

AMASS *Magazine*

**Social
Extinction**

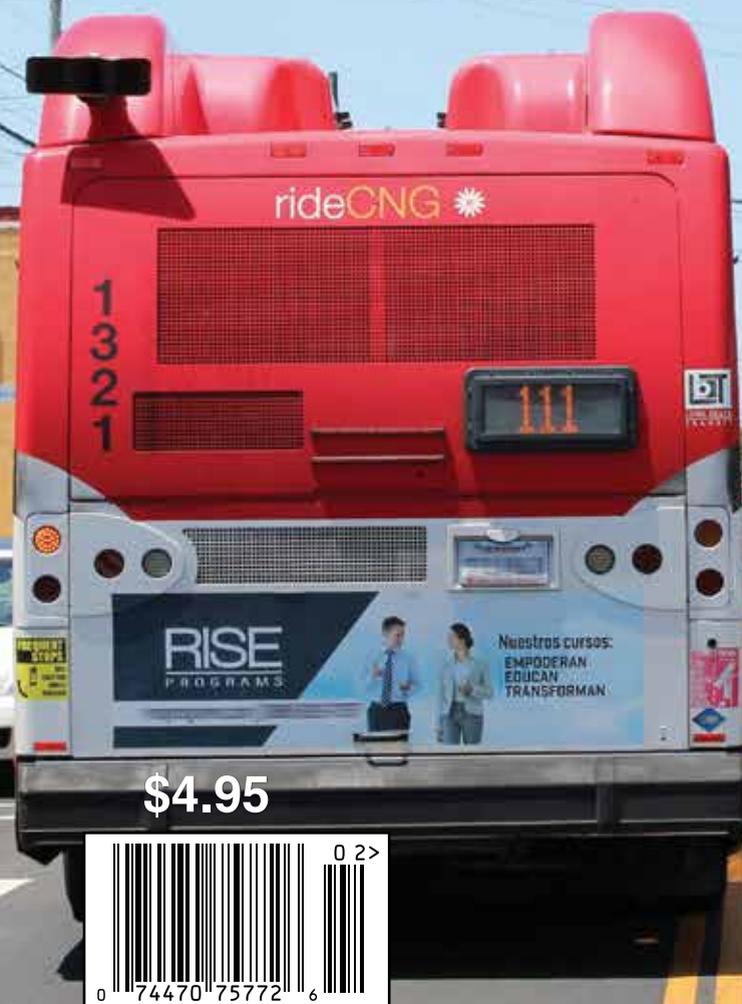
**Myth of
the Center**

Road Diet Riot

**Media and
Gun Violence**

**Health and
Class**

**Equality and
Dystopia**



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ISSUE 74
NUMBER 2
VOLUME 24



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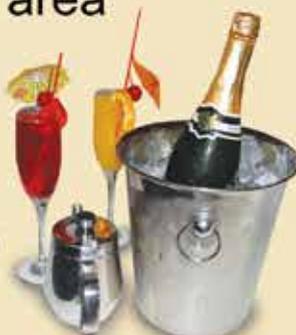
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AMASS

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Photo by Robert Fox

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COVER:

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PHOTO BY ROBERT FOX



“Road Diet Squeeze”

Cover design by Heli Swensson

Photo by Robert Fox

“Parking is essential right now in Long Beach. Frankly, any argument against creating more parking is illogical and ludicrous. More importantly, however, it is economically unjust. Economic equity is really about mobility equity.

When you are starting out, or on a low income, you can get a job only where you can walk or where a bus-line can take you to within around 30 minutes. Any more time than that makes the employment so onerous that it becomes difficult to survive long term. Well, if you have to get to work “ON TIME” then you might want to reconsider our buses. Being 10 to 15 minutes late for work several times will lose you that job.

A mass transit system would help expand work opportunities but we don't really have one. We have the Blue Line but it was down for a year and is only now running. And the fifty-two dedicated police officers on the line are not there because it is a perfect ride.

We need to replace the head of Public Works and the traffic engineers, and those responsible for this horror story!”

- Robert Fox

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DOLLAR MEALS AND DIABETES

ELIZABETH ORAM

Logan County, West Virginia was the epicenter of the final battle of the “mine wars” of the 20th century: the Battle of Blair Mountain. In 1921, thousands of miners—white, black and immigrant—stood together and took up arms against the forces of state and corporate terror that held them hostage in coal country. They were proud workers and they knew they deserved better. To the defeated and discouraged working class of present-day Appalachia, the story of the Battle of Blair Mountain must sound like a fairy tale.

Today, Logan County is ground zero for another battle—the struggle to survive in a region with the highest rates of Type 2 Diabetes (T2D) in the country. It is a place where all the risk factors for this global pandemic come together: chronic economic stress, broken communities, powerlessness, poverty, and toxic food.

Eighty years after conquering the major communicable diseases, the poor are still dying younger than the rich. In a shocking reversal rarely seen outside of wartime, 2017 saw a decline in life expectancy among some sectors of the poor in the US. A 2018 survey finds the same dismal reversal of longevity gains in Great Britain. Public health indicators between the rich and the poor continue to diverge, but now it is chronic illness, not infection, that is the killer. Insidious and poorly understood biologic processes are driving accelerating rates of cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes. And, like the infectious pandemics of the 18th and 19th centuries, these illnesses claim more victims among the poor.

The prevailing 19th century explanation for this disparity was “miasma”: a mysterious and invisible cloud of toxic air that was thought to hover over the slums of industrial England and sicken the residents. The first epidemiologist, John Snow, debunked this explanation forever by proving that it was tainted water, traced to a single pump, that was causing cholera. The germ theory took hold.

There is no germ theory for these modern-

day scourges—no coherent, scientifically acceptable explanation for why poor people get more chronic illnesses. Medicine, the scientific lens through which we interpret and understand disease, is not a neutral force. When capitalism emerged from the ashes of the feudal realm, science took the place of religion as the legitimating ideology for the new social order. Who can dispute a scientific fact? But the focus of medical science is on individual habits, biology and genes. It’s an orientation that ignores environment, social relations and the now-undisputed unity of mind and body in the genesis of illness. Is health an individual problem with individual solutions? Or is health the social product of how we live in society? There are powerful repercussions depending on how these questions are answered. Modern medicine’s answer—that our individual biology determines our health—effectively eliminates the possibility that societal change can improve our wellbeing. We can only change ourselves, or submit to our genetic fate. It is a belief system that works very well to cement the status quo in place. But is it an accurate representation of how disease works?

Medically, T2D is the inability of cells to utilize insulin, with eventual failure of the pancreas to produce insulin. Insulin is the “key” that allows glucose (sugar) into the cells. If insulin is absent or blocked from entering the cell, blood sugar rises in the bloodstream, but cells are starved. A high blood sugar environment is uniquely toxic to cells. The failure of insulin—“insulin resistance”—is related to a pervasive high sugar diet and obesity. Researchers have characterized diabetes as a microcosm of the degenerative process of aging on a cellular level. The elevated blood sugar binds to cellular structures, producing inflammation that

accelerates the damage of aging. Unsurprisingly, diabetes is the major risk factor for heart disease and stroke—diabetics have three times the risk of death from these cardiovascular conditions. Diabetics may suffer blindness due to retinopathy, amputation due to vascular disease, numbness and pain due to nerve damage and kidney failure requiring dialysis. It increases the risk for cancer and dementia. Diabetes is like speeding up the aging process. But it is premature aging with a preference for the poor.

The number of people diagnosed with diabetes has skyrocketed since 1980, increasing more than fourfold. The global prevalence has doubled. According

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– Elizabeth Oram

to the World Health Organization, we are on track for one out of four people in the world to have diabetes by 2050, and estimates of undiagnosed illness is as high as 30-50%. Incidence is rising fastest in middle-and low-income countries.

Health care providers like myself are taught that diabetes is a hereditary affliction made worse by “lifestyle” factors: unhealthy food choices, a sedentary lifestyle and obesity. We are trained to treat one patient at a time, and use the personal responsibility mantra to push our patients to improve their health status. Gluttony and sloth will get you sick.

Over the years I started to question these assumptions. If diabetes is primarily genetic, why has prevalence doubled in 40 years? It is impossible for genes to change that quickly. On the other hand, when we analyze maps of diabetes incidence, it is zip code, not genetic code, that appears to confer risk. Very poor localities like Appalachia, Native American reservations and impoverished urban neighborhoods all have outsized incidence. Endocrinologists blame the exceptionally high prevalence of T2D in Native American populations on “bad genetic substrate.” But I found studies comparing members of a Native American tribe who grew up with strikingly different socioeconomic circumstances (due to income-producing casinos on their land). The more economically secure section of the tribe has dramatically lower rates of T2D. Same genes, different outcome.

If T2D is not primarily hereditary, then certainly it is due to diet, obesity and lack of exercise. It is, after all, a condition in which the body has trouble turning food into energy. Is the globally pervasive Western diet the unseen contagion that is sickening modern humans and taking years off our lives? The answer is a qualified yes. The modern western diet is high in sugar, denatured white flour, vegetable oils, and meat; it is low in fresh vegetables, fruits and whole grains. More importantly, it is spiked with hidden sugar and fats, highly processed, and laced with chemicals to make it feel good in your mouth. The scientists Gary Taubes and Robert Lustig have shown that sugar, present in almost all processed foods, is physically addictive. Sugar and simple carbohydrates are also calming—they temporarily treat feelings of stress and depression through the release of endorphins, the body’s own opioid compounds. The impact of sugar alone could account for the entire obesity and diabetes epidemic.

The popular writer Michael Pollan has written persuasively and urgently about the disastrous health effects of corporate food production driven by powerful agribusiness interests. But his dietary mantra: “eat food, not too much, mostly plants,” is a tough ask for the residents of Logan County, home to 37 fast food restaurants; or those forced to live in the “food deserts” of dense impoverished urban neighborhoods, where there are Burger Kings with 64 oz. sodas, but no greengrocers. The tax-subsidized food industry spends billions on saturation marketing, chemical flavor manipulation, and portion creep—this expenditure has been highly effective in changing eating behavior over the years. Opting out is a luxury that takes time and money.



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Making the “choice” to eat real food means having access to affordable, high quality fresh fruits, vegetables, grains, and protein, and more importantly, the time to prep and cook a healthy meal from scratch every evening. Making the “choice” to be healthy means having safe streets to play in, bike lanes in neighborhoods that are walkable and time for informal group sports. Working Americans are exhausted and indebted, every family member is in the work force and work schedules are punishingly unpredictable by design—when parents finally pick up hungry and cranky children from day care, they want to treat them to something fun, delicious, fast and cheap. There is a straight road from Dollar Meals to diabetes.

The jaw-dropping explosion in diabetes having been normalized, treatment of this illness has become an industry. Lip service is given to “healthy lifestyles” by the pharmaceutical industry, but maintenance of an ever-growing market for expensive drugs used for a lifetime is the holy grail of Big Pharma. And profits continue to roll in as the disease destroys organs: the kidney dialysis industry has been wholly financialized and is now controlled by two corporate players, DaVita and Fresenius, whose stock is ascendant on Wall Street. Kidney failure preferentially affects the poor, but it is fully covered by Medicare at any age, so treating it is much more profitable than preventing it. A ProPublica investigation has found that fatality rates for dialysis in the US are worse than anywhere else in the developed world—commercial dialysis care means short staffing, filth, high rates of infection and medication errors. A decade ago every major hospital had a diabetes center to focus on prevention—the vast majority have closed. The real money is in treating the complications.

So far in our story we have a corporate global food system that has replaced real food with highly profitable, adulterated, non-nutritive food-like substances

for an expanding market around the world. Add to that an insurance industry that masquerades as health care; health care that profits from our illness; oppressive conditions of work that leave us stressed and exhausted with no time to prepare and enjoy real food, and communities built for machines that deprive us of the natural physical exercise our bodies need to survive. And yet we have only scratched the surface of the modern miasma.

The late Richard Levins was known as “the dialectical biologist.” A Marxist, a farmer, a biologist, and professor emeritus at Harvard, Levins insisted that a dialectical method was necessary to deal with complexity and change in the social and natural world. Medicine, on the other hand, divorces itself from the social, and deals in simple linear, causal relationships between biological parts: A causes B and is cured by C. But health and illness are always in dialectical relationship with environment, society, culture and history. We can’t chop reality into little pieces without losing the plot. The global pandemic of diabetes, and the social gradient that confers increased risk on the poor, is similarly complex. Biological feedback systems designed by evolution to protect us from danger have become the danger.

It turns out that our bodies generate substances that can cause diabetes, even in the presence of an optimal diet. These substances—hormones called cortisol and adrenalin—are produced by the adrenal glands to be released into the bloodstream under conditions of extreme life-threatening necessity. That is the evolutionary function, anyway—think tiger chasing prey on the savannah. The effect is to temporarily raise the blood sugar under stress to super-charge muscle and brain function. Robert Sapolsky is a neuroscientist who has been studying baboon populations in Africa for 30 years, and what he has discovered about a stress response gone awry is part of the puzzle of diabetes.

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Humans are experiencing something new—chronic stress, stress that lasts for days, weeks, even years, and the physiologic consequences are devastating. When cortisol levels in the bloodstream are chronically elevated, the result is not only diabetes, but a cascade of related ills: impaired immunity to infection and malignancy, abdominal obesity, increased rates of dementia (high blood sugar is toxic to the brain’s hippocampus), high blood pressure, depression, diminished fertility and more. Pregnant women who experience frequent stress can have babies who secrete higher levels of glucocorticoids their whole lives—they are overweight and get more diabetes. According to physician and researcher Gabor Mate: “stress is not an abstract psychological event, it is a set of physical responses in the body.”

We know from post-mortem studies that the adrenal glands of poor people are abnormal and enlarged from overuse—the work of continually pumping cortisol and adrenalin into the blood. What causes this kind of chronic stress? Why do the poor get more of it? Arline Geronimus, a professor of public health at the University of Michigan, studies the health effects of the stressors of poverty, along with gender and race inequality. It is a catalogue of misery: unsafe living conditions, the constant threat of random violence, rampant everyday racism, discrimination and social exclusion, excessive caregiving responsibilities, deteriorated housing and crowded conditions, precarious employment and chronic financial insecurity. Geronimus calls the cellular damage wrought by this onslaught “weathering”—it prematurely ages every organ system in the body. As author Damon Young put it recently, writing in the *New York Times* about

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the premature death of black men: “we age out of bullets and into high blood pressure.”

The levels of stress that cause this weathering occur when the threats to bare survival are always just beyond our ability to control. We then expend all of our energy simply trying to cope, but the threat is always close behind. We lack the power to control the forces that are buffeting our lives, and the lives of those we love. To be poor is to be at the bottom, always looking up.

It is this pyramid of hierarchy that is the most important factor in the social gradient of illness. In Sapolsky’s baboon tribe, it’s good to be the king. It’s also healthier—lower order members of the pack have higher stress hormone levels with resulting lower fertility, excess disease and shorter life spans. In the human tribe, “hierarchy” is a euphemism for our class position, and the consequences are the same. The health effects of an accident of birth are more diabetes, more cardiovascular disease, more cancer and a shorter life span.

This association is borne out in the famous Whitehall Studies. These longitudinal trials of health outcomes for thousands of British civil servants were begun in 1967 and are still ongoing. The subjects are not poor, and yet any job characterized by the experience of domination led to shortened life spans. According to Sir Michael Marmot, principal investigator: “We have strong evidence that there are two important influences on health in explaining the hierarchy in health. The first is autonomy, control, empowerment. People who are disempowered, people who don’t have autonomy, people who have little control over their lives, are at increased risk of heart disease, increased risk of mental illness. And we’ve also shown they had metabolic disturbances, the so-called metabolic syndrome, which increases risk of diabetes. We’ve shown that these work factors increase risk of the metabolic syndrome related to insulin resistance and lipid disturbances that, we think, increase risk of diabetes and heart disease.”

We take for granted that for most Americans, work is hierarchical and alienating. But being dominated and powerless in the workplace literally makes us sick.

We also know that there are factors that are protective against the damaging effects of stress. The single highest predictor of elevated stress hormone levels in Sapolsky’s baboons is social isolation. The single most important buffer is social connectedness and community. The most damaging scenario for human health is lack of control over what is going on, no predictive information about the stressor, no outlets for the frustration caused by it, and no social support in coping with it.

So, it is not surprising that, according to Vicente Navarro, a researcher who has spent his life documenting the health consequences of capitalism, “the world’s healthiest societies are those with the lowest inequality—societies where leftwing forces are strong.” Navarro attributes this to the increased social cohesion and greater sense of power and participation in less unequal countries. Universal access to health care does not make the social

gradient vanish because it cannot heal the weathering of body and spirit.

The quotidian, grinding violence that is life on the losing end of capitalism; a corporate assault that poisons our food and preys on the victims—this is the miasma that sickens us. The people of Logan County in Appalachia have endured decades of deindustrialization and layoffs that have all but destroyed their communities. With those losses go the institutions of collective support and connectedness that Sapolsky cites as essential to resilience and survival. In the wake of this trauma, the victims are disoriented, paralyzed, their sense of self-worth and autonomy shredded. It is that autonomy that is the prerequisite for power, and the antidote to the diseases of despair. The Battle for Blair Mountain occurred in the context of organized working people who knew their labor was indispensable and understood their power in withholding it. The response was rapid and brutal, and it continues to this day in Appalachia. “Stress” doesn’t begin to describe the experience of living in one of capital’s sacrifice zones.

As the globally dominant social and economic system, capitalism’s impact on our lives is all-encompassing. Diabetes may be a final common pathway of a toxic social environment that literally depletes life. Its disparate toll in zip codes like Logan County should be an urgent wake-up call. We are a product of our social relations, but we also shape them. It is that struggle—to forge human connections and locate our power—that brings health.

In 2018, teacher walkouts all over the country were sparked by a wildcat strike in West Virginia. The tipping point for the West Virginia teachers was the imposition of a “personal fitness wellness app,” refusal of which would incur a fine. The teachers saw the deception in a device that is not only personally invasive, but coercive and disempowering. In the face of the real threats to health—inadequate salaries, overcrowded classrooms, and unresponsive officials—the teachers’ united NO echoed with a strike wave across the country. It was the spirit of Blair Mountain.

Elizabeth Oram is a nurse and adjunct lecturer at Hunter College. She writes for the Alliance for Sustainable Communities, a community-based nonprofit organization that works to promote and encourage ways to make our communities more sustainable, and other sources.



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through a grant it has received from The James Irvine Foundation.

JANUARY

JANUARY 3 FRIDAY 8:00 PM
SUZANNE LUMMIS: TWEETS FROM HELL
A party to get in the spirit for the election year and the fight ahead. Suzanne Lummis debuts her COLA fellowship-supported opus, "Tweets from Hell." Regular admission. Members FREE.

JANUARY 4 SATURDAY 8:00 PM
POETRY IN MOTION
Since 1988, Eve Brandstein has presented an eclectic array of writers from the literary and Hollywood communities. This season, Poetry In Motion will feature special events and solo performances. Special general admission ticket available online for \$15. At the door: \$20 general admission, \$10 students/seniors, \$8 members.

JANUARY 5 SUNDAY 5:00 PM
DUENDE NIGHTS OPEN MIC
A poetry performance experience for the multicultural, underground poets and artists of today. Bring original poems, short stories, songs, and music. Organized by Americas Poet Society founder Antonieta Villamil. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

JANUARY 5 SUNDAY 5:00 PM
FIRST SUNDAY OPEN READING
Our popular monthly open reading. Features this month, TBA. Hosted by Steve Goldman. Sign ups begin at 4:45 PM. Five-minute limit. In the Scott Wannberg Bookstore Poetry Lounge. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

JANUARY 11 SATURDAY 1:00 PM
TEMPLE OF MAN 60TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Founded by Robert Alexander in 1960, The Temple of Man celebrates 60 years of creative joy with members from across the country. Free, but donations gratefully accepted.

JANUARY 11 SATURDAY 8:00 PM
HOLIDAY MASON, DAVID ST. JOHN, & MARIANO ZARO
Holiday Mason is the author of five full-length collections. In celebration of the release of her most recent book, *The Weaver's Body*, she reads with acclaimed poets David St. John and Mariano Zaro. Regular admission. Members FREE.

JANUARY 12 SUNDAY 2:00 PM
SOAP BOX POETS
This is your home. Bring your words. The mic is yours. Sign ups begin at 1:45 PM. There is a five minute limit. Hosted by Jessica Wilson Cardenas. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

JANUARY 12 SUNDAY 7:30 PM
PUBLIC WORKS IMPROV PRESENTS: NEW BEGINNINGS
Public Works Improvisational Theatre presents an evening of lively variety arts programming celebrating talented writers, storytellers, poets, musicians and comics. Every month, we explore topical themes for your pleasure and enjoyment! Hosted by Eric Vollmer. Regular admission. Members FREE.

JANUARY 17 FRIDAY 8:00 PM
MATTHEW ZAPRUDER & AMY GERSTLER
Nationally acclaimed poet and former *New York Times Magazine* Poetry Column editor Matthew Zapruder reads from his latest book, *Father's Day*. He's joined by legendary Los Angeles poet Amy Gerstler. Regular admission. Members FREE.

JANUARY 18 SATURDAY 4:00 PM
WHEN WHERE YOU'RE FROM HAS A BAD REPUTATION: WRITING ABOUT THE INLAND EMPIRE
Five women poets and writers from different parts of the Inland Empire share their work and discuss how it reflects their experiences and amplifies our marginalized voices in this region. With Iiz Gonzalez, Juanita E. Manz, Rebecca Nolan, Isabel Quintero, & Tisha Marie Reichle-Aguilera. Regular admission. Members FREE.

JANUARY 18 SATURDAY 8:00 PM
PAUL CUMMINS & JEFFREY GRAHAM
Lawyer Jeffrey Graham and renowned educator and activist Paul Cummins read from their respective books, each of which compiles decades worth of dedication to the art of poetry. Regular admission. Members FREE.

JANUARY 19 SUNDAY 1:00 PM
WRITERS RESIST IV
This year it's not Writers Resist—it's Writers Attack! The finest literary voices in Southern California feature together to inspire political action and social change. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

JANUARY 19 SUNDAY 5:00 PM
SALIENT SUNDAY OPEN READING
Hosted by Radomir Luza & Patricia Murphy. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

JANUARY 25 SATURDAY 4:00 PM
BRADLEY BOBBS: LECTURE ON PHYSICS & PHILOSOPHY PT. I
Quantum physics has revolutionized our understanding of the universe, our role in it, and the nature of reality itself. Dr. Bobbs presents the science, history, and controversies behind the philosophical mysteries of quantum physics in a way that is understandable to any adult. Part I covers the ultraviolet catastrophe, quantum leaps, wave-particle duality, changing the past, quantum uncertainty, and antimatter. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

JANUARY

JANUARY 25 SATURDAY 8:00 PM
TOWARDS A TOTAL POETRY
A release party for the latest LP from Sean McCann's Recital label, a collaboration with L.A. luminary Paul Vangelisti. Featuring multimedia and sound poetry performances from Vangelisti and others. Regular admission. Members FREE.

JANUARY 26 SUNDAY 2:00 PM
NEBRASKA GIRL OPEN READING
Sign-ups at 1:30 PM. Hosted by Wyatt Underwood. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

JANUARY 26 SUNDAY 4:00 PM
KELLY GRACE THOMAS
Kelly Grace Thomas celebrates the release of her debut collection, *Boat Burned*, a book about blazing limiting beliefs and building something better, brighter. Featuring readings by Brendan Constantine, Tanya Ko Hong, Arminé Iknadossian, Victoria Lynne McCoy, Jeremy Radin, and other special guests. Regular admission. Members FREE.

JANUARY 26 SUNDAY 8:00 PM
7 DUDLEY CINEMA
Experimental films with fiery discussion & live music. Hosted by Gerry Fialka. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

JANUARY 31 FRIDAY 8:00 PM
FILM SCREENING: HOW I WRITE A POEM
Premiere screening of "How I Write a Poem," a documentary featuring poets interviewed by Mariano Zaro for his PoetryLA series. Featuring live readings by several of the poets included in the film. Regular admission. Members FREE.

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 1 SATURDAY 8:00 PM
POETRY IN MOTION
Since 1988, Eve Brandstein has presented an eclectic array of writers from the literary and Hollywood communities. This season Poetry In Motion will feature special events and solo performances. Special general admission ticket available online for \$15. At the door: \$20 general admission, \$10 students/seniors, \$8 members.

FEBRUARY 2 SUNDAY 5:00 PM
DUENDE NIGHTS OPEN MIC
A poetry performance experience for the multicultural, underground poets and artists of today. Bring original poems, short stories, songs, and music. Organized by Americas Poet Society founder Antonieta Villamil. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

FEBRUARY 2 SUNDAY 5:00 PM
FIRST SUNDAY OPEN READING
Our popular monthly open reading. Features this month, TBA. Hosted by Steve Goldman. Sign ups begin at 4:45 PM. Five-minute limit. In the Scott Wannberg Bookstore Poetry Lounge. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

FEBRUARY 6 THURSDAY 8:00 PM
MEHNAZ SAHIBZADA
Mehnaz Sahibzada reads from *My Gothic Romance*, her first full-length poetry collection. The book represents a literary and cinematic exploration of the beauty within the dark, and is a study of primal fear and what attracts us to the morally ambiguous. Regular admission. Members FREE.

FEBRUARY 7 FRIDAY 8:00 PM
POETRY: FROM CHICAGO TO L.A.
Join DePaul Professor/poet Richard Jones (*Stranger on Earth*) and L.A. poets Michelle Bittig, Jack Grapes, and Alexis Rhone Fancher for a night of cross-country poetic exploration. Regular admission. Members FREE.

FEBRUARY 8 SATURDAY 4:00 PM
BRADLEY BOBBS: LECTURE ON PHYSICS & PHILOSOPHY PT. II
Quantum physics has revolutionized our understanding of the universe, our role in it, and the nature of reality itself. Dr. Bobbs presents the science, history, and controversies behind the philosophical mysteries of quantum physics in a way that is understandable to any adult. The second of two lectures, this talk covers multiple universes, quantum entanglement, spooky action-at-a-distance, and of course, that partially deceased feline. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

FEBRUARY 8 SATURDAY 8:00 PM
A TRIBUTE TO KATE BRAVERMAN
Poet and novelist Kate Braverman was one of Los Angeles' greatest writers. Through her searing body of work and via the workshops she taught at Beyond Baroque and elsewhere, she had a profound influence on the city's literary imagination. Featured guests TBA. Regular admission. Members FREE.

FEBRUARY 9 SUNDAY 2:00 PM
SOAP BOX POETS
This is your home. Bring your words. The mic is yours. Sign ups begin at 1:45 PM. There is a five minute limit. Hosted by Jessica Wilson Cardenas. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 9 SUNDAY 7:30 PM
PUBLIC WORKS IMPROV PRESENTS: LOVE IS A MANY SPLENDORED THING
Public Works Improvisational Theatre presents an evening of lively variety arts programming celebrating talented writers, storytellers, poets, musicians and comics. Every month, we explore topical themes for your pleasure and enjoyment! Hosted by Eric Vollmer. Regular admission. Members FREE.

FEBRUARY 14 FRIDAY 8:00 PM
BEYOND BROKEN HEARTS CLUB
Join us on Valentine's Day for an evening of storytelling, food, cocktails, and entertainment. Check the website for more details. Special Admission.

FEBRUARY 15 SATURDAY 8:00 PM
BRIAN TEARE AND GILLIAN CONOLEY
Acclaimed poets Brian Teare and Gillian Conoley visit Beyond Baroque to read from new work. Regular admission. Members FREE.

FEBRUARY 16 SUNDAY 5:00 PM
SALIENT SUNDAY OPEN READING
Hosted by Radomir Luza & Patricia Murphy. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

FEBRUARY 16 SUNDAY 7:00 PM
7 DUDLEY CINEMA
Experimental films with fiery discussion & live music. Hosted by Gerry Fialka. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

FEBRUARY 21 FRIDAY 8:00 PM
POETS FEED THE PEOPLE
The World Stage Press presents a poetry showcase and fundraiser for the Los Angeles Food Bank. Each dollar donated equals 7 meals, so the \$20 admission ticket pay for 140 meals for L.A. residents who are in danger of going hungry. We hope to raise enough for 5,000 meals. Featured readers TBA. Special Admission.

FEBRUARY 22 SATURDAY 8:00 PM
BOOK LAUNCH: UNDER THE BELLY OF THE BEAST
Join Beyond Baroque and members of its After School Workshop for the launch of *Under the Belly of the Beast*, the first book project to emerge from the After School. Hosted by Alyka Aoki and Cort Bratby-Rudd. Regular admission. Members FREE.

FEBRUARY 23 SUNDAY 2:00 PM
NEBRASKA GIRL OPEN READING
Sign-ups at 1:30 PM. Hosted by Wyatt Underwood. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

FEBRUARY 23 SUNDAY 5:00 PM
A CELEBRATION OF TONI MORRISON
Beyond Baroque celebrates the profound and powerful legacy of one of the greatest of all American novelists. Featuring readings, and a discussion hosted by Shonda Buchanan. Featured readers TBA. Regular admission. Members FREE.

FEBRUARY 29 SATURDAY 8:00 PM
ELLYN MAYBE'S POETRY RODEO
The Elynn Maybe Band returns to Beyond Baroque! Formed in 2010, the band's performances feature an innovative blending of poetry and music. It has toured across the United States and Europe, and has performed alongside luminaries such as singer-songwriter Jackson Browne. Regular admission. Members FREE.

MARCH

MARCH 1 SUNDAY 5:00 PM
DUENDE NIGHTS
A poetry performance experience for the multicultural, underground poets and artists of today. Bring original poems, short stories, songs, and music. Organized by Americas Poet Society founder Antonieta Villamil. Free, but donations gratefully accepted.

MARCH 1 SUNDAY 5:00 PM
FIRST SUNDAY OPEN READING
Our popular monthly open reading. Features this month, TBA. Hosted by Steve Goldman. Sign ups begin at 4:45 PM. Five-minute limit. In the Scott Wannberg Bookstore Poetry Lounge. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

MARCH 6 FRIDAY 7:00 PM
CALIFORNIA FLUXFEST 2020
Fluxfest is an art festival celebrating all things Fluxus. For 2020, Fluxfest has been appointed to California. There will be a series of Classic and Contemporary Fluxus performances by the current Fluxus worldwide community. Free, but donations gratefully accepted.

MARCH 7 SATURDAY 8:00 PM
POETRY IN MOTION
Since 1988, Eve Brandstein has presented an eclectic array of writers from the literary and Hollywood communities. This season Poetry In Motion will feature special events and solo performances. Special general admission ticket available online for \$15. At the door: \$20 general admission, \$10 students/seniors, \$8 members.

MARCH

MARCH 8 SUNDAY 2:00 PM
SOAP BOX POETS
This is your home. Bring your words. The mic is yours. Sign ups begin at 1:45 PM. There is a five minute limit. Hosted by Jessica Wilson Cardenas. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

MARCH 8 SUNDAY 7:30 PM
PUBLIC WORKS IMPROV PRESENTS: IF I WERE SPRING
Public Works Improvisational Theatre presents an evening of lively variety arts programming - celebrating talented writers, storytellers, poets, musicians and comics. Every month, we explore topical themes for your pleasure and enjoyment! Hosted by Eric Vollmer. Regular admission. Members FREE.

MARCH 12 THURSDAY 8:00 PM
DOREEN STOCK & STEPHEN KESSLER
Doreen Stock, author of *My Name is Y*, and Stephen Kessler, author of *Garage Elegies*, bring their latest works from Northern California and beyond. Regular Admission. Members FREE.

MARCH 13 FRIDAY 8:00 PM
KEVIN RIDGEWAY, WENDY RAINEY, & CURTIS HAYES
An evening of poetry made in Long Beach as three exceptionally talented poets from one of Southern California's creative hotbeds read new work. Regular admission. Members FREE.

MARCH 14 SATURDAY 4:00 PM
BEYOND SPANISH; POETRY IN BASQUE, CATALAN, GALICIAN, & SPANISH
A multilingual reading with poetry in Basque, Catalan, Galician and Spanish. Sponsored by the Spanish Resource Center of the Consulate General of Spain. With Josu Baque Ugarteburu, Mariano Zaro, and others. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

MARCH 14 SATURDAY 8:00 PM
JOHN MURILLO
L.A. native and nationally-acclaimed author of *Up Jump the Boogie* John Murillo returns to Southern California for a special reading. Hosted by F Douglas Brown, and featuring additional readers TBA. Regular admission. Members FREE.

MARCH 15 SUNDAY 5:00 PM
SALIENT SUNDAY OPEN READING
Hosted by Radomir Luza & Patricia Murphy. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

MARCH 15 SUNDAY 7:00 PM
7 DUDLEY CINEMA
Experimental films with fiery discussion & live music. Hosted by Gerry Fialka. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

MARCH 20 FRIDAY 7:00 PM
PROUST IN VENICE
Writers, poets, actors, and students perform readings of Proust's *A Remembrance of Things Past*. The selections will focus on the theme of Venice. Readings will be interspersed with refreshments and talks. Featured readers TBA. Regular admission. Members FREE.

MARCH 22 SUNDAY 4 PM
JEAN BARRETT HOLLOWAY & JAN WESLEY
Jean Barrett Holloway launches her new book *William Tecumseh Sherman, Known to His Troops as Uncle Billy, Remarks on His Profession*. Jan Wesley reads new poems. Regular admission. Members FREE.

MARCH 27 FRIDAY 8:00 PM
MARK RHODES & PHOEBE OZUNA
Mark Rhodes gives his last reading at Beyond Baroque, where he has been involved since 1975. He is joined by Phoebe Ozuna, the author of *The Large Economy of the Beautiful* and the co-founder of Caluenga Press. Regular admission. Members FREE.

MARCH 28 SATURDAY TIME TBA
SPRING GARDEN FESTIVAL
Join Beyond Baroque and Safe Place for Youth (SPY) for a day of food, conversation, poetry, music, and art. Held in the Beyond Baroque/SPY community garden, these quarterly festivals are centered around a farm-to-table meal and a love of community. Check the website for more details, including the start time. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

MARCH 28 SATURDAY 8:00 PM
GREGORY CORSO: A CELEBRATION
Join Bob Branaman, S.A. Griffin, Richard Modiano, Pamela Mosher, Aram Saroyan, and Tate Swindell in an evening dedicated to Beat legend Gregory Corso, author of "The Bomb," "Marriage," and many other seminal works. Regular admission. Members FREE.

MARCH 29 SUNDAY 2:00 PM
NEBRASKA GIRL OPEN READING
Sign-ups at 1:30 PM. Hosted by Wyatt Underwood. FREE, but donations gratefully accepted.

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OPEN LETTER ON PARKING IN LONG BEACH

R O B E R T F O X

Parking is essential right now in Long Beach. Frankly, any argument against creating more parking is illogical and ludicrous. More importantly, however, it is economically unjust. Economic equity is really about mobility equity.

When you are starting out, or on a low income, you can get a job only where you can walk or where a bus-line can take you to within around 30 minutes. Any more time than that makes the employment so onerous that it becomes difficult to survive long term. Well, if you have to get to work "ON TIME" then you might want to reconsider our buses. Being 10 to 15 minutes late for work several times will lose you that job.

Poor citizens struggle to save a few dollars because their first purchase is invariably a car. Why? Because it expands the scope for their work search, allowing them to drive outside the area to get more than low-paying service jobs to support their families. A bus ride to Torrance can take as long as two and a half hours. That's eight hours of work and five hours of commute. This leaves little chance for a relationship, a family, a life at all. These time and work pressures can make you into an automaton, like those work slaves in Fritz Lang's film, *Metropolis* (1927).

A mass transit system would help expand work opportunities but we don't really have one. We have the Blue Line but it was down for a year and is only now running. And the fifty-two dedicated police officers on the line are not there because it is a perfect ride.

Eighty-eight percent of Long Beach citizens work outside the city because we lack jobs. And with a 10.25% sales tax it is highly unlikely that retail businesses will choose to locate here. In fact we are tied with Chicago in being the highest-taxed city in the United States.

What does this have to do with parking? With rents and mortgages as high as they are, very few households have only one breadwinner. And the chance of both partners working in the same company or location is highly unlikely.

So, there you go. Both need cars to get to work, buy food, see the doctor, take the kids to school, shop for clothes or other needed items (and we have little retail here).

This means the city needs more parking to ensure economic equity for all. Here are some examples of what we can do. First of all, more diagonal parking would give the neighborhood 40% more parking spots. Second, preferential parking. This will allow residents to park more easily within their own neighborhoods and make illegal the storing of five cars or more on the street. Third, parking structures. If we created more of these structures in the business corridors we could add up to 700 parking spaces to the adjacent neighborhoods.

I was so intrigued by this idea that I flew to Ann Arbor, Michigan to see how that city used these structures to revitalize their downtown area. These were impressive three-story, brick-backed, ivy-covered structures with arched entrances and venting to the main street. The city rented these spaces to business owners during the day, and at night to nearby neighbors on a monthly basis. It was a great success. The city also shortened the parking spaces on their main street to accommodate more vehicles of average size. What a concept!

So why doesn't the City of Long Beach deliver these kinds of improvements? Not only is there no interest in this, its agenda is to stop the addition of any new parking. As the vice chairman of Long Beach Transit said: "If we added one more parking space to Long Beach we would be going in the wrong direction." My

response was: "What city do you live in?"

Ironically the city has a new slogan: GO GREEN! Well, who doesn't want to save the planet? Who doesn't want to use clean and safe energy? Who doesn't want to be environmentally friendly? NO ONE!

However, is driving around the block fifteen times to find a parking place helping the planet? Waiting endlessly in congested traffic? The only beneficiary I see is the city's parking department which will collect over \$20 million of ticket revenue for the general fund (They recently raised the parking fines to \$75.00 to create an additional \$1.3 Million).

Is it the intention of this city to keep the poor residents in their place? Getting 3 parking tickets a month (\$225.00) will certainly cut into any savings people might get from their jobs, especially since our minimum wage has been repressed for decades. Parking fines are like discriminatory additions to rent. People in Eldorado Park do not get

**The only results
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general fund.**

– Robert Fox

tickets as we have no enforcement there. Only the parking-impacted, lower income areas of the city get tickets.

Here is a thought. We should lower the parking fines within parking-impacted areas of the city to \$45.00, the amount in force in 2015. It is not as if people purposefully violate the parking law, it's just that they're desperate. The defective markings on the streets often force them to fit into odd-size spaces because someone else improperly parked, or edge over into the red zone by a few inches. But these tickets disproportionately impact the poor residents since those of means in areas like Eldorado Park have large garages and long driveways. We need compassion, Long Beach!

Putting new parking meters along 4th Street and extending into the neighborhoods was just wrong. Meters will kill small businesses and hurt apartment dwellers who have no access to parking. These neighbors only asked for trash cans from the city, but in order to get them they had to agree to these meters.

Jennifer Hill, President of the 4th Street Merchants Association, wanted cement trash cans for Retro Row. There was not enough money in the Business Improvement District (BID) bank account so the city told her that meters would be required to raise the funds. They then spent money to install the meters way beyond what Jennifer wanted, and the city would get all the income until the project was paid for, at which point they would split the money with the Association. Eventually a trashcan could be purchased (I would have just bought the trashcans for her and put an end to it, but the city refused).

So why is the city doing this? "Road Diets" are standardized plans that have been implemented in many cities to create a relatively auto-free future. These seem like worthy plans, and we should be working toward diminishing the effects from the auto. They're promoted as a move towards a greener society but instead they harm the cities they're imposed on. Our city wants us to give up our cars NOW. It doesn't want to wait until 2050. Issues of ticket affordability, car safety, or access to parking spots are not part of their equation. The city simply wants to make this revolution happen quickly and the elimination of parking spots will satisfy this goal. But this is occurring way in advance of the actual shedding of cars, the car diet.

What we need is an incremental process of change which includes good logical choices, like electric mass transit; repealing the W2 requirements for Uber, Lyft, and Ride Share; funding the conversion from gas to water

process for all autos. These actions are doable and are what the people want (We already have the technology).

The city's agenda is dangerous, prejudiced and just flat out wrong. It is no longer protecting and serving us, but controlling and ignoring us. We've lost our voice to protest. With only 90 seconds to speak before the City Council, what could we say, even if they were listening?

There's no doubt that the city broke laws to create this mess, and it hopes no one will have the funds or desire to press a law suit. But this may change in the future. Already a GoFundMe link has been set up and the money is pouring in to sue the city.

The real tragedy is that the burden of this mess falls most heavily on the working poor and to a great extent on the upwardly mobile as well. Just a reminder, our immigrant population came here for a better life, not to be stuck in the lowest strata of society. Everyone should have a chance to succeed without the government preventing success.

We need to replace the head of Public Works and the traffic engineers, and those responsible for this horror story!

Is it too late to have a government of the people, by the people and for the people?

Robert Fox is running for the 2nd District City Council Seat.

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THE CENTRIST DELUSION

RAOUL MARTINEZ

In a world of competing narratives serving competing interests, there's always a temptation to gravitate to the political center ground, the would-be midpoint between two apparent extremes, with its aura of moderation, reasonableness and realism. After all, isn't the truth supposed to be "somewhere in the middle," a composite of competing claims? The simple answer is no. Not in science and not in politics. When there are two opposing sides to a debate, sometimes the midway position is empirically false or morally abhorrent. In every civilization, the center ground of political opinion has been home to dangerous, inaccurate and oppressive ideas.

A Consensus of the Powerful

In eighteenth century Britain, centrists endorsed slavery, reformists called for improved working conditions for slaves and radicals demanded the abolition of the entire institution. As historian Adam Hochschild recounts, if in 1787 "you had stood on a London street corner and insisted slavery was morally wrong and should be stopped, nine out of ten listeners would have laughed you off as a crackpot. The tenth might have agreed with you in principle, but assured you ending slavery was wildly impractical." The center ground is a social construction, commanding most loyalty from those whose privilege protects them from the ravages of the system they support.

The center ground doesn't necessarily represent majority opinion—it's a consensus of the powerful. In the US, for instance, public opinion has for decades been in favor of universal healthcare, while most US politicians—Republicans and Democrats—have staunchly opposed it. The shifting center ground has reframed political perceptions to such an extent that someone like Bernie Sanders, who would once have been regarded as a middle-of-the-road politician in the mould of president Franklin D. Roosevelt, has long been characterized as a radical insurgent.

Struggles to abolish slavery, end child labor, resist colonialism, extend voting rights, achieve racial and gender equality, and grant basic human rights to all required courageous members of society to challenge the dominant identities and narratives of their day. Those who did were labeled as extremists, and sometimes punished with imprisonment or death.

It's easy to look back at the injustices of history with moral clarity and ignore the fact that this clarity owes its existence to the hard work of those who came before us. Our moral compass is the outcome of yesterday's sacrifices and struggles.

Extremists for Love or Hate?

Today, Martin Luther King is viewed by many as one of the greatest Americans in history. In a 2011 survey, 94 percent of those polled viewed him positively, yet in his

own lifetime, a 1966 Gallup poll found that 63 percent of respondents viewed him negatively. In 1961, a Gallup survey showed that even when Americans supported the stated goals of the civil rights movement, a majority did not support their tactics—sit-ins, freedom buses and mass demonstrations. When King spoke out against the Vietnam war, *Life* magazine described his speech as "demagogic slander." King, Rosa Parks and other civil rights activists were regularly called "Anti-American," "communists" and "traitors." The FBI referred to him as "the most dangerous negro leader in this Nation." Robert Kennedy signed off on a surveillance program to monitor King's home, offices, phones and hotel rooms, as well as those of his colleagues. At one point, the

FBI even sent him an unsigned letter encouraging him to kill himself. Why?

King was deeply critical of the centrist politics of the day. His demands for change challenged the legal, cultural and political mainstream. In his famous "Letter From Birmingham Jail," he described his views of the sympathetic so-called moderate:

"I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council-er or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: 'I agree

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false or morally
abhorrent.**

— Raoul Martinez

with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action'; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a 'more convenient season'. Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection."

King was often called an extremist. Initially he was distressed by the term but later "gained a measure of satisfaction from the label." As he put it, "the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?" King felt that the world desperately needed creative extremists for "love, truth and goodness" and argued that freedom was never given away by systems of power. It always had to be won by "strong, persistent and determined action."

One of the reasons King is celebrated now is that his legacy has been sanitized in ways that distort what he believed and fought for. He is remembered for his inspiring message of racial equality, an area where the dominant story has been revised, but his message of economic justice and his anti-war campaigning are deemphasized or ignored. Few people associate him with the view that the global system of capitalism takes "necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes" and has "outlived its usefulness." These views are as challenging today as they were in King's time.

The saintly aura of bygone human rights icons is rarely matched by those who wage the same struggles

today. They are constructed after a battle has been won, and in ways that prevent us learning from history. How many of us would have supported King and the movement he represented when to do so came at a cost, when the struggle was dangerous, the methods unpopular, and when those who did support him were dismissed as cultists or threats to national security?

It takes courage, effort, and imagination to rewrite dominant narratives, to perceive the familiar as extreme and the normal as outrageous. It takes robust understanding to develop and defend convictions that are incompatible with the assumptions of peers and the powerful. This is the moral challenge of every generation: to see beyond the prejudices, lies and smears of their own time; to identify the injustices, threats and problems of their era, and work together to overcome them. The location of the center ground is never a given—it is precisely what we want to change when we engage in political struggle.

The Unconvincing Mask of Moderation

In my own lifetime, center ground politicians have launched illegal wars based on false claims, in which hundreds of thousands of innocent people were killed; made billions in profits from selling arms to the most repressive regimes on the planet; systematically dismantled the regulations of the financial sector leading to one of the most devastating economic crashes in history; pursued, unnecessarily, economic austerity which has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and inflicted great suffering on millions more; allowed tens of thousands of desperate souls to drown in the Mediterranean; and all while overseeing soaring inequality within and between nations. These are serious



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and tragic failings, but the problems with business-as-usual politics go deeper still. If we take the warnings of the scientific community seriously—and we must—the very survival of our civilization depends on us radically and urgently redefining the center ground of political opinion.

Confronted with the extremism of the far right, many in the establishment are clamoring for a return to the center-ground, to turn back the clock to the 1990s. These dynamics played out clearly in the US election of 2016. During the Democratic primaries, poll after poll showed that Bernie Sanders, with his populist progressivism, stood a far better chance of beating Donald Trump than Hillary Clinton. The data signaled that a contest between Trump and Clinton would be extremely close, with some polls putting Trump ahead of Hillary, but that a contest between Trump and Sanders would very much favor Sanders. In May 2016, analytics expert Dustin Woodard wrote that Sanders “beats Trump in every single poll and by an average margin of 14.1 percent.” Yet institutional support—within the Democratic party itself, but also in the wider media—rallied behind Clinton. According to Democratic National Committee Chair, Donna Brazile, this support extended to rigging the primaries to keep Sanders out. At a time of deep anti-establishment sentiment, this was a gift to Trump. Ultimately, Clinton won the popular vote but lost the election. A poll on the eve of the election suggested that Sanders would have emerged with a large majority. After the election, pollster guru Nate Silver concluded “Bernie probably would have won.”

Clinton’s loss is symptomatic of something deeper: an establishment committed to holding the unconvincing mask of moderation firmly in place over a corrupt, exploitative and unsustainable system. Trump and the emboldened far right across Europe represent a new category of threat, but the reality behind this mask reveals greater continuity between Trump and previous administrations than we have been led to believe. Trump’s rhetoric about immigrants is hateful, but Obama deported more immigrants than all of the presidents in the twentieth century combined. Trump’s idea to build a wall along the Mexico border has rightly angered many, but in effect the wall already exists, consisting of an extensive system of detection technologies, guards, and hundreds of miles of barriers and fences.

Moreover, under Obama, the annual budget for border and immigration enforcement rose to \$5bn more than all other federal law enforcement agencies combined. Trump’s brash climate denial is terrifying, but Obama’s environmental record was dismal. According to climate scientist James Hansen, he “failed miserably” on climate change, presiding over policies that were “late, ineffectual and partisan.” Indeed, under Obama’s watch, the US became the world’s number one producer of fossil fuels; oil, gas, and coal subsidies rose by 45 percent (to almost \$20 billion a year); and the US repeatedly weakened climate negotiations, resisting any legally binding emission targets. The assessment of Harvard professor Cornell West is that: “Despite some progressive words and symbolic gestures, Obama chose to ignore Wall Street

crimes, reject bailouts for homeowners, oversee growing inequality and facilitate war crimes like US drones killing innocent civilians abroad.”

Redefining the Center Ground

The centrism of our time is the gateway drug to the far right. This lesson needs to be learned—and quickly. Just as the US establishment treated Sanders as a greater threat than Trump, the UK establishment—even its more progressive wing—has treated Jeremy Corbyn as a greater threat than Boris Johnson. As a result, during the present UK general election campaign, I have heard friends warn of the dangers of *all* extremes: both Corbyn on the left and Johnson on the right. I have seen the Liberal Democrats attempting to position themselves as the sensible choice between these wild alternatives. A string of prominent voices, from Tony Blair to John Major, have called for a return to the center ground. They, and many others, suffer from *the centrist delusion*: the notion that the existing center-ground, almost by definition, is the home of reasonableness and moderation. It’s intellectually lazy, oblivious to the fact that it has been the establishment consensus—embodied by the likes of Tony Blair and Barack Obama—that has created the intersecting inequality, democratic and climate crises we now face. Failure to recognize the disease of toxic centrism prevents us treating its ugly symptoms: Trump, Bolsonaro, Netanyahu, Modi and now Johnson. Ideologies of hate are thriving on the failure of establishment politics to respond to the crises it has unleashed.

In the UK’s imminent election, the choices are clear. The Conservative manifesto was described by Paul Johnson of the Institute for Fiscal Studies as being so lacking in substance that it would be inadequate for a budget, let alone a full term in government. And the promises that have been made (such as 50,000 new nurses and 40 new hospitals) have not survived scrutiny. But we don’t need a manifesto to know what we are going to get. A party funded by billionaires and shielded by the billionaire-owned press does not exist to serve the majority. The Tories have been in power for almost a decade, with Johnson offering them firm support throughout most of that time. Judging by their record, we can expect more NHS privatization, more tax cuts for the rich, more inequality, more homelessness, more public and private debt, more hungry children, more underfunded schools, more weapons sold to human-rights-abusing regimes, more scapegoating, and more broken promises. And in the context of the climate crisis—the most serious issue we face—their manifesto, should it be emulated, amounts to a death sentence for countless people in the Global South and a grim future for us all. Internationally, a Johnson government constitutes a boost to the far right which has been chalking up victories from the US to Brazil to Hungary.

The Liberal Democrats embody the toxic center ground. Their 2045 decarbonization target is a polite form of climate denial—inadequate to the extreme. Their leader, Jo Swinson, has voted with the Tories over 800 times, more than a number of Tory politicians. These votes include

supporting fracking and backing a punishing austerity regime which not only was economically illiterate, costing Britain over 100 billion pounds, but is implicated in the deaths of over 120,000 Britons. One of the researchers behind this finding called it a form of “economic murder.” Shortly before the election, the Liberal Democrats abstained on a motion demonstrating opposition to NHS privatization. Since the start of the campaign, they have repeatedly misled the electorate about how to vote tactically to keep out the Tories. By splitting the vote, they may well hand the keys of No. 10 to Johnson, guaranteeing a disastrous Brexit, and contravening their stated aim for

the election. Perhaps most tellingly, from Gordon Brown to Ed Miliband to Corbyn they have shown a far greater willingness to work with the Conservatives than Labor.

A New Common Sense

The Labor manifesto, in stark contrast, is a big step towards a genuinely reasonable and rational center ground—a new common sense. Placed in international context, their spending and taxation plans, endorsed by hundreds of senior economists, are unremarkable. Were every spending pledge implemented, the UK would still be spending less than Sweden, Norway, Belgium, Finland

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and France. Were corporation taxes raised to 26%, as Labor intend, it would still be lower than in Germany, France, Australia, Canada and Japan. It may not be radical according to international standards but, in the context of British politics, it represents a warm embrace—a decisive break with neoliberalism that reverses austerity, renationalizes the NHS, rescues our schools, removes the debt burden from our students and makes affordable housing a reality. When it comes to addressing the climate crisis, Labor would turn the UK into a world leader while creating a million green jobs in the process. More needs to be done, but it's a bold start—one judged by Friends of the Earth to make them greener than even the Greens. Labor's Brexit position—a referendum within six months with a credible Leave option beside a Remain option—is the height of moderation in a nation split down the middle by the issue.

If the majority of people simply voted in their own interests, Labor would come close to winning almost every seat in parliament on December 12. Yet the billionaire-owned British media—parked as it is on a socially and ecologically toxic centre ground—has made the choice between a warm embrace and punch in the face seem confusing and difficult. How have they achieved this? Mainly by moving the conversation away from policies, voting records and party funders, and onto the reputations of party leaders. It's easy to destroy someone's reputation, much harder to destroy support for the NHS, affordable housing, well-funded schools and a million green jobs.

Since his election as leader, Corbyn has been attacked for being incompetent, a threat to national security, disrespectful to the queen, a terrorist sympathizer, a foreign spy, a Russian stooge and, most recently, an anti-semite. From within his own party, a small but determined group of MPs and officials have been working to force him out, orchestrating mass resignations from the shadow cabinet, public warnings of electoral disaster, repeated pleas for him to resign, a failed leadership challenge, and numerous attempts to smear his reputation and undermine his credibility. Those behind these attacks have demonstrated a willingness to sabotage the electoral chances of their own party in order to achieve this aim.

This is nothing new. It is worth remembering that socialist Tony Benn, who passed away at the age of 88 having achieved near national treasure status, was—when running for deputy leader of the Labor party—viciously attacked by the media and labeled “the most dangerous man in Britain.” He was demonized in news articles and cartoons, repeatedly called “mad,” a “loony leftist,” and once was depicted as Hitler in a *Daily Express* cartoon. Like Corbyn, he was attacked by other Labor MPs such as Tony Crosland who described him as “just a bit cracked.” The media attacks reached their highest intensity when Benn ran for the deputy leadership. David Powell, the author of Benn's biography, described the ensuing campaign as “venomous.” According to Labor MP and Benn supporter, Michael Meacher, “There was never less than a half-page of vitriol in the press every day, and the

source was the right wing of the Labor party.” When Benn stood in a by-election in 1983, the day of polling saw the *Sun* run a feature with the headline: “Benn on the couch: a top psychiatrist's view of Britain's leading leftie.” The article diagnosed Benn as “a Messiah figure hiding behind the mask of the common man...greedy for power and willing to do anything to get it.” Benn himself concluded that press owners used their papers “to campaign single-mindedly in defense of their commercial interests and the political policies which will protect them.”

Protecting Privilege

Those holding most of the wealth and power in society need centrist politics to rationalize and protect their extreme privilege. They work to normalize whatever policies and ideas will favor them. Over the last few decades, this has meant low taxation, deregulation and privatization—neoliberalism—coupled with an amoral, exploitative and extra-activist foreign policy justified under the rubric of ‘national interest.’ To succeed, a compliant media is essential. It is absurd to call the media “free” when it is controlled by a handful of billionaires whose outlets each day feed millions of people words and images designed to reproduce the toxic center ground from which they profit. Historian Mark Curtis recently conducted a search of the UK national press spanning the three months leading up to the election. He found 1450 articles on “Corbyn and anti-semitism” and only 164 covering “Johnson and Islamophobia.” He also found 272 pieces on “Corbyn and the IRA” compared with only 2 mentioning “Johnson, Yemen and war crimes.”

In some parts of the world, individuals and groups that threaten entrenched interests are assassinated. In Britain, they are character assassinated. When you are swindling most of the people, most of the time, the only way to engineer consent is through deception. This is a constant, yet the current Tory campaign has reached Trumpian proportions of deceit. To give just one example, the Coalition for Reform in Political Advertising, a non-partisan group, has found that 88 percent of the Conservative party's promoted ads, on Facebook and elsewhere, contain false claims. Hundreds of the ads put out by the Liberal Democrats were found to be potentially misleading. As for Labor, not a single ad was found to contain falsehoods or distortions.

We have long been told that there's no smoke without fire. Unfortunately, in the world of politics, not only is there smoke without fire, there is often fire without smoke. Real crises go unnoticed while fictional crises saturate the news cycle. This pattern has brought our civilization to a crossroads. The scale of the crises faced in Britain and the world requires a rapid, bold, ambitious change of direction. Winning this change requires sustained struggle each and every day. But some days are of special significance, presenting opportunities to dramatically broaden or narrow our collective horizons.

Raoul Martinez is the author of *Creating Freedom: Power, Control and the Fight for our Future*.

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A LOTTERY OF EQUALITY DISPENSES DYSTOPIA

JOHN O'KANE

A common refrain in the Democratic Party debates has been support for more equality, the inclusion of those yet to access the American Dream. Most candidates even want to include migrants in their target group and make them eligible for free college and medical care. Expanding the base of successful citizens is what has defined this country, a liberal idea that's unfortunately remained mostly an idea over the past few generations, especially for the Democratic Party which has left the lower classes behind in its embrace of the market to referee selections, a defaulted endorsement of Milton Friedman: Equality results from individuals and groups freely accessing the market to their advantage. To slightly alter his famous construction, if we demand equality before freedom, market freedom, we get neither; if we demand this freedom before equality, we get both.

Rahm Emanuel spoke for the candidates recently on "This Week," saying in response to the proverbial claim from Chris Christie that they have no answer for the great Trump economy, that *they* will produce an economy for everybody. What form of freedom will produce this ideal? The notion of equality is one of the central enigmas in our cultural heritage, a compromise-abstraction penned in the founding documents, the Preamble to the Declaration in particular. And it's sealed with divine authority. We're blessed, "endowed" by our "Creator," spiritually enhanced from exposure to a force that grants us exceptional status. Such an enlightening spiel could hardly be tainted with prejudice, though few believe we're literally created equal or guaranteed equal status in the future.

But these inspirational words pump many to scramble for the spoils and grab a piece of equality. They spur the chance to move ahead and secure equal status

with someone above them, and move even further up the occupational chain, replacing others cast aside in the competition. Since the system's slots are only relatively expandable, the movers will mostly change places with other strivers on the way up, but the incentive to be more equal keeps the strivers in motion. Inviting more and more to compete in the competitive marketplace and win a lottery is a lofty and functional ruse, but lotteries guarantee that many will be left holding unredeemable stubs, fated to occupy slots frozen in the chain. Inequality is built into the hustle which essentially becomes a license for repressing the differences and histories of all seekers, and a diversion from exposing the myth that we all sprint from the starting gate with an equal chance to succeed.

Will offering batches of lottery tickets to all strivers and dreamers only create more victims if the institutions are lacking to process them equitably? If wages remain stagnant, and access to permanent jobs with benefits and an affordable college education are limited, to mention a few striking symptoms, these proposals will remain embarrassingly utopian.

An improvement in our democracy is a precondition for such changes, the greater representation of more aspiring souls in the direction of some form of equal influence if not Direct Democracy, a quite utopian notion as well that will mandate nearly universal literacy. This will be virtually impossible to legislate in large-scale systems. In fact, the very impulse of the democratic idea threatens to destroy society. In pushing more and more citizens to get involved and advance beyond their current stations, many will become alienated from having to accept lesser positions of power and

influence. Specialization of function is this capitalism's language, requiring that positions and decisions be efficiently ranked.

Which raises the question of whether completely socialized democracies, the requisite for approximating an egalitarian society, can exist (Arthur Galston, "Yes, Contemporary Capitalism Can Be Compatible With Liberal Democracy," *The Guardian*, 8/21/19). None currently do, and the only course imaginable at this time to produce one would be through the creation of cooperative structures that can work in relatively small, cohesive and homogenous groupings. Otherwise the increased participation will tend to reach a point where the many

Inequality is built into the hustle which essentially becomes a license for repressing the differences and histories of all seekers, and a diversion from exposing the myth that we all sprint from the starting gate with an equal chance to succeed.

— John O'Kane



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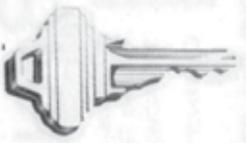
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voices will become so demanding that chaos ensues, the impossibility of equitable governance finally inviting an authoritarian response.

It's telling that since the emergence of mass society in the early 20th century there have been few novels that project a viable utopia. Those that play with the possibility of utopia but finally script their failure and inevitable dystopian replacement have been the norm. H. G. Wells' *Modern Utopia* (1905) was one of the last before the dystopian classics were penned after WWI: Zamyatin's *We* (1921); Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932); Orwell's *1984* (1948); Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974); Burgess's *1985* (1978), to mention a few.

Liberal democracies did adjust after WWII, proving the fablers wrong at least in terms of the timeline. Central to this adjustment was the social contract that expanded opportunity for those at the bottom of the hierarchy. An expanding middle class was key since it provided the target-stimulus for the excluded to strive for membership. The era of middle class shrinkage coincident with our current neoliberal order, what Jennifer Matsui calls a stealthy, nameless apparatus of denial, has blocked this expansion ("Neoliberalism: The Ideology That Dares Not Speak Its Name," *CounterPunch*, 9/27/19). With little room to move up, the lower and working classes have suffered severely, and this has led to the voiding of this historic contract, along with a rash of irrational consequences that threaten to destroy the legal bases for democracy, leaving capitalism's excesses unchecked.

What's evolved is a contract defaulted to the mass by private interests unaccountable to the larger society, an imposed script in the name of populism only. Citizens become more and more disenfranchised as they hopelessly succumb to suspect authority figures (*A People's Manifesto*, 2017). Lacking the ability to participate in elections--especially with the wave of gerrymandering and the influence of dark money--they stop voting their interests and consume the symbols that cut through the clutter to the simple "solutions" that defy civil dialogue. Government becomes the obvious target in a world of proliferating enemies.

The decline of factual journalism, and especially investigative reporting, leave a space to be filled by the social media advocacy of violence, hatred, and demagoguery that reinforces these trends. With the cultural cement for a credible social contract lacking, and mobility into and through the middle regions of the social structure evaporating, the orchestrators can refuse to cooperate across partisan divides and keep grabbing more power. The extremes of wealth and poverty compound with little to brake or reverse the process.

The Democrats' laudable call for more equality comes in the face of this middle class evaporation and epidemic of inequality, brought to us by forces in play over the course of the past forty years or so which have prevented the absorption of the excluded into an equitable contract.

It's a familiar story. The emergence of globalization as a response to the stagnation of the domestic US economy

in the mid-seventies created significant blockages. Freed from national restraints, corporations sought pockets of cheap labor overseas to boost their bottom lines after years of contraction. This value was not returned to the stakeholders, however, and especially not to employees (breaking unions was another significant plank in these offshore moves), but mostly to stockholders. The pumped-up stock prices seeded the capital-expanding wealth of the elite minority as wages stagnated. And much of their new wealth was used to speculate in finance and real estate, the banks following suit to re-secure their lost profitability from bad loans and other reversals during the downturn. Why *make* things when the properly placed financial instruments can *conjure* a greater and quicker return!

It was also used in the buying up of rivals. The mergers-and-acquisitions boom was a boon for Wall Street investors who saw their stocks soar. But the mass layoffs that ensued weakened unions and helped bust contracts, compounding the decline in the manufacturing sectors. The overall shrinkage of the domestic industrial base from these developments and the unpatriotic flight of corporations overseas depleted public budgets from the loss of tax revenue, leaving black holes in the labor economy that expanded inequality. And the new information economy that succeeds the age of labor manufacturing created sharper disparities with the rapid rise of educated workers' salaries in the face of stagnating wages.

The catch-up game was already mostly lost when the Great Recession hit in 2008, the moment of Obama's ascendancy. His administration's feeble efforts to restore the middle class even to its pre-Recession status has taken its toll. Its austerity policies, in sync with budget-balancing state mandates, overwhelmingly benefited entrenched interests. Keynesian counter-cyclical policies that would keep the vulnerable working and paying taxes, refuse to make them carry the major burden of the downturn, measures to stabilize the system more fairly that Obama himself championed in his early speeches, were nixed. This resulted in the migration of capital away from the lower sectors, and especially from minority communities, into the bank accounts of the elite, further increasing inequality.

In flailing for an alternative to Trump most Democratic candidates have managed to avoid mentioning the Obama legacy, and for good reason. His center-right policies helped elect Trump. Sanders or Warren could appreciably reverse these trends with a converted 2020 Congress. Their "big ideas," lambasted on their right of the debate stage as violating the establishment code of incrementalism, are the best option to restore the conditions for productively and equitably absorbing more aspiring citizens and expanding the middle class.

The seekers of office perennially pander to this category in the middle, what most Americans from below and above it blindly identify with as a way to evade their link to the realities of class. But they avoid pitching their scripts to the lower classes, that relatively same percentage

of victims structurally excluded since the country's inception. If restoring the middle class to prominence is a precondition for expanding opportunities for more of the excluded, some will find slots, but this percentage will not change that much. As it stands, few from this cluster make it and the Sanders/Warren push promises to shrink the lower significantly and boost the middle with a big infusion of resources. This will help to modulate the friction between these sectors, the divisions that keep victims at each other's throats instead of the system.

Significantly shrinking that bottom strip of deprived that has been impervious to all filter-down schemes is a tall order, even with this kind of support. It's a throwback to the "Great Society," Keynesian counter-cyclical strategy of subsidizing specific sectors, direct investments that can sustain the deprived. Precisely placed debt-creation can produce the capital whose fruits will potentially wipe it out. And as the beneficiaries access this power they'll spend a greater percentage of it on their immediate needs than the wealthy. The feeling of belongingness on the part of the new participants will tend to increase productivity. And the net effect will increase tax revenues over the long term.

This is an idea too "big" only if you ignore the scale of the revolution that pushed the middle class to the bottom over the past generations. And this is affordable if you view the issue honestly, as a collection problem. Sanders' tax proposal over time would at least get back what the beneficiaries of changed policies have received as the relatively progressive tax structure was dismantled. These subsidies, mostly to those who don't need them, have bloated budgets. The Trump tax cuts are only the most recent transparent example. There's George Bush's cuts in 2003 and 2006, the first coming after underwriting the Afghan War and coinciding with the expense for the Iraq War. Reagan's military build-up coincided with the biggest ever tax reduction for the upper tiers. Needless to say austerity succeeded these misadventures in deficit building, and that bill should also be collected. With interest rates now at historically low levels, a Sanders-type big plan could float once the books are balanced.

The real Sanders/Warren contribution to the crisis of the middle class then will be to treat its shrinkage and decline as integrally linked to the expanding lower

levels. That is, reverse the trajectory that created this crisis through an investment that absorbs those left behind in the march of "progress." If they were pushed down, then push them back up while expanding the middle to re-bulge the center of the hourglass. This will have to start with aggressively attacking the homeless problem, that symptom of contraction and exclusion that points to a major flaw in our social order. If the "class struggle has become the middle class struggle," according to Jeffrey St. Clair, then this will serve to at least temper it ("Roaming Charges," *CounterPunch*, 10/18/19).

Substantial change won't come without such aggressive infusions. "Incremental fixes" aren't even possible without the pressure of the "bully pulpit" to build support for major reforms (Harold Meyerson, "The Fierce Urgency of Less," *The American Prospect*, 10/18/19). Conventional public-policy solutions are simply no longer sufficient since the neoliberal counter-revolution is too entrenched. What good will come from educating more workers for the technocracy when there are only so many good-paying slots for them to occupy? What good will it do to invite more to join the nickel-and-dimed economy when the low wage levels make it necessary for so many to supplement them with welfare in order to survive?

A fundamental political restructuring must precede an expansion of the lottery. The institutionalization of experiments in democratic process begun through the efforts of the Occupy movement, for example; the reversal of *Citizens United vs. FEC* for sure, and beyond to the elimination of superfluous finance from the election process to sync with a radically shortened time frame for the events themselves. And, a few more parties on the ballot would be welcome.

The Democrats can talk and talk about including everyone in their version of a more humane and equal America, but squatting on Wall Street for funds to keep their jobs, and mingling with K Street to underwrite the interests of those who are sabotaging this inclusion, will only sharpen the divides.

Reprinted from *CounterPunch*. John O'Kane's most recent book is *Jukebox Confessionals*.



RUN ON THE DOLLAR DUE TO PANIC OR GREED?

ELLEN BROWN

What's going on in the repo market? Rates on repurchase agreements ("repo") should be around 2%, in line with the fed funds rate. But they shot up to over 5% on September 16 and got as high as 10% on September 17. Yet banks were refusing to lend to each other, evidently passing up big profits to hold onto their cash – just as they did in the housing market crash and Great Recession of 2008-09.

Since banks weren't lending, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York jumped in, increasing its overnight repo operations to \$75 billion; and on October 23 it upped the ante to \$120 billion in overnight operations and \$45 billion in longer-term operations.

Why are banks no longer lending to each other? Are they afraid that collapse is imminent somewhere in the system, as with the Lehman collapse in 2008?

Perhaps, and if so the likely suspect is Deutsche Bank. But it looks to be just another case of Wall Street fattening itself at the public trough, using the funds of mom and pop depositors to maximize bank profits and line the pockets of bank executives while depriving small businesses of affordable loans.

Why the Repo Market Is a Big Deal

The repo market allows banks and other financial institutions to borrow and lend to each other, usually overnight. More than \$1 trillion in overnight repo transactions collateralized with U.S. government debt occur every day. Banks lacking available deposits frequently go to these markets to fund their loans and finance their trades.

Legally, repos are sales and repurchases; but they function like secured overnight or short-term loans. They work like a pawn shop: the lender takes an asset (usually a federal security) in exchange for cash, with an agreement to return the asset for the cash plus interest the next day

unless the loan is rolled over. The New York Fed currently engages in two types of repo operations: overnight repurchase agreements that unwind the next business day, and 14 day repurchase agreements that unwind after 14 days.

The Fed re-started its large-scale repo operations in September, when borrowing rates shot up due to an unexpectedly high demand for dollars. The Fed said the unusual demand was due largely to quarterly tax payments and Treasury debt settlements. Other factors proposed as contributing to the cash strains include regulatory change and, a decline in bank reserves due to "quantitative tightening" (in which the Fed shrunk its balance sheet by selling some of its QE acquisitions back into the market), as well as unusually high government debt issuance over the last four years and a flight into U.S. currency and securities to avoid the negative interest rate policies of central banks abroad.

Panic or Calculated Self-interest?

The Fed's stated objective in boosting the liquidity available to financial markets was simply to maintain its "target rate" for the interest charged by banks to each other in the fed funds market. But critics were not convinced. Why were private capital markets once again in need of public support if there was no financial crisis in sight? Was the Fed engaged in a stealth "QE4," restarting its quantitative easing program?

The Fed insisted that it wasn't, and financial analyst Wolf Richter agreed. Writing on *Wolfstreet.com* on October 10, he said the banks and particularly the primary dealers were hoarding their long-term securities in

anticipation of higher profits. The primary dealers are the 24 U.S. and foreign broker-dealers and banks authorized to deal directly with the U.S. Treasury and the New York Fed. They were funding their horde of long-term securities in the repo market, putting pressure on that market, as the Fed said in the minutes for its July meeting even before repo rates blew out in mid-September. Richter contended:

"They'd expected a massive bout of QE, and perhaps some of the players had gleefully contributed to, or even instigated the turmoil in the repo market to make sure they would get that massive bout of QE as the Fed would be forced to calm the waters with QE, the theory went. This QE would include big purchases of long-term securities to push down long-term yields, and drive up the

The repo market allows banks and other financial institutions to borrow and lend to each other, usually overnight.

– Ellen Brown

prices of those bonds”

Prices were high and yields were low, a sign that there was heavy demand. But the dealers were holding out for even higher prices and even lower yields. ... Massive QE, where the Fed buys these types of Treasury securities, would accomplish that.

But That’s Exactly What the Fed Said it Wouldn’t Do.

What the Fed was doing instead, it said, was to revive its “standing repo facility” – the facility it had used before September 2008, when it abandoned that device in favor of QE and zero interest rate policy. But it insisted that this was not QE, expanding the money supply. Overnight repos are just an advance of credit, which must be repaid the next day. While \$165 billion per month sounds like a lot, repo loans don’t accumulate; the Fed is just making short-term advances, available as needed up to a limit of \$165 billion.

In *Wall Street on Parade*, on October 28, Pam and Russ Martens pointed to another greed-driven trigger to the recent run on repo. The perpetrator was JPMorgan Chase, the largest bank in the U.S., with \$1.6 trillion in deposits. Quoting David Henry on Reuters:

“Publicly-filed data shows JPMorgan reduced the cash it has on deposit at the Federal Reserve, from which it might have lent, by \$158 billion in the year through June, a 57% decline. ... The data shows its switch accounted for about a third of the drop in all banking reserves at the Fed during the period.”

This \$158 billion drawdown in JPMorgan’s reserve account is evidently what necessitated the Fed’s \$165 billion in new repo offerings. But why the large drawdown?

Henry attributed it to regulatory changes that increased the bank’s required reserves, but according to the Martens, something more was involved. “The shocking news,” they write, is that “According to its SEC filings, JPMorgan Chase is partly using Federally insured deposits made by moms and pops across the country in its more than 5,000 branches to prop up its share price with buybacks.” Small businesses are being deprived of affordable loans because the liquidity necessary to back the loans is being used to prop up bank stock prices. Bank shares constitute a substantial portion of the pay of bank executives.

According to Thomas Hoenig, then Vice Chair of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), in a July 2017 letter to the U.S. Senate Banking Committee:

“[If] the 10 largest U.S. Bank Holding Companies [BHCs] were to retain a greater share of their earnings earmarked for dividends and share buybacks in 2017 they would be able to increase loans by more than \$1 trillion, which is greater than 5 percent of annual U.S. GDP.”

Four of the 10 BHCs will distribute more than 100 percent of their current year’s earnings, which alone could support approximately \$537 billion in new loans to Main Street.

If share buybacks of \$83 billion, representing 72 percent of total payouts for these 10 BHCs in 2017, were

instead retained, they could, under current capital rules, increase small business loans by three quarters of a trillion dollars or mortgage loans by almost one and a half trillion dollars.

Hoenig was referring to the banks’ own capital rather than to their deposits, but the damage to local credit markets is even worse if deposits are also being diverted to fund share buybacks. Banks are not serving the real economy. They are using public credit backed by public funds to feed their own private bottom lines.

The whole repo rigmarole underscores the sleight of hand on which our money and banking systems are built, and why it is time to change them. Banks do not really have the money they lend. To back their loans, they rely on their ability to borrow from the reserves of other banks, generated from their customers’ deposits; and if those banks withhold their deposits in the insatiable pursuit of higher profits, the borrowing banks must turn to the public purse for liquidity. The banks could not function without public support. They should be turned into public utilities, mandated to serve the interests of the people and the productive economy on which the public depends.

Ellen Brown is an attorney, chair of the Public Banking Institute, and author of thirteen books including *Web of Debt*, *The Public Bank Solution*, and *Banking on the People*. EllenBrown.com.

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GUN CONTROL: CAN WE TAKE A SHOT AT IT?

CHARLENE CHAI

Optimism often seeks to retain the proud mantra of America: the land of the free and the home of the brave. Allow realism to reintroduce our country's bona fide salutations — we are America, the land of the free and the home to mass shootings. Making the 249th shooting in 216 days, the El Paso tragedy claimed the lives of 22 victims and marks yet again another day in history that not only calls more strongly for a limit on gun ownership in the United States than ever before, but identifies the irrational blockages of American ideology. America has seemed to discard the entire “constitutional right” controversy; the country has wholeheartedly welcomed firearms as an integral aspect of culture and society. Now, the real controversy lies in the NRA's slippery-slope phobia of modest background checks free-falling headfirst towards firearm annulment. Yet when

the media continues to deny the hate behind the El Paso shooting and the public carries on glorifying gun ownership, the censorship of public irrationality and unwillingness to admit moral wrongdoing calls for action in limiting public access to guns (Hedges), whether that be more stringent background checks or the closing of gun law loopholes.

With the cultural fetishization of weapons and the impossible task of repurchasing the great number of guns in circulation, mass shootings have become socially contagious, drawing motivation from the widespread media fascination with violence. When NRA

lobbying remains a political sidetrack to the immoral abuse of gun sales, and media violence hides behind the facade of mental illness, measures must be taken — small as they may seem — to decrease gun violence in America. When we live in a country that integrates guns as a symbol of social power and labels the mentally ill as “loony, crazy freaks,” we have not taken the initiative to find a solution to the violence that has been strewn across American history, nor have we attempted to take responsibility for

heightened feelings of supremacy while in possession of a gun that spurred 21-year-old Patrick Wood Crusius to open fire at the El Paso Walmart. Racially motivated, Crusius confessed to “targeting Hispanics”; possessing the weapon was a means of entry to fulfilling his ethnic abhorrence.

The gun heritage has become ingrained in the mind of the public — with an approximate 120.5 guns for every 100 people, there are officially more guns in America than actual Americans (Eastwood). The weapon has, sadly, become a part of the United States' national identity. Such glorification of guns stands as an obstruction to solvency; the unassailable support for weapons demonstrates the psychological shortcomings of our country. Standing as the greatest obstacle we must overcome, the dilemma of gun control represents America's irresponsibility and refusal to admit that the media culture spurs the increasing cases of mass shootings in the country. It is time to see guns as a potential for danger rather than an indicator of big bucks.

Crusius had legally purchased his semi-automatic rifle online — a process that

does not require background checks. And that is not the only method of purchase that allows people to bypass screenings and slip past the law; obtaining guns through gun shows and private sales also stand as major loopholes to avoid background checks. The numbers don't lie: 74 percent of mass shooters acquire their guns legally (KUNC). The inattentive and lax processes that allow for public access to guns simply allow for mass shootings to occur in America. The criminality of mass shooters derives from vigilante extremes, but their access to weapons only hands them the medium to carry out their sick

Gun ownership transcends self-preservation, existing as a hierarchical provocation that places the weapon on a pedestal

— Charlene Chai

the violence that continues to transpire from sea to shining sea.

Indeed, handguns and other assault weapons may have assimilated themselves into American culture and society, but it doesn't mean that they are always used for protection. The psychology of why people want to own guns indicates that protection is the reigning reason, but an overwhelming 73 percent of gun owners view guns as a “privilege” and a sign of wealth (Gamlich). Gun ownership transcends self-preservation, existing as a hierarchical provocation that places the weapon on a pedestal. It is such economic discrimination and

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paradigms. According to Brady, a gun prevention group, 1 in 5 gun transactions are orchestrated without any background checks. The ratio of gun buys without any inquisition is indicative of how horrifyingly easy it is to get your hands on a firearm — and indicative of how mass shootings have become a common occurrence.

NRA advocates point fingers at black markets and other illegal gun trafficking systems, professing that universal background checks would dramatically change the United States right to bear arms into a “European style privilege reserved for wealthy elite who can afford to comply with burdensome, bureaucratic procedures to acquire a firearm.” (Cox) But in spite of that perspective, the “inconvenient” background checks could not only lessen to a certain degree the number of lives lost in a shooting rampage, but solve the problem of the no-questions-asked paradigm of online weapon purchase. It is these same “burdensome” background check laws that take the initiative to relieve America of one of its many irrefutable gun problems.

This brings us to the problem of the media’s continuous dismissal of the problem of hate crimes. In response to El Paso, President Donald Trump quips, “hate has no place in our country” and the El Paso city mayor claims “it’s not what we’re about.” Despite the acknowledgment of the presence of racial intolerance behind vigilante extremes, nothing has been done about the outflow of guns. Once again, the media diminishes the

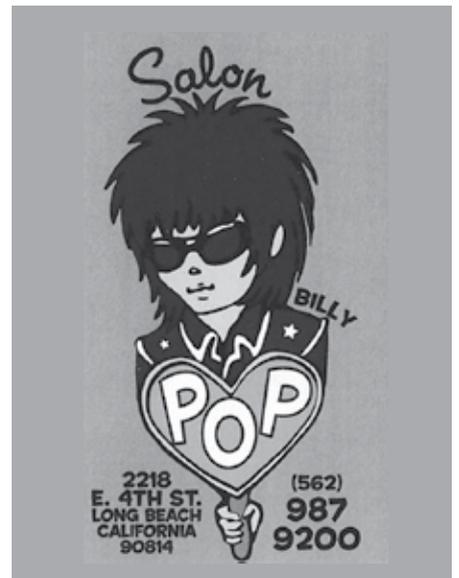
scope of mental illness, dismissing the unforeseen violence in El Paso as a bout of crazy. Granted that the conservative grassroots demographic is declining—the NRA argument of mental illness only serves to sidetrack the assault weapon discord with an irrational reverence for the weapon (Associated Press). Instead of casually dismissing those with mental health problems as “lunatic” and “crazy,” providing proper care to the mentally ill is the first step to overcome the problem of overwhelming gun violence in America. The media turns a blind eye to the unanswered question about the role of domestic violence that aids in the creation of such mass shooters; instead, the public is presented with the final product—yet another man that went off the rails.

Interestingly enough, the topic of gun control has even introduced corruption into United States culture—NRA lobbying has become, ironically, the most anti-American form of democracy. The NRA calls it free speech; the truth deems it bribery. When “ALEC model bills are, word-for-word, introduced in our state legislatures at a non-trivial rate” (Jackman) and are thus more likely to be enacted into law, the gun control debate enunciates yet another aspect of socio-political strife. There exists an undeniable irresponsibility of the people that correlates with the obstinate gainsay in the media; we would much rather cover up the ever-spreading blotches of gun violence that stains our homage to our many achievements and

landmark breakthroughs. Our country has always prided itself on being a land of equality and opportunity—a melting pot of problem solvers and innovative thinkers—but those very qualities are contradicted by the constant flood of gun violence. The irrationality of gun rights supporters defies the democratic foundations of the United States, glossing over the saddening frequency of mass shootings, covering it as another national tragedy, and all the while not doing anything to prevent another occurrence.

The term “mass shooting” has become a euphemism for “negligence” and “denial.” When people kill people and people use guns, then yes, guns do indeed kill people

Charlene Chai is a writing major at Chapman University.



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PHARMA AND DRUG PRICE NEGOTIATIONS

DONALD SHAW

Since his 2016 campaign, President Trump has rhetorically stood against most Republicans by supporting a plan to have the government negotiate with pharmaceutical companies to achieve lower drug prices. But a few weeks ago, Trump suddenly changed his tune.

“Pelosi and her Do Nothing Democrats drug pricing bill doesn’t do the trick. FEWER cures! FEWER treatments!” Trump tweeted on Nov. 22, referencing a bill from Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) that would facilitate the price negotiations he had long embraced. “Time for the Democrats to get serious about bipartisan solutions to lowering prescription drug prices for families.”

As recently as late September, Trump appeared to support negotiations. “It’s great to see Speaker Pelosi’s bill today,” Trump tweeted on Sept. 20, the day after the speaker unveiled her bill.

So why did Trump suddenly change his mind? The impeachment proceedings likely played a role, but according to *The Hill*, he has also been talking to a key pharmaceutical industry ally on the issue.

Trump’s tweet opposing Pelosi’s bill “came after he met with Rep. Greg Walden (R-Ore.), a leading opponent of Pelosi’s bill,” *The Hill* reported. Indeed, the “FEWER Cures” talking point Trump used in his tweet echoes the hashtag, #FewerCures, that Republicans on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, led by Walden, have been promoting in their materials opposing the bill.

Walden is not just a leading opponent of letting the government negotiate with drug companies—he’s

also the House member who received the most campaign money from the pharmaceutical and health products industry in the last election cycle, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. So far this cycle, he has taken the third highest total from the industry of anyone in the House, despite plans to retire at the end of this session.

In 2017 and 2018, Walden received \$458,700 from PACs of pharmaceutical and health products companies, including drug companies Pfizer, Eli Lilly, and Merck, as well as individuals employed by the companies.

The government has been unable to negotiate for lower drug prices since 2003, when Congress included a provision banning negotiations in the bill that created the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit.

– Donald Shaw

So far in 2019, he has taken \$120,150 from pharmaceutical and health products PACs and employees.

Pelosi’s bill, called the Lower Drug Costs Now Act, would require the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to negotiate prices on insulin products and a minimum of 25 of the most expensive drugs that do not have generic competitors. It would also penalize companies that increase the cost of drugs faster than the rate of inflation. The bill, which is expected to be voted on by the House in December, would save CMS \$345 billion by 2029, according to an analysis by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO).

The government has been unable to negotiate for lower drug prices

since 2003, when Congress included a provision banning negotiations in the bill that created the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit. Walden voted in favor of that bill.

Some of Walden’s pharmaceutical donors make drugs that would likely be subject to price negotiations under the bill. AbbVie makes hepatitis C drug Viekira, which has a list price of \$27,773 for a 30-day supply and does not have a generic competitor. Cerdelga, a Gaucher’s disease treatment that retails for \$26,000 for a 30-day supply, is made by Sanofi Genzyme and does not have any generic competitors.

Walden’s objection to the bill is similar to that of the pharmaceutical industry: The reduction in drug company profits from allowing CMS to negotiate would lead to reduced spending on research and development. In its report on the bill, CBO states that while “in the short term, lower prices would increase the use of drugs and improve people’s health,” over the next 10 years the bill “would lead to a reduction of approximately 8 to 15 new drugs coming to market.”

Donald Shaw writes for *Sludge*.



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YOUTUBE AND WHITE NATIONALISM

ERIC HANANO KI

The white nationalist website VDare said it surpassed a \$40,000 fundraising goal thanks, in part, to a livestreaming fundraiser recently on YouTube. Despite criticism, the technology company has declined to ban the organization from its platform.

VDare is a leading white nationalist website that regularly attacks immigrants. The Southern Poverty Law Center has written that the site “regularly publishes articles by prominent white nationalists, race scientists and anti-Semites.” Numerous Republicans have promoted VDare content over the years. Now-White House senior adviser Stephen Miller shared a link to VDare in 2015, as the SPLC’s Michael Edison Hayden recently reported.

The site also runs a YouTube channel which regularly features white nationalist propaganda. For example, VDare host Wilson Hewlett said the alleged El Paso shooter’s use of the word “invasion” to describe immigration was “apt,” praised an anti-Semitic trope as potentially being “onto something,” and argued there are “general differences in aptitude across racial lines.”

Despite YouTube’s claim to have a policy that prohibits “videos alleging that a group is superior in order to justify discrimination, segregation or exclusion based on qualities” such as race, the platform has allowed the organization to continue to post videos (it briefly banned the channel in August then reversed itself).

YouTube’s willingness to grant a platform to VDare allows the outlet to directly raise money on the video site

for its work.

On December 3, VDare spent nearly two hours on YouTube promoting its year-end fundraising campaign, which Editor Peter Brimelow called “the most important part of our financial life.” The fundraiser also featured VDare contributors John Derbyshire and Faith Goldy. Derbyshire, who has described himself as “a mild and tolerant” “racist” and “homophobe,” was previously fired from the *National Review* after he penned a column advising white and Asian parents to warn their children about the supposed threats posed

VDare is a leading white nationalist website that regularly attacks immigrants.

– Eric Hananoki

by Black people. Goldy is a white nationalist who last year unsuccessfully ran for mayor of Toronto.

The livestream naturally featured white nationalist content. Brimelow pushed the “great replacement” conspiracy theory, stating that there’s a “demographic disaster” happening and people in “Europe and America are being displaced, are being outnumbered, swamped, by massive immigration.” And Derbyshire, apparently referencing a blog post by “The Z Man,” said: “He was writing just yesterday, I think it was, how you can’t help but notice that some of the

whitest states like Maine and Minnesota have been getting some of the most troublesome groups coming in as refugees from Africa. That’s how we got Ilhan Omar. That’s how Lewiston, Maine, turned Somali. These people know what they’re doing.”

During the livestream, VDare displayed a banner asking viewers to visit its site to donate money. VDare’s commentators also used YouTube’s “super chat” feature, which enables viewers to pay money to have their comments featured prominently. (VDare wrote at one point: “Your super chats will be read at the end of the stream! Thank you all!”)

At the beginning of the livestream, Brimelow stated that site had already raised “about \$16,000” and hoped to get to \$20,000 by the end of the night to get a “matching grant.” By the end of the livestream, VDare advancement officer Lydia Brimelow said “we were only \$387 short of the super stretch. That amount—and more—came in within minutes of turning off the mics. By midnight we surpassed the super stretch matching by over \$1,000, bringing our 24 hour total, including the fully matched pledges, to \$42,574!”

In addition to white nationalist YouTube videos, the funding enables VDare to publish posts such as: “One Problem With These Hispanic Immigrants Is Their Disgusting Behavior,” “Indians Aren’t That Intelligent (On Average),” “Diversity Is Strength! It’s Also...Hispanic Immigrants Taking Over FBI’s Ten Most Wanted,” “America Does Not Need ANY Immigrants From Africa,” and “Roll Over, JIHAD—There’s Also HIJRA, Muslim Conquest By Immigration.”

Eric Hananoki writes for *MediaMatters* and other publications. Excerpted by permission from *MediaMatters*.



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WERE OTHER HUMANS THE FIRST VICTIMS OF THE SIXTH MASS EXTINCTION?

NICK LONGRICH

Nine human species walked the Earth 300,000 years ago. Now there is just one. The Neanderthals, *Homo neanderthalensis*, were stocky hunters adapted to Europe's cold steppes. The related Denisovans inhabited Asia, while the more primitive *Homo erectus* lived in Indonesia, and *Homo rhodesiensis* in central Africa.

Several short, small-brained species survived alongside them: *Homo naledi* in South Africa, *Homo luzonensis* in the Philippines, *Homo floresiensis* ("hobbits") in Indonesia, and the mysterious Red Deer Cave People in China. Given how quickly we're discovering new species, more are likely waiting to be found.

By 10,000 years ago, they were all gone. The disappearance of these other species resembles a mass extinction. But there's no obvious environmental catastrophe---volcanic eruptions, climate change, asteroid impact---driving it. Instead, the extinctions' timing suggests they were caused by the spread of a new species, evolving 260,000-350,000 years ago in Southern Africa: *Homo sapiens*.

The spread of modern humans out of Africa has caused a sixth mass extinction, a greater than 40,000-year event extending from the disappearance of Ice Age mammals to the destruction of rainforests by civilization today. But were other humans the first casualties?

We are a uniquely dangerous species. We hunted woolly

mammoths, ground sloths and moas to extinction. We destroyed plains and forests for farming, modifying over half the planet's land area. We altered the planet's climate. But we are most dangerous to other human populations, because we compete for resources and land.

History is full of examples of people warring, displacing and wiping out other groups over territory, from Rome's destruction of Carthage,

less violent, less intolerant---less human.

Optimists have painted early hunter-gatherers as peaceful, noble savages, and have argued that our culture, not our nature, creates violence. But field studies, historical accounts, and archaeology all show that war in primitive cultures was intense, pervasive and lethal. Neolithic weapons such as clubs, spears, axes and bows, combined with guerrilla tactics like raids and ambushes, were devastatingly effective. Violence was the leading cause of death among men in these societies, and wars saw higher casualty levels per person than World Wars I and II.

Old bones and artifacts show this violence is ancient. The 9,000-year-old Kennewick Man, from North America, has a spear point embedded in his pelvis. The 10,000-year-old Nataruk site in Kenya documents the brutal massacre of at least 27 men, women, and children.

It's unlikely that the other human species were much more peaceful. The existence of cooperative violence in male chimps suggests that war predates the evolution of humans. Neanderthal skeletons show patterns of trauma consistent with warfare. But sophisticated weapons likely gave *Homo sapiens* a military advantage. The arsenal of early *Homo sapiens* probably included projectile weapons like

javelins and spear-throwers, throwing sticks and clubs.

Complex tools and culture would also have helped us efficiently harvest a wider range of animals and plants, feeding larger tribes, and giving our species a strategic advantage in numbers.

The Ultimate Weapon

But cave paintings, carvings,

History is full of examples of people warring, displacing and wiping out other groups over territory, from Rome's destruction of Carthage, to the American conquest of the West and the British colonization of Australia.

— Nick Longrich

to the American conquest of the West and the British colonization of Australia. There have also been recent genocides and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, Rwanda, Iraq, Darfur and Myanmar. Like language or tool use, a capacity for and tendency to engage in genocide is arguably an intrinsic, instinctive part of human nature. There's little reason to think that early *Homo sapiens* were less territorial,

and musical instruments hint at something far more dangerous: a sophisticated capacity for abstract thought and communication. The ability to cooperate, plan, strategize, manipulate and deceive may have been our ultimate weapon.

The incompleteness of the fossil record makes it hard to test these ideas. But in Europe, the only place with a relatively complete archaeological record, fossils show that within a few thousand years of our arrival, Neanderthals vanished. Traces of Neanderthal DNA in some Eurasian people prove we didn't just replace them after they went extinct. We met, and we mated.

Elsewhere, DNA tells of other encounters with archaic humans. East Asian, Polynesian and Australian groups have DNA from Denisovans. DNA from another species, possibly *Homo erectus*, occurs in many Asian people. African genomes show traces of DNA from yet another archaic species. The fact that we interbred with these other species proves that they disappeared only after encountering us.

But why would our ancestors wipe out their relatives, causing a mass extinction---or, perhaps more accurately, a mass genocide?

The answer lies in population growth. Humans reproduce exponentially, like all species. Unchecked, we historically doubled our numbers every 25 years. And once humans became cooperative hunters, we had no predators. Without predation controlling our numbers, and little family planning beyond delayed marriage and infanticide, populations grew to exploit the available resources.

Further growth, or food shortages caused by drought, harsh winters or overharvesting resources would inevitably lead tribes into conflict over food and foraging territory. Warfare became a check on population growth, perhaps the most important one.

Our elimination of other species probably wasn't a planned, coordinated effort of the sort practiced by civilizations, but a war of attrition. The end result, however, was just as final. Raid by raid, ambush by

ambush, valley by valley, modern humans would have worn down their enemies and taken their land.

Yet the extinction of Neanderthals, at least, took a long time---thousands of years. This was partly because early *Homo sapiens* lacked the advantages of later conquering civilizations: large numbers, supported by farming, and epidemic diseases like smallpox, flu, and measles that devastated their opponents. But while Neanderthals lost the war, to hold on so long they must have fought and won many battles against us, suggesting a level of intelligence close to our own.

Today we look up at the stars and wonder if we're alone in the universe. In fantasy and science fiction, we wonder what it might be like to meet other intelligent species, like us, but not us. It's profoundly sad to think that we once did, and now, because of it, they're gone.

Nick Longrich teaches Paleontology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Bath. He writes for *The Conversation* and other publications.



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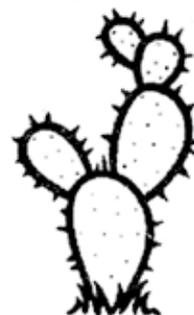
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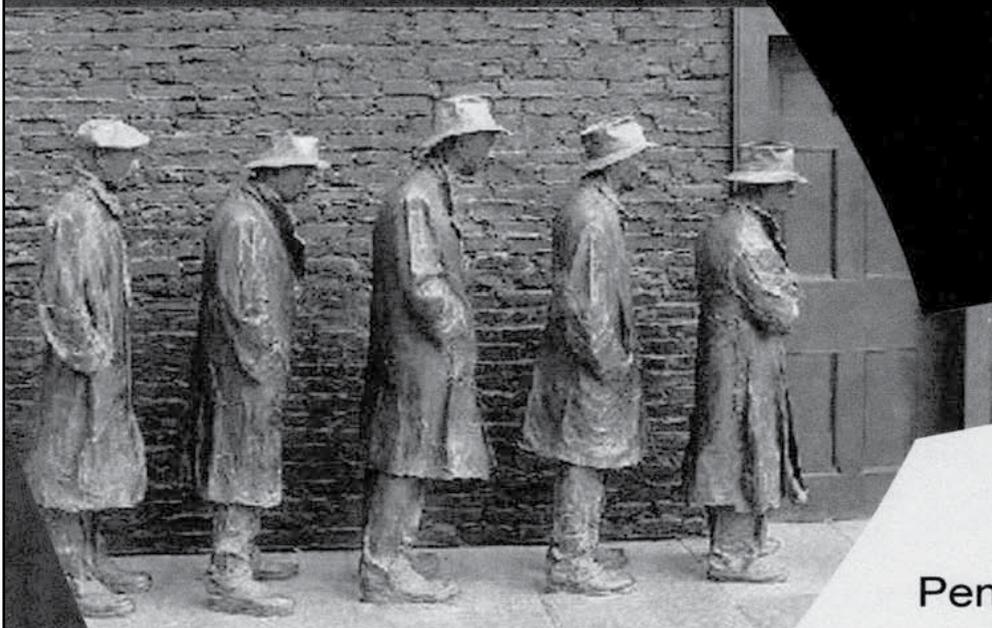
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HOMELESS SERVICES

- Offer **resource information** to persons experiencing homelessness.
- Connect persons wanting services with the **Multi-Service Center** and **Mental Health America's Village** (MHA) and other service providers.
- Encourage persons experiencing homelessness to **access food, clothing, and other resources** at service providers.

7 DAYS/WEEK
9:30AM - 5:30PM

HOMELESS OUTREACH SPECIALIST
(562) 972-8489

NAGA CAFE

KHMER STREET FOOD

3225 East Pacific Coast Highway Unit A
Signal Hill CA 90755 United States
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Store Hours:

10am to 9pm Sunday to Saturday



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Noodles

(Garnish with Fried Garlic, Cilantro & Scallions)

PHNOM PENH NOODLE (HOUSE SPECIAL)	\$11
<i>SLICE PORK, GROUND PORK, PORK MEAT BALLS, CHICKEN, CRISPY DUCK & SHRIMP</i>	
BEEF NOODLE SOUP	\$9
<i>SLICED RIBEYE, BEEF MEAT BALLS & BEEF TENDON</i>	
CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP	\$8
<i>POACHED ORGANIC BROWN CHICKEN</i>	
SHRIMP NOODLE SOUP	\$8
BEEF BALL NOODLE SOUP	\$8
<i>BEEF MEAT BALLS</i>	

YOUR CHOICE OF NOODLES:

SMALL RICE NOODLE - SOFT FLAT RICE NOODLE - EGG NOODLE

Rice Plates

(All Rice Plates Comes with our HOUSE PICKLED VEGGIES)

POACHED CHICKEN	<i>ORGANIC BROWN CHICKEN</i>	\$10
<i>SERVED with SEASONED RICE, CUCUMBER & TOMATOES</i>		
BEEF SKEWERS (3)		\$10
<i>MARINATED with OUR HOUSE HERBS & SERVED with STEAMED RICE</i>		
BBQ PORK		\$9
<i>MARINATED in OUR GLAZED SPICE HONEY SERVED with STEAM RICE</i>		
PRAWNS		\$10
<i>GRILLED with BUTTERED HERBS & SERVED with STEAMED RICE</i>		
TWAKO (KHMER SAUSAGE)		\$9
<i>SERVED with STEAM RICE</i>		
SHRIMP FRIED RICE		\$9
KHMER FRIED RICE		\$9
HOUSE COMBINATION FRIED RICE		\$13
<i>SHRIMP, BBQ PORK, SAUSAGE</i>		

Khmer Sandwiches

(ALL SANDWICHES COMES with our PICKLED GREEN PAPAYA & CARROTS SALAD, CUCUMBER, CILATRO, JALAPENOS & HOME STYLE SPREAD)

BEEF SKEWERS	\$8
BBQ PORK	\$7
CRISPY FRIED CHICKEN	\$6
BUTTERED HERBS PRAWNS	\$8
TWAKO (KHMER SAUSAGE)	\$7
PORK BELLY KAW (PORK BELLY STEW)	\$7

Rice Porridge

(Garnish with Fried Garlic, Cilantro and Scallions)

HOUSE RICE PORRIDGE	\$9
<i>PORK BLOOD, PORK BELLY, LIVER & SHRIMP</i>	
FISH RICE PORRIDGE	\$8
<i>STEAMED CATFISH</i>	
CHICKEN RICE PORRIDGE	\$8
<i>POACHED CHICKEN</i>	
SIMPLE PORRIDGE	\$6
<i>NO MEAT</i>	

Extras

BEEF, CHICKEN, PORK, FISH OR SHRIMP	\$6
PICKLED VEGGIES	\$3.5
HOUSE BROTH	\$3
RICE / NOODLE SAUCE	\$2
	\$.50

Drinks

COFFEE (HOT OR ICED)

DRIP COFFEE	\$2.5
ESPRESSO (2 SHOTS)	\$3
LATTE	\$3.5
CAPPUCCINO	\$3.5
MACCHIATO	\$3.5
AMERICANO	\$3.25
MOCHA	\$4
NATURAL COLD BREW	\$4
ICED MILK COFFEE	\$3.5

TEA (GREEN - BLACK - JASMINE)

HOT TEA	\$2.5
ICED TEA	\$2.5
MILK TEA	\$3.5
HONEY MILK TEA	\$3.75
MATCHA GREEN TEA	\$4
FLAVORED TEA	\$3
<i>(MANGO - PASSION FRUIT - PEACH)</i>	
THAI ICED TEA	\$4
KHMER LIME ICE TEA	\$4
LEMON ICED TEA	\$3
FRESH LIME SODA	\$4

Long Beach's Community Wellness Center



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TABLES

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LIVE



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SHUFFLE



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