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**"Peytch's Place"**

Cover design by Heli Swensson

Photo by John O'Kane

Long Beach is losing one of its great artists to gentrification. Peytch has occupied his studio for 29 years on 14th Street just east of the 710 FWY. He's worked in several genres since getting his aesthetic inspiration growing up in Germany but settled on mobile sculptures when he moved into the space on 14th. Now these art forms are not exactly what you might think. They're not those kinetic objects with hanging rods that play with the principle of equilibrium, what you might find on a pass through the galleries on the monthly art walks in downtown Long Beach. His space is filled with a wide array of exquisitely sculpted mobiles that are in various states of arrested development. Some were mobile en-route to his studio, others were towed in. Peytch's life-long love is with vintage Mercedes cars, treating them like works of art. He's worked on many over the years but prefers those made from the 1970s through the mid-to-late 1980s since they're more durable and less electronically complicated.

- John O'Kane

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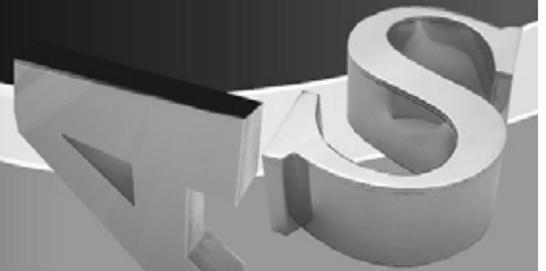


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PEYTCHE'S PLACE

JOHN O'KANE

Long Beach is losing one of its great artists to gentrification. Peytch has occupied his studio for 29 years on 14th Street just east of the 710 FWY. He's worked in several genres since getting his aesthetic inspiration growing up in Germany but settled on mobile sculptures when he moved into the space on 14th. Now these art forms are not exactly what you might think. They're not those kinetic objects with hanging rods that play with the principle of equilibrium, what you might find on a pass through the galleries on the monthly art walks in downtown Long Beach. His space is filled with a wide array of exquisitely sculpted mobiles that are in various states of arrested development. Some were mobile en-route to his studio, others were towed in.

Peytch's life-long love is with vintage Mercedes cars, treating them like works of art. He's worked on many over the years but prefers those made from the 1970s through the mid-to-late 1980s since they're more durable and less electronically complicated. This is also a stretch that nurtured his formative years and which most nostalgia-driven consumers of pre-owned German quality are driven to. The streets of Long Beach are filled with these marvels, their owners members of a virtual subculture who acknowledge each other with nods, waves and honks. Most find their way to Peytch's place.

Its suite of workspaces truly conjures an artist's studio, one where the creator lives with his work, thoroughly cohabits with his materials, the stacks, clusters, mounds, and layers of substances that will be processed into product. It's no state-of-the-art ultra-efficient techno-repair palace where the proprietors adhere to a set schedule and everything is in its place, catalogued and measured and slotted like in some military installation.

Artists simply don't thrive in this kind of environment. Peytch is surely an efficient worker but passion playfully delivers his results in a space that's raw and random. The mass of parts---generators, hoses, wheels, wrenches, lug-bolts, brake pads, motor mounts, etc.---can be left exposed in their everyday clutter, easily retrievable at a moment's notice according to his "method," the ability

to scan the inventory quickly and recognize the item he needs (not unlike the power to pick out relevant words on a page thoughtfully read). You get the feeling he eats this kind of challenge up.

If he should not find what he needs the creative instinct really kicks in. He scours the area for parts that are close enough to warrant some customizing, using whatever materials he can to collage the vehicle back to health. The great tradition of German engineering that gave us these marvels demands that parts be precisely measured, otherwise the whole system might be damaged. Trimming a hose to fit might keep the machine running smooth for a good while but it will likely need to be replaced well before its time and even possibly affect the functioning of another part in due course. But Peytch has mastered the nuances of size and shape. One day he needed to replace a fuel filter on a 1983 Diesel but he didn't have this particular one so he scrounged around and found one from a 1984 to make the appropriate modifications.

He prides himself on the ability to get the vehicle in good enough shape that it will not need servicing for quite some time. He's apparently not satisfied unless he can repair the vehicle so well that its current condition is improved and even approaches the quality of its origins.

It's the artist's temperament to never accept the existent!

And this means to always improvise. On another day he found a small part he needed that had languished in a nearby stash, but the encrustations from its years of obscurity had to be removed so he rummaged through the trash and found a plastic container, pulled out his pocket knife and sculpted the perfect receptacle for marinating the part in baking soda.

Peytch's creative atmosphere encourages multitasking, the time for diversions and interruptions, impromptu chats with clients and visitors who drop in, especially those with emergencies, and time to explain to a customer why the work was done. We can all relate to being brushed-off by our doctor or a repair person with phrases that betray the anxiety of having to spend precious time making you feel assured about what the problem really was that you brought to them, urging you through the exit with the consolation that they're the expert and not to worry!

Peytch the expert is the Tony Romo of car repair. He overcompensates for all the pundits that refuse to

**Some customers
climb inside the cars
to admire the artistry,
and even frantically
make offers,
but Peytch quickly
shoos them away,
making sure no dinks
or smudges
spoil the canvases...**

— John O'Kane



Photo by John O'Kane

explain why it took four hours to get your car to stop stuttering, or why a routine maintenance check-up led to your need to apply for a loan at the local credit union. Time's not an issue. Take a seat and let him orate about why your transmission is slipping, graphically explain how the configuration of bands works or doesn't work in that mystery box, what likely caused the dysfunction, stressing the need to frequently monitor the fluid level. Or why you need a valve adjustment to extend the life of the car, what a valve is, where it's located, what function it provides in the car's combustion system. You come away wondering if Peytch perhaps got a masters degree in combustion technology at the Free University of Berlin. He pelters you with enough information that you're tempted to take notes and enter the DIY world, even scrounge around for your dog-eared owner's manual at Planet of Books on Anaheim.

If you're not currently in need of repairs, Peytch will likely not mind if you peruse his gallery, the part of his studio for the aesthetically-inclined. Now this is not a space in back or peripheral to the action, a kind of sidelight that Peytch offers to his fans as cultural compensation for waiting out the repair time, stocked with cheese and crackers and rotgut wine. It's sort of hiding in plain sight. Some regulars see it right away but if you're a novice and aren't especially art-minded you can possibly access it when the light changes and you squint, suddenly seeing objects thrown into relief like you've slipped through a wormhole into another dimension.

These objects are the truly vintage variety of Mercedes from even further back in time than usual, exquisite immobile sculptures gracefully occupying space. They need attention, often major service, but for the moment they lie only in potential readiness to be worked on. In fact, the owners are likely in no great hurry to get their vessel running for fear of lessening its life span. They've probably pondered its fate for a long while, relishing its sheer beauty. Hence the expired plates from some time in the Bush administration.

Some customers climb inside the cars to admire



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the artistry, and even frantically make offers, but Peytch quickly shoos them away, making sure no dinks or smudges spoil the canvases...

My 1981 Mercedes diesel developed a serious sputter during the week and a friend of a friend highly recommended Peytch. I called him on Friday and relayed the symptoms. He said it was likely a fuel line problem and graciously agreed to fix the problem the next morning while I waited.

I'm waiting outside his studio with his two loyal employees, Israel and Poncho, when a black Mercedes sedan turns the corner at Oregon and 14th, coming straight toward us. As it approaches I notice that it appears to be similar to my car. The driver parks in tandem to mine and two identical structures face off. He proceeds to inspect mine like he's sizing it up for potential purchase and finally smiles before slipping the vehicle into a lane, telling me that it shouldn't take more than a few hours. I decide to explore the area, perhaps find a café or coffee spot and catch up on the day's news. He says he'll call me with a heads up.

Peytch's place is in a kind of strip mall of wholesale businesses with recently standardized facades, and I quickly discover that the entire area is a variation on this pattern, elaborated with warehouses and home-conversions. The only island of commerce within reasonable walking distance is Dino's Burgers on Anaheim. Its scatter of customers are either waking to the day with monster coffees or finishing off the previous night's dealings with ballast. The Dinosaur burger appears to be the substance of choice. I get the breakfast special and a small Dinosaur burger on the side.

Getting the call after a pleasant few hours of chats and doses of headline news, I meander back to a buzz of activity outside Peytch's place. Several of his



Photo by John O'Kane

loyal customers in waiting are schmoozing it up but a few are animated about the arrival of the landlord, or his representative, who apparently came by to complain about the number of cars parked around the area. This is a common occurrence according to Peytch and the very issue that led to his need to move. His original lease, from 1991, specified that only seven cars could be parked within the confines of his allotted rental space. As his business grew this limitation could not realistically be enforced, but it wasn't until recently when a new owner bought the strip of property. Peytch believes this has more to do with the changing nature of the adjacent businesses whose owners mostly cater to an upscale clientele and don't want his kind of action to taint it.

Anyway, Long Beach's loss is Bellflower's gain. Peytch's mobile sculptures are now housed in his new studio at 10506 Trabuco Street. 562-436-2435

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AMLO SHOWS HOW IT'S DONE

E L L E N B R O W N

While U.S. advocates and local politicians struggle to get their first public banks chartered, Mexico's new president has begun construction on 2,700 branches of a government-owned bank to be completed in 2021, when it will be the largest bank in the country. At a press conference on Jan. 6, he said the neoliberal model had failed; private banks were not serving the poor and people outside the cities, so the government had to step in.

Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known as AMLO) has been compared to the United Kingdom's opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn, with one notable difference: AMLO is now in power. He and his coalition won by a landslide in Mexico's 2018 general election, overturning the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that had ruled the country for much of the past century. Called Mexico's "first full-fledged left-wing experiment," AMLO's election marks a dramatic change in the political direction of the country. AMLO wrote in his 2018 book *A New Hope for Mexico*:

"In Mexico the governing class constitutes a gang of plunderers.... Mexico will not grow strong if our public institutions remain at the service of the wealthy elites."

The new president has held to his campaign promises. In 2019, his first year in office, he did what Donald Trump pledged to do — "drain the swamp" — purging the government of technocrats and institutions he considered corrupt, profligate or impeding the transformation of Mexico after 36 years of failed market-focused neoliberal policies. Other accomplishments have included substantially increasing the minimum wage while cutting top government salaries and oversize pensions; making small loans and grants directly to farmers; guaranteeing crop prices for key agricultural

crops; launching programs to benefit youth, the disabled and the elderly; and initiating a \$44 billion infrastructure plan. López Obrador's goal, he says, is to construct a "new paradigm" in economic policy that improves human welfare, not just increases gross domestic product.

End of the Neoliberal Era

To deliver on that promise, in July 2019 AMLO converted the publicly owned federal savings bank Bansefi into a "Bank of the Poor" (*Banco del Bienestar* or "Welfare Bank"). He said on Jan. 6 that the neoliberal era had eliminated all the state-owned banks but one, which he had gotten approval to expand with 2,700 new branches. Added to the existing 538 branches of the former Bansefi, that will bring the total in two years to 3,238 branches, far outstripping any other bank in the country. (Banco Azteca, currently the largest by

number of branches, has 1,860.) Digital banking will also be developed. Speaking to a local group in December, AMLO said his goal was for the Bank of the Poor to reach 13,000 branches, more than all the private banks in the country combined.

At a news conference on Jan. 8, he explained why this new bank was needed: "There are more than 1,000 municipalities that don't have a bank branch. We're dispersing [welfare] resources but we don't have a way to do it. . . . People have to go to branches that are two, three hours away. If we don't bring these services close to the people, we're not going to bring development to the people. . . . They're already building. I'll invite you within two months, three at the most, to the inauguration of the first branches because they're

already working, they're getting the land ... because we have to do it quickly."

The president said the 10 billion pesos (\$530.4 million) needed to build the new branches would come from government savings; and that 5 million had already been transferred to the Banco del Bienestar, which would pass the funds to the Secretariat of Defense, whose engineers were responsible for construction. The military will also be used to transport physical funds to the branches for welfare payments. AMLO added, "They are helping me. They are propping me up. The military

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"Welfare Bank").**

– Ellen Brown

has behaved very well and they don't back down at all. They always tell me 'yes you can, yes we do, go.'"

To concerns that the government-owned bank would draw deposits away from commercial banks and might compete in other ways, such as making interest-free loans to small businesses, AMLO countered: "There's no reason to be complaining about us building these branches. ... [I]f private banks want to build branches, they have every right to go to the towns and build their branches, but as they won't because they believe that it's not [good] business, we have to do it. . . it's our social responsibility, the state can't shirk its social responsibility."

Issues With the Central Bank

While the legislature has approved the new bank, Mexico's central bank can still block it if bank regulations are breached. Ricardo Delfin, who works at the international accounting firm KPMG, told the newspaper *La Razon* that if the money to fund the bank comes from a loan from the federal government rather than from capital, it will adversely affect the bank's "Capitalization Ratio." But AMLO contends that the bank will be self-sufficient. Funding for construction will come from federal savings from other programs, and the bank's operating expenses will be covered by small commissions paid on each transaction by customers, most of whom are welfare recipients. Branches will be built on land owned by the government or donated, and software companies have offered to advise for free.

About the central bank, he said: "We're going to speak with those from the Bank of México respecting the autonomy of the Bank of México. We have to educate them because for them this is an anachronism, even sacrilege, because they have other ideas. But we've arrived here [in government] after telling the people that the neoliberal economic policy was going to change. . . . There shouldn't be obstacles. How is the Bank of México going to stop us from having a [bank] branch that disperses resources in favor of the people? What damage does that do? Whom does it harm?"

AMLO has repeatedly promised not to interfere in the business of the central bank, which has been autonomous for the past quarter of a century. But he has also said that he would like its mandate expanded from just preserving the value of the peso by fighting inflation to include fostering growth. The concern, according to the *Financial Times*, is that he might use the central bank to fund government programs, following in the footsteps of Argentina's former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, "whose heterodox policies led to high inflation and, many economists believe, the country's current crisis."

Mark Weisbrot counters in *The New York Times* that Argentina's problems were caused, not by printing money to fund domestic development, but by a massive foreign debt. Hyperinflation actually happened under Fernández de Kirchner's successor, President Mauricio Macri, who replaced her in 2015. The public debt grew

from 53% to more than 86% of GDP, inflation soared from 18% to 54%, short-term interest rates shot up to 75%, and poverty increased from 27% to 40%.

In an upset election in August 2019, the outraged Argentinian public re-elected Fernández de Kirchner as vice president and her former head of the cabinet of ministers as president, restoring the 12-year Kirchner legacy begun by her husband, Nestor Kirchner, in 2003 and considered by Weisbrot to be among the most successful presidencies in the Western Hemisphere.

More appropriate than Argentina as a model for what can be achieved by a government working in partnership with its central bank is that of Japan, where Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has funded his stimulus programs by selling government bonds directly to the Bank of Japan. The BOJ now holds nearly 50% of the government's debt, yet consumer price inflation remains low — so low that the BOJ cannot get the figure up even to its 2% target.

Other Funding Options

AMLO is unlikely to go that route, because he has vowed not to interfere with the central bank; but analysts say he needs to introduce some sort of economic stimulus, because Mexico's GDP has slipped in the last

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year. The Mexican president has criticized GDP as the ultimate standard, advocating instead for a model of development that incorporates wealth distribution and access to education, health, housing and culture into its measurements.

But as Kurt Hackbarth warned in *Jacobin* in December, “To fully unfurl [his] program without simply ransacking other line items to pay for it will require doing something AMLO has up to now categorically ruled out: raising taxes on the rich and large corporations which, not surprisingly, make out like utter bandits in Mexico’s rigged financial system.”

AMLO has continually vowed, however, not to raise taxes on the rich. Instead he has enlisted Mexico’s business magnates as investors in public-private partnerships, allowing him to avoid the “tequila trap” that brought down Argentina and Mexico itself in earlier years — getting locked into debt to foreign investors and the International Monetary Fund. Mexico’s business leaders seem happy to invest in the country, despite some slippage in GDP.

As notes by Carlos Slim, Mexico’s wealthiest man, “Debt didn’t go up, there is no fiscal deficit and inflation came down.” In November 2019, the Economy Secretariat reported that foreign direct investment showed a 7.8% increase in the first nine months of that year compared with the same period in 2018, reaching its second highest level ever; and at the end of 2019 the peso was up around 4%. Stocks also rose 4.5%, and inflation dropped from 4.8% to 3%.

Partnering with local business leaders is politically expedient, but public/private partnerships can be expensive; and as U.K. Professor Richard Werner points out, tapping up private investors merely recirculates existing money in the economy. Better would be to borrow directly from banks, which create new bank money when they lend, as the Bank of England has confirmed. This new money then circulates in the economy, stimulating productivity.

Today, the best model for that approach is China, which funds infrastructure by borrowing from its own state-owned banks. Like all banks, they create loans as bank credit on their books, which is then repaid with the proceeds of the projects created with the loans. There is no need to tap up the central bank *or* rich investors *or* the tax base. Government banks can create money on their books just as central banks and private banks do.

For Mexico, however, using its public banks as China does would be something for the future, if at all. Meanwhile, AMLO has been a trailblazer in showing how a national public banking system can be initiated quickly and efficiently. The key, it seems, is just to have the political will — along with massive support from the public, the legislature, local business leaders and the military.

Ellen Brown chairs the Public Banking Institute and has written thirteen books, including her latest, *Banking on the People: Democratizing Money in the Digital Age*. EllenBrown.com.

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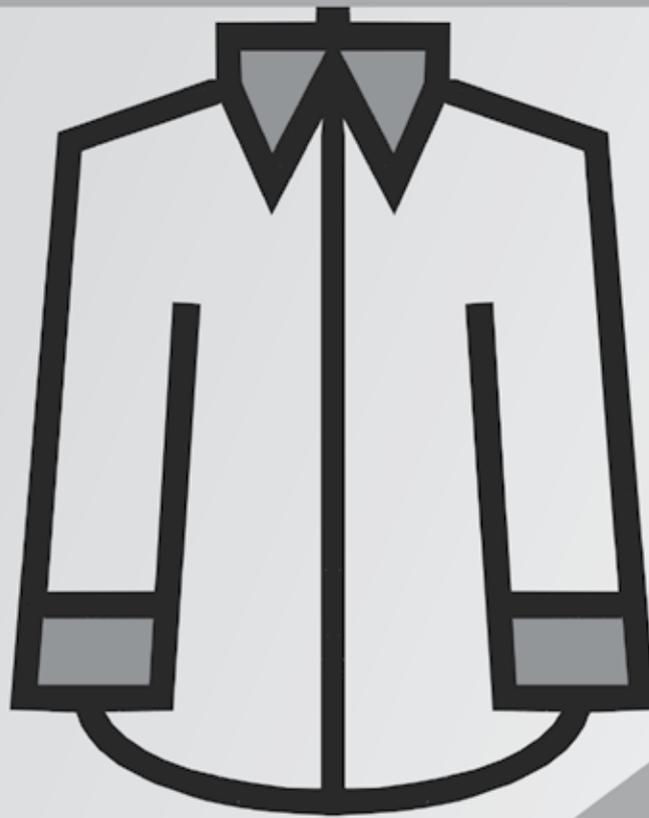
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MYSTIQUE OF THE "BLACK VOTE"

**ADOLPH REED JR. AND
WILLIE LEGETTE**

Many progressives hoped that South Carolina black voters, who have consistently expressed strong support for Medicare for All and other components of Bernie Sanders’ political program, would counter the conventional wisdom that the “black vote” is tightly aligned with the Democratic party’s establishment wing and deliver a Sanders victory on Saturday. Of course, those hopes didn’t materialize. Black voters were 56% of the Democratic electorate here, and Biden received an estimated 61-64% of their votes. Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, the only other candidate embracing a reasonably honest version of Medicare for All, received 17% and 5% respectively. That was the not so good news on February 29.

The much better news, though, is that exit polls showed half of Democratic primary voters in South Carolina supported “replacing all private health insurance with a single government plan for everyone.” Roughly 40% of voters indicated that they saw health care as the most important issue, and fewer than one in ten agreed that the economic system “works well enough as it is.” Indeed, 53% of those voters agreed that the American economic system “needs a complete overhaul.” South Carolina is one of 14 states that refused to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, and medical debt is the leading cause of personal bankruptcy in the state; so it’s not surprising that Democratic voters would be so open to transformative political change in principle.

Yet, of those in South Carolina who support replacing private health insurance, 44% voted for Biden, 29% for Sanders and 8% for Warren. Of those who said that the economic system needs a complete overhaul, 49% voted for Biden, and 22% for Sanders. A similar pattern emerged on Super Tuesday as well. So how do we make sense of what seems to be the disconnect between people’s concerns and how they voted?

Several factors account for it. One is likely confusion or uncertainty fomented by conservative Democrats and the corporate media. Some voters believed erroneously, for example, that Buttigieg or other opposing candidates supported Medicare for All. In addition, the anti-Medicare for All industry front group, Partnership for America’s Health Care Future, spent \$200,000 on non-stop ads that directly attacked Medicare for All, including during the Charleston debate.

A reason for that disconnect that we want to focus on in particular has to do with the complexities of what is called the “black vote.” Nationally, black voters are more likely than others to support a single-payer health care system at 74%, compared to 69% among Hispanics and 44% among whites. And there is little reason to assume that black support for Medicare for All in South Carolina

differs substantially from the national data. Our experience in the Debs-Jones-Douglass Institute’s Medicare for All-South Carolina campaign certainly comports with the national findings. Between December 2019 and the primary, our “I’m a Medicare for All Voter” initiative gathered more than 10,000 pledge cards from South Carolinians, largely black, who indicated that they would vote only for candidates who support Medicare for All.

The disjunction between candidate choices and issue concerns reflects how people are accustomed to making their short-term electoral calculations and how they understand the issues that affect their lives. People take different criteria to candidate selection than to their estimations of the

issues that most concern them. In part that is the result of decades of bipartisan neoliberal hegemony in which electoral politics has been drained of serious policy differences. For more than forty years neither Republicans nor Democrats have sought to address Americans’ decreasing standard of living and increasing economic insecurity. Both parties have subordinated voters’ concerns to the interests of Wall Street and corporations. Therefore, in states like South Carolina Democratic party politics is fundamentally transactional, where people are habituated to making electoral choices based on considerations like personal relationships or more local concerns that do not center so much on national policy issues. In effect politics—or at least electoral politics—has been redefined as not the appropriate

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– Adolph Reed Jr. and Willie Legette

domain for trying to pursue policies that address people’s actual material concerns like health care, education, jobs and wages, or housing.

That narrow view of politics was on display regarding the “black vote” in particular in the run-up to the 2016 South Carolina primary when Congressmen James Clyburn (D-SC), John Lewis (D-GA), and Cedric Richmond (D-LA) denounced calls for free public higher education as “irresponsible” because “there are no free lunches.” When Clyburn endorsed Biden in 2020, he took a swipe at Medicare for All, another issue with strong black American support, indicating that the choice this year is Biden vs. Medicare for All. (It may be worth noting that Clyburn, between 2008 and 2018, took more than \$1 million from the pharmaceutical industry.)

Almost exactly four years ago, political scientist Cedric Johnson published a very important Jacobin magazine essay—titled “Fear and Pandering in the Palmetto State”—prompted by the, if anything, more disappointing outcome of the last South Carolina primary. In rejecting the interpretation that black South Carolinians had voted against their interests in supporting Hillary Clinton, he also rejected the idea of a singular “black vote.” He insisted that “some black people did vote their interests, as they understand them, which shouldn’t be a revelation if you see black people as a group who hold multiple, shifting and conflicting interests.” He then laid out a variety of scenarios under which black South Carolinians would reasonably have voted for Clinton, noting that it’s also important to take into account that their “impressions, preferences, and expectations have been formed in a conservative state in uncertain times.”

Johnson problematizes “black politics” as a framework for understanding either black Americans’ electoral behavior or their class and political interests. He points out that “voting for a presidential candidate... is only a proxy for political interests, which are again multifaceted and shifting.” Black politics, in fact, is an historically specific phenomenon, as Johnson argues elsewhere. It is a label attached to the racialized black interest-group politics that consolidated after the great victories of the 1960s. It is thoroughly a class politics that rests on a premise—and one asserted with increasing intensity as class differences among black Americans become clearer in political debate—that all black Americans converge around a racial

agenda defined arbitrarily by political elites and others in the stratum of freelance Racial Voices.

That perspective helps to understand the vitriol with which Reps. Clyburn, Lewis, and Richmond attacked the Sanders program in 2016. It stemmed from a turf-protectiveness affronted by direct appeals to black Americans addressing concerns arising from their discrete social positions. Such appeals are “irresponsible” not only because they encourage black people to aspire beyond the constraints of neoliberal hegemony but also because those appeals disregard the brokerage role of the black political class and political-managerial class opinion shapers.

The black political class, to put it bluntly, uses the status of “representing” black people to accrue benefits for themselves and elite strata among black Americans. In pursuing such interests, it is not unusual for them to advocate anti-democratic positions. In 2016 the members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and other black elected officials offered the strongest opposition to decreasing the role of Super Delegates at the Democratic Party Convention. Unashamedly, they argued that they as black representatives should not have to run against party activists, and they should not be expected to support presidential candidates that they did not have a role in selecting.

Since 2016 the black punditry has converged around a narrative that Sanders has difficulty appealing to black voters, even as polls have shown repeatedly that his program is more popular among black Americans than any other group. This effort recently hit a comic plateau when the *The Root* produced a report purporting to evaluate the Democratic candidates in relation to a “Black Agenda.” The report, based on criteria crafted by anonymous “experts,”

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ranked Warren first with Biden, Buttigieg, and Steyer also ahead of Sanders. Tellingly, Buttigieg and Steyer offered decidedly class-skewed racial programs centering on entrepreneurship and business development, and Sanders was graded down for having had the temerity to consider mobilizing a primary challenge to “the first black president.”

Another facet of this black politics is that, in reducing all of black Americans’ concerns to race, it undermines our abilities to organize the majoritarian social movement response we need to combat the ever more naked assertion of ruling-class power against all working people in the United States. In 2018, we noted—regarding South Carolina in particular—that Republicans and Democrats shared an interest in making race the most significant fault line in the state’s politics. We recalled political scientist V. O. Key’s 1949 conclusion that the state’s preoccupation with race stifled political conflict and noted the irony that Key’s assessment of how race worked then largely holds today, albeit in a different way because black Democrats are as committed to that race reductionism as are white Republicans. Much as other Wall Street Democrats clearly are more troubled by a Sanders victory than a Trump re-election, the black brokerage stratum is ever more explicit that its main objective is to undermine black Americans’ participation in a broad movement for social transformation along economically egalitarian lines.

The CBC response to Trump’s election brings this problem into clear view. In 2016, candidate Trump challenged black elected officials and the Democratic Party by asking black voters, “What do you have to lose” in voting for him. Responding to the provocation, the CBC presented a report, “We Have A Lot To Lose: Solutions To Advance Black Families In The 21st Century” to President Trump. The Caucus followed this up with the “Jobs and Justice Act of 2018.” Both offered moderate neoliberal solutions to the salient problems confronting the majority of black people. After the press conferences both documents were submitted to the dust bin of history. Such posturing expresses the character of contemporary “black politics.”

This leads to our final observation regarding last Saturday’s primary. Johnson concludes his essay by stressing that our endgame “is not the election of a president but the transformation of the country into a place that is more egalitarian, just, and humane, a society where poverty is not possible and where real freedom is enjoyed by all... The kind of popular pressure we need to advance some of the best of Sanders’s platform—free higher education, postal banking, public works, a single-payer health care system, stronger financial regulation, and so on—cannot be built in an election cycle.”

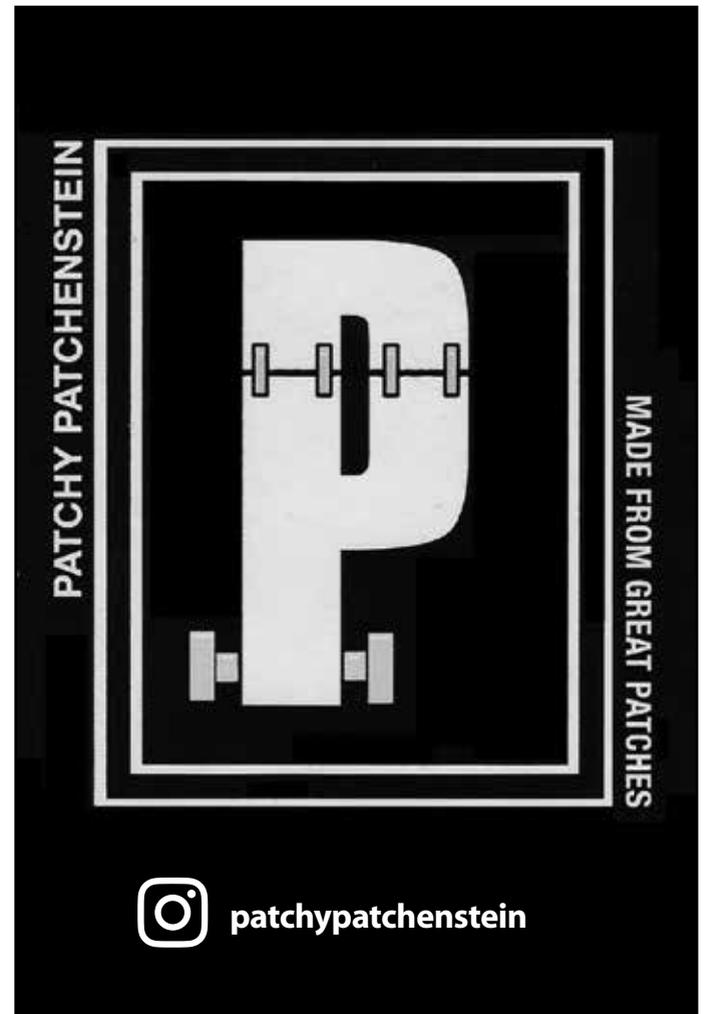
Now we should say: “two election cycles.” As our opponents have made strikingly clear in recent weeks, to whatever extent it wasn’t already, we won’t and were never going to be able simply to elect our way into the kind of just society we need and deserve. The struggle for the Democratic presidential nomination and the room for debate it provides remain crucial, of course. However, the South Carolina results, as well as those of several—e.g., Virginia, where Biden bested Sanders 53-23, and 53% of

voters indicated preference for Medicare for All—of the Super Tuesday states, underscore the need to dig in and build on the potential the Sanders moment has provided us to take up the slow, unglamorous work of building organically rooted working-class politics around issues that connect directly with people’s lives and concerns all over the United States. That approach is what led us to undertake the Medicare for All-South Carolina campaign, for which nonpartisan grassroots political education directed toward the primary was only an initial phase.

We agree with Johnson, who is our friend and comrade, as well that the South Carolina primary in itself is significant really only in relation to the bizarre, disingenuous claim that winning the black vote in particular is the key to being able to win the presidency. No Democrat will win South Carolina in November. And it is worth noting that the same is likely true of several of the southern Super Tuesday states as well; outside the southern states Biden and Sanders were basically competitive.

So here we are. The vaunted South Carolina primary has come and gone; the work remains.

Adolph Reed Jr. is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania and an organizer for Medicare for All-South Carolina. Willie Legette is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at South Carolina State University and Lead Organizer, Medicare for All-South Carolina.



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THE OBAMA LEGACY: REFORM VERSUS REVOLUTION

J O H N O ' K A N E

Those factions of the Democratic party which worked so hard in 2016 to sabotage Bernie Sanders' chances for the nomination have been nervous for some time about the persistent popularity of the progressive agenda. We've been witnessing the blowback from this assault. The arrival of the "squad" in 2018 and Warren's addition to the slate of candidates for the upcoming election are striking symptoms, unthinkable without the Sanders' "revolution." Sanders tapped into the desire for change that lay dormant in the party, above all the pressure to represent excluded citizens but also to reform a process that enabled the sabotage. The power of Super Delegates, entrenched insiders whose choices are immune to actual voting, for example, that pre-decided Hillary Clinton's status. We owe Sanders for the challenge to this archaic practice and the seeding of passion for participatory democracy. Sadly, it took this independent outsider to make this desire manifest.

Nervousness has apparently morphed into dread as establishment insiders now want to expel or repress the influence of anyone associated with this popular progressive legacy that's found tenuous sanctuary in the Democratic party. They believe these "outsiders" have hijacked it, taken it too far to the left. But this is a false charge since the progressives mostly want to restore the liberal foundation that predated the turn to the right ("Demonizing the Few to Alienate and Sway the Many," *CounterPunch*). The real hijackers are the elite that pushed the party ideologically toward the Republican party in the 70s, refusing to acknowledge the popular pressures from a strain of citizenry that will become today's excluded.

Barack Obama's recent comments are a potent

addition to the rhetorical lashing-out at these alleged outsiders, and they're very curious indeed since he was hailed as a species of outsider himself in the run-up to the 2008 election. He warns the candidates that they should stay focused on improving the system rather than radically transforming it, "tearing it down." We are not a country that endorses "revolution," but one committed to reform. This is the authentic American tradition.

A curious read of history! Since virtually every "reform" passed during his tenure is being or has been dismantled by the Trump administration, you'd think he would ally with the candidates who will give the Democrats the best chance to at least retrieve the status quo that he inherited. The ease with which his legacy is being reversed and modified is testimony to the limits of his actions in creating real hope and change. Like Obamacare, his signature retooling of a Republican plan, proposed by the

Gingrich Congress early in the Clinton administration in response to its efforts to pass Single Payer, and realized during Romney's stretch as Massachusetts Governor. He and the Democrats spent nearly two years crafting this "reform," years when they had control of Congress and could have produced at least some form of public option if not full-blown Medicare for All.

No question that Obamacare tackled pre-existing conditions, mandated coverage for more people, and expanded the Medicaid buffer. But then the private insurance system it props up is flagrantly inadequate, the plans it offers guarantees of indebtedness through exorbitant copays and sub-standard, profit-driven services, leaving thousands to die prematurely every year and a country with the life expectancy of

roughly 30th on the global chain. This corporate, overhead-driven system is responsible for the fact that its expanded costs have far outstripped wages (Alex Matthews et al, UC Berkeley Labor Center, 12/3, "Health Care Costs Under Job-based Plans").

Obama celebrated his win as a victory for democracy, a passionate reach across the partisan divide to negotiate and compromise. Unfortunately, he compromised ahead of the process, admitting that Single Payer would be the best option but that we have a private insurance industry that must be party to any solution. This let these private players off for their successes over time

Had Obama absorbed King's full social justice into his policy approaches the Congressional Black Caucus would not have slighted him, relatively early in his administration, for virtually ignoring the economic plight of African-Americans.

– John O'Kane

in blocking progress toward the best solution, giving the adversaries a victory without a fight. His mantra of “hope and change” was not about getting the best after all. Why would the Republicans need to compromise in the face of such advance support?

Obama’s “reforms” of the economy were similar. They worked the financial system in place. But this was what he lambasted in his speeches during the summer of 2008 as the economy tanked, the system the neoliberal “revolution” spawned during the Reagan years and solidified under Bush. This had to be reversed, he claimed. And he was positioned to do exactly that, campaigning for the Democratic nomination at the very moment when the flaws in this system were being exposed. It was the historical opening progressives pined for, but Obama blew it, appointing Wall Street interests to reform themselves (His cabinet appointees were mostly from the establishment, some even from the Bush administration).

Instead of implementing enlightened fiscal policies to kickstart this reversal, these figures relied on the same ole monetary tools that had directed policies in the past and which had encouraged the speculative frenzies that destabilized the financial system. Timothy Geithner, Treasury Secretary in the early years, organized efforts to sanction filter-down economics. The Fed, though supposedly independent, was in lockstep. It offered interest free loans to banks which unfortunately didn’t pass their gains onto many borrowers in the form of debt forgiveness, loan modifications, refinancing opportunities, or new mortgages. A filtering-down strained through government censors! The tight borrowing conditions were justified to defend against the return of instability as the profits of the financial sector soared. Dodd-Frank, the legislation passed by the Democratic Congress in 2010, standardized this exclusion, its formula debt-income ratios over-reactive penalties against legit borrowers that usurped the power of small banks to capitalize their communities and revive the sectors lagging behind in the “recovery.”

The skewed nature of this reform was of course already exposed when the administration passed checks to the big banks right out of the gate. This was nominally about the need to replace their reserves and keep the banking system solvent but letting so many bad actors off the hook for inefficiencies raised questions about whose circumstances were being reformed. Getting a pass on the consequences of the free market mechanisms sent a conflicting message. It meant that these entities were granted privileged positions to compete against the rest of the field, free to gobble up smaller banks which they did with alarming efficiency.

The latter, especially community banks, were more sympathetic with the needs of the lower-income borrowers most impacted by the crisis. So why did *they* have to fail? Why weren’t *they* part of the “reform?”

Such questions were smoothed over by claiming that the borrowers caused the crisis, that they shouldn’t have taken out loans they couldn’t afford. But the overly expensive, guaranteed-to-fail nature of these loans, ignored by these claimants, couldn’t be excised from the

record.

The real tragedy is that we live with this contradiction and its effects now in the form of a significant drop in the percentages of homeowners, as well as in access to capital assets, that have paralleled the exponential increase in the fortunes of the 1%. The widening inequality gap under Obama manufactured a culture of alienated citizens, many who dropped out of the 2016 election, or switched to the Republicans.

However persuasive as an inspirational figure spouting pre-election snippets of economic populism, Obama’s post-election accommodation with power unfortunately embraced the familiar path of “liberal reform.”

The practitioners of this kind of “reform” wield compromise as their ultimate strategy. They’re “problem solvers,” pragmatists who do the right thing and get things done. They position themselves in the center, the space of reason and moderation, where they claim to process the voices from the spectrum surrounding them without bias. This center, however, is far from a neutral battleground. It’s a staging arena where players can mask their sympathies with voting formulas and procedural codes that signal the absorption in credible democratic processes while mostly legitimizing the status quo. This is an attractive notion for moments of extreme polarization when partisan bickering replaces productive cooperation. But claiming this staging space in the center to deliver compromise is not the same

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as actively seeking common ground through a process that challenges the interests working behind the scenes to set the agenda and position the goalposts, the lobbyists who usurp the democratic process. This search is about exposing the imbalance of power and struggling to correct it, compromising only after sustained commitment to principles, refusing to accept the artificial construct of the political center as a given. The positioning in the center in advance leads to skewed “compromise,” the easy accession to the agenda that forced the need for compromise in the first place. It means abdicating common ground and shifting with the power of the adversary, ignoring the movement of the goalposts.

And no question the conservatives Obama courted through much of his administration pushed the goalposts to the right, having little interest in compromise or neutrality. They ignored his overtures to democratic process. In fact, they were not really interested in reform. Emboldened by Obama’s weakness, they pushed to further strengthen the Republican platform crafted in the early 70s. This constituted a virtual counter-revolution, an all-out effort to roll back the liberal gains of the 60s, the variable reforms of the Great Society. These were entrenched by the end of the decade, nurturing the political soil that sprouted Reaganism. This left changes in place that were more structurally rooted than what the liberal-left activists of the earlier era could offer. The sudden collapse of SDS and large-scale movement pressure on the system left a great deal of unfinished business.

And Obama’s enemies across the aisle were naturally more extreme than when the counter-revolution commenced, having a generation of time to convert the effects of this ongoing revolution into our naturalizing center-right order. The Democratic party itself has shifted with these changes.

Obama’s centrist “reform” regime could only ever be anachronistic---lost in the imaginary of some pluralistic model of power---in the face of a counter-revolution in progress this formidable. It mostly served the interests of the entrenched. As Raoul Martinez claims, centrism is the “gateway drug to the far right,” the powerful needing “centrist politics to rationalize and protect their extreme privilege” (“The Centrist Delusion,” *Information Clearing House*, December 12, 2019).

Obama needed to deliver substantial change during his administration. This didn’t need to be radical, or “revolutionary,” merely something that would stick and be difficult to reverse. A revamped, progressive tax code that could authorize a continuing distribution of wealth to approximate the kind of economic populism he touted in his speeches, for example. He needed to counter the counter-revolution with the right’s brashness. That he’s now ascribing “revolutionary” pretensions to those candidates---particularly Sanders and Warren---who want to institutionalize progressive change does a disservice to the democratic process. His demonizing of outsiders who he claims are revolutionaries is part of the problem. He should’ve fought to restore the progressive liberal tradition while exposing the counter-revolutionary aberration.

There’s no surer way to discredit a position or person than to associate them with the sentiments of “revolution.” The phrase “tearing down,” used to suggest what progressives will do if given power, conjures angry, bereted, gun-toting males transforming the system extra-legally, a sure put-off for the average citizen. It meshes nicely with “revolution.” Obama goes after the “outsiders” in his own party with charges of extremism for actions alleged to eventually occur, yet sanitizes his vocabulary with respect to the counter-revolution, the narrative stretch of actions and the actors attached to them responsible for preventing many of the reforms he once espoused. This continuing revolution, sustained through laws and the political pressures of mercenaries working the system, uproots the structures for securing freedom and prosperity while pitching the opposite. Why can’t Obama, and the string of insider Democrats, properly name this narrative?

Failing to name it, it’s hardly a shock that he also fails to specify how these outsiders are revolutionaries. They’re certainly not advocating anything that would justify a tearing down of the system. And this isn’t even their phrase. As opposed to a tearing down, they advocate a serious retrofit that preserves what’s consistent with the progressive liberal tradition but adds reforms that substantially strengthen it. Crafting a progressive tax code, which once existed in this country, and pushing for a living wage, more access to education, and a more humane immigration policy, hardly qualifies as a tearing down. They’re reforms which catch us up with most of the rest of the advanced industrial world. The advocacy of Medicare for All is similarly a reform that merely builds on an existing structure, the mid-1960s legislation that created Medicare. Critics contend this expansion will mean the elimination of health care plans people want, but the real message tends to get lost. The gist of these health plans will be reconstituted within a comprehensive plan that improves care and minimizes financial burdens.

And attempting to do something about the excessive inequality we’ve inherited, the manufacturing of the 1%, hardly qualifies as a tearing down either. The Founding Fathers certainly didn’t expect America to evolve into another aristocracy. A recent Reuters poll shows that nearly two-thirds of respondents support taxing the rich at higher rates to support programs that would benefit all Americans (Julia Conley, *Portside*, 1/10/20.). And there are certainly not that many radicals lurking in the shadows of mainstream America.

Pushing reforms legislatively to the edge and putting external pressure on the system that blocks them, will dissolve the center and help re-build this country, not tear it down. The only entities in danger of being torn down at this moment in the election cycle, according to Leland Nally, are insurance companies, corporate profiteers, climate deniers, and immigration reactionaries (“Obama Is Wrong to Push Democratic Party Centrist,” *Common Dreams*, 11/26/19).

Obama cited Martin Luther King religiously, maligned as an outsider in his day who fought vigorously for full social justice. Unfortunately, Obama slighted his

complete narrative, most evident in the few years before he died, that embraced economic populism. King laid the foundation for critical perspectives on diversity, an expanded notion that linked issues of race and class, the formative concept for the Rainbow Coalition that Jesse Jackson marshaled to challenge the Democratic party in the 80s. And these perspectives constitute a remarkable mesh with the current progressive agenda. Had Obama absorbed King's full social justice into his policy approaches the Congressional Black Caucus would not have slighted him, relatively early in his administration, for virtually ignoring the economic plight of African-Americans. This is the reason why, according to Michael Eric Dyson, the liberal left is having a difficult time reconciling Obama's legacy with what must be done to move forward and win the election (*Meet the Press*, 12/24).

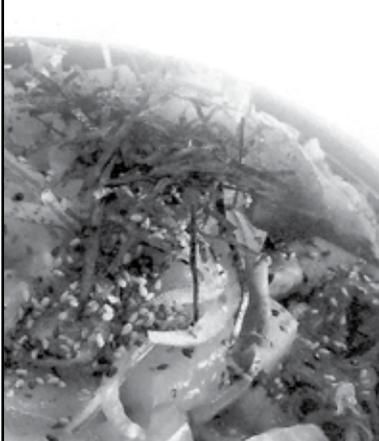
Real reformers are invariably outsiders, and if their ideas slip into the mainstream they tend to be sanitized, their complete contributions to the improvement of society repressed. The resulting amnesia allows the insiders to selectively appropriate their significance and repeat the farces of history.

If one of the liberal-reformer Democrats is elected, how will they script the Obama legacy?

Reprinted from *CounterPunch*.

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TAKING UTOPIAN THINKING SERIOUSLY

MELISSA GORDON

In many peoples' minds, the idea of "utopia" means an idyllic, paradisiacal place; an escape rather than a viable alternative that could be attained in the future. But utopian ideas and movements can exist to serve as powerful motivation and guidance for political change. As a panel showed at the WERN conference in San Francisco recently ("Planetary Utopias, Capitalist Dystopias: Justice, Nature, & the Liberation of Life"), the food sovereignty movement is *grounded* by utopian proposals for how to reorganize our food system around justice.

Many social movements in the 19th and 20th centuries, which were guided by utopian politics and radical imagination, attempted to build a more just world beyond capitalism. But the political and economic crises of the 1970s lead to the rise of a new movement which saw leaders such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher advance many policies that ushered in mass privatization, deregulation of markets, structural adjustment programs, and a full-fledged war on labor. These neoliberal policies, which weakened—and even directly attacked—social supports and social movements, dashed hopes for an alternative world. It seemed as if Thatcher's famous phrase, "there is no alternative," won the day (though it surely helps to "win the day" when you have the forces of two of the world's imperial powers behind you to beat down alternatives, too).

Today, neoliberal capitalism as an idea and way of organizing society is so pervasive that one may still believe "there is no alternative," or, as literary critic Frederic Jameson put it, "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism." But utopian politics are still alive and well, and they're here to suggest otherwise. Late sociologist Erik Olin Wright suggests the idea of "'real utopias' [as] a way of thinking about alternatives and transformation," and references the motto of the World Social Forum (which began in the 2000s as an alternative to the World Economic Forum):

In our political moment, where everything on the horizon feels increasingly dystopian, utopian political visions of what we want the world to look like, such as food sovereignty, are necessary to both ground us and cause us to advance.

— Melissa Gordon

"Another world is possible."

Our existing capitalist food system seems downright dystopian. It acts, as Annie Shattuck said in her opening remarks at the WERN panel, as "a spearhead of global capitalism," opening up new frontiers for capital accumulation and ravaging the planet in its wake. It seems fitting that a utopian proposal such as food sovereignty — emphasizing the food system as an important vehicle for positive change in our society — would emerge to offer an alternative to a capitalist food system.

Food Sovereignty is more than a critique; it is a proposal for an alternative way of organizing the food system. It may not already be happening on a large scale anywhere—as has been historically true of any liberatory proposal—but there are pockets and fragments of food sovereignty in places around the world. In the Basque Country of the Iberian Peninsula, the Basque Farmer's

Union developed a network of community-supported agriculture that buffered farmers against risk and ensured customers their weekly vegetable basket. In Detroit, Michigan, the Oakland Avenue Farmer's Market has transformed abandoned land into collectively organized food production that not only sells healthy foods in a neighborhood where they are not otherwise readily available, but also boosts the local economy by investing profits into the farm which employs 13 people and teaches residents to grow and cook their own food. And in Florida, the community-based labor group, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) has forced some of the nation's largest tomato-buying enterprises

to pay a premium for tomatoes picked by CIW members, helping assure a fair wage for the pickers and promoting the CIW's Fair Food Program.

Such examples motivate us to continue challenging the unfair and unequal way our food system and society are currently organized. When cynics continue to declare no other world is possible, these existing models, as small as they may appear, show us that prospects for a better future are already being lived right in front of us.

During the panel, Maywa Montenegro, a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at University of California, Davis, told the story of the Open Source Seed Initiative (OSSI), a project that works to bring back control of seeds to communities and farmers.

In the current seed governance regime, a few

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large companies and universities own many of the worlds' seeds, maintaining enormous power over farmers and the food system. OSSI's seeds, on the other hand, are part of what they call a "protected commons," where seeds are not owned by a single individual, but are collectively shared. They include on their packaging a simple pledge that the seeds will remain open source and the owner will not restrict anyone's use. This way of governing seeds "respects the sovereignty of local people" to develop their shared seeds in the way that is best for their own community. OSSI has carved out space within the capitalist agriculture system, challenging seed companies by showing a different, more egalitarian way of governing seeds. Rather than feel hopeless at the mercy of the seed giants, farmers can see that there is an alternative – one that is a more equitable, communal, and practical way of governing seeds.

Antonio Roman-Alcala, a PhD student at the International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, Netherlands, followed Maywa by emphasizing that our fight for food sovereignty and justice must use tactics "that correspond to the world we want to live in." As an example, Antonio referenced Monica White's *Freedom Farmers*, which tells of collective agency and community resilience among black farmers in the south. By living in solidarity with one another, in non-hierarchical communities that center shared food and farming, these groups demonstrate alternative possibilities within a sea of capitalism. Living out an embodiment of a more just

and resilient community—though perhaps initially out of necessity— exemplifies a food sovereign world, guided by utopian ideas.

Finally, Food First's Eric Holt-Giménez spoke about his experiences with Nicaraguan farmers who had been bankrupted and had their livelihoods degraded by the Green Revolution. They worked to develop their own food sovereign communities through resistance to the large land owners and oppressive plantations. Many peasant farmers, like other Nicaraguans outside of agriculture, were already set on breaking from the status quo and shifting to a new, more utopian world, so Campesino-a-Campesino, the farmer-to-farmer movement Eric has supported and worked with for decades, fit into the larger Sandinista revolution.

In Nicaragua, there was a movement rooted in a universal vision of a just future. But in the US and elsewhere today, absent of a universalizing vision, we have a multitude of small utopian projects fragmented across the landscape, with the radical Right filling the void in the political imagination. But perhaps food sovereignty can help bridge the urban-rural divide, and give us the guiding purpose we need to keep fighting for a new food system. And perhaps the Green New Deal could be the platform that finally develops political will and cohesion among these fractured movements. Specific structural changes like parity, anti-trust laws, soil conservation, and supply management could help create the foundation for food sovereignty in the US.

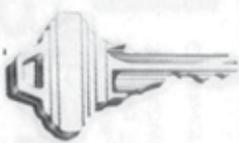
Eric finished the panel by saying, "utopias are what lead us from wrong thinking and lead us to much more clarity about the solutions at hand." In our political moment, where everything on the horizon feels increasingly *dystopian*, utopian political visions of what we want the world to look like, such as food sovereignty, are necessary to both ground us and cause us to advance. Hopefully, we can string together our scattered utopian projects into a mass movement that could build a world that is better for all. In fact, one might even say that joining our collective struggles for a better world is the only—or at least, the best—alternative.

Melissa Gordon writes for *Food First* and other publications.



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J O N Q U E A L L Y

The fight for Medicare for All received a two-handed boost from tens of thousands of doctors recently when the American College of Physicians—in a move described as a “sea change for the medical professions”—officially endorsed a single-payer system as among only one of two possible ways to improve the nation’s healthcare woes.

Representing 159,000 doctors of internal medicine nationwide, the ACP is the largest medical specialty society and second-largest physician group in the country overall after the American Medical Association (AMA).

The ACP delivered its case in a 43-page position paper—titled “**Envisioning a Better U.S. Health Care System for All: Coverage and Cost of Care**”—published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. According to the paper:

Although the United States leads the world in health care spending, it fares far worse than its peers on coverage and most dimensions of value. Cost and coverage are intertwined. Many Americans cannot afford health insurance, and even those with insurance face substantial cost-related barriers to care. Employer-sponsored insurance is less prevalent and more expensive than in the past, and in response, deductibles have grown and benefits have been cut. The long-term solvency of U.S. public insurance programs is a perennial concern. The United States spends far more on healthcare administration than peer countries. Administrative barriers divert time from patient care and frustrate patients, clinicians, and policymakers. Major changes are needed to a system that costs too much, leaves too many behind,

and delivers too little.

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), a leading candidate for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination and the author of the The Medicare for All Act of 2019 now in the U.S. Senate, welcomed the development.

“I am delighted that the American College of Physicians has come out in support of a Medicare for All, single-payer healthcare system,” Sanders said in a statement.

“All over this country, a growing number of doctors are sick and tired of the enormous waste and bureaucracy that exists in our cruel and dysfunctional healthcare system,” Sanders added. “They are sick and tired of spending time filling out reams of paperwork and arguing with insurance companies. Medicare for All will give doctors the freedom to focus on making their patients healthy, not making health insurance executives wealthy.”

**Medicare for All
will give doctors
the freedom
to focus on making
their patients healthy,
not making
health insurance
executives wealthy.**

— Jon Queally

The ACP’s detailed review of the current for-profit system—even with some of the improvements resulting from the Affordable Care Act (ACA)—found that “too many Americans are uninsured or underinsured” and that current spending is “high and unsustainable”—especially as other developed nations show their ability to achieve better or similar outcomes for less while offering universal, government-guaranteed coverage to all.

While it did not say that Medicare for All was the only way to achieve a more equitable, accessible, and sustainable healthcare system, the ACP laid out four key recommendations for achieving universal coverage in the United States. They are:

1. The American College of Physicians recommends that the United States transition to a system that achieves universal coverage with essential benefits and lower administrative costs.
2. Coverage should not be dependent on a person’s place of residence, employment, health status, or income.
3. Coverage should ensure sufficient access to clinicians, hospitals, and other sources of care.
4. Two options could achieve these objectives: a single-payer financing approach, or a publicly financed coverage option to be offered along with regulated private insurance.

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MEDICARE FOR ALL

While acknowledging that a transition to Medicare for All could be “highly disruptive” to the healthcare system, the ACP said “single-payer financing approach could achieve [its] vision of a system where everyone will have coverage for and access to the care they need, at a cost they and the country can afford. It also could achieve our vision of a system where spending will have been redirected from health care administration to funding coverage, research, public health, and interventions to address social determinants of health.”

Medicare for All, the paper continued, could also “achieve other key policy objectives, including portability, lower administrative costs and complexity, lower premiums and cost sharing, lower overall health care system costs, better access to care, and better health outcomes, depending on how it is designed and implemented.”

While the ACP in its backing of a single-payer approach also co-endorsed the more incremental step of creating a federally-administered “public option” as a pathway to universal coverage, Drs. Steffie Woolhandler and David Himmelstein, co-founders of Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP), argue the latter would be an inferior avenue if the aim is to cover everyone while reducing overall costs.

According to an op-ed by Woolhandler and Himmelstein, also published in the *Annals* alongside the ACP’s new position paper, “Achieving universal coverage would be costlier under the ‘public choice’ model the ACP co-endorses along with single payer.”

Unlike a public-private mix of coverage that the public option would represent, the pair write, a single-payer Medicare for All would allow hospitals and doctors to “save billions on billing-related costs” each year, and those savings could be re-purposed “to expand care” to millions for less cost than the status quo.

In a separate but related move to the ACP’s announcement, more than two thousand physicians announced an open letter to the American public, prescribing single-payer Medicare for All, in a full-page ad in *The New York Times* that ran in the print edition on Tuesday, January 21, 2020.

Among the doctors “prescribing” Medicare for All as the only serious solution to the nation’s healthcare

crisis, said PNHP—which helped organize the effort—are towering figures in American medicine” and include Dr. Marcia Angell, former editor-in-chief of the *New England Journal of Medicine*; Dr. Bernard Lown, developer of the defibrillator; Dr. Paul Farmer, infectious disease expert and founder of Partners in Health; and Dr. Mary Bassett, former New York City Health Commissioner.

The full text of the open letter follows:

We are doctors from across the spectrum of our profession. We serve patients rich and poor, in hospitals and clinics, private offices and public agencies.

We witness daily the inhumanity and irrationality of the current health care system. America funds health care more generously than any other nation, and our hospitals and medical workforce are second to none. Yet despite an abundance of medical resources, care is too often meager.

For the thirty million who remain uninsured and millions more whose insurance is inadequate to their needs, life-saving treatment is often out of reach, deepening health disparities. Oppressive costs and the fear of financial ruin amplify the suffering of illness. Meanwhile, doctors and nurses struggle to provide good care in a bad system. We waste countless hours complying with arcane billing requirements and, along with our patients, imploring insurers to fulfill their promises of coverage.

It is time to transform the way we pay for care — to embrace improved Medicare for All.

Medicare for All would curb soaring drug prices and dismantle the wasteful bureaucracy of private insurance companies, freeing up hundreds of billions of dollars to expand and improve care — while ensuring free choice of doctor and hospital.

Vested interests who profit from the current broken system raise false alarms of dislocation and disruption to incite fear of change. They are wrong. Improved Medicare for All would bring welcome relief to patients, lower costs for families and communities, and allow doctors and nurses to focus on what matters most: caring for our patients.

Partially excerpted from *Common Dreams*.



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ABOUT BEYOND BAROQUE

Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center is one of the nation's most successful and influential grassroots incubators of literary art. Founded in 1968, and housed in the original Venice City Hall building in Venice, California, it is a nonprofit public space dedicated to cultivating new writing and expanding the public's knowledge of poetry, fiction, literature, and art through cultural events and community interaction. The Center offers a diverse variety of liter-ary and arts programming, including readings, workshops, art exhibits, and education. The Center also houses a bookstore with the largest collection of new poetry books on the west side of Los Angeles; the Mike Kelley Gallery, which specializes in text and language-focused visual art; and a 50,000 vol-ume archive of small press and limited-edition publications that chronicles the history of poetry movements in Los Angeles and beyond.

Few literary spaces have done more to cultivate innovative art from cultural outsiders, or to shape emerging artistic movements. Across five decades Be-yond Baroque has nurtured the Venice Beats, cradled the Los Angeles punk scene, and provided crucial support to a series of seminal experimental writ-ers and artists that include Dennis Cooper, Wanda Coleman, Mike Kelley, and Will Alexander.

It's legendary free workshops have profoundly shaped Los Angeles literature by helping to launch a number of influential careers, including those of Kate Braverman, Tom Waits, Leland Hickman, Bob Flanagan, Eloise Klein Healy, David Trinidad, Jim Krusoe, Exene Cervenkova, Amy Gerstler, Paul Vange-listi, Michael Ondaatje, Harry Northup, Brendan Constantine, Jenny Factor, and Sarah Maclay.

It's reading and performance series have exposed L.A. audiences to some of the world's most notable writers and artists, often at early stages in their ca-reers, including Allen Ginsberg, Amiri Baraka, Raymond Carver, X, Patti Smith, Viggo Mortensen, Paul Auster, Chris Kraus, Eileen Myles, Luis J. Ro-driguez, Dana Gioia, Hector Tobar, David St. John, Robin Coste Lewis, and Maggie Nelson.

Today the Center continues to provide a vital cultural forum through it's free workshops, reading series, youth programming, and artistic gatherings.

Beyond Baroque's Mission

Beyond Baroque's mission is to encourage the writing, reading, publication, dissemination, and preservation of contemporary literature through program-ming, education, archiving, and services in literature and the arts.

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P A N D E M I C PROTECTION AND PREPARATION FOR CORONAVIRUS

STEPHANIE K. BAER

As the coronavirus spreads in the United States, nurses across the country have said they don't have enough resources to protect themselves from getting sick and hospitals are unprepared to treat patients who are infected, according to a new survey.

Of the more than 6,500 nurses who responded to the survey conducted by the union National Nurses United, only 30% reported that their employer has sufficient personal protective equipment on hand to protect staff if they see a surge in patients with suspected COVID-19 infections. Less than half of those who responded — 44% — said their employer has provided information about how to identify and respond to potential cases of the virus.

"When nurses are not protected, the community is not protected," said Cathy Kennedy, a nurse at Kaiser Permanente Roseville in California, where a patient infected with the virus died this week.

"We also hope that this death will compel hospital management to take seriously our calls for open communication, continuous training in infectious disease protocols and personal protective equipment, PPE, to keep us all safe at work and in turn our wider communities," she added.

COVID-19 was first detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan last December and has since spread to more than 80 countries, including

the United States.

While health officials say the risk to the general public is still low — 209 cases have been confirmed in the US — the virus is spreading within communities and health care workers who have treated COVID-19 patients are among the infected.

Speaking during a press conference Thursday, nurses said there's a shocking lack of preparedness at hospitals, which puts nurses who are on the frontlines

**"When nurses
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died this week.**

— Stephanie K. Baer

of providing care at particular risk.

Only 29% of the nurses who responded said that there was a plan in place at their workplace to isolate patients with possible coronavirus infections and just 19% reported that their employer has a policy to address employees with suspected or known exposure to the virus.

"The results of our national survey of more than 6,500 nurses are truly disturbing," said Jane

Thomason, an industrial hygienist for the union. "They show that large percentages of the nation's hospitals are unprepared to safely handle COVID-19."

The union also criticized the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for not being more proactive to fight the spread of the disease, demanding that the agency direct health care facilities to put in place measures for screening and isolating patients that show symptoms of respiratory illness.

"The CDC has been behind the ball at almost every step of the way," Thomason said.

Now, Thomason said the CDC has been discussing weakening their guidance for health care workers, including recommending surgical masks — which public health experts say don't protect against infection — instead of respirators for nurses providing care to patients with COVID-19.

"We have ample scientific evidence that this is the wrong step to take," she said, citing a report that surgical masks did not protect nurses from SARS, another respiratory coronavirus that spread worldwide in 2002.

"Now is the time to use every possible tool available to guarantee the highest level of protection ...

to prevent the spread of infection, to protect health care workers, and to preserve our capacity to respond to a potentially widespread outbreak," Thomason said.

A spokesperson for the CDC said in an email that there have been discussions "on the possibility of updating standard guidance if supply is limited nationwide or worldwide" but did not specify whether recommending surgical

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masks instead of N-95 respirators was part of those discussions.

Meanwhile, another nurse who is sick and in quarantine after treating a patient with COVID-19 at a hospital in Northern California said in an anonymous statement provided by the union that the CDC has not approved requests from her doctor and county health officials to test her for the virus.

“They said they would not test me because if I were wearing

the recommended protective equipment, then I wouldn’t have the coronavirus,” she said. “What kind of science-based answer is that?”

The nurse said she volunteered to care for a patient who tested positive because she had all the recommended protective gear and training to do so.

The last she heard from the CDC was that it needs an “identifier number” to initiate her testing and that it was prioritizing testing for

people with more severe illness. Only so many samples can be tested each day, the nurse said she was told.

“I am a registered nurse, and I need to know if I am positive before going back to caring for patients,” she said. “Delaying this test puts the whole community at risk.”

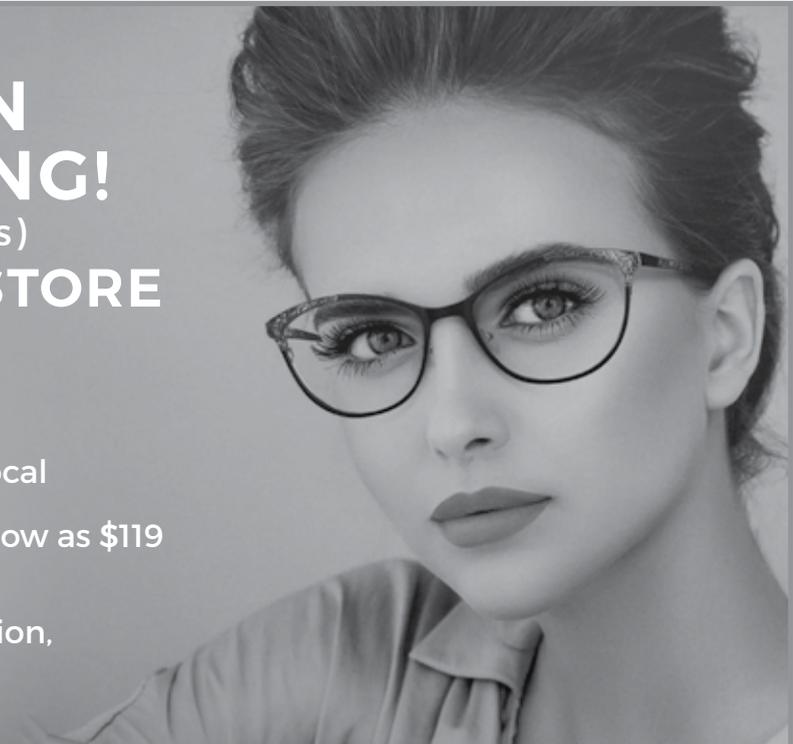
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PANDEMIC THE CORONAVIRUS HOAX

R O N P A U L

Governments love crises because when the people are fearful they are more willing to give up freedoms for promises that the government will take care of them. After 9/11, for exam-ple, Americans accepted the near-total destruction of their civil liberties in the PATRIOT Act's hollow promises of secu-rity.

It is ironic to see the same Democrats who tried to impeach President Trump last month for abuse of power demanding that the Administration grab more power and authority in the name of fighting a virus that thus far has killed less than 100 Americans.

Declaring a pandemic emergency, President Trump now claims the power to quarantine individuals suspected of being infected by the virus and, as *Politico* writes, "stop and seize any plane, train or automobile to stymie the spread of conta-gious disease." He can even call out the military to cordon off a US city or state.

State and local authoritarians love panic as well. The mayor of Champaign, Illinois, signed an executive order declaring the power to ban the sale of guns and alcohol and cut off gas, water, or electricity to any citizen. The governor of Ohio just essentially closed his entire state.

The chief fearmonger of the Trump Administration is with-out a doubt Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institutes of Health. Fauci is all over the media, serving up outright false-hoods to stir up even more panic. He testified to Congress that the death rate for the coronavirus is ten times that of

the seasonal flu, a claim without any scientific basis.

On *Face the Nation*, Fauci did his best to further damage an already tanking economy by stating, "Right now, personally, myself, I wouldn't go to a restaurant." He has pushed for closing the entire country down for 14 days.

Over what? A virus that has thus far killed just over 5,000 worldwide and less than 100 in the United States? By con-tract,

The panic produced by these fearmongers is likely helping spread the disease, as massive crowds rush into Walmart and Costco for that last roll of toilet paper.

– Ron Paul

tuberculosis, an old disease not much discussed these days, killed nearly 1.6 million people in 2017. Where's the panic over this?

If anything, what people like Fauci and the other fearmongers are demanding will likely make the disease worse. The martial law they dream about will leave people hunkered down inside their homes instead of going outdoors or to the beach where the sunshine and fresh air would help boost immunity. The panic produced by these fearmongers is likely helping spread the disease, as massive crowds rush into Walmart and Costco for that last roll of toilet paper.

The madness over the coronavirus is not limited to politicians and the medical community. The head of the neoconservative Atlantic Council wrote an editorial this week urging NATO to pass an Article 5 declaration of war against the COVID-19 vi-rus! Are they going to send in tanks and drones to wipe out these microscopic enemies?

People should ask themselves whether this coronavirus "pan-demic" could be a big hoax, with the actual danger of the dis-ease massively exaggerated by those who seek to profit – fi-nancially or politically – from the ensuing panic.

That is not to say the disease is harmless. Without question people will die from coronavirus. Those in vulnerable cate-gories should take precautions to limit their risk of exposure. But we have seen this movie before. Government over-hypes a threat as an excuse to grab more of our freedoms. When the "threat" is over, however, they never give us our freedoms back.

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JOHN HOLBEIN

The United States has one of the lowest rates of youth voter turnout in the world. The gap between 18-to-29-year-olds and those over 60, a common measuring stick, is more than twice as large here than it is in comparable democracies, like Canada and Germany.

And early evidence from the 2020 presidential race suggests that isn't going to change this year. Youth turnout in the first states to hold primaries and caucuses has ranged from 10% in Alabama to 24% in Iowa. Fewer than 1 in 5 young people cast ballots in all Super Tuesday states. Compared to primaries and caucuses in the past, fewer young people are voting in 2020, while older citizens are voting at higher rates. Overall, the share of Americans who vote appears to be rising.

Recent research indicates that these patterns have fundamentally shaped the nomination process. Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, a progressive candidate who draws high levels of support from young people, is not doing as well as he expected because not enough of his young supporters are turning out at the polls.

Continuing a Long-Running Pattern

So, why don't more young people vote? And what might solve this problem?

In our new book, *Making Young Voters: Converting Civic Attitudes into Civic Action*, D. Sunshine Hillygus and I tried to answer those questions.

The fact that few young people

vote is nothing new. Historically, about 55% of Americans have voted in presidential elections. Youth voting levels have been much lower than that for decades. In U.S. presidential elections, about 70% of voters 60 and up have turned out---which is nearly three times the rate of Americans between 18 and 29.

This pattern hasn't changed much in recent elections. Even in 2018 – a year when more young people voted in a midterm election than in decades – a full 7 in 10 young voters failed to cast a ballot – versus only 4

In interviews with dozens of young people, we found that many of them lacked confidence in themselves and their ability to navigate the voting process for the first time.

– John Holbein

in 10 of those eligible to vote overall. The gap between voters under and over 30 barely budged.

There is good scientific evidence that if young people turned out at the same rates as older citizens, American democracy would be transformed. Elected officials would be more likely to pay attention to the policy areas that young people care about, like climate change or public education; the people elected to public office would look more like the people they represent; and the set of public policies implemented would fundamentally change.

Getting Interested

Many people argue that younger Americans fail to vote because they are apathetic about politics. You might have heard that millennials – people between the ages of 24 and 39 – are generally too cynical, too disinterested and too self-absorbed to cast a ballot.

But this claim simply isn't true for millennials or the very youngest voters, who belong to Generation Z. In the 2016 general election, for example, a full three out of four of Americans between the age of 18 and 29 said they were interested in politics. Though young people who intend to vote are much more likely than people over 30 to be derailed by obstacles.

For instance, young people are often confused by complex and unclear voter registration rules. Moreover, youth are especially unlikely to know where they should vote and to be negatively affected when polling places get moved.

In interviews with dozens of young people, we found that many of them lacked confidence in themselves and their ability to navigate the voting process for the first time. Many told us that in their busy, hectic, and ever-changing

schedules, voting often simply falls by the wayside.

Simply put, many young people want to participate, care about what happens in the political arena, and plan to participate. But they find doing so too big of a hassle to actually follow through on their good intentions.

Removing Obstacles

Electoral reforms that make registering and voting easier, we've found through our research, help encourage young people to follow through and vote.

We're seeing that reforms like same-day registration – which

allows people to register when they come to cast a ballot – are particularly effective.

At present, however, same-day registration is available in only 21 states and the District of Columbia.

Likewise, preregistration for 16-and-17-year-olds – letting them enroll before they might go to college or join the workforce – can also substantially increase the number of voters under 30.

Unfortunately, only 18 states, along with the District of Columbia, allow preregistration.

Closing the Gap

When states implement these types of reforms, they close the gap between older and younger voters by about a third.

Our findings are consistent with early work that shows that automatic voter registration substantially increases the number of young people voting for the first time.

This suggests that reforms that work to make voting easier and expand the electorate have great potential to meaningfully increase turnout for young voters. Reforms such as lowering the voting age to

16 – which places like Takoma Park, Hyattsville and Greenbelt in Maryland and Berkeley, California allow for local elections – offer great potential to bring in the next generation of young voters.

Taking these steps won't completely close the gap between young and older voters, but they do help.

However, many states have gone in the opposite direction in recent years. States like North Carolina, Arkansas and Florida are making registering and voting more difficult through reforms that require photo identification at the polls or severely reduce the number of polling places – which leads to long lines of voters waiting to cast their ballots.

Studying Civics

Civics, taught in many but not all public schools, can also play a role. Proponents for high-quality civics – from the Founding Fathers down to public officials today – have long advocated for an approach that gets young people more politically engaged. Instead, many schools favor what we call “bubble sheet civics.”

They focus on rote

memorization of facts and figures about politics, government and history – the types of things that can be measured on multiple-choice exams.

We find that this approach simply doesn't lead to a high level of civic engagement, such as voting in most elections. Surveys show that taking a civics course in high school does nothing to increase the chances a young person will cast their ballot. And there's no difference in youth voter turnout rates between states like Florida and Arizona that mandate civics instruction and those that don't, such as Oregon and Washington.

I don't think it has to be this way.

We've observed that some schools do go beyond bubble sheet civics. They get teens and tweens to discuss contemporary political issues, encourage students to become involved in civic and political action – such as by having them help eligible citizens to register and to vote – and help their classmates register or preregister. They also practice voting in symbolic elections. Going that route can make a big difference.

John Holbein writes for *The Conversation* and other publications.



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YOUTH TURNOUT IS LOW BECAUSE OF REALITY TV

BOBBY LEWIS

On March 11, Fox Nation host Tomi Lahren went on *Fox & Friends* to blame the low youth turnout in the recent Democratic primary elections on the ABC reality show *The Bachelor*. Lahren suggested that young voters “looking for a freebie or a handout” can’t be counted on to vote, because it’s not “glitzy and glamorous” enough to peel them away from a *Bachelor* season finale, Twitter, or alcohol.

Lahren’s complete ignorance of youth voter suppression, fashioned into holier-than-thou insults by the 27-year-old talking head, was enthusiastically received by the *Fox & Friends* hosts. Ainsley Earhardt added that young people could have also been too busy making guacamole and buying Coca-Cola to vote, and Brian Kilmeade complained that “We’re not asking you to give up 12 hours, just 12 minutes.”

On the same primary election night, there were multiple reports of long lines at collegiate polling places, with at least one voter having to exit the line before voting because the wait was too long. Quinton Lucas, the Mayor of Kansas City, MO, was even turned away from his own polling place despite previously voting for himself four times; he later found out that a worker had entered his name into the system as “Lucan Quinton.” The Super Tuesday Democratic primary contests were also plagued by extremely long lines, with one man having to wait almost seven hours before voting at Texas Southern University.

In October 2019, *The New York Times* reported on nationwide efforts to suppress the youth vote, led

by Republicans with the clear intent of reducing the Democratic vote. GOP legislators closed many polling places heavily used by young voters in the 2018 midterms, after they helped Democrats take back the House of Representatives. Closing polling sites on college campuses, despite an increase in youth turnout from the 2014 midterms, overloads the polling sites that remain and directly contributes to the long lines that

figure that?

TOMI LAHREN (FOX NATION HOST): Well, they show up to rallies, they show up for the fun events, of course, they show up on Twitter to support the revolution, but as many of us suspected, it’s very different to support a revolution from Twitter when there’s crowds involved, when you can have your moment in the sun and you can be part of a movement, and when you actually have to go to the polls on *Bachelor* finale night, the two are very different things. One of them takes effort. Which, we know that the Bernie Sanders crowd that maybe is looking for a freebie or a handout might not be the most reliable when it comes to voter turnout. Just a thought.

A I N S L E Y E A R H A R D T (CO-HOST): Think about that, because it’s interesting you said *The Bachelor*. I called my dad; my dad was watching *The Bachelor* last night and we started talking about next Tuesday. Next Tuesday is St. Patrick’s Day. The young voters might not show up on that day either.

LAHREN: You know, Ainsley, I have a feeling that you may be right about that. Again, it’s just showing that the social media activism that’s really propped up people like Bernie Sanders, AOC, and others is not the same as showing

up in real life.

LAHREN: I’m not saying Bernie Sanders supporters or Joe Biden supporters are not necessarily hard-working Americans. But there is a big difference between those who scream and yell and have signs and tweet and get angry over things on Twitter, and those who are actually going to be the type of Americans that want to waste their time on a Tuesday night to go do this thing called voting. It’s a very different thing, especially for young people.

BRIAN KILMEADE (CO-HOST):

That younger generation seems to show up for rallies but doesn’t show up to vote. How do you figure that?

– Bobby Lewis

dissuade voters from voting. Voter ID laws, another favorite conservative policy, also limit otherwise eligible college students from voting by restricting the validity of out-of-state or school-issued ID cards.

But on Fox News, none of that is important, and youth turnout was low because everyone just wanted to watch *The Bachelor* instead of voting.

BRIAN KILMEADE (CO-HOST): That younger generation seems to show up for rallies but doesn’t show up to vote. How do you

LAHREN: These people that show up to the rallies, it's like showing up for a concert. It's showing up for something that you can put on your social media and say, "I was here." But it's not the same as just going to vote. The two are very different. One is a lot more glitzy and glamorous and the other just takes a little bit of effort on a *Bachelor* night, on a St. Patrick's

Day, something that a lot of young people quite frankly aren't just -- not willing to do.

KILMEADE: I can't wait to tell the young generation they didn't have to make a choice, because the polls will probably close by the time the *Bachelor* finale got underway. We're not asking you to give up 12 hours, just 12 minutes.

EARHARDT: They were making guacamole in the hours before. They were shopping for their Coca-Cola.

KILMEADE: You're right. They were crushing some guac.

Bobby Lewis writes for *MediaMatters* and other publications.

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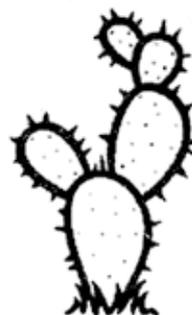
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"I believe in the love; it is all that we have." – Scott Wannberg

It's here,
the virus that eats old people,
and yesterday I hit 66.
Never thought this old flesh could be so appealing.
An uneasy contract for a body shy at heart.

Atlas reaches back, an itch he just has to scratch.
The sky falls.

Icarus flies into the sun on nitro bat wings.
Boom, goes the dynamite!
It's a whole new game of
extraordinary innings.

New borders are being drawn around a state
of heightened emotions.

Everyone in their right or left mind
are emergency clowns painted in primary colors of
angry, afraid and sad.

The elevator to fight or flight
that has no stop button
moves swiftly,
as this swirling miasma of feelings
shifts into electric sleep on a new set of wheels.

Big moments get small in less than a New York minute,
a single week seems like years waiting for your ticket to ride.
We all hang suspended in our collective disbelief.

But there is still kindness in the world–
compassion, civility.
There is love.
Get it while you can,
save it on an empty shelf
somewhere in your heart.
Remember where you put it in case of emergency,
don't be afraid to break the glass.

Here and there,
together and alone,
we have never been where we are going,
although it is guaranteed,
we will get there.

Time abides,
the earth abides,
people too.

So does the blushing heart
that rises with every sun
laughing in the clover.

S.A. Griffin
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