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**ISSUE 70  
VOLUME 23**

Number 2

INTERVIEW

**TALKIN' POETRY,  
POLITICS, PLACES, AND  
PEOPLE WITH  
RICHARD MODIANO**

DAN MARCUS

8

ELECTION

**ELECTION SHOWS  
HOW GERRYMANDERING  
IS DIFFICULT TO  
OVERCOME**

DAVID A. LIEB

18

ELECTION

**DROPS, AND THE DROPPED:  
DIVERSITY AND  
THE MIDTERM  
ELECTIONS**

JOHN O'KANE

22

INTEREST RATES

**TRUMP'S WAR ON THE FED**

ELLEN BROWN

26

RENT CONTROL

**WHAT WERE YOU ALL  
THINKING ABOUT  
PROP. 10?**

SPARKY BALDWIN

30

ISRAEL

**TRUMP AND AMERICA'S  
FIFTY FIRST STATE**

NICOLETTE KARP

32

AMAZON

**AMAZON IS EVERYTHING  
THAT'S WRONG  
WITH AMERICA**

ROBERT REICH

38

SEXUALITY

**THE HUXLEY TRAP**

ROSS DOUTHAT

40

FOOD

**WHAT'S IN AMERICA'S  
FREEZER?**

H. CLAIRE BROWN

44

# AMASS

**EDITOR:**

JOHN O'KANE

**MANAGING EDITOR:**

DAN MARCUS

**EDITORIAL CONSULTANT:**

ALEXIS MANNING

**ASSISTANT EDITORS:**

DAVID GORDON

ASHLEY GREEN

**DESIGNER:**

HELI SWENSSON

**INTERN:**

CINDY THAYER

**CONTRIBUTORS:**

SPARKY BALDWIN

WILLIAM BLUM

ELLEN BROWN

NOAM CHOMSKY

ROBBIE CONAL

MARC COOPER

SLOBODAN DIMITROV

S.A. GRIFFIN

TOM HAYDEN

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON

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PETER DALE SCOTT

SANDRA TSING-LOH

DAVE ZIRIN

**COVER:**

“A POET IN THE LOBBY”

PHOTO BY NEIL DE LA PEÑA



## “A Poet in the Lobby”

Photo by Neil de la Peña. Cover design by Heli Swensson

In classic Zen fashion, poet/philosopher Richard Modiano as captured by Neil de la Peña's camera is clearly in the world but not of it—an effect achieved in part by the vibrant earth tones of his garb as contrasted with the white, ethereal hues of Beyond Baroque's interior. The crispness of the image enhances its uncanny three-dimensional quality, allowing us to make a clear distinction between the subject and his surroundings. Another poetic trope—the fleeting nature of existence—is underscored by the unidentified individual frozen forever in time as he approaches the top of the stairs.

Neil de la Peña divides his time between pictures that move and those that don't. (neildelapena.photo) Neil's extensive credits as a cinematographer encompass feature films, documentaries, television, and music videos. His fine art photography, meanwhile, was well represented in his 2016 Highland Park show, In Plain Sight. Recently, VIDA of San Francisco established the Neil de la Peña Signature Collection, employing his photographic images to create a range of high fashion items, including apparel, bags, and pillows. [shopvida.com](http://shopvida.com)

- Dan Marcus

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# SAVE THE DATES!

## JANUARY

\*\* Members FREE ◆ FREE

### Friday, Jan 4, 8:00pm MASON'S NOISE PARLOUR

The quarterly presentation of L.A.'s best young talent is curated by local singer-songwriter MASON SUMMIT. Regular admission. \*\*

### Sunday, Jan 6, 5:00pm 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. Free, but donations always appreciated.

### Sunday, Jan 6, 5:00pm LA POESIA FESTIVAL

Open mic and featured Latin-American poets hosted by Antonieta Villamil. FREE but donations appreciated.

### Saturday, Jan 12, 4:00pm PENELOPE MOFFET & MARY TORREGROSSA

The quarterly presentation of L.A.'s best young talent is curated by local singer-

songwriter MASON SUMMIT. Regular admission. \*\*

### Saturday, Jan 12, 8:00pm YOU CAN GET HERE FROM THERE

You Can Get There From Here is a joint effort by Dancer/Choreographer Liz Hoefner Adamis, Poet Laurel Ann Bogen with the majority of the poetry from Beyond Baroque's 2015 anthology Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond (edited by Suzanne Lummis). Regular admission. \*\*

### Sunday, Jan 13, 1:00pm WRITERS RESIST

Celebrate the power of the written word and redouble your commitment to preserving our rights, democracy, and environment with some of the finest writers and poets in Los Angeles at the third annual staging of this inspiring event. ◆

### Sunday, Jan 13, 2:00pm THE SOAP BOX POETS OPEN READING

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 are always welcome. In the Mike Kelley Gallery.

### Sunday, Jan 13, 7:00pm VOICE IN THE WELL LOOKING FORWARD

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. \*

### Saturday, Jan 19, 8:00pm COMEDY WITH MARTY FIDELMAN

"The Adoption Diaries" is an honest look at the unique experience of being an adoptee, treated with humor and compassion. Suitable for all ages. Regular admission. \*\*

### Friday, Jan 25, 8:00pm LAUREL RAY DIAZZO 7 SPECIAL GUEST!

Check the website for more information. \*\*

### Saturday, Jan 26, 8:00pm NTOZAKE SHANGE TRIBUTE

Regular admission. \*\*

### Sunday, Jan 27, 7:00pm DUDLEY CINEMA

Experimental films with fiery discussion & live music. Free admission, donations appreciated, Laughtears.com. Gerry Fialka host. ◆

### Thursday, Jan 31, 8:00pm STEPHANIE TRUDEAU MI CHAVELA

Experimental films with fiery discussion & live music. Free admission, donations appreciated, Laughtears.com. Gerry Fialka host. ◆

## FEBRUARY

Please check the website for more information

### Friday, Feb 1, 8:00pm KUDISAN KAI MEMOIRS OF A BACK UP DIVA \*\*

### Saturday, Feb 2, 8:00pm POETRY IN MOTION

### Sunday, Feb 3, 5:00pm FIRST SUNDAY OPEN READING

### Sunday, Feb 3, 5:00pm LA POESIA FESTIVAL

### Thursday, Feb 7, 8:00pm READING TEA LEAVES AFTER TRUMP \*\*

### Friday, Feb 8, 8:00pm AMERICA WE CALL YOUR NAME \*\*

### Saturday, Feb 9, 8:00pm DARK INK \*\*

### Sunday, Feb 10, 2:00pm THE SOAP BOX POETS OPEN READING

### Sunday, Feb 10, 4:00pm VOICES NEW & OLD \*\*

### Sunday, Feb 10, 7:00pm VOICE IN THE WELL HEARTS ABOUNDING \*\*

### Friday, Feb 15 8:00pm GRATEDUL CONVERSATIONS \*\*

### Saturday, Feb 16, 8:00 pm LIN BENEDEK, ALEXIS RHOME FANCHER & SUSAN HAYDEN \*\*

### Sunday, Feb 17 4:00 pm OPEN READING ◆

### Friday, Feb 22 8:00pm SUSAN SONDE \*\*

### Saturday, Feb 23, 8:00pm BRENDA HILLMAN, SARA MUMULO & VANESSA ANGELICA VILLAREAL

### Sunday, Feb 24, 2:00 pm THE NEBRASKA GIRLS OPEN READING

### Sunday, Feb 24, 4:00pm MAUREEN OWEN & BARBARA HENNING \*\*

### Sunday, Feb 24, 7:00pm 7 DUDELY CINEMA ◆

## MARCH

Please check the website for more information

### Friday, Mar 1, 8:00pm DARIKA BROWN READS FROM NEW WORK ◆

### Saturday, Mar 2, 8:00pm POETRY IN MOTION

### Sunday, Mar 3, 5:00pm FIRST SUNDAY OPEN READING

### Sunday, Mar 3, 5:00pm LA POESIA FESTIVAL

### Saturday, Mar 9, 8:00 pm WOMEN OF A CERTAIN AGE

### Sunday, Mar 10, 1:00pm JACK GRAPES & RICHARD LONG

### Sunday, Mar 10, 2:00pm SOAP BOX POETS

### Sunday, Mar 10, 4:00pm JIM NATAL& DOROTHY BARRESI \*\*

### Sunday, Mar 10, 7:00pm VOICE IN THE WELL CARRY ON \*\*

### Friday, Mar 15 JEFF MACMAHON SIX MONOLOGUES \*\*

### Saturday, Mar 16 S.A. GRIFFIN BIRTHDAY BASH! ◆

### Sunday, Mar 24, 2:00pm THE NEBRASKA GIRLS OPEN READING

### Sunday, Mar 24, 7:00pm 7 DUDELY CINEMA ◆

### Sunday, Mar 31 4:00 pm LAUREL BLOSSOM & PATRICK DONNELLY \*\*



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I N T E R V I E W  
TALKIN' POETRY,  
POLITICS, PLACES,  
AND PEOPLE  
WITH RICHARD  
MODIANO

D A N M A R C U S

This year, the venerable Venice cultural outpost known as Beyond Baroque marks its fiftieth anniversary. I walk down the garden path leading to its impressive front entrance, arriving a bit early for an interview with poet Richard Modiano, who also happens to be the executive director. So I stroll into the bookstore that occupies the space between the lobby and conference room where a staff meeting is underway. I'm glad for the time to browse—it's not a large bookstore but I could still get lost in it. Twenty minutes later, the director appears. We head out to the lobby and begin.

**DAN MARCUS:** I've always been intrigued by the name Beyond Baroque? Is there a story behind it?

**RICHARD MODIANO:** There is. In fact, our founder George Drury Smith gave two versions. The first seems more logical. When he was in college he was taking a course in art history and the professor casually tossed out the notion that once you get beyond the Baroque period there's really no significant art. George emphatically did not agree, so when he started his poetry magazine he named it "Beyond Baroque" as a response.

**MARCUS:** And the second version?

**MODIANO:** That one's simpler: it came to him in a dream.

**MARCUS:** And he told both versions?

**MODIANO:** Yes. Depending on what day it was. And of course they aren't totally incompatible.

**MARCUS:** How would you characterize the role played by

Beyond Baroque in this community?

**MODIANO:** Its primary role, I would say, is to cultivate new writing talent and provide a showcase for up-and-coming writers while at the same time recognizing the contribution of contemporary writers who have come before—mainly poets.

**MARCUS:** Mainly poets?

**MODIANO:** Yes, but by no means entirely. *Beyond Baroque* started as a poetry magazine. Then George gradually expanded it to include essays, short fiction, and what's known today as "flash fiction."

**MARCUS:** How would you define that exactly?

**MODIANO:** "Flash fiction" is a relatively new term. In the past it was called "the short-short story." A short story could be, say, six thousand words. That would be the approximate length, for example, of a story by Hemingway. And at some point as the length increases we're in novella territory.

But take it in the other direction and we arrive at the short-short story—a.k.a. flash fiction. It could be anywhere from two hundred to five hundred words. It has a beginning, a middle, and end. And it has characters and a plot condensed into a miniature.

**MARCUS:** Sounds like a challenge.

**MODIANO:** It is. And it's somewhat related to poetry when you consider that the most common type of contemporary U.S. poetry is the short, lyric poem, which averages about forty-two lines. But of course, in a poem you don't really have to tell a story. You're basically

conveying a mood, an emotion.

**MARCUS:** That's strongly evident in your poems "Hiroshima" and "At the Subway Station," which use tangible elements drawn from life to create a heightened reality. For me they have a certain haiku-like quality in the way they lead to a moment of realization, a sudden awareness. And of course you've written actual haikus as well—which are... what...seventeen syllables?

**MODIANO:** Something like that.

**MARCUS:** What started you off writing poetry? Were you

Different  
possibilities  
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to wonder, did I really want  
to become a college  
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Sal Paradise."

an English major in college?

**MODIANO:** No, I majored in anthropology. I was interested in how different types of human behavior were the products of different cultures and different levels of civilization.

**MARCUS:** Which college did you attend?

**MODIANO:** The University of Hawaii. It was famous for its Pacific anthropology. At that time a number of prominent anthropologists and archeologists were there...and people like Roger Green were teaching. The names are unknown, perhaps, to the world at large, but well-known to specialists in the field.

**MARCUS:** So you were particularly drawn to that part of the world?

**MODIANO:** Yes, the Pacific Rim. I'd been impressed with the idea of Rousseau's "noble savage" and the writings of Daniel Defoe, people like that. It was a matter of seeing the world through an idealized or romanticized lens with the intent of making a particular critique of Western European civilization. But at the same time I wanted the facts. How did they really live?

**MARCUS:** Was your concept of the noble savage altered by your study of anthropology?

**MODIANO:** It was. I came to understand that the noble savage was not, in fact, that noble. So-called primitive societies were organized differently because of the material conditions under which their inhabitants lived. They formed different types of familial relationships. My previous ideas were particularly influenced by the novel *Island* by Aldous Huxley. It was essentially a didactic way of presenting what he considered to be an ideal society by drawing upon various non-western traditions and putting them together with western science and fringe science to create a utopia. If we brought all of these different cultural elements together, Huxley suggests, we could all live a better life. The novel was written in 1962—it was Huxley's final book—and I came of age a little later, during the hippie era. The hippies were striving to live like the noble savage of their time.

**MARCUS:** How did a would-be anthropologist become a poet?

**MODIANO:** The seed was planted when I was in high school. I was a big fan of Bob Dylan and when I heard his lyrics I thought, "This is poetry." But what impressed me the most was that a number of his album covers had actual poems he'd written printed on the reverse side. At that time I didn't know that he was strongly influenced by people like Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Jack Kerouac.

**MARCUS:** Had you read their work?

**MODIANO:** Not at that point. In high school back then

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## I N T E R V I E W

you were mostly exposed to the nineteenth century English language classics, both British and American.

**MARCUS:** Did those appeal to you?

**MODIANO:** Well, you have to consider the context—they were assignments, something you *had* to do. There was homework attached, which tends to rob you of the pleasure of enjoying a poem for its own sake. Later, in college, I went back to that earlier poetry and had a much better appreciation. But Dylan's stanzas on the album sleeves showed me that poetry was alive, that it was living in the here and now. The way he was writing and what he was writing about was something that resonated with me.

**MARCUS:** You realize, of course, that you were taking the road less traveled. Everyone else who was influenced by those Dylan albums tended to focus on the songs, pick up a guitar, and became a singer/songwriter.

**MODIANO:** Well, I just didn't have that particular talent. It never occurred to me to try and make music...other than the music that was inherent in a good poem. And as I later learned, if you go back to the origins of poetry in preliterate times it was meant to be sung as well as recited. It's easier to remember something if it rhymes and you can sing it; it's much easier to memorize a song lyric than it is a piece of prose.

**MARCUS:** But your poetry, while it has a wonderful musicality, doesn't necessarily rhyme.

**MODIANO:** I'm talking about the origins. Music and

poetry were wedded at the beginning and later separated.

**MARCUS:** Did reading Dylan's poetry eventually lead you to read the writers that influenced him?

**MODIANO:** I actually came to them from a completely different direction. I read a book called *This Is It and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience* by Alan Watts.

**MARCUS:** Watts' books were everywhere back then. He was the best-known propagator of Zen philosophy.

**MODIANO:** And in his pictures he looked like the man in the gray flannel suit. Anyway, one of the essays in *This Is It* was titled "Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen." In it, Watts mentioned a book by Jack Kerouac called *The Dharma Bums*. I decided I wanted to read it but my local bookstore only carried *On the Road*. But it was the same author so I said, "Okay, I'll read *On the Road* instead." And to coin a cliché, it changed my life.

**MARCUS:** How so?

**MODIANO:** It showed me that there are all kinds of things you can do in this world. Different possibilities opened up and I began to wonder, did I really want to become a college professor? Even if I could go on field trips to New Zealand and Tahiti and the Trobriand Islands and places like that? Is this what I wanted to do? I said to myself, "I don't know. Maybe I want to have adventures like Sal Paradise."

And the fact that Kerouac was describing events that take place between 1947 and 1952 made me think, wow, they were doing that back in my father's day, when my father was



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a kid like me.

Interestingly enough, in my later life I met people that were a generation older than me who'd also been very affected by the book. When I worked at the Art Students League in New York I was talking with a guy there who was around twenty years older than me. I mentioned that I read *On the Road* when I was a senior in high school and he said, "I read it when I was a senior in high school too. It had just come out in paperback."

**MARCUS:** Did you happen to see the film version that was released around six years ago?

**MODIANO:** Yeah.

**MARCUS:** What was your take?

**MODIANO:** Hmm... nice try. But not entirely successful. I thought Viggo Mortensen was excellent as Old Bull Lee, the William S. Burroughs character. He was the best actor in it.

**MARCUS:** It's interesting to contemplate how the film might have been cast if it had been made earlier.

**MODIANO:** Actually, when the book came out in 1957 and became a bestseller, Kerouac wrote a letter to Marlon Brando urging him to get behind a film version. He wanted Marlon to play Dean Moriarty, the Neal Cassady character. After Brando passed away they found the letter among his effects and his children auctioned it off. But you can still read it online.

**MARCUS:** What's your take on Kerouac's fictional alter ego, Sal Paradise?

**MODIANO:** Well, Sal serves as a witness throughout the book. When he's with Dean he's reporting on Dean. When he's with Old Bull Lee, he's reporting on Old Bull Lee.

Sal in the book and Kerouac in real life was an East Coaster living in Massachusetts and New York City. He reveled in the experience of traveling west across the country, getting rides from the kinds of people that had existed in his imagination. To him they were legendary...they were bigger-than-life figures.

There's a very vivid scene where he's in Cheyenne,

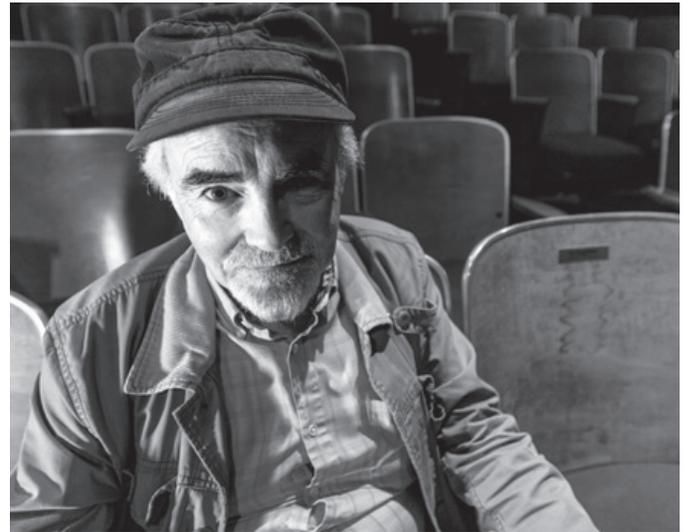


Photo by Neil de la Peña

Wyoming, during a Wild West show and then, of course, Dean is the great hero of the West to him. He's a modern-day cowboy.

**MARCUS:** Did you finally get to read *The Dharma Bums*?

**MODIANO:** I did. And from Watts' essay I knew that the characters in that book were also based on real people—that Ray Smith was Jack Kerouac, that Alvah Goldbrook was Alan Ginsberg, and Japhy Ryder was Gary Snyder.

When I was a freshman in college, I read a book by Snyder titled *Earth House Hold* and in it there was an essay called "Buddhism and the Coming Revolution." One of the things I'd been wrestling with was how could I marry my spiritual beliefs to my political activism? Snyder's essay was the bridge.

**MARCUS:** What *were* your spiritual beliefs?

**MODIANO:** I was basically a fellow traveling Buddhist. I mean, I didn't have a formal connection to Buddhism. I hadn't taken Buddhist refuge vows or anything of that nature.

**MARCUS:** When did your political interests begin?

**MODIANO:** Early on. I grew up watching the Vietnam War

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on television. In those days the reportage was much more raw and less—for want of a better word—self-censored.

I was a conventional patriotic kid—I mean, not super-patriotic in any sense—but I believed that the United States... that we were the good guys. What made me begin to question this belief during the Vietnam War was a famous news clip of this guy taking a Zippo lighter and lighting a peasant's robes on fire. Then there was napalm and the accidental bombings of civilians. It was hard to reconcile us with righteousness anymore. Are we the good guys? Why are we doing this? And a little earlier in the sixties the Civil Rights Movement was happening and we were seeing...on television...police dogs and fire hoses.

Here, I have to wind it back a little and tell you a story. In December of 1960, my family took a road trip across the U.S. We went to visit a family friend who lived in Florida, then we drove up the East Coast to New York City where my father was from and visited relatives. Then we headed back to L.A. But we did drive through the South. We were in Mississippi and I have a vivid memory of passing a billboard that said, "You are now entering Klan Country." And I said, "Dad, look. They misspelled 'clan.'" Without missing a beat, he said, "That's because they're ignorant."

Shortly after that we visited the Vicksburg battlefield and museum and I remember my father commenting, "Look around. There are all these monuments to the Confederate troops and none for the Union troops." When we entered the museum we were greeted by the guy at the desk. He said, "Y'all, we'd like you to sign the guest book." My father proceeded to sign it and mentioned where we were from—Los Angeles, California. This guy looked at the signature and read the name out loud: "Mo-di-an-o. You sound like a *fereigner*."

Also, I remember looking at a display case containing various documents and my father saying, "Boys, these are bills of sale for slavers. They actually sold human beings at one time. It's terrible. That's why the Civil War was fought."

**MARCUS:** How would you characterize your father's politics?

**MODIANO:** He was a New Deal Democrat. As was my mother. It's not that my parents were militantly political or talked about it all the time but it was very clear where their sympathies lay. In 1964, when the civil rights workers Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner disappeared, I remember my father saying, "We drove through that part of the country... we went through Neshoba County. And those boys...I think they're probably dead."

Around a year later we were watching the Sunday Night Movie on ABC—the film *Judgment at Nuremberg*—when it was interrupted by live coverage of the standoff at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. My father was shocked by that. My mother was too.

**MARCUS:** How do you feel about the push in the past few years to take down Confederate statues?

**MODIANO:** Fine. Take 'em down.

**MARCUS:** As someone who came out of that era, who was shaped by it, is the sixties connection something you think about as the executive director of Beyond Baroque?

**MODIANO:** Well, I think about the fact that it started in 1968, which was a tumultuous time in the history of the world. It was the year the Tet Offensive began in Vietnam and it was a turning point—the establishment itself finally lost faith that we were headed for victory in Vietnam. There was no light at the end of the tunnel.

Another event that year struck closer to home. My father and my uncle were partners in the construction business—they had a company in North Hollywood. My Uncle Frank was the guy that dealt with City Hall and the Board of Supervisors and got the permits and so on and was involved in establishment politics. I believe he belonged to the San Fernando Valley Democratic Committee, things like that. And he was very active in the Robert F. Kennedy campaign for president.

My father, on the other hand, was ordinarily not an activist type at all but Uncle Frank persuaded him to become involved and donate some money. So the two brothers went to the Sportsman's Lodge in Studio City and met RFK. And this was one of the stops he made on the day he was assassinated. He had dinner at Lucy's El Adobe Cafe, then went on to the Ambassador Hotel. My Uncle Frank was there that night. We were watching it on TV when the results came in and Bobby was declared the winner. He gave a brief victory speech... everybody was applauding...and a few moments later he was shot as he walked through the kitchen on his way out.

After that my father lost all interest in any kind of politics. It was June of 1968. Martin Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated in April only two months before. And in-between there was the May, 1968, student rebellion in France. It was a tumultuous time. In March, Lyndon Johnson had decided not to run for a second term after being defeated by Eugene McCarthy in the New Hampshire primary.

**MARCUS:** Clearly, Beyond Baroque plays a key role in representing and perpetuating the unique culture of Venice, California. What's your personal view of this area's history and the changes that have taken place over the years?

**MODIANO:** Actually, the first time I came to Venice was as a little kid with my father, who was going to look at a lot he and my uncle were thinking of building on. It was circa 1960, could have been '59. What I remember most vividly is the all-pervasive odor of oil and petroleum. The oil derricks were still there at that time.

If you look at old photos of Venice, starting as far north as Ocean Park Boulevard, you'll see the derricks going south along the coast. They went past Redondo and all the way to Long Beach, where they're still pumping today.

During our visit we witnessed a fire—a building was burning and a crowd of people had gathered to watch. And the crowd was multi-racial, which was an interesting aspect of Venice back then.

**MARCUS:** Can you say a few words about Venice's history

leading up to that time?

**MODIANO:** Sure. It's basically a story of a rise and a fall. It started out as Abbott Kinney's dream of creating a faux Venice, Italy. There were gondolas plying the canals and there were Ferris wheels. It was a resort, a place to have fun, a theme park of sorts. Where we are now [the Beyond Baroque building] was the old Venice City Hall, built in 1906.

The Depression killed off the frivolous entertainment. If Disneyland had opened in 1928, it would have closed in 1930. Then oil was discovered and they sank oil wells and began pumping and of course the odor of petroleum is not exactly inviting and Venice began its descent into a low-rent, quasi-industrial area. It came to be known as "the slum by the sea."

Another big change occurred in the 1940s: Hughes Aircraft. It employed a huge number of people and Venice was the place where you could find low-rent housing. Some of it was built by Hughes and some was preexisting.

**MARCUS:** Where was Hughes located?

**MODIANO:** On the bluffs by Loyola Marymount University, not far from here. I think a few hangars are still left and one of them was where the Spruce Goose was stored. Raytheon is there now.

There's a great novel by Chester Himes called *If He Hollers, Let Him Go*. Himes was an African-American writer and the book is about an African-American worker at an aircraft plant modeled after Hughes and the racial tensions he had to deal with.

So the population swelled and there was a lot of money to go around. Then World War II ended, the war industries wound down, there were massive layoffs, and Venice went back to becoming the slum by the sea. Once again it was a low-rent area and low-rent areas attract artists. Cheap living. So artists arrived—including those who came to be known as the Venice West Beats in the mid-fifties. And the coming of the Beats was the revival of an art scene in Venice. Or, to be more precise, it was the *creation* of an art scene in Venice.

**MARCUS:** When I think of the Beats I think, of course, of people like Ginsberg in New York and Ferlinghetti in San Francisco. Who were the leading lights in the Venice area... are there any in particular that come to mind?

**MODIANO:** Sure. There was Stuart Z. Perkoff, probably the most well-known. Another prominent Venice Beat was Alexander Trocchi. He was an immigrant from Scotland.

**MARCUS:** I saw that you did a reading of his poetry at the Stella Adler Theater.

**MODIANO:** Yes. Then of course there's Frank Rios. He's the last of the Venice Beats and still lives here.

**MARCUS:** Does he ever come to Beyond Baroque?

**MODIANO:** Frank was here in March for our Beyond

Beats Celebration, one of the ongoing series of events commemorating our fiftieth anniversary year.

So there you have some of the origin story going back to the fifties. Interestingly, our founder George Drury Smith

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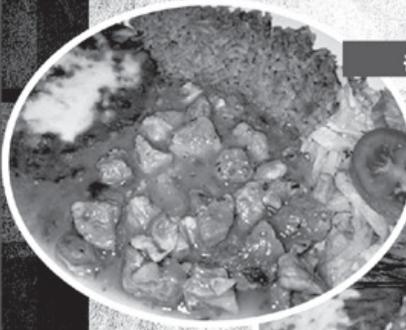
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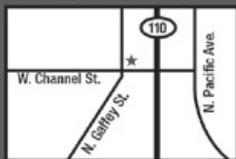


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came to Venice because he thought that the Beat scene was still happening.

**MARCUS:** In what year?

**MODIANO:** That would have been 1964. He was four years too late. In fact, his impetus for starting *Beyond Baroque*, the magazine, was to revive the literary arts scene in Venice.

**MARCUS:** What was going on at that time?

**MODIANO:** It was an in-between stage. It was after the Beats and prior to the hippies. A few years later, the Los Angeles Free Press was sponsoring rock concerts on the old Venice pier, which was known as the Pacific Ocean Park Pier. It had an amusement center, POP, and a club called the Cheetah where rock groups used to appear. And of course the Doors formed in Venice in '65. Michael C. Ford was a friend of the band and he's still friends with the surviving members, Robby Krieger and John Densmore.

**MARCUS:** When did you get involved in the scene?

**MODIANO:** I started going to the Free Press concerts during the summer in '66 and '67. As I recall, there were two concerts and one of them was called Brucemas in honor of Lenny Bruce's birthday.

**MARCUS:** Somehow that makes perfect sense.

**MODIANO:** Right. Bruce was a radical, cutting-edge, political comedian. His comedy was topical the way George Carlin's was later on. He would talk about the Caryl Chessman case and things like that.

**MARCUS:** Which brings us back to your politics, particularly your involvement in the Industrial Workers of the World. I always associate the IWW with an earlier historical period—I don't know of anyone who was a member in the 1960s.

**MODIANO:** Actually, I didn't join until 1974, when I moved to New York City to attend NYU. One night I was coming out of the subway on Sixth Avenue and when I got up the street there was this little folding table that had a banner on it that said IWW and there was some literature and a guy standing there so I went up and told him I knew about the IWW...though I didn't know that it still existed. But there it was, so I picked up some literature and went to a meeting at the IWW headquarters located at 119 East Tenth Street. That building, by the way, is totally gentrified today and worth somewhere around twenty million dollars. But back then it was low rent.

**MARCUS:** They ruined it.

**MODIANO:** (laughs) And you know it had to be on the Lower East Side. So I joined up and became a Wobbly [a member of the IWW] in the 1970s. I discovered that the

Living Theater was a job collective of the IWW and met its founders, Judith Molina and Julian Beck.

**MARCUS:** I associate the Wobblies with Woody Guthrie. I didn't know they were around in New York in the seventies.

**MODIANO:** Well, Lower Manhattan was Red headquarters for the country, so to speak. (chuckles) The Communist Party U.S.A., had its headquarters near Union Square at Fourteenth Street. The Socialist Workers Party's headquarters was on Lower Broadway. And there was a multi-story building known as 339 Lafayette Street. That's where the War Resisters League had its headquarters, along with the Congress of Racial Equality and the Socialist Party U.S.A.

**MARCUS:** Did you go down to Greenwich Village?

**MODIANO:** I lived in Greenwich Village.

**MARCUS:** Did anything remain of the sixties' folk music scene? I'm thinking of artists like Dylan, your original poetic inspiration, Phil Ochs, Carolyn Hester, Len Chandler...

**MODIANO:** At that time the legendary clubs were still there. And the IWW had a number of contacts in the folk scene. There was a fellow Wobbly who's still alive and performing named Mark Ross. He knew all the Little Red Songbook classics and contemporary folk songs and he was friends with Dave Van Ronk and Rosalie Sorrels. Utah Phillips made appearances. These people all had a close connection with the IWW. They weren't necessarily living in the Village but they still came through. You can draw a line all the way from Joe Hill and the folkies of the twenties and thirties and Woody Guthrie down to Tom Morello of Rage Against the Machine.

Tom is a Wobbly and still active. In 2015 he produced a concert at the Troubadour commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the execution of Joe Hill. He had an all-star group there. Joan Baez...Boots Riley...you name 'em. And the Los Angeles GMB, the General Membership Badge of the IWW, had a table set up in the lobby.

**MARCUS:** In general, how would you characterize the history of the IWW, say, since World War II?

**MODIANO:** It waxed and waned. It had a very low point in the 1950s and it began to grow again in the 1960s, largely through the efforts of a group of students who were going to a Labor college in Chicago, I forget what it was called now. But there is a poet and author by the name of Franklin Rosemont who was very involved. He also started the Chicago Surrealist Group. In fact, he and his girlfriend Penelope, later to be his wife, actually went to Paris and met André Breton the year before his death. Breton was the granddaddy of the Surrealist movement—they called him the pope of Surrealism. He recognized Franklin and Penelope as fellow Surrealists and gave them his blessing. Of course the Surrealists by and large were very political, especially Breton, who co-wrote a manifesto with Leon Trotsky.

**MARCUS:** You're kidding.

**MODIANO:** No. It's about revolutionary art and it's well done. There was another Surrealist by the name of Benjamin Péret who fought on the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War.

**MARCUS:** Like Hemingway?

**MODIANO:** Hemingway was there as a reporter; Péret was there as a combatant.

But along with the politics, there was a connection between the IWW and the arts going back to the very earliest days. For example, in 1912 there was something called the Paterson silk strike. John Reed and Eugene O'Neill—who was a supporter of the IWW—Mabel Dodge, and a number of avant-garde artists produced a show at Madison Square Garden to raise money for the IWW strikers in Paterson, New Jersey. So throughout its history there's been a very strong connection between the IWW and the arts. The IWW newspaper, the *Industrial Worker*, carried poetry.

**MARCUS:** Speaking of the arts, I enjoyed browsing in the Beyond Baroque bookstore before we started the interview. It's good to be browsing in any bookstore in this day and age and yours is especially unique—it's got to be one of Venice's hidden treasures

**MODIANO:** Thank you. Well, we're certainly not a typical retail book store—we don't have a showcase display window and we're set back from the sidewalk. But we welcome people who want to step off the beaten path and look through our selection.

A number of our customers purchase books connected to the events we hold. If there's a reading, for example, we order extra copies of that book and other books by our author guest. We had Pat Thomas here not too long ago—he's a great musician and music journalist who wrote a biography of Jerry Rubin called *Did It*—so naturally we ordered copies

of the book.

And since we've been talking about the Wobblies, there's an author name William Adler who wrote a biography of Joe Hill. Several have come out over the years but Adler's is the first that's well-researched and documented. He had a publication reading here so we made sure extra copies were on hand. On another occasion, Eric Thomas Chester came and did a reading of his book, *The Wobblies and Their Heyday*.

So for any author-related events of whatever nature, we order the book. We recently had Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, for example, who wrote *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*. Roxanne is one of the original Second Wave feminists. Her current book is called *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment*. She deconstructs the Second Amendment and discusses the historical conditions under which it was written, why it was written, and how it's been used to justify all sorts of different things.

**MODIANO:** For non-author events we might order books that are thematically related. There's a fellow by the name of Ross Altman, a folk singer and composer...

**MARCUS:** I've seen him. He's superb.

**MODIANO:** Agreed. Ross, as you know then, is very political and he put on a program celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the October revolution, so we ordered John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*.

In a similar vein, subject-wise, we had a workshop here with Robert Rosenstone. He wrote a biography of John Reed called *Romantic Revolutionary*, and that's the book Warren Beatty optioned to make *Reds*. He actually hired Robert as a consultant on the movie.

(A BB staff member enters)

It looks like I have to get ready for tonight's program.

**MARCUS:** Well, this has been a pleasure. Thank you, Richard.

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# ELECTION SHOWS HOW GERRYMANDERING IS DIFFICULT TO OVERCOME

DAVID A. LIEB

**W**ith an election looming, courts earlier this year declared congressional districts in two states to be unconstitutional partisan gerrymanders. One map was redrawn. The other was not.

The sharply contrasting outcomes that resulted on election day in Pennsylvania and North Carolina illustrate the importance of how political lines are drawn — and the stakes for the nation because that process helps determine which party controls Congress.

Pennsylvania flipped from a solid Republican congressional delegation to one evenly split under a map redrawn by court order, contributing to the Democratic takeover of the U.S. House. Despite an almost even split in the popular vote, North Carolina's congressional delegation remained overwhelmingly Republican under a map drawn by the GOP.

"We did everything we could," Democrat Kathy Manning said. "But we just could not overcome the gerrymandering, and that's the way the district was designed to run."

Manning held more than 400 campaign events, contacted tens of thousands of voters and had outspent the Republican incumbent in North Carolina's 13th District — but still lost by 6 percentage points in a district Republicans drew to favor their candidates.

Partisan gerrymandering has been carried out by both Democrats and Republicans throughout U.S. history. But an Associated Press statistical analysis based on 2016 election data found that more states had

Republican-tilted districts than Democratic ones. Some of the largest GOP congressional advantages were in North Carolina and Pennsylvania, where Republicans fully controlled redistricting after the 2010 Census.

One of the Democrats' biggest edges was in Maryland, where they were in charge of the last redistricting.

A follow-up AP analysis using preliminary 2018 election data shows the Republican statistical edge was cut in half under Pennsylvania's new court-ordered congressional map but grew even larger in North Carolina.

Though an increasing number of states have adopted independent commissions, many states still rely on lawmakers and governors to draw legislative and congressional districts. Republicans controlled that process in far more states than Democrats because

of their electoral success nationwide in 2010. Those maps were in place for the Nov. 6 elections, except in places where courts ordered them redrawn, and will be again in 2020.

The results have national implications: Democrats potentially could have won even more seats in the U.S. House and state legislatures had it not been for Republican gerrymandering. North Carolina is a prime example of gerrymandering's consequences.

Republicans and Democrats in this month's elections split the total votes cast for major party candidates in the state's 13 congressional districts about evenly, with Republicans getting 51 percent (a figure that is slightly inflated because one GOP incumbent ran

unopposed). Yet Republicans won 10 of those races, about three-quarters of the total seats

That equates to a pro-Republican tilt of nearly 26 percent under an "efficiency gap" analysis that provides a statistical way of measuring the partisan advantages that can stem from gerrymandering. That figure was up from about 20 percent in 2016.

By comparison, Democrats in Pennsylvania received 54 percent of this year's total two-party vote for congressional candidates, including one race where a Democratic incumbent ran unopposed. Democrats and Republicans each won 9 seats under a map drawn by the Democratic-tilted state Supreme Court with the

**"No matter what happens, no matter who's in the White House or what the national trends are or how much money you have, you just can't beat gerrymandered seats," said Eric Couto, executive director of Wisconsin Progress.**

— David A. Lieb

assistance of an outside expert.

That marked a significant shift from the 13-5 Republican majority in the state's congressional delegation during the three previous general elections under a map that had been enacted in 2011 by the Republican-led Legislature and governor.

Pennsylvania's pro-Republican "efficiency gap" fell from 16 percent in the AP's 2016 analysis to 7 percent under this year's court-drawn map — a level that some political scientists attribute to the high concentrations of Democrats in urban areas that make it more difficult for them to win elsewhere.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court redrew districts after it ruled that partisan gerrymandering in the old map infringed on a state right to "free and equal" elections. One of the Democrats who sued was Bill Marx, a high school civics teacher in Pittsburgh who said he feared that legislative gerrymandering was building apathy and cynicism in the next generation of voters.

Marx said he believes the new district boundaries resulted in "a more fair congressional representation of the will of the people in Pennsylvania."

But Pennsylvania Republican Party spokesman Jason Gottesman said the new map "put Democrats at an unfair advantage in this election." Republicans contend the court overstepped its powers by adopting new districts, a duty that belongs to the Legislature.

"The Pennsylvania Supreme Court robbed us of at least three to four congressional seats that we might not have lost if the redistricting would not have happened the way that it did," Gottesman said.

While Republicans are fuming in Pennsylvania, Democrats remain frustrated in North Carolina. There, the GOP-drawn congressional boundaries pack Democratic voters into three highly concentrated districts. Republicans are spread more evenly across the other 10 districts.

Republicans "have gerrymandered the heck out of lots of different places," said Democratic voter Melinda Wilkinson, a retired music teacher from Raleigh. She added: "It seems very unfair."

Republican state Rep. David Lewis, who helped shepherd the congressional map through North Carolina's GOP-led General Assembly, acknowledged politics played a role in the districts but said there is no evidence that Democratic voters were prevented from "fully participating and exercising their right to choose the candidates of their choice."

In August, federal judges ruled that North Carolina's congressional districts violate protections for Democratic voters but determined there wasn't enough time to redraw them before the Nov. 6 elections. The U.S. Supreme Court is considering whether to hear an appeal in that case.

For state legislative districts, the AP's analysis has found some of the largest partisan advantages in Michigan and Wisconsin. Democrats won 52 percent of the total major party vote for the Michigan House

this year and flipped several Republican-held districts, yet Republicans still won 53 percent of the seats.

Republicans controlled Michigan's last redistricting by holding the governor's office and both legislative chambers. They won't control the next redistricting: A Democrat won the governor's race, but voters made that irrelevant by approving a constitutional amendment shifting redistricting to an independent commission.

In Wisconsin, a federal judicial panel invalidated the state Assembly districts as an unconstitutional partisan gerrymander in 2016. But the U.S. Supreme Court overturned that in June and sent the case back to the lower court to establish whether there was harm to particular voters. A new trial is set for April.

Preliminary results from the 2018 elections show Wisconsin Democrats received 54 percent of the total votes cast for major party Assembly candidates — a figure inflated by the fact that Democrats ran unopposed in 30 districts compared to just eight for Republicans.

Yet Republicans won 63 of the 99 Assembly seats, just one less than their pre-election majority. That marks an increase in the pro-Republican "efficiency

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## ELECTION

gap" from about 10 percent in 2016 to almost 15 percent this year. Democrats also won or are leading in elections for all of Wisconsin's statewide offices, showing voter support for their candidates in races that are not affected by gerrymandering.

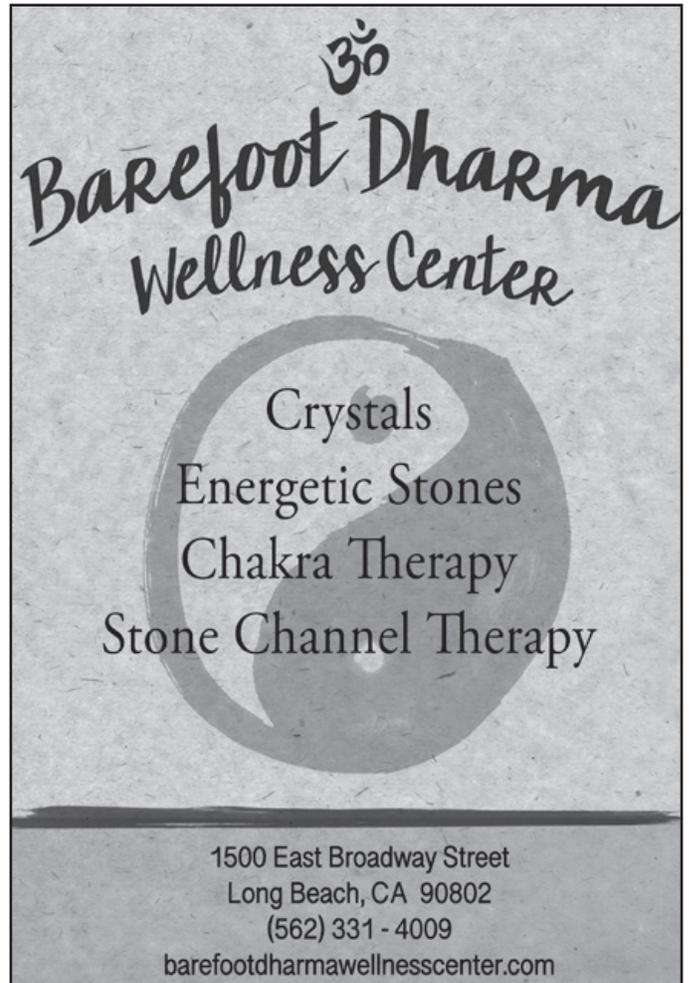
Republican Assembly Speaker Robin Vos called it a "faulty premise" to say that Republicans' legislative majority is due to gerrymandering. "We are the ones who have been given a mandate to govern," Vos said.

But Assembly Minority Leader Gordon Hintz said "Wisconsin's gerrymandered maps worked exactly as Republicans intended." He said non-competitive districts have made it increasingly difficult for Democrats to recruit candidates and raise money.

Wisconsin Progress, an organization that recruits and trains liberal candidates, said 30 of the 31 Democratic candidates it backed in Republican-held Assembly districts ended up losing in the Nov. 6 elections.

"No matter what happens, no matter who's in the White House or what the national trends are or how much money you have, you just can't beat gerrymandered seats," said Eric Couto, executive director of Wisconsin Progress. "That's the whole point of gerrymandering."

David A. Lieb writes for earthactionnetwork and other publications. Associated Press reporters Gary Robertson in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Scott Bauer and Todd Richmond in Madison, Wisconsin, contributed to this report.



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# DROPS, AND THE DROPPED: DIVERSITY AND THE MIDTERM ELECTIONS

J O H N O ' K A N E

**T**he left professes diversity as its vehicle and goal to expand power and bring more of the deserving into the system but, ironically, it's one of the reasons why the Democrats fared so poorly in the 2016 election. Some, like Jay Haug, blame their intolerance. They force their issues of race, gender, and sexuality in the faces of their opponents with a politically correct inevitability that backfires (*American Thinker*, 1/20/17). Similarly, J. T. Young claims their diverse pitch is undercut by their homogenizing of substance and badgering methods (*The Daily Caller*, 11/30/17).

Could they have diversified and softened their pitch to those outside their orbit?

It's difficult to imagine how believers in traditional marriage, for example, could have engaged in a productive conversation with the LGBT community.

The left needed a more flexible frame to approach these outsiders—especially moderate, working class, and rural whites—and set aside their differences at least long enough to win elections, something the right has been very good at for some time now.

These differences were no minor obstacle. The success of the Sanders campaign challenged the Democratic Party's established position on who should be included in its coalition. The Democrats have left the lower and working classes behind over the past forty-plus years as they've shifted to the right. In the mid-to-late 1970s the Democrats began to embrace identity politics, the special endorsement of racial, ethnic and gendered groups believed to be deprived and deserving of special treatment.

As Robert Benn Michaels shows, the energy spent in protecting and elevating these groups consumed the field, leaving the class narrative to lie fallow ("Introduction" to *The Trouble with Diversity*, 2006). Their love affair with diversity erupted from this shift, replacing the mandate to expunge racism from society that had motored the civil rights movement into the 1970s and the solid support for equality that had been a mainstay of its platform. Though never completely losing the initiative to fight racism and inequality, the focus was on celebrating the differences that people of color brought to the social mix and finding ways to include them more successfully. The working class was and is not all white, of course, but the effect of this shift has been the exclusion of significant numbers of whites, particularly the lower classes. The Democrats and, more broadly, the left, have acted and legislated according to the belief that this approach was a necessary corrective since "white" is synonymous with "privileged."

The 1977 Bakke case, where a white medical school applicant was successful in claiming reverse discrimination against the affirmative action process, was the beginning of a challenge to the easy conflation of white and privileged. Ronald Reagan's election a few years later captured many of these disaffected whites for the Republican Party where they've mostly remained. The 2008 economic collapse should have returned them in droves to the Democrats, and would have to some version of the older party.

The priority given by the new Democratic Party to demographic inclusion over economic justice helps explain this failure and why so many people of color,

especially Blacks, rejected Sanders. But more pointedly, according to Briahna Gray, they believed that since he is white his policies would exclude them—a misperception since these policies were more progressive than Clinton's and geared to reduce inequality across the board and help keep the disaffected working class males from supporting Trump (*The Intercept*, "Fetishizing 'Identity Politics' Could Cost Democrats," 6/18/18).

Those left of the liberals and the fringe to their left, relatively small in terms of numbers but not inconsequential, fought to include moderate, working class, and rural whites in the coalition because of their belief that economic justice issues should trump demographics. Had they had a more influential voice, the right would not so

**Many of  
the Great Society  
programs,  
for example,  
have been  
severely  
weakened,  
if not eliminated.**

— John O'Kane

easily have captured this group.

But as it turned out, the reigning bloc of liberals wrote off small-town, de-industrialized, red-purplish-state America with its surfeit of deprived whites—and even sectors of moderate white suburbia—where many were certainly waiting for change. Had they scoured these areas inspired to grasp the economic damage these sectors suffered they could’ve possibly found a way to include these victims, though this would’ve required some quite innovative therapeutic conversion strategies.

They could’ve schmoozed with those privileged whites living in trailer parks on the non-living wages of the flexible, global economy and found ways to bring them into the majority. They could’ve become profilers and identified potential candidates with darker drops of blood and made use of the new testing technologies celebrated in the criminal procedure TV shows to learn if they possessed the requisite one percent or even more, and then worked out how much of a percentage was needed to make it into the coalition.

Once they knew who was in or out they could’ve held a meeting where these candidates, the drop-challenged, were interviewed about their role in slavery, giving them a chance to repent and receive political absolution. Many of the candidates would likely have acknowledged the injustices of slavery but also suggested they follow the money and go after families which accumulated great wealth from these injustices, even offering to authorize a payroll deduction at their credit unions in good faith. Some would surely have asked for help, however, in getting their kids into the better state colleges which had begun to recruit diverse candidates from outside the country to get higher tuition for their budget crises.

The real challenge then would’ve been to get the parties to engage in a conversation, no mean task since the effects of years of segregation have seeded fear and distrust in everyone’s minds. Those astute in conversion therapies might’ve succeeded in producing a consensus that more fairly placed the blame. But therapists would’ve faced an especially formidable challenge in getting those giving priority to racial, demographic justice and those pushing the priority of economic justice to see through the other’s eyes. Drop-challenged high school grads from deficit-ridden rural and inner city public schools would’ve had to mix it up with the drop-wealthy, some educated at elite schools and who might’ve been fairly recent arrivals from challenged countries. Could they have bridged the divide?

The “demographic destiny” of the drop explosion, the priority given to race, then as now, conforms to a certain ethic of equality. The liberal mandate is to mostly include the excluded, provide opportunities through expanded access that will somehow give the recipients a greater share of income and wealth, and spread the correct bodies through the social matrix in the hope that filter-down economics will deliver them from material evil. The flaw here, though, is that they will have to face off with the occupational structure and this means hierarchy and exclusion, no sure guarantee that the new included will

find greater equality in a system that dispenses so many low wages.

As Jennifer Delton points out, while post-1970s diversity policies have successfully darkened the working populace in both the public and private sectors, this is mainly evident at the professional levels and, tellingly, as the society has witnessed an increasing gap between top and bottom (*Washington Post*, “The Left’s Grand Delusion,” 7/28/17).

The economic justice camp conforms to a different ethic. It pushes toward an equality of results, though never fully endorsing this extreme since it conjures a host of taboos for Americans. It means too much action from government and that will lead to welfare and eventually socialism, or even communism, since the individual must be free to achieve on their own. And the leaders are all-too-aware of the occupational barriers that must be confronted, not to mention the political ones. Many of the Great Society programs, for example, have been severely weakened, if not eliminated. So this camp has been ineffective, defaulting to an equality of opportunity approach that is easier to execute—just let the forces of our self-correcting system play out!—and sounds so right.

Perhaps these therapists can temper the drop friction and find a way to move forward. But more likely they’ll have to honestly admit that these notions of equality, ambiguously referenced in the Declaration of Independence, rift the cultural fabric and can’t be



successfully united without force, some form of top-down authority that would surely provoke a backlash in the absence of a changed consciousness among the populace, and especially among liberals on the left whose diversity fundamentalism still mostly holds through the 2018 midterms.

While the recent election witnessed the success of progressive Democratic candidates and those of color who prioritized economic justice, the most progressive ones fell short as Ryan Grim claims (*The Intercept*, "How Midterm Results Will Keep Democratic Infighting Going," 11/6). The electoral map shows that the Democrats' biggest gains were in the suburbs (*New York Times*, 11/6). The Republicans still mostly captured those in economically deprived areas and the working class. According to national exit polls, the working class voted for Trump by 37 points in 2016 and Republican House candidates by 24 points in 2018 (*Working Class Perspectives*, "Class Prejudice and the Democrats' Blue Wave," Jack Metzgar, 11/26/18). This split between demographic diversity and economic justice will continue, according to David Brooks (Meet the Press, 11/11), until either the Republicans attract more people of color, beyond their already substantial following, or the diversity liberals can manufacture a new coalition. Otherwise 2020 won't be much different than 2018.

The engineering of a vague sense of equality through the inclusion of many who are already privileged and the targeting of others strictly because they fit protected categories will continue to invest the ethic of equalization with contradictions and absurdities and invite further backlash in the absence of a fully inclusive coalition.

Consider the current lawsuit against Harvard by Asian Americans who contend they were denied admission in favor of lesser-qualified applicants (to create a more balanced student body, the school claims, based on life experiences as well as academics). There are simply not enough slots in elite or any other institutions to accommodate the qualified and tinkering with this balance from above and outside can only make our hyper-competitive society even more impossible, our democracy more fragile. The only fair and honest quota system is one that is fully inclusive but also realistically achievable. This will require an overhaul of the wage and occupational structures to absorb the surplus of applicants and compensate for the inevitable glitches and exclusions.

Forced and deficient quota systems invite a reactionary PC. Political correctness is a legitimate response to rigidity, the refusal of the system to change. It targets specific sectors where unsolved issues fester, and the link between race and class is certainly one. But politics is rarely correct. It is riddled with experimental errors forced through by special interests. Political rationality is irrationality masking as progress. It offers mostly sketchy constructs awaiting deconstruction.

Thanks to the student input from my Fall writing seminar in the expression of these thoughts.



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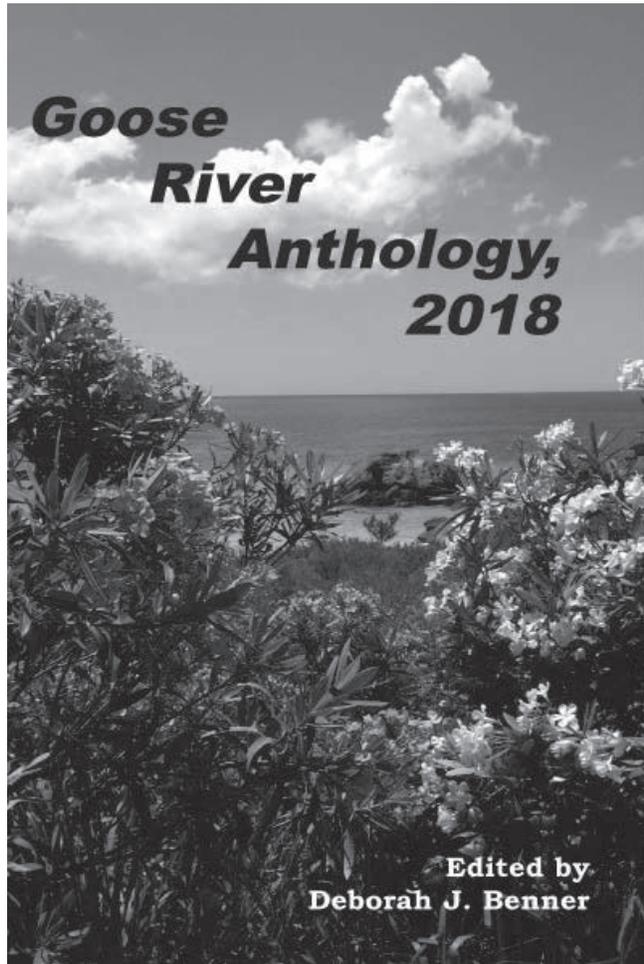
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# TRUMP'S WAR ON THE FED

ELLEN BROWN

October was a brutal month for the stock market. After the Fed's eighth interest rate hike on September 26th, the Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped more than 2,000 points and the NASDAQ had its worst month in nearly 10 years. After the Dow lost more than 800 points on October 10th and the S&P 500 suffered its first weeklong losing streak since Trump's election, the president said, "I think the Fed is making a mistake. They are so tight. I think the Fed has gone crazy." In a later interview on Fox News, he called the Fed's rate hikes "loco." And in a *Wall Street Journal* interview published on October 24th, Trump said he thought the biggest risk to the economy was the Federal Reserve, because "interest rates are being raised too quickly." He also criticized the Fed and its chairman in July and August.

Trump's vocal criticisms are worrisome to some commentators, who fear he is attempting to manipulate the Fed and its chairman for political gain. Ever since the 1970s, the Fed has declared its independence from government, and presidents are supposed to avoid influencing its decisions. But other Fed-watchers think politicians should be allowed to criticize the market manipulations of an apparently out-of-control central bank.

## Why the Frontal Attack?

Even if the president's challenges are a needed check on the Fed, it has been questioned whether he is going about it in the right way. Challenging the central bank in public forces it to stick to its guns, because it must maintain its credibility with the markets by showing that its decisions are based on sound economic principles rather than on political influence. If the president really wants the Fed to back off on interest rates, it has been argued, he should do it with a nod and a nudge, not a frontal attack on the Fed's sanity.

True, but perhaps the president's goal is not to subtly

affect Fed behavior so much as to make it patently obvious who is to blame when the next Great Recession hits. And recession is fairly certain to hit, because higher interest rates almost always trigger recessions. The Fed's current policy of "quantitative tightening" – tightening or contracting the money supply – is the very definition of recession, a term Wikipedia defines as "a business cycle contraction which results in a general slowdown in economic activity."

This "business cycle" is not something inevitable like the weather. It is triggered by the central bank. When the Fed drops interest rates, banks flood the market with "easy money," allowing speculators to snatch up homes and other assets. When the central bank then raises interest rates, it contracts the amount of money available to spend and to pay down debt. Borrowers go into default and foreclosed homes go on the market at firesale prices, again to be snatched up by the monied class.

But it is a game of Monopoly that cannot go on forever. According to Elga Bartsch, chief European economist at Morgan Stanley, one more financial cataclysm could be all that it takes for central bank independence to end. "Having been overburdened for a long time, many central banks might just be one more economic downturn or financial crisis away from a full-on political backlash," she wrote in a note to clients in 2017. "Such a political backlash could call into question one of the long-standing tenets of modern monetary policy making – central bank independence."

And that may be the president's end-game. When higher rates trigger another

recession, Trump can point an accusing finger at the central bank, absolving his own policies of liability and underscoring the need for a major overhaul of the Fed.

## End the Fed?

Trump has not overtly joined the End the Fed campaign, but he has had the ear of several advocates of that approach. One is John Allison, whom the president evidently considered for both Fed Chairman and Treasury Secretary. Allison has proposed ending the Fed altogether and returning to the gold standard, and Trump suggested on the campaign trail that he approved of a gold-backed currency.

But a gold standard is the ultimate in tight

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– Ellen Brown

money – keeping money in limited supply tied to gold – and today Trump seems to want to return to the low-interest policies of former Fed Chair Janet Yellen. Jerome Powell, Trump’s replacement pick, has been called “Yellen without Yellen,” a dovish alternative in acceptable Republican dress. That’s what the president evidently thought he was getting, but in his October 24th *Wall Street Journal* interview, Trump said of Powell, “he was supposed to be a low-interest-rate guy. It’s turned out that he’s not.” The president complained:

“Every time we do something great, he raises the interest rates. . . . That means we pay more on debt and we slow down the economy, both bad things. . . . I mean, we had a case where he raised interest rates right before we have a bond offering. So you have a bond offering and you have somebody raising interest rates, so you end up paying more on the bonds. . . . To me it doesn’t make sense.”

Trump acknowledged the independence of the Fed and its chairman but said, “I’m allowed to say what I think. . . . I think he’s making a mistake.”

**Presidential Impropriety or a Needed Debate?**

In a November 2016 article in *Politico* titled “Donald Trump Isn’t Crazy to Attack the Fed.” Danny Vinik agreed with that contention. Trump, who is not a stickler for consistency, was then criticizing Fed Chair Janet Yellen for keeping interest rates too *low*. Vinik said that while he disagreed with Trump’s interpretation of

events, he agreed that the president should be allowed to talk about Fed policy. Vinik observed:

“The Federal Reserve is, by definition, not independent. Unlike the Supreme Court, the central bank is a creation of Congress and is accountable to lawmakers on Capitol Hill. It can be changed—or abolished—by Congress as well. And to pretend it’s not—to treat the Fed as an entity totally removed from American politics—also leaves us powerless to talk about the ways it might be improved. . . . The long tradition of deference to the Fed’s policy independence can even pose a risk: It creates an environment in which any critique of the Fed is seen as out of line, including the idea of reforming how it works.”

Vinik quoted Andrew Levin, a Dartmouth economist and twenty-year veteran of the Fed, who published a set of recommended central bank reforms in conjunction with the Center for Popular Democracy’s Fed Up campaign in 2016. One goal was to make the Federal Open Market Committee, which sets Fed policy, more representative of the American public. The FOMC is composed of the president of the New York Fed, four other Federal Reserve Bank presidents, and the Federal Reserve Board, which currently has only four members (three positions are vacant). That means the FOMC is majority-controlled by heads of Federal Reserve Banks, all of whom must have “tested bunker experience.” As Vinik quoted Levin:

“The Federal Reserve is a crucial public agency, so there are lots of important questions—

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## INTEREST RATES

including the selection of its leaders, the determination of their priorities, and the specific strategy that they're following—that should all be open to public discourse.”

Vinik also cited Ady Barkan, the head of the Fed Up campaign, who agreed that questioning Fed policy was appropriate, even for the president. Barkan said the Fed's independence comes from its structure: its leaders are appointed, not elected, for long terms, which inherently insulates them from political pressure. But the Fed must still be accountable to the public, and one way policymakers fulfill that responsibility is through public comments. Monetary policy decisions, said Barkan, are therefore appropriate topics for political debate.

### Reassessing Fed Independence

According to Timothy Canova, Professor of Law and Public Finance at Nova Southeastern University, the Fed is not a neutral arbiter. It might be independent of oversight by politicians, but Fed “independence” has really come to mean a central bank that has been captured by very large banking interests. This has not always been the case. During the period coming out of the Great Depression, the Fed as a practical matter was not independent but took its marching orders from the White House and the Treasury; and that period, says Canova, was the most successful in American economic history.

The Fed's justification for raising interest rates despite admittedly low inflation is that we are nearing

“full employment,” which will drive up prices because labor costs will go up. But wages have not gone up. Why? Because in a globalized world the availability of cheap labor abroad keeps American wages low even if most people are working (which is questionable today despite official statistics).

Higher interest rates do not serve consumers, homebuyers, businesses or governments. They serve the banks that dominate the policy-setting FOMC. The president's critiques of the Fed, however controversial, have opened the door to a much-needed discourse on whether the fate of the economy should be in the hands of unelected bureaucrats marching to the drums of Wall Street.

**Postscript:** The stock market has turned positive as of this writing (November 1), but the rebound has been led by the FAANG stocks -- Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google. As noted in my article of September 13th, these are the stocks that central banks are now purchasing in large quantities. The FANG stocks jumped in unison on October 31st although only one (Facebook) had positive news to report, suggesting possible market manipulation for political purposes.

Ellen Brown is an attorney, founder of the Public Banking Institute, and author of twelve books. *Banking on the People: Democratizing Finance in the Digital Age*, is due out at the end of the year. [EllenBrown.com](http://EllenBrown.com).

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# WHAT WERE YOU ALL THINKING ABOUT PROP. 10?

SPARKY BALDWIN

**E**arly on election day last month as I headed to the polls, a friend passing by in his car stopped mid-street and after gaining my attention said, “Man, everything I’ve heard says Prop. 10 is headed for a landslide.”

“Which way?” I asked.

“The right way,” he said.

“Pass?” I asked.

“Seventy to 80 percent, that’s all I’m hearing,” he said.

Proposition 10, otherwise known as the Affordable Housing Act, was a statewide attempt to overturn the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act, which was passed by a Democratic legislature in 1995 and signed into law by Republican Governor Pete Wilson.

Costa-Hawkins has a threefold mandate: 1) It prohibits any California city from regulating the rental market with regard to apartment buildings built after 1995, in addition to *all* single-family home and condo rentals; 2) It bars the expansion of existing rent regulations on the books prior to 1995; and 3) It explicitly prohibits “vacancy control,” a form of rent control aimed at limiting the amount a landlord can raise rents for any vacant unit when leasing to a new tenant.

The impetus for overturning Costa-Hawkins is equally clear: In the LA Basin and Orange County, approximately one-third of all renting households direct more than half of their household income to rent, according to Harvard University’s Joint Center for Housing Studies. In LA County alone, some 600,000 residents—about six percent of the county’s population—live in homes where 90 percent of all income goes to housing, according to a meta-analysis of homelessness underwritten by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. And again, in LA County, according

to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, more than two-thirds of those currently experiencing homelessness report it is for economic reasons. In this context, economic reasons can mean an unexpected change in income which results in an inability to make a monthly housing payment.

As you probably know, the rule of thumb for monthly housing costs is they shouldn’t exceed one-third of household income. The examples above clearly defy that standard, and the number of working homeless in the state is clearly on the rise. It’s also important to realize the rung on the ladder below working homeless is not-working homeless, and homelessness is no way to get on or stay on the working side of the equation.

But there also are other unintended consequences of unbridled housing costs. If all or most of all household income is going into possessing a household, then that household has limited or no participation in the rest of the economy: food, childcare, tuition, consumer goods and

services, etc. That’s both a private and public issue—a private quality of life issue, and a public economic issue.

Proposition 10 proposed regulating rents against substantial and repeated increases and included single-family homes and condos, reversing their omission from regulation by Costa-Hawkins. Further, a recent Stanford study found that rent control policies have been shown to minimize displacement in wild housing markets. The study focused on San Francisco, a city this writer has lived in off and on for decades, and found rent controlled apartments kept residents in the city who otherwise would have left. Given The City’s reputation for an eclectic population that has helped shape state, national, and international culture, art, and policy,

the lack of equitable housing policy likely affects San Francisco’s historical notoriety for being at the appropriate edge of social change.

Case in point. I rented in a gentrifying neighborhood in San Francisco in 1990. I paid \$1,150 per month for a two-bedroom walk-up in a neighborhood where the first night we took possession, I watched a couple of young men carry a bleeding friend to a car just below my deck. There were oncoming sirens and I wondered for a moment what I had done moving there.

The building I lived in had a two-bedroom apartment below ours. It essentially was a duplex. We shared a garage and our unit had a deck over the garage. Our apartment, not

**You’re  
California  
dreamin’  
if you don’t think  
we need  
the folks we’re  
displacing.**

– Sparky Baldwin

## RENT CONTROL

the building, sold in May 2017 for \$1.98 million.

While I lived there, I ran a meals program for seniors in the inner city and produced documentaries about teen pregnancy and the need for federal attention, as well as taught English and job skills to teen refugees from the former Soviet Union. As it was, we left The City due to the pre-dot com recession in the early 1990s. But what are the chances those types of programs are being run by residents of San Francisco today, unless salaries for those positions have quintupled in the past twenty years? It's likely folks doing those kinds of jobs are commuting from elsewhere, or the demographics have changed so drastically due to housing costs that there isn't need for senior serving agencies or programs for teens in San Francisco anymore.

But let's get back to Proposition 10.

Opponents of the measure, namely the California Apartment Association, argued that regulating rents takes money out of the hands of landlords. That may be true, but it wasn't their money in the first place.

Another argument, by the office of the Legislative Analyst, found Proposition 10 could reduce state and local revenue by "tens of millions of dollars per year in the long term" due to projected losses on property taxes. See, the more rent a landlord charges, the greater the associated property taxes collected by the state and municipalities. However, the analyst's projections also included a significant uptick in sales taxes if renters were able to direct discretionary income toward other purchases.

Another argument straight out of the cowboy capitalist playbook is that any rental regulations might tend to slow the construction of new housing units in the state. The McKinsey Global Institute estimates that the state's housing crisis is fueled by a shortage of at least two million units, and any measures that potentially limit how much rent can be charged may make building new units less appealing to developers and investors.

But wait a minute. Costa-Hawkins has given developers and investors more than twenty years to close the housing gap unfettered by rent controls, and instead that gap has only widened and rents have continued to soar.

All of this begs an interesting question. California's rate of homeownership has trended downward since a high of 60 percent in 1960, and a short-lived spike to 60.7 percent in 2006. It's now pegged at 55.1 percent, which is

an uptick from 53.1 percent a year earlier. If you subtract "underwater" homeowners who essentially have no equity in their property, homeownership would hover much closer to 50 percent.

Across the state, then, there is roughly a 1:1 parity between homeowners and renters. In Long Beach, it's more of a 40-60 split, homeowners to renters. How then—and this may seem obviously rhetorical—did Proposition 10 fail by a 60-40 margin? That means at the very least roughly 10 percent of Californians voted against their own interests, and in Long Beach closer to 20 percent of residents did the same.

Once again, the obvious reason is money. Opponents outspent proponents by a 3:1 margin: \$75 million to \$25 million. Clearly, Proposition 10 worried some deep pockets. But there's more to be concerned with than the blinding avarice of California apartment owners. No society of any size has been able to sustain itself when the living conditions of the majority of citizens are so depraved in comparison to those of the "landed." Adam Smith's notion of a liberal economy still considered unmanaged capitalism as a state to avoid if there was to be equity in the marketplace and if "all boats were to rise." That caveat seems to have been forgotten and supplanted with the neoliberal mantra that inequality is unavoidable and any effort to ameliorate it simply an economic inefficiency. Unfortunately, those inefficiencies have names, children, and dreams that contribute to what makes living here why we all live here. You're California dreamin' if you don't think we need the folks we're displacing.

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# TRUMP AND AMERICA'S FIETY FIRST STATE

NICOLETTE KARP

President Trump's relocation of the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in May was an audacious move that recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital and fulfilled his campaign promise. This move thrilled Prime Minister Netanyahu, who responded by stating that it was an "important step towards peace, for there is no peace that doesn't include Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel" (Holmes). But at the same time this infuriated the Palestinian people and officials, greatly threatening the ongoing peace process. Every country of course has the right to choose its capital. But the entire Israeli and Palestinian conflict ultimately leads to the question of which state rules Jerusalem. The United Nations has resisted this move, opting to keep Jerusalem as a split capital in hopes of keeping the peace process alive (Samuelson). The Palestinians are still insistent on maintaining the dual capitals but are showing signs of becoming more accepting (Pollock). The hope is that Trump's move won't scuttle this progress.

The problem is that Trump's political intervention in an already corrupt and extremist political climate might complicate an already divisive religious one. We must recognize that this perennial war originated from opposing religious beliefs. Both the Judaic and Islamic religions have claimed the city as their holiest site for over five thousand years, and the stubborn attitude of religious superiority will persist until one side

backs down and a mutual agreement on how to split the city emerges. The Jews may be indigenous to Israel, but they must accept that Jerusalem is far too religiously symbolic for the Palestinians to retract their territorial claims. The Israelis have shown tolerance on occasion. Holy sites such as The Dome of the Rock are visited by both Muslims and Jews but only the Muslims may freely pray there. In respect of the Muslim community the Israeli Defense Forces agreed to arrest Jews violating this ban (Staff).

Nevertheless, Israel still seeks

**Israel's strengths and superior values in directing this process won't mean much if this situation is not resolved.**

– Nicolette Karp

to establish an undivided Jerusalem. It has long deserved a land of its own but unfortunately Palestinians view its actions as Zionist, and as an excuse to discriminate against them (Green). They point to the fact that they're underrepresented in the Knesset, and their neighborhoods lack the privileges that most Jewish neighborhoods enjoy such as advanced road, school, and law enforcement systems. They have a precarious residency status (Tahhan). These hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Jerusalemites live in constant fear of

losing their citizenship as Israel law demands strict proof of continuous residence. Studying abroad can even disqualify them as well as their attempts to obtain citizenship from another country.

And it's difficult for Palestinians to get citizenship in the first place. Jews may partake in the Israeli Law of Return, which states that every Jew has the right to return to Israel and receive legal citizenship. But Palestinians must encounter a grueling process to declare their citizenship. In fact, the 14,000 Arabs who fled Israel during the Arab-Israeli War in 1948 don't have the same opportunity to reclaim their land (Estrin).

Jerusalemites of course aren't the only Palestinians who have felt discriminated against. According to Al Jazeera, 38% of Israeli citizens are Palestinians who feel forced to live under the Israeli occupation. Those in the Gaza Strip are oppressed by Israel's illegal restrictions over their air, land and water, leaving them with a deteriorating economy and deprived of their own military and trade options. Palestine has no functioning civil government and as a result groups like Hamas have stepped into the

void, all the time blaming Israel for the dysfunction (Gordon).

While Palestine and much of the international community slanders Israel for its aggressive power moves that often issue in human rights abuses, Israel justifies its actions by claiming self-defense (Milne). A country certainly has an inherent right to protect its borders in the face of hostile forces. However, Palestinian terrorist groups have developed a means to secure media sympathy and rebuke its right to defense. According to the New York Post, Hamas terrorists

hide mortars in hospitals, schools, and mosques, using innocent Palestinians as human shields (Board). And Israel is blamed by the UN and the media when it targets these locations.

It should be said that Jerusalem is quite functional under Israeli rule. In fact, if it weren't for the strict Israeli security established in Jerusalem the holy site would descend into chaos as it has in the Gaza Strip and West Bank (Gordon). All religious practices are protected. Christians also value the city for its connections to Jesus Christ who died and was resurrected there according to the Bible. Under Palestinian rule Christians would be severely persecuted (Lee).

According to the Washington

Institute, 52% of the Palestinians living in Israeli-ruled Jerusalem would prefer to be citizens of Israel since they have a higher quality of life and get pension and health benefits. So, if Israel relinquished rule of this area many Palestinians would be stripped of legal rights (Green).

Yet no matter how much more stable things would be under Israeli rule, it is simply wrong to assume that the Palestinians will retract their control of the Dome of the Rock and allow for their capital to be anywhere other than Jerusalem. And if the Palestinians fail to secure Jerusalem as their capital then there doesn't seem to be much chance for a two-state solution in the absence of

compensating diplomatic moves by the Trump administration. Though modulated recently, the riots and protests continue at the Gaza border even as the Egyptian government demanded that Hamas halt the protests (Khoury).

Israel's strengths and superior values in directing this process won't mean much if this situation is not resolved. It's the feeling of "religious superiority" and the refusal to back down or surrender on both sides that will continue this chaos.

Nicolette Karp is a writing student at Chapman University.



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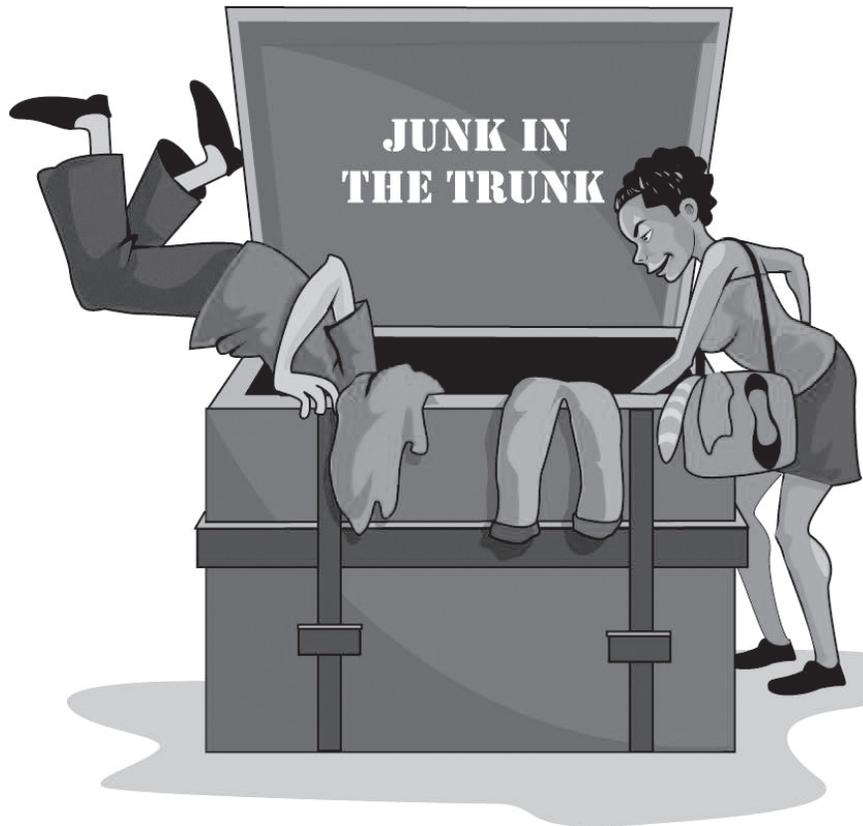


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# AMAZON IS EVERYTHING THAT'S WRONG WITH AMERICA

ROBERT REICH

While America was fixated on the most tumultuous midterm election in modern history, Amazon reportedly decided that its much-vaunted “second headquarters” would be split between Long Island City in Queens, and Crystal City, across the Potomac from Washington, D.C.

What does Amazon’s decision have to do with America’s political tumult? Turns out, quite a lot.

Amazon’s main headquarters is in Seattle, one of the bluest cities in the bluest of states. New York and metropolitan Washington are true-blue, too. Amazon could have decided to locate its second headquarters in, say, Indianapolis, Indiana. Indianapolis vigorously courted the firm. Indianapolis is also a Republican city in a bright red state.

Amazon’s decision wasn’t based on political partisanship, but it reveals much about the real political and economic divide in America today. Amazon’s business isn’t just selling stuff over the Internet. It’s getting consumers anything they want, faster and better. To do so, it depends on a continuous flow of great new ideas.

Like the other leading firms of the economy, Amazon needs talented people who interact with each other continuously and directly – keying off one another’s creativity, testing new concepts, quickly discarding those that don’t work, and building cumulative knowledge.

Technology isn’t a thing. It’s

a process of group learning. And that learning goes way beyond the confines of any individual company. It happens in geographic clusters, now mostly along the coasts.

As the Times’ Emily Badger has reported, the digital economy has been great for places like Seattle, New York, metropolitan Washington, and the other big talent hubs like San Francisco, Boston, and LA. But it’s left behind much of the rest of the country. The result is widening inequalities of place.

For most of the last century,

they’d be separately.

The invention sparked inside these hubs is delivering streams of new designs and products to the rest of the world – including to other global hubs.

In return, the money pouring into these places is delivering high wages, great living conditions (museums, restaurants, cafes, recreation), and unbounded wealth.

Yes, corporate rents and housing costs are skyrocketing, as are the costs of sending kids to school (even many “public” schools are in effect private ones because nobody but the rich can afford to live in the school district).

But the incomes and profits more than make up for it, which is why Amazon chose New York and metro Washington.

As money pours into these hubs, so do service jobs that cater to the new wealth – pricey lawyers, wealth managers, and management consultants, as well as cooks, baristas, and pilates instructors.

Between 2010 and 2017, according to Brookings, nearly half of the America’s employment growth centered in just 20 large metro areas, now home to about a third of the U.S. population.

Relative to these booming hubs, America’s heartland is becoming older, less well-educated, and poorer.

The so-called “tribal” divide in American politics, which Trump has exploited, is better understood in these economic and cultural terms: On one side, mega-urban clusters centered on technologies of the future. On the other, great expanses of space inhabited by people left behind.

Another consequence is a more distorted democracy. California (now inhabited by 39.54 million) and New York (19.85 million) each get two senators, as do Wyoming (573,000) and North Dakota (672,591).

**So as the American middle class disappears, the two groups falling perilously behind are white, rural, non-college Trumpsters, and the urban poor.**

– Robert Reich

wages in poorer parts of America rose faster than wages in richer places, as inventions were put to work in the hinterlands. After Henry Ford invented the Model T, for example, workers on assembly lines all over the Midwest built it.

Now it’s just the opposite. Bright young people from all over America, typically with college degrees, are streaming into the talent hubs of America – where the sum of their capacities is far greater than

Even though Democratic Senate candidates in the midterm elections received 12 million more votes than Republican Senate candidates, Republicans still gained at least one more Senate seat.

The biggest talent hubs – like San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington – also harbor large and

growing populations of poor who have been stranded by the turbo-charged gentrification. These gleaming cities are becoming the most Dickensian locales in the land, where homelessness and squalor mix with luxury high-rises and pricey restaurants.

So as the American middle class disappears, the two groups falling

perilously behind are white, rural, non-college Trumpsters, and the urban poor.

It's not Amazon's business to know or care. That falls to the rest of us.

Robert Reich is Professor of Public Policy at UC, Berkeley, and former Secretary of Labor under Clinton.



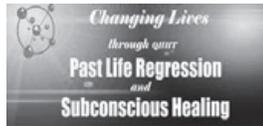
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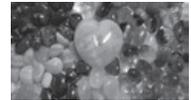
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## THE HUXLEY TRAP

ROSS DOUTHAT

There are times in any columnist's life when you worry about being too much oneself, too on-brand, too likely to summon from one's readers the equivalent of the weary line delivered by a colleague listening to J.R.R. Tolkien read aloud from his Middle-earth sagas: "Not another [expletive] elf!"

The appearance in the same week of a *Politico* magazine essay on how conservatives lost the culture war over pornography and an *Atlantic* cover story on the decline of sexual intercourse makes me concerned about this possibility — that if I weave both pieces into an argument about our culture's decadence, my readers will find it to be a little bit predictable, a little, well, *too much*.

But like Tolkien with his beloved elves, I'll persevere, because the articles are worth the recommendation. For *Politico*, Tim Alberta tells the story of how the internet essentially killed off the anti-pornography movement, by making pornography so ubiquitous and porn use so pervasive that trying to regulate it in any meaningful way seemed like giving orders to the tide.

Then Kate Julian's *Atlantic* examination of what she calls the "sexual recession" looks at a surprising reality of life in the sexually liberated West — the fact that despite (or because of?) our permissive culture and the sweeping availability of entertainments that cater to every kind of sexual desire, the sexual act itself has fallen somewhat out of fashion, along with its usual accompaniments (relationships, marriage, childbearing), while onanism and long-term celibacy are on the rise.

What both writers are describing is a post-sexual

revolution landscape that almost nobody expected — with one notable exception, to be discussed below.

Conservatives didn't expect it because they believed that sexual liberation would inevitably lead to social chaos — that if you declared consent the only standard of sexual morality and encouraged young people to define fulfillment libidinally, you would get not only promiscuity but also a host of dire secondary consequences: Teen pregnancy rates and abortion rates rising together, a pornography-abetted spike in rape and sexual violence, higher crime rates among fatherless young men ... basically everything that seemed to be happening in the 1970s and

tranquilizer, or both. And that tranquilizing effect seems to extend beyond predation to the normal pursuit of sexual relationships, because some combination of Netflix, Tinder, Instagram and masturbation is crucial to the decline-of-sex story that Julian's *Atlantic* essay tells.

So the pornified, permissive post-sexual revolution order today seems much more stable than conservative pessimists expected 30 years ago, with no social collapse looming on the horizon.

But liberal optimists were wrong as well — wrong to expect that the new order would bring about a clear increase in sexual fulfillment, wrong to anticipate

a healthy integration of sexual desire and romantic attachment, wrong to assume that a happily egalitarian relationship between the sexes awaited once puritanism was rejected and repression cast aside.

Instead we've achieved social stability through, in part, the substitution of self-abuse for intercourse, the crowding-out of real-world interactions by virtual entertainment, and the growing alienation of the sexes from one another. ("I'm 33, I've been dating forever, and, you know, women are better," one straight woman in Julian's story says. "They're just better.")

This isn't the sex-positive utopia prophesied by Wilhelm

Reich and Alex Comfort and eventually embraced by third-wave feminists. It's a realm of fleeting private pleasures and lasting social isolation, of social peace purchased through sterility, of virtual sex as the opiate of the otherwise sexually unsuccessful masses.

And the one person who really saw it coming was Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*, the essential dystopia for our times, which captured the most important feature of late-modern social life

**The only  
good news, and the  
best evidence  
that we might yet escape  
Huxley's trap, is that we  
retain enough  
genuinely-human  
aspiration to be  
unhappy with it.**

— Ross Douthat

1980s, when the anti-porn crusade Alberta describes was strongest.

But many of those grim social trends stabilized or turned around in the 1990s, and instead of turning teenage boys into rapists, the internet-enabled victory of pornographic culture had, perhaps, the opposite effect. Rates of rape and sexual violence actually fell with the spread of internet access, suggesting that the pleasures of the online realm were either a kind of substitute for sexual predation, a kind of sexual

— the way that libertinism, once a radically disruptive force, could be tamed, domesticated and used to stabilize society through the mediation of technology and drugs.

True, none of our pharmaceuticals quite match his “soma” — the “perfect drug,” a booster calls it, with “all the advantages of Christianity and alcohol” but no hangover or religious guilt. (Our own versions are more dangerous and unevenly distributed.) But our hedonic forms of virtual reality are catching up to his pornographic “feelies” and his “Violent Passion Surrogate.” (“All the tonic effects of murdering Desdemona and being murdered by Othello, without any of the inconveniences.”) And on the evidence of many internet-era social indicators, they increasingly play the same tranquilizing and stabilizing roles.

Above all Huxley nailed the way that a society sufficiently far gone into hedonism will lose even the language to describe clearly why, say, “a single-use silicone egg that men fill with lubricant and masturbate inside” (a recent Japanese innovation mentioned by Julian) might not be a positive development.

The people trying to argue against porn in Alberta’s article, or the people struggling to articulate their sexual and romantic discontents in Julian’s, are trying to find their way back to a worldview that takes moral virtue and human flourishing seriously again. But they inhabit a society that often recognizes only arguments about pleasure versus harm, and that at some level has internalized the logic of Mustapha Mond, one of the Controllers of Huxley’s world civilization: “Chastity means passion, chastity means neurasthenia. And passion and neurasthenia mean instability. And instability means the end of civilization. You can’t have a lasting civilization without plenty of pleasant vices.”

Pleasant vices and stability: With some technological assistance, that’s the sexual culture we’ve been forging. The only good news, and the best evidence that we might yet escape Huxley’s trap, is that we retain enough genuinely-human aspiration to be unhappy with it.

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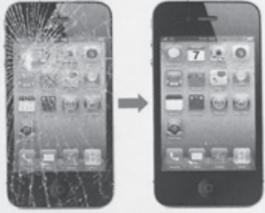
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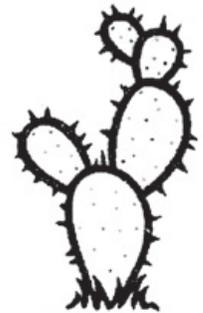
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## WHAT'S IN AMERICA'S FREEZER?

H. CLAIRE BROWN

Last month, America's vast network of refrigerated warehouses held enough frozen whole turkeys to feed every single family in the country on Thanksgiving. At the same time, the country's public and privately owned freezers had 27 million pounds of raspberries socked away for a rainy day. We also had more than a billion pounds of frozen juice concentrate in storage across the nation, and an additional billion pounds of frozen blueberries. That's according to the United States Department of Agriculture's cold storage report, released every month from the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

During a normal month, the cold storage report provides a fascinating snapshot into America's pantry. In May, for instance, 60,215,000 pounds of shelled pecans languished in giant refrigerators across the nation. That's the highest number for the month of May since record-keeping began in 1970. If those pecans were redistributed today, 120 million cooks could use them to make pecan pies—and if those pies were each cut into eight slices, everyone in the U.S. could have almost three.

But ag policy watchers were anticipating June's cold storage report for a different reason: tariffs.

Would our rapidly escalating trade war with Mexico and China, some wonks have wondered, result in huge volumes of unsold meat in American coffers?

That outcome has seemed likely, as Mexico doubled its tariff on U.S. pork imports to 20 percent on June 5th, and China raised the

25 percent tariff it set in April to 62 percent, effective July 6, *Forbes* reports. As a result, experts were predicting this month's cold storage report would show about 2.5 billion pounds of meat caught in the chilly, transitional spaces between the farm and grocery store. The *Wall Street Journal* talked to storage facility staff who said they were nearing capacity and processors who said they were slowing production as a result of the economic shift.

## Would our rapidly escalating trade war with Mexico and China, some wonks have wondered, result in huge volumes of unsold meat in American coffers?

— H. Claire Brown

Now, the numbers released by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) show that meat in U.S. cold storage in fact slightly surpassed the predicted 2.5 billion pound threshold in June. This glut of unsold inventory isn't exactly surprising—it's not just steaks and ground beef that have been impacted by the tariffs, after all. As Reuters reported earlier this month, China had been buying nine out of ten pig byproducts (including ears, hearts, tongues, stomachs and feet) produced

in the U.S. before the tariffs—and for prices higher than those items fetch in the pet food and rendering industries. After the tariffs kicked in, U.S. shipments of pork byproducts fell by about a third in April and May combined. The loss of the Chinese offal market alone could mean an \$860 million loss for the U.S. pork industry.

But even though American cold storage now has enough meat squirreled away to feed every single person in the world a quarter-pounder of something, the current embarrassment of briskets is nowhere near record-breaking. We've faced these kinds of backlogs before.

The country's stockpile of red meat reached its all-time high for the month of June in 1919, the same year a storage tank of molasses exploded in Boston, sending an ooze through the streets that killed 21 people and injured 150.

And poultry reached its June peak in 2002, the same month Americans tuned into both "The Wire" and "American Idol" for the first time. Also that month, Vice President Dick Cheney served as Acting President for two and a half hours while then-president George W. Bush had a colonoscopy.

June 2018 did break some records, though. We now have more total chicken stockpiled than in any other June since record-keeping began, and within that category drumsticks are at an all-time high. Veal reached a peak last month too, as did onion rings.

If the tariffs continue to impact purchasing, a dearth of warehouse space may mean lower prices for domestic consumers. Here's to a drumstick in every pot.

Claire Brown writes for *The New Food Economy* and other publications. [claire.brown@newfoodeconomy.org](mailto:claire.brown@newfoodeconomy.org).

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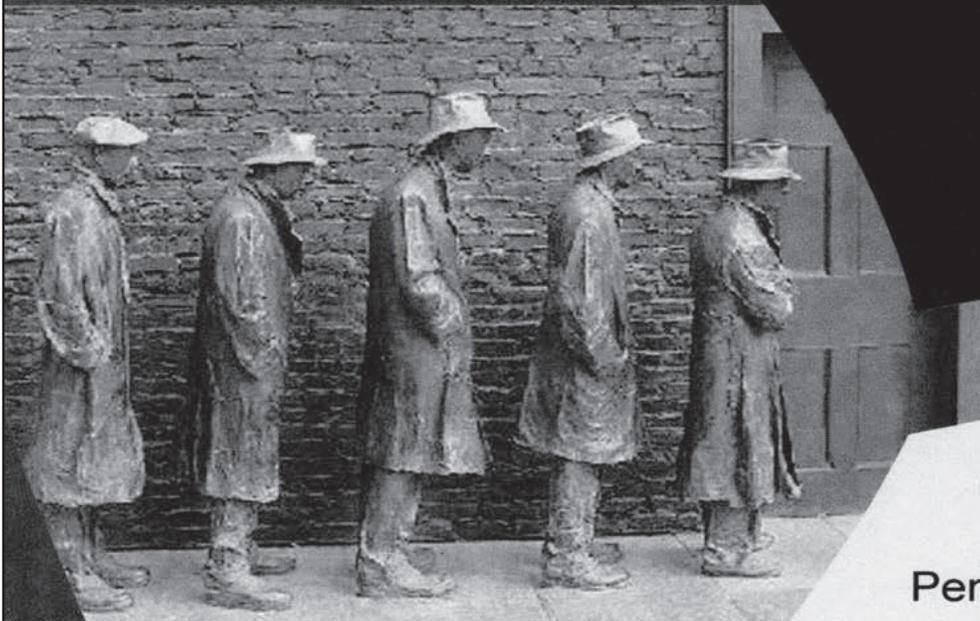
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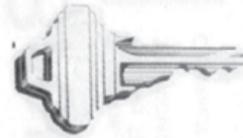
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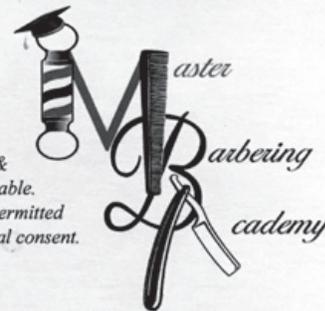


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