—this time to hold her joints in place. When the time arrives for it to come off, she has already

decided that she will no longer be dancing ballet. That moment of unbracing is also one of unlearning: unlearning the ways that something outside of her body holds it together, and more important, unlearning the values that brought her to the breaking point. It is during the year she spends studying abroad in France as a college student that Whittet gives up ballet. She begins to eat when she is hungry; she revels in the softness of her stomach; she falls in and out of love. When a car accident puts her in another brace, Whittet no longer worries about how it will hold her back from ballet. Instead, she yields to her body's limitations and makes way for new forms of self-discovery and self-expression. Through therapy and an MFA writing program, Whittet eventually discovers how her mind can unlearn the painful stories that her body had for so long stored in muscle memory. "Growing back from hunger is, for a woman, the greatest form of protest," she writes.

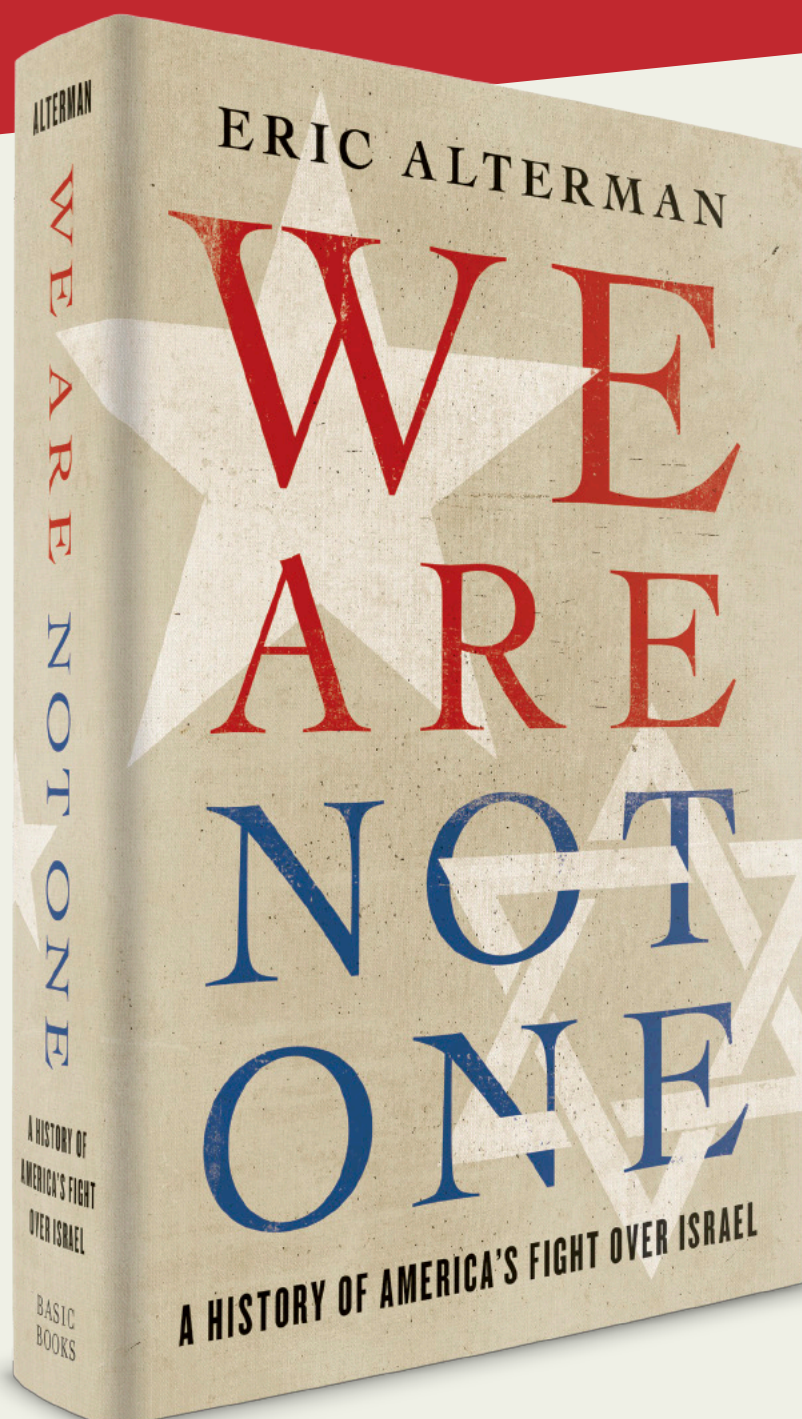
These protests are difficult; many dancers struggle to unlearn what ballet encodes in them. Robb gives up her dream of becoming a ballerina at age 15, but even as she successfully begins her second act as a writer, she finds that ballet haunts her waking and dreaming life. Being a ballerina—or, to be more precise, being recognized as a ballerina—is a mark of distinction she yearns for even after she has given up such an ambition, and she describes her feelings toward ballet as somewhere "between longing and regret and feminist disdain." Throughout Robb's book, I recognized the ballet logic weaseling its way into her mind much in the way it had with mine. Like Robb, I feared for a long time any form of exercise that might lead to bulky muscles, disrupting the coveted balletic lines. Before I began seriously training in modern and contemporary dance techniques, I shared what Whittet calls a "small-hearted" attachment to the belief that "modern dance was for failed ballet dancers." (Whittet later gave up that notion after taking two modern dance classes.) I also understand why Robb nevertheless chooses to find a way to keep ballet in her life, to try and feel at home in her body. But I understand as well why Whittet and Robb both stopped—not for a lack of strength or ambition, but because they were no longer willing to accept the excessive demands that ballet placed on their body and mind.

"Get into the habit of breaking habits," said one of my own ballet teachers, Muriel Maffre—and yet the idea of building a physical practice that requires constantly breaking the patterns and questioning the discipline that one has imposed on oneself is no easy feat. I continue to dance, but much of my practice involves trying to unlearn what ballet implicitly taught me while staying proficient in the physical language. What if, rather than focusing on all the ways in which my body fell short, I used ballet as a practice of radical acceptance of where it was and how it felt in that moment? Relearning ballet from teachers with an integrated approach to dance, biomechanics, and functional movement expanded my perception of my own body and its habits. Training in mirrorless studios and immersing myself in a range of dance techniques and movement languages—from Merce Cunningham to Lester Horton to William Forsythe to Gaga—helped me break the ballet logic. It was exhausting, but above all it was liberating. It freed me from the expectations that ballet could only be one thing and for certain types of bodies. Rather than valuing lighter-than-air thinness, I valued weightedness and seeing how bodies could play with gravity. Instead of seeking endless lines, I sought how the spine and hips could spiral and arc. Extensions mattered less than intention in movement, and an appreciation of autonomy mattered more than standards of aptitude.

Like Robb and Whittet, I had to step outside the world of ballet to fully understand all that I had put myself through (and continue to). Ironically, perhaps, by choosing a life of the mind—I, as a political theorist, and Whittet and Robb as writers—we came to see the history of our bodies in a new light. A patch of scar tissue near my ankle and a nagging hip issue serve as daily reminders to try, as Whittet has, to "untangle my injury from the movements that caused it," to see it "as the result of something much deeper": namely, a societal and cultural expectation for women to ignore their own pain, to accept if not welcome it as normal. Whereas I used to let ballet define me, now I find ways to define it on my own terms. I choose to find a way—again, as Whittet writes, reflecting on her final ballet performance—to love ballet "for the power and grace I [feel] in my body, and for knowing it no longer had a hold on me."

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Ringleader

The cult of J. Edgar Hoover

BY ADAM HOCHSCHILD

J. EDGAR HOOVER, WE'VE ALWAYS ASSUMED, BECAME THE most powerful unelected American of his time because he had the goods on everybody: the mistresses, financial shenanigans, and underworld connections of presidents who might fire him and legislators who might investigate him. Two new books about the longtime FBI chief make you realize that there was something else as well. Hoover's half-century of immense influence rested on his mastery of a very American art—the crafting of his image.

In the Yale historian Beverly Gage's lengthy and judicious *G-Man: J. Edgar Hoover and the Making of the American Century*, there are few facets of Hoover's career that go unexplored. By contrast, Lerone A. Martin's *The Gospel of J. Edgar Hoover: How the FBI Aided and Abetted the Rise of White Christian Nationalism* is more of a prosecutor's brief. Martin, the director of the

Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute at Stanford (a copublisher of King's papers), focuses not just on Hoover's notorious racism but also on his promotion of a distinct brand of conservative evangelicalism. Despite their differences, however, both books document the prodigious effort Hoover put into self-promotion. The FBI director would leave behind more than 200 boxes of press clippings.

Hoover grew up in a lower-middle-class world far removed from glamorous headlines. His father, after failing to make ends meet working in a shoe shop, became a printing foreman in a government agency but long struggled—at one point in an asylum—with what was then called “melancholia.” In response, the young J. Edgar became ferociously determined to succeed, working by day while getting his college and law degrees at night. He then immediately joined the Justice Department, and in 1919, at the remarkably young age of 24, he got his first big break: an appointment to head the department's new Radical Division just as the nation was in the midst of its first Red Scare. Ignited by the revolution in Russia and labor militancy at home, this period saw public hysteria and government prosecution directed against anarchists, socialists, and communists—and Hoover was there to do his part.

An early sign of his eye for media coverage appeared in 1920, when Hoover invited half a dozen journalists along on one of the notorious Palmer Raids against radicals that he personally led. He was rewarded when a newspaper reported how the intrepid raiders raced over the snow-covered streets of Paterson, N.J., in “a large bobsled drawn by two fast steeds” to catch their dangerous quarry. Another part of skillful PR is knowing when to keep your name out of the papers, and one suspects Hoover's agile hand as well in stories vilifying the groups targeted in the raids, such as a *New York Times* article based on information “from an official source in Washington.”

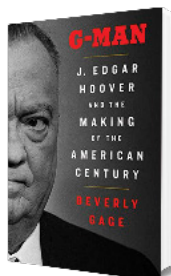
In 1924, Hoover got his next promotion, to the position he would hold for the rest of his life: chief of the Justice Department's Bureau of Investigation (“Federal” would be added just over a decade later). Once a small, inconspicuous unit, the Bureau of Investigation had mushroomed dramatically during the Red Scare, and it would continue to grow with the rise of organized crime during Prohibition.

As Hoover settled into his new job, he became ever more zealous about winning himself and “the Bureau” royal treatment in the mass media of the 1930s and '40s. One great gift, as Gage explains, turned out to be the Hays Code, which movie producers adopted in 1934 to fend off government censorship. Among other things, the code forbade the glamorization of gangsters,

which meant, in effect, that “if American directors wanted to make movies about crime, the policemen now had to be the heroes.”

In the 1935 Warner Brothers film *G-Men*, one character says of his crime-fighting colleagues, “When they tackle a job, they stick to it till they’re finished, with no fat-faced politician standing around telling ‘em what to do.” A torrent of similar movies followed, with the increasingly influential Hoover ensuring that they glorified the FBI. A decade later, he even appeared briefly on-screen as himself, reading through papers at his desk in *The House on 92nd Street*, about the FBI’s cracking of a Nazi spy ring. The films kept coming, including *The FBI Story*, starring Jimmy Stewart. Hoover won the adulation he craved; movie directors, in return, received personal tours of FBI facilities and selected information from case files.

Hoover’s years in the spotlight spanned the Great Depression, World War II, and the tumultuous 1960s. In 1965, the TV series *The FBI* was born and would run for nearly a decade. Its star was Efrem Zimbalist Jr., who, before filming started, spent several weeks absorbing FBI culture at its training academy. “At Hoover’s direction,” Gage writes, “the show largely dispensed with women and romance.” Over time, he made other demands, “including the elimination of any portrayal of police brutality, wiretapping... and civil rights cases.” Hoover invited Zimbalist, a Goldwater Republican, to speak to some 750 bureau workers and their guests, who gave him a standing ovation after he voiced his “awe and admiration” for the FBI. For 40 minutes afterward, the actor signed autographs.



G-Man

J. Edgar Hoover and the Making of the American Century
By Beverly Gage
Viking.
\$64 pp. \$40

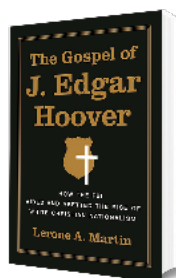
Martin’s *The Gospel of J. Edgar Hoover* explores a more neglected aspect of Hoover’s mastery of the media: its connection with religion. “His squadron of efficient Protestant and Catholic ghostwriters in the Crime Records Division [the name for the FBI’s huge public relations staff] pumped out material at an astonishing rate.... He was featured in *Our Sunday Visitor*, the nation’s most widely circulated Catholic weekly, as well as in the popular *Sunday School Times*. Nothing, however, surpassed the influence and prominence of Hoover’s presence in *Christianity Today*.”

That magazine, founded and overseen by Billy Graham, was the voice of conservative white evangelicals. To them, the ecumenically minded National Council of Churches, with its support of integration, was dangerously left-wing. By 1960, *Christianity Today* had a circulation upwards of 160,000—more than quadruple that of William F. Buckley’s *National Review*. Hoover—or rather the FBI word-smiths who penned his articles, as well as the laudatory comments introducing

The Gospel of J. Edgar Hoover

How the FBI Aided and Abetted the Rise of White Christian Nationalism

By Lerone A. Martin
Princeton.
\$360 pp. \$29.95



them, supposedly from the magazine’s editors—wrote for the journal for years. Addressing the clergymen who were its main audience, he asked, “Have you, as a minister, preached any sermons describing the frightful challenge which communism poses for the spiritual heritage of America?” No one ever asked, it seems, whether suggesting sermon topics was a proper task for a nonpartisan civil servant. In *Christianity Today*’s pages, Hoover decried youth crime, the lack of faith, and more. The Campus Crusade for Christ reprinted portions of these articles, and daily newspapers ran other writings by Hoover. The director’s many friends in Congress—by the end of his life an astonishing 15 members were former FBI agents—inserted them in the *Congressional Record*.

Christianity Today’s imprimatur gave Hoover’s words more impact than if they had appeared in a press release, for it meant

that the Crime Records Division could distribute well over 100,000 copies of his articles carrying both the FBI seal and the line “Reprinted from *Christianity Today*.” Large bundles went to the bureau’s field offices throughout the country, to US embassies around the world, to the many favored friends on Hoover’s “Special Correspondents List,” and to anyone who wrote in—one enthusiast in Garden Grove, Calif., requested 1,000 copies. Not only did all of this paint a halo of piety around Hoover’s image, Martin observes, but *Christianity Today* and its brand of evangelicalism received free promotion at taxpayer expense.

Hoover also mastered the art of cultivating reporters and feeding them scurrilous items about his enemies. And when any paper, large or small, reprinted a speech or article of his, he sent a thank-you letter acknowledging its contribution to the war on crime. The awed editor of the Shelbyville, Ky., *Sentinel* was thrilled to see his efforts appreciated by the figure he called the “Chief of America’s Heroic G-Men.”

Hoover lost no opportunity to shape how he was portrayed. An unlikely friendship with Morris Ernst, a onetime chief counsel for the ACLU, resulted in a chapter on Hoover in a memoir that Ernst wrote in 1945. Ernst sent it to Hoover for review; when Hoover had finished his edits, the chapter spoke of Ernst’s “increasing admiration” for him and concluded that any criticisms of the FBI director “do not stand up in the eyes of anyone desirous of looking at the complete record.”

Hoover also drew on his contacts to determine how stories were reported. When the FBI arrested a bumbling group of Nazi saboteurs put ashore by submarine during World War II, Hoover skillfully managed to take all the credit, even though it was the Coast Guard that had first spotted the men, and one of the saboteurs had lost his nerve, gone to the FBI, and confessed.

Another way Hoover won his glowing press was to turn even routine occasions into news events. For instance, there was usually a celebrity speaker at the FBI Academy’s graduation ceremony. One year, President Dwight Eisenhower appeared and was awarded an honorary gold badge. More than a decade later, President Richard Nixon went a step further and actually hosted the graduation in the White House.

Hoover’s PR operation conducted thousands of tours of the FBI’s headquarters: the basement

Adam Hochschild is the author, most recently, of American Midnight: The Great War, a Violent Peace, and Democracy’s Forgotten Crisis.

shooting range (VIPs got to fire a Tommy gun), the rooms holding the machine guns of John Dillinger and trophies of conquest from other gangsters; the vast rows of filing cabinets containing the secrets of dangerous subversives. The tours drew even more attention when the visitors themselves were newsworthy: Eleanor Roosevelt, the bandleader Guy Lombardo, the Detroit Tigers' manager, and various movie stars.

The summit of Hoover's conquest of the media was his 1958 book *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It*. Yet another product of his busy ghostwriters, the book was syndicated in many newspapers and became a No. 1 best seller, which was all the more remarkable because by that point only a minuscule number of Americans were still enraptured by the USSR. Of the US Communist Party's estimated 5,000 members, some 1,500 were FBI informants. Hoover "shared with the communists an interest in exaggerating their influence," Gage observes.

The FBI itself gave the book its greatest push, mobilizing agents to extoll its virtues and hand out copies. Each field office was expected to contact local bookstores.... Those who did the best received bonuses and raises. On one occasion, [senior FBI official William] Sullivan traveled to Ohio to speak before the Citizens' Committee of Cincinnati, a grassroots group invented by the local field office to impress Hoover. Sullivan arrived to find a fleet of trucks packed with copies of *Masters of Deceit*, with a free book promised to anyone who showed up for the event.

It was a publicity machine that lesser authors could only dream of.

Much of what's included in *G-Man* and *The Gospel of J. Edgar Hoover* is already familiar: the story of Hoover's long, bitter vendetta against Martin Luther King Jr., for example, including his bugging of King's extramarital affairs, his leaks about them to journalists and politicians, and his sending the recordings to King himself, along with a threatening anonymous letter intended to provoke him to suicide. Gage correctly reminds us, however, that Hoover was no lone wolf here.

Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy signed off on the wiretapping, and the results of it were shared with President Lyndon Johnson, just as, earlier, top Eisenhower administration officials and key members of Congress knew about COINTELPRO, the bureau's "counterintelligence program" intended to infiltrate and disrupt left-wing organizations.

Curiously, though, the otherwise thorough Gage omits one instance when Hoover forced a president to submit to his will. On the spurious grounds of alleged communist connections, he torpedoed Johnson's plan to appoint to his cabinet the University of California president Clark Kerr—a story Seth Rosenfeld tells in his important 2012 book *Subversives*.

We're all too familiar by now with Hoover's lifelong racial prejudice. He called King a "burrhead" and declared in 1965 that "white citizens are primarily decent," while "the colored people are quite ignorant, mostly uneducated, and I doubt they would seek an education if they had an opportunity." When he came under pressure to remedy the FBI's paucity of Black agents, Hoover sent his chauffeur to the training academy and made him an agent but kept him on as his driver and gardener.

Also known for decades is Hoover's long relationship with his aide Clyde Tolson, a bond so public that it's hardly fair to call Hoover closeted. The two men drove to work together, vacationed together, went to the Stork Club and racetracks together, and even double-dated with Richard and Patricia Nixon. On ceremonial occasions, Tolson was always one step behind or to the side of his boss, like a royal or presidential spouse. Hoover brought Tolson to his home to recuperate from various illnesses. Successive presidents granted each man an exemption from the rule requiring federal civil servants to retire at 70. Although they both developed trouble walking, they kept tottering to their offices at FBI headquarters even when Hoover was taking long afternoon naps and Tolson was blind in one eye and having speech and memory problems. What the couple may have done together in the privacy of a bedroom, we will never know. Quite possibly nothing—and all that sublimated sexual energy instead went into putting additional coats of polish on Hoover's image as a bold crusader against gangsters, communists, and Black radicals.

Their relationship did not prevent the FBI, however, from pursuing homosexual

government employees, who lost jobs by the hundreds in the "Lavender Scare" of the 1950s. Martin tells the chilling story of an FBI agent whose adult son had changed his name and become a gay rights activist. According to an internal memo, the agent told his superiors "that he hopes that he might continue to occasionally contact his son but if the Bureau desires, he will stop seeing him." Even this was not enough; the man was censured, put on probation, and transferred away from Washington.

A revealing but largely unknown story about Hoover is mentioned in passing by Gage and elaborated on by Martin. It concerns Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux, an evangelist who became the first African American—and first minister of any race—to have his own TV show. Michaux's politics were in line with Hoover's: He preached a sermon, for example, in which he declared that Black Americans lagged behind the "intellectual culture of [their] White brother" by centuries and that slavery had been God's way of introducing them to Christianity. But what Martin reveals is the extent to which the FBI was aware of Michaux's extreme conservatism, rejoiced in it, and enlisted him in its vicious campaign against King. Early on, an agent identified Michaux as a "very vigorous exponent for race segregation. He believes everybody, White, Black, Yellow or Red has a definite place in life and that each should keep their place." In 1950, Hoover sent Michaux a fan letter claiming that he watched him on television, and the next year a telegram: "Keep up the good work." A half-dozen years later, when the civil rights movement was heating up, the FBI invited Michaux for a visit and told him, an agent reported, that "it might be necessary to call [you] into service." Michaux said he would be ready "at any time."

That time drew closer as the movement's support soared after the 1963 March on Washington, where King gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. Hoover and his underlings were pleased when Michaux gave a radio sermon attacking King and insisting that civil rights legislation was useless because "God's will must be done on this earth before you are made equal." A year later, the FBI gave him a call.

In 1964, just two days after the bureau sent King the notorious poison-pen letter and recordings, Michaux met Hoover, ap-

parently for the first time. Hoover shared his rage that King kept criticizing the FBI for its negligence on civil rights, with an aide noting that Michaux was “distressed to learn of...King’s false statements against the Director and...wanted to do something about the situation.”

Michaux returned for a second meeting with Hoover some two weeks later, where it was agreed that he would “issue to the wire services a public letter which he would write to King...and state that the Director and the FBI have been extremely effective in the Civil Rights Movement. He will also call upon Reverend King to issue a public apology to the Director so that Negro people may realize who their friends are.” Michaux delivered on his promise, condemning King for his “suspicious remarks” and demanding that he “aid the FBI.” He also quoted a Hoover speech and some statistics that the FBI had supplied him with and added a final flourish about how Americans needed to choose between “God and the Devil.”

A radio sermon on the same theme and another visit to FBI headquarters followed, along with several thank-you letters from Hoover. The following year, Michaux brought more than 100 of his parishioners to protest outside a Baltimore meeting of King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which was planning a voter registration drive in the South and a campaign supporting the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Echoing Hoover’s obsession, Michaux told reporters that King’s followers were riddled with “Communist infiltrators.” Already the object of outrage in the Black community, Michaux and his protesters were quietly watched over by agents from the FBI’s Baltimore office—the kind of protection that Hoover almost never extended to civil rights demonstrators.

After reading these books, it is hard not to picture Hoover’s FBI as a cult. Much like the followers of a highly demanding guru, FBI men—and for half a century, the agents were all men—understood their work as something more than just a job. It was a way of life, and the fewer connections you had outside that life, the better. Afraid that local ties might bias or distract them, Hoover did not post new agents to their hometowns or even their home states. Not surprisingly, bureau men largely ended up socializing with one another. Hoover

created an FBI athletic league and also headed a Masonic lodge for Justice Department employees. Unlike priests, FBI agents could marry, but Hoover once fired an unmarried clerk when he learned that a woman had slept in the young man’s apartment for two nights.

As in most cults, the leader looked for certain kinds of people as his followers, and so some things gave you an inside track at the FBI, such as being a Mason, or an alumnus of Hoover’s alma mater, George Washington University, or a fraternity man there—especially a member of Kappa Alpha, whose chapter Hoover had headed. This fraternity was tight-knit, heavily Southern, and glorified the “Lost Cause” of the Confederacy; the Kappa Alpha motto was even etched into the ceiling of the Mississippi statehouse.

Something else that helped your FBI career was being ardently Christian. There were special vesper services for Protestant agents and their families, a regular FBI mass and communion breakfast for Catholics, and retreats (no families allowed) open to agents of any faith. The Presbyterian Hoover was widely but incorrectly believed to be Catholic because of his fondness for Jesuits, the order cofounded by the “soldier-saint” Ignatius of Loyola. Hoover told one group of Jesuit students that their spiritual practices were “analogous to the FBI’s approach to training.” The bureau’s twice-yearly weekend retreats—to which no Black agents were invited—were even held at a Jesuit center in Maryland with a high-ranking agent serving as “retreat captain.” Hoover’s books, autographed by the director, were in the center’s library; awards given by him were on the wall; and an engraved silver communion chalice, purchased with donations from FBI agents, was presented by him as well. Back in Washington, Catholic agents knew it was politic to worship at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle, which several senior FBI officials (including one who was Episcopalian) attended faithfully. According to Martin, one of them also reported on attendance to Hoover.

The cult of Hoover even extended to how its members dressed. The FBI director, Gage writes, “cultivated a particular type of man as his ideal agent: tall, white, conservative, athletic, always in a dark suit and spit-shined shoes.” Hats were

required outdoors. Hoover once harshly reprimanded a field office manager for hiring a man whose lips were too “large” and “prominent.” FBI men had to meet exacting physical standards—even though their day-to-day duties didn’t usually involve physical labor. The bureau circulated a chart specifying “Desirable Weight Ranges for Males,” which depended on height and whether one had a “Small,” a “Medium,” or a “Large Frame.” Like boxers, agents forever worried if they would “make the weight,” especially since some offices had surprise “weigh-ins” between annual medical exams. Overweight agents were put on probation, given punitive transfers to remote locations, or fired. Exempted from

these requirements was Hoover himself. Although he doesn’t say how long it was used, Martin quotes an astonishing oath that new FBI agents had to take as of 1937: “I shall, as

a minister, seek to supply comfort, advice and aid to those who may be in need of such benefits; as a soldier, I shall wage vigorous warfare against the enemies of my country.” Hoover was imagining his followers as both a church and an army.

What does a cult gain its creator? When it is centered not in an isolated ashram but at the very heart of national power, it can turn an outsider into an insider. In the eyes of Washington’s elite, Hoover might have appeared to be an outsider: short, overweight, and possibly homosexual, the son of a low-level federal employee with a history of mental illness, and the graduate of a college far from the Ivy League. But commanding the FBI, molding its agents into his version of holy warriors, and demonizing as un-American Martin Luther King, student radicals, Communist Party members, and Black Americans all turned Hoover into the ultimate insider. Although investigations, the shattering of his reputation, and reforms of the FBI would soon follow, nothing symbolized Hoover’s acceptance by Washington insiders as much as the solemn ceremonies after his death, from a heart attack, at the age of 77. His body lay in state in the Capitol rotunda; Chief Justice Warren Burger and President Nixon delivered eulogies; and when an honor guard finally folded the American flag that had covered his coffin, it was presented to Clyde Tolson.

**As in most cults,
Hoover sought certain
kinds of followers.**



A Chosen Family

Nan Goldin's life between art and activism

BY BARRY SCHWABSKY

IHAD TURNED OFF MY PHONE'S RINGER BEFORE A SCREENING of Laura Poitras's new film, *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*, but about halfway through I felt it silently buzz: a notification. I pulled the phone out of my pocket and saw that what had arrived was a "breaking news" alert from *The New York Times*: "Walmart, the largest U.S. retailer, agreed to pay \$3.1 billion to resolve thousands of lawsuits over its pharmacies' roles in the opioid crisis."

That crisis, as we all know by now, is largely the result of an aggressive push by Purdue Pharma to make its product, OxyContin, the go-to drug for the control of chronic pain. Purdue, privately owned by the extended Sackler family, put OxyContin on the market in 1996, and in 2020, the Committee on Oversight and Reform reported that the drug had generated

some \$35 billion in revenue, making the Sacklers one of America's wealthiest families. Marketed as safe and reliable, OxyContin is in fact intensely addictive and easily abused. It has been responsible for hundreds of thousands of overdose deaths. Many users who no longer have access to OxyContin prescriptions have gone on to use heroin or fentanyl in

its place. A National Bureau of Economic Research working paper published in November 2019 found that "the introduction and marketing of OxyContin explain a substantial share of overdose deaths over the last two decades."

All the Beauty and the Bloodshed follows the story of PAIN (Prescription Addiction Intervention Now), the protest group founded in 2017 by the photographer Nan Goldin, who had herself become addicted to OxyContin. Goldin started the group as a response to the prominence of the Sackler name in museums throughout the United States and Europe—from the Louvre, the Metropolitan, and the British Museum on down. PAIN began agitating for art institutions to refuse donations from the Sacklers and to remove their name from museum walls—to stop according respectability to these ruthless drug pushers. Borrowing a page from ACT UP, the group used dramatic and disruptive tactics, including die-ins, to pursue its goal. PAIN received little attention at first but eventually met with widespread success; today, the Sacklers are non grata in art patronage. In the film, the culmination of PAIN's efforts is the removal in December 2021 of the Sackler name from the wing of the Metropolitan Museum that houses the Temple of Dendur. (It should be noted that the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum is named after a family member who was never a shareholder in Purdue Pharma and so did not profit from OxyContin.)

But as that breaking-news alert from the *Times* suggests, the story of the opioid crisis is far from over. The same can be said for the fate of the Sacklers, though they've spent a fortune on insulating themselves from personal responsibility for kick-starting the crisis. Purdue Pharma declared bankruptcy in September 2019 and was ordered to dissolve in September 2021, yet the family's personal wealth—including billions that had been siphoned out of the company over the previous decade—remained abundant. But a few months later, around the time their name was effaced from the Met, another judge ruled that the settlement reached in bankruptcy court was wrong to release the Sacklers from personal liability. What will happen next remains unclear. Though the film shows Goldin and her associates reveling in their victory at the Met, Goldin herself also

expresses a certainty that the Sacklers will never really pay the price for the damage they caused. Their money is its own defense.

The story of PAIN and its success in persuading museums to cut ties with some of their most lavish donors is an important one, and it resonates with the sense among many today that art institutions must somehow be prised out of the hands of plutocrats whose values and interests are at odds with those of artists and art lovers. It's a reminder that fortunes are usually built on exploitation of one kind or another, and that no individual or family should have the means to use culture to gold-plate what might otherwise have been an unsavory reputation. Maybe that's why, walking into the theater for my first viewing of *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*, I'd assumed that Goldin's efforts with PAIN would be the film's main subject.

In fact, that story is only one aspect of a far more complex portrait of the artist. If there's a center to *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*, it's probably the story of Goldin's childhood—of being raised in the repressive atmosphere of American suburbia circa 1960 by parents who were incapable of nurturing her or her older sister, Barbara. It was Barbara who showed Nan what love is, but when she became a rebellious adolescent, their parents had her institutionalized. Later, Goldin obtained hospital records indicating that Barbara had been kept there mainly to keep her away from her mother, who could only worsen her condition. After she was finally released, Barbara died by suicide at the age of 18. The parents were warned that Nan would likely meet the same fate if she continued to live with them. The inability of the conventional family to provide for the well-being of its members, and the search for an alternative form of family, provides the key to Goldin's life and work.

So Goldin's story is a tale about families: her birth family and its calamitous effects on her sister; her elective family in late 1970s Boston and then in 1980s New York, a kindred band of queers and junkies and other outsiders who professed not to give a damn about the mainstream society that had rejected them as vehemently as they rejected it; and, of course, the Sackler family, Jewish like her own, whose patriarch enjoined his children to "leave the world a better place than when you entered it." Well, we all know how that turned out. It's also a story about the dialectics of dependency—from the "sexual dependency" that Goldin chronicled in her most notable work, to the chemical dependencies that have been so much a part of this artist's life—and the drive to establish autonomy. And it's a story about the power of art, as well as its limitations when the conditions of life require a more direct intervention.

Biography is not usually the best way to explore an artist's work, but Goldin is a special case: an artist whose work is more intimately concerned with her life and milieu than most. You might say that her photography is not just about life; it is a way into life, a way of being with others, of finding solidarity in a harsh world. In the film, Goldin describes herself as having been an almost pathologically shy and withdrawn teenager, until the progressive "hippie school" where she'd landed after separating from her family at the age of 14 received a donation of cameras from the Polaroid Corporation. Suddenly she had a voice, a way to connect.

The incessant refrain of commentators on Goldin's art is that she differs from other photographers in that—as Fredrik Liew writes in the publication accompanying "This Will Not End Well," Goldin's current exhibition at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm—"instead of being a spectator, she works from within her direct experience." That show comprises her work from the 1980s to the present in the form of slideshows and video, and the densely illustrated catalog, with new texts by writers like Vince Aletti, Eileen Myles, and Lucy Sante, offers an insightful overview. But her immediate and casual-looking style had been anticipated by an older generation of photographers like Robert Frank and Garry Winogrand, whose "snapshot aesthetic" overturned previous ideas of good composition and lighting. "I don't worry about how the picture is going to look," Winogrand proclaimed. "I let that take care of itself." This insouciance, in the

best cases, led to pictures of incredible energy and complexity.

What Winogrand and the others kept from the documentary tradition was a conception of the photographic project as a journey of discovery, an exploration of the world "out there," a way of seeing how other people are. Photography, in this sense, has a quasi-anthropological function. But Goldin has mostly eschewed this impulse. She doesn't work to find out how "they" live, as the Swiss-born Frank did when he toured the United States to create his renowned book *The Americans*, for instance, but to record, in a diaristic mode, how "we" live. Her work has been more like a family album than an objective study.

Staying close to Goldin's own identification of her art with her life, *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed* returns again and again to her images as a way to tell her life story, and to her life story as a way to illuminate the images. Poitras's documentary might almost function as a kind of mini-retrospective, giving

viewers who already know Goldin's work a welcome reminder, while those who are coming to it fresh can enjoy a clear introduction. And while the film was directed by Poitras—who surpasses here the sensitivity she showed in her portrayal of Edward Snowden in her Academy Award-winning 2014 documentary *Citizenfour*—it really should be considered a collaboration between Poitras and Goldin, whose viewpoint, voice, and presence are so central to the film. Poitras revealed Snowden, you might say, but thanks to her skill at weaving together all these threads with such a cunning sense of rhythm, she allows Goldin to reveal herself. The portrait of the artist is also a self-portrait, and all the more powerful for that. Moreover, seeing Goldin's work projected on a screen means seeing it in its native habitat. While Goldin also shows it in the form of framed prints and gathers it in books, her great innovation has been her use of the slide show as an art form: images that move past you in sequence, each one, perhaps—to twist a famous phrase of Walter Benjamin's violently out of context—meant to "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."

PAIN received little attention at first but eventually met with widespread success.

It all started with *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*—still Goldin’s most famous work, and arguably still her best. The work took form in 1980 and has remained a fluid, protean project: The version in the Stockholm show is dated 1981–2022. For most of us, it is encapsulated in the book of the same name, first published in 1986 and still in print. *The Ballad* is undoubtedly a work that only a young person could have made; the images are permeated by a sense of desperation peculiar to that time in life, one based on the self’s identification with its desires and its desirability. Goldin once called it “the history of a re-created family, without the traditional roles.” Like most families, Goldin’s “family of friends” is as full of pain and conflict as it is of love. No one will ever forget her self-portrait with black eyes after a boyfriend beat her up; it’s a paean to survival.

In *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*, Goldin recalls how, at the early showings of the *Ballad* slide show, the audience was made up mostly of the same people who were in the pictures. She took photographs of her friends and then would pass them around the group; if someone didn’t like the way they looked in one, they would just remove it. And yet the pictures are not just about the individuals we see; they are about the whole situation—the space, the light and especially the darkness that saturate them, the shifting vibrations of relationships among the people in them. The whole frame is fraught with the anticipation of something, who knows what, that might be about to happen. Goldin’s eye was unique, but it functioned as an instrument of something beyond the individual sensibility. Hers was a community bonded by sexual and social nonconformity—and by drugs. “I wanted to be a junkie,” Goldin recently told the writer Darryl Pinckney. “I grew up wanting to be a junkie.”

Addiction wasn’t the worst scourge to afflict Goldin’s found family. Not only was 1981 the year that she began work on *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*; it was also the year in which *The New York Times* published a story with the ominous headline “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals.” The AIDS epidemic was beginning. It too leaves its mark on the cycle’s imagery—for instance, in the stark, unforgettable depiction of Cookie Mueller, the writer and performer who is one of the series’ recurrent figures, at the

open-casket funeral of her husband, Vittorio Scarpati, just about two months before her own death. In 1989, Goldin organized “Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing,” an exhibition at Artists Space in New York that functioned as a cri de coeur from a community devastated by the virus and raging against the dying. The show included work by more than 20 artists, among them the photographer Peter Hujar, who had died of AIDS, as well as others who were ill, including Scarpati, Mark Morrisroe, and David Wojnarowicz.

“Witnesses” became a pawn in the era’s culture wars before it even opened. Stung by the puffed-up controversy fomented by North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms and others over the grants given to Robert Mapplethorpe, Andres Serrano, and other artists, the National Endowment for the Arts ruled that the show was “political rather than artistic in nature” and withdrew the funding it had already committed. An alternative explanation for the decision, also offered by the NEA’s chairman, was that Wojnarowicz’s essay in the exhibition catalog (which had not been funded by the NEA) included searing, over-the-top blasts at Helms (“I can, in the privacy of my own skull, douse Helms with a bucket of gasoline and set his putrid ass on fire”), then-New York Archbishop John Cardinal O’Connor (“This fat cannibal from that house of walking swastikas up on fifth avenue”), and other public figures who had taken blatantly homophobic stances on AIDS.

“Witnesses” proved to be the moment when Goldin and her allies faced down the powerful political forces attempting to quash them and came out on top—the ensuing controversy ended with the NEA backing down from the cancellation of its grant. And as *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed* shows, it was also the moment when Goldin’s inward-looking focus on her immediate coterie took on a public and political face, prefiguring her eventual role as the organizer of PAIN. Wojnarowicz, who appears in this part of the film as the prophetic voice of righteous anger, serves as a sort of model for Goldin in her role as spokesperson for the victims of the Sacklers’ greed. “To make the private into something public,” as Wojnarowicz declared, “is

an action that has terrific repercussions” in exposing the fragility of an imposed consensus: “To turn our private grief at the loss of friends, family, lovers, and strangers into something public would serve as another powerful dismantling tool. It would dispel the notion that this virus has a sexual orientation or the notion that the government and medical community has done very much to ease the spread or advancement of this disease.” Goldin, too, would make a public issue of private suffering.

As Goldin writes in the catalog for the the 1989 “Witnesses” exhibition: “I feel my own recent recovery from addiction, and that of many of my friends, is directly related to AIDS. With the advent of a fatal illness in our midst, the glorification of self-destruction wore thin. We were no

longer playing with death—it was real and among us, and not at all glamorous.”

Nearly three decades later, the lesson of AIDS would teach Goldin how to respond to a different

kind of epidemic, the opioid crisis. “I believe I owe it to those affected by this epidemic to make the personal political,” she wrote in the January 2018 issue of *Artforum*. “I read the brilliant articles by Patrick Radden Keefe and Margaret Talbot (in the *New Yorker*) and Christopher Glazek (in *Esquire*) and I interpreted them as a call to arms. I knew of no political movements on the ground like ACT UP. Most of my community was lost to AIDS. I can’t stand by and watch another generation disappear.”

Goldin had been prescribed OxyContin following a surgery and immediately became addicted. After surviving a fentanyl overdose, she went into rehab and got clean. As she makes clear in the film, she still depends on buprenorphine, itself an opioid, which is used to treat opioid-use disorder. “This is not my road to recovery,” she says in the film. “It is my recovery.”

Meanwhile, the opioid epidemic continues. As I was putting the finishing touches on this essay, I noticed a *New York Times* headline concerning another pharmaceutical firm unconnected to the Sacklers: “Justice Dept. Sues AmerisourceBergen Over Role in Opioid Crisis.” Will this story ever end? **N**

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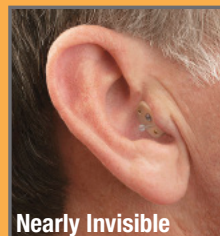
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