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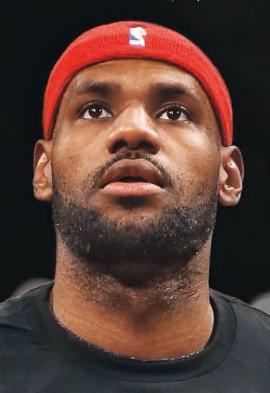
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FEATURES

How Many Chances Do You Get to Be an American Hero?

John McCain the Republican versus John McCain the patriot. By Gabriel Sherman

22

Why Ever Stop Playing Video Games

Life is rigged, play is not. By Frank Guan **28**

As American As Refusing to Stand for the National Anthem

Sports may never be a politics-free zone again. By Reeves Wiedeman

34

EW VORK

FEBRUARY 20-MARCH 5, 2017

INTELLIGENCER

13 Talk

How Trump's surrogates are revolutionizing the language of lying By Christian Lorentzen

16 92 Minutes With...

Glenn Close, back on Broadway for a second turn in Sunset Boulevard By Carl Swanson

18 **Brand Names**

Melania and Ivanka Trump have shed their sex-sells pasts. So now what are they hawking? ByAmyLarocca

$THE\ CUT$

43 American Fashion Confronts America

With the mostanticipated collection of Fashion Week leading the way By Cathy Horyn

CASIL

- 8 Comments

STRATEGIST

49 Best Bets

Four poufs; an all-women salon comes to Bay Ridge

51 Look Book

The marionette collector whose life consists of his toy dog, golf, and cigars

52 Properties

Life in Trump buildings: the protesters, the new frisson, and the extremely clean floors By Nick Tabor

58 Food

Where (and what) you'll be eating next

THE CULTURE PAGES

63 Glass Ceiling

At 70, Sally Field gets her dream role

68 Later, Haters

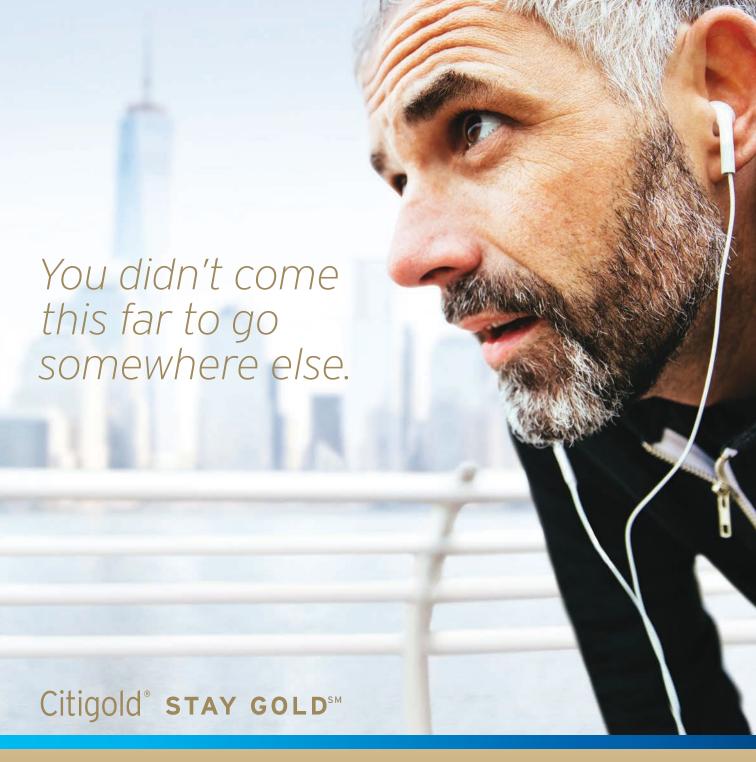
The women of Girls talk diversity, backlash, and the only character to have matured

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Comments





Trump may say that his main goal is to bring jobs and safety to all Americans, but he's actually waging "a culture war sold through chimerical economic and security gains," Jonathan Chait wrote in his latest column for the magazine ("The True Purpose of Trumpism," February 6-19). Stephen Prothero, author of Why Liberals Win the Culture Wars (Even When They Lose Elections), appreciated Chait's attention to this aspect of the president's appeal. "As persistent as America's culture wars are proclamations of their demise. So I was glad to see Jonathan Chait reckon with Trump as a culture warrior," he wrote. "No, culture wars are not just about sex. Neither are they new. The election of 1800 turned on efforts to label Thomas Jefferson an infidel and even a Muslim. Next came efforts to banish Catholics and Mormons from the American family. Like Trumpism, our prior culture wars have been weaponized by anxiety and anger over forms of life that are passing away. What makes Trumpist nostalgia so powerful is its combination of religion and ethnicity-its effort to pit white Christians against everybody else." But Micaela di Leonardo, a professor of anthropology at Northwestern, argued that Chait's definition of Trumpism left women out of the equation: "Trump's misogyny is at least as consequential as his racism-both in terms of voter motivations, and because of the sheer numbers and energy of the multiracial, LGBTQ-inclusive, feminist anti-Trump

demonstrations to date. Let's not forget that American culture wars, since the 1920s, have always been as much about women's rights and 'imperiled' masculinity as about white nationalism." And Judith Zinn, a clinical social worker, took issue with Chait's characterization of Trump's "troubled-adolescent behavior pattern." "This understates the magnitude of Mr. Trump's issues," she wrote. "In my 30-plus years as a practicing psychotherapist, I have never encountered anyone displaying the combination of symptoms manifested by Mr. Trump. Had I met with someone displaying the grandiosity, paranoia, and pathological lying, along with a host of other aberrant behaviors, exhibited by Mr. Trump, I would have deemed that person to be a poor candidate for psychotherapy."

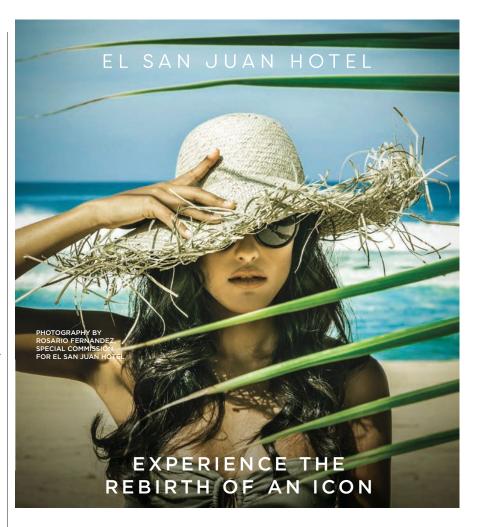
For the "Spring Fashion" issue, Amy Larocca profiled the new editor of Vogue Arabia, Princess Deena Aljuhani Abdulaziz ("The Anna Wintour of the Middle East," February 6-19), prompting this response from Philip Seib, author of The Al Jazeera Effect: "As Abdulaziz and your article make clear, women in the Arab world should not be viewed as if they were aliens from outer space. Their culture may be different than that of the West, but they possess the intelligence and aspirations to exercise positive influence within their societies. During this time when Islamophobes spew mindless hatred, articles such as this are useful in deflating

the myths that too often attach to Arab life." Some readers, though, took issue with how, as Larocca wrote, "Abdulaziz declined to comment on political issues several times over the course of our meeting, insisting that she does not view her role that way." Yet, as commenter kitteneye pointed out, "she would not be the first Middle Easterner to toe a delicate political line while interacting with the West."

3 Lauren Schwartzberg went to Hilton Head, South Carolina, to meet Stan Smith, the mustachioed former tennis champ whom people primarily know as the namesake of the iconic (and oftimitated) Adidas sneaker ("The Kids Think I'm a Shoe," February 6-19). "Finally, a definitive piece on ex tennis pro, Stan Smith," @amanimartin tweeted. "If the sneaker world had a Mount Rushmore, he'd belong." The Wall Street Journal's Jacob Gallagher wrote, "Next time someone says that Kanye is responsible for making Adidas 'cool' right now, just point to this." Many readers backed up Schwartzberg's point that people don't really know the man behind the shoe. @howardblas tweeted, "I have long been asking random people on subway, streets of NYC, etc with these shoes if they know who Stan Smith is?!" And the writer Melissa Malamut added, "As a big sports fan, I'm ashamed I didn't know any of this." But sneaker historian Elizabeth Semmelhack noted that this isn't particularly surprising: "I have often thought about the men behind some of the most famous sneakers of all time; no doubt, Chuck Taylor and Jack Purcell would feel as Smith does, that people simply think they are a shoe ... Although the athletic accomplishments of these two men faded over time, their shoes became, like the Stan Smith, enduring style icons. It is a curious fate that seems to await even Michael Jordan. In 2015, research revealed that a sampling of fourth-graders had no idea who Jordan was despite being fully acquainted with his name-bearing sneakers. It is clear that fame is fickle, but if you happen to get a sneaker endorsement your name might just endure."

CORRECTION: In "A Nominee in the Moonlight" (February 6-19), Carmen Harris, Naomie Harris's mother, was incorrectly identified as Lisselle Kayla, the pseudonym she's used as a writer.

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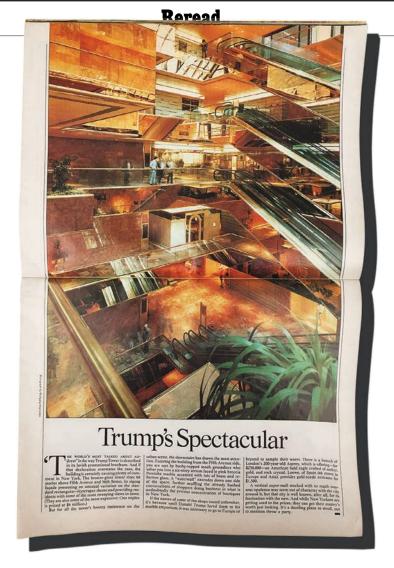
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May 2, 1983

When Trump Tower Was Luxurious

Before the tourists, before the Secret Service. By Christopher Bonanos

The Escalation >> When Trump Tower opened, it rode the fine edge between really tacky and really nice—the New York Times' Paul Goldberger wrote a surprised review saying that he kinda liked it—but there was no argument that it was expensive. Ninety-one of the apartments were over \$1 million, with one at \$6 million, at a time when the typical two-bedroom luxury apartment was about \$300,000. (To see what the prices are like today, see our story on page 56.) Retail space was the highest-priced on Fifth Avenue, \$150 to \$400 per square foot, and Asprey and Cartier had stores in the atrium. Today, Gucci rents the big street-level store, but in the atrium, one organization has the lion's share of space. Trump Grill, Trump Bar, Trump's Ice Cream Parlor, and the Trump Store (one of two in the building; the other closed last year because it was in violation of the zoning code) now occupy much of the retail square footage. That, and a big Starbucks. And that escalator.

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INSIDE: Glenn Close's reprise of Norma Desmond / Parsing the Ivanka and Melania brands



Sean Spicer arguing with the press about the president's reorganization of the National Security Council, January 30.

Talk: Christian Lorentzen

The Rhetoric of Evasion

What Trump's White House has done to the way politicians lie.

"WE'RE PUTTING CONUNDRUMS on top of hypotheticals on top of conjecture here. We take it all very seriously, but I think we're having the same conversation seven different ways, respectfully, and ignoring all the other things that the national-security adviser, president, the vice-president, and this administration are doing together," Trump counselor Kellyanne Conway said on February 13 to MSNBC's Steve Kornacki. At issue was the phone chatter between Michael Flynn and Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak and whether they talked about sanctions relief in the late days of the Obama administration, but really Conway could have been talking about any of the things she goes on television to talk about, because she was using her three favorite rhetorical tactics. First she casts doubt on the verifiable reality of the question at hand, painting the attempt to get at the truth as a Sisyphean task; then paints herself as the polite and respectful one, implying that her interlocutor is the one violating codes of civility; and finally claims

that the reporter is ignoring the day's real events of substance, in this case the president's meetings with Shinzo Abe and Justin Trudeau. In the end, the administration is always the victim, along with the hardworking, disenfranchised American families who are being denied the chance to herald its good works on their behalf. Except by the end of the day, Flynn had resigned. Purporting to defend the resignation while actually lashing out about it, Trump himself explained that "the leaks are real" but "the news is fake."

It would be exciting to be able to trace a lineage for the Trump administration's language from the modernists through deconstruction's destabilizing of the text, but the truth is Conway & Co. engage so much in the simple act of lying that there are more straightforward models at hand, like Jonathan Swift's "The Art of Political Lying" or Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man*. As the administration grinds into its second month, Trump's flacks have made increasing use of a variation of Bartleby's "I would prefer not to": "I can't speak to that." Or, as I like to translate it, "I haven't prepared any lies to respond to that question." The irony of Flynn's termination is that he was fired for lying while working in a house full of liars. Among Swift's requirements for a good political liar are that he "have but a short memory," that he be ready and willing to swear to "both sides of a contradiction," and that he never consider "whether any proposition were true or false, but whether it were convenient for the present minute or company to affirm or deny it." The listener faced with such a liar is best served by abandoning any effort at interpretation or sorting true from false: "The only remedy is to suppose, that you have heard some inarticulate sounds, without any meaning at all." Unfortunately, that doesn't work on Twitter.

Of course, some statements are plainly untrue without quite being lies. For these, we have Princeton philosopher Harry Frankfurt's 2005 treatise On Bullshit and its great forebear, Max Black's "The Prevalence of Humbug." This is how Black defined humbug: "deceptive misrepresentation, short of lying, especially by pretentious word or deed, of somebody's own thoughts, feelings, or attitudes." The administration set an early standard for humbug with press secretary Sean Spicer's first press conference, two days after the Women's March. "This is what makes our country so beautiful, is that on one day you can inaugurate a president, on the next day people can occupy the same space to protest something," Spicer said. "But he is also cognizant to the fact that a lot of these people were there to protest an issue of concern to them and not against anything." This is pure bullshit in that by virtue of the fungibility of "a lot," it falls short of being a lie because it's nonfalsifiable. It's simply in pure violation of common sense. Of course all the protesters were against something: the president. Perhaps there were "a lot" of other people there, too: T-shirt hawkers, Christian preachers who turn up wherever there's a crowd, Nazis waiting to get punched—I mean, white nationalists waiting to get punched. (What's the difference again?) Spicer's pretentious initial patriotic avowal and the twisted syntax of "cognizant to the fact" are tells that he probably doesn't believe what he's saying: He hates the protesters, and he knows there were hundreds of thousands of them and that he was at that instant becoming a national laughingstock.

You get the sense with Spicer that his own awareness that he's bullshitting (not very convincingly) at his boss's behest is the reason for his hostility to the reporters in the room. ("You have been part of the confusion!" he told a reporter for

Five Falsehoods of Trump's February 16 Press Conference (Hat tip to PolitiFact.)

"It was the biggest Electoral College win since Ronald Reagan.

 $The \ Ninth$ Circuit Court "has been overturned at a record number.

"We had Hillary Clinton give Russia 20 percent of the uranium in our country.

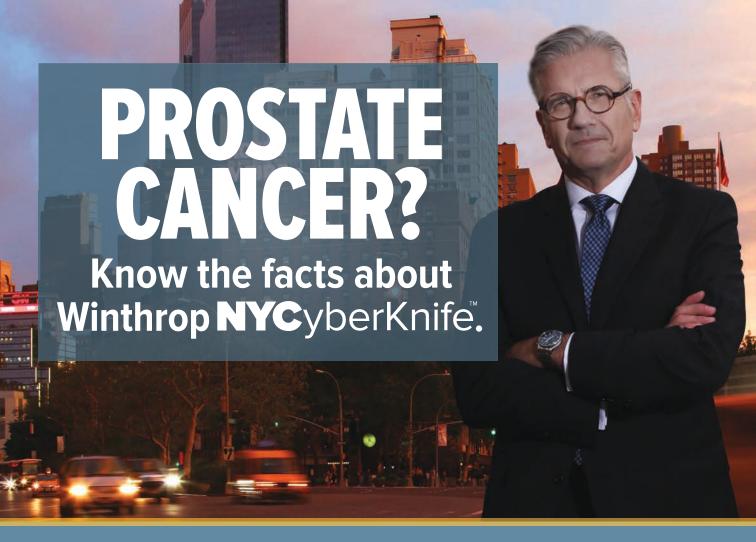
"Nobodu mentions that Hillary received the questions to the debates.

> "Russia is fake news.

NBC News during the briefing later mocked with "the ban is not a ban" on Saturday Night Live.) Conway seems to take pleasure in her evasions, and their boss seems to believe many of the false things he says. It must have been hard for Spicer the day after the inauguration to perform the postmodern two-step of denying that the crowds could be quantified and then asserting that they were the biggest ever. He's been a flack for two decades and must be used to having jobs that put him in closer proximity to the truth or require him to spread misinformation that is harder to expose. He also seems ill-adapted to the age of social media. When asked about the president's tweets about Nordstrom dropping Ivanka Trump's clothing line when he hadn't tweeted about the attack on the Quebec City mosque, Spicer leaned on his own statements almost two weeks earlier in which he'd offered condolences on behalf of the president, who'd never expressed or tweeted them: "You're equating me addressing the nation here and a tweet? That's the silliest thing I've ever heard." This is what your therapist calls projection: @real-Donald Trump is the pure product, digitally mainlined to his base; Spicer, with his constant assertions that Trump isn't doing anything different from what Thomas Jefferson or Barack Obama did before him, is a pawn placed between Glenn Thrush and the facts. Spicer's predicament is absurd.

Equating Trump and Obama isn't the sort of move that White House senior policy adviser Stephen Miller would make. He eschews the evasions and projections of Conway and Spicer in favor of pure zealotry, in a style true to his roots as a teenage right-wing talk-radio pundit. "We have a president who has done more in three weeks than most presidents have done in an entire administration," Miller told George Stephanopoulos in deflecting a question about Nordstrom, Kmart, and Sears cutting ties with Ivanka. This is an instance of bullshit that stops short of lying if for "done more" you substitute "inspired more protests." Miller's preferred rhetorical moves are absolutist: "Sean Spicer, as always, is 100 percent correct and that what he said is true and important. And I agree with it ... George, it is a fact and you will not deny it ... And I'm prepared to go on any show, anywhere, anytime, and repeat it and say the president of the United States is correct 100 percent." Here the speaker's enthusiasm and willingness to repeat the assertion (of voter fraud in New Hampshire, but it could be anything) stand in for evidence, and Miller's "100 percent" catchphrase masquerades as a quantifiable truth claim.

But Miller's more dangerous rhetoric falls outside the realm of bullshit and instead takes the form of a false binary: "This is an ideological disagreement between those who believe we should have borders and should have controls and those who believe there should be no borders and no controls." Miller is a passionate nativist, and here he's groping toward the sort of argument about structural injustice we usually hear from the left, whether from feminists, civilrights activists, or anti-interventionists. In denying that between his proposed poles of intolerance and borderlessness there's a substantial constituency who would favor both a secure border and humane treatment of the undocumented, he lacks a convincing term for the pervasive, impersonal power of his opponents, along the lines of "patriarchy," "white supremacy," or "the military-industrial complex." When he and his colleagues come up with a more sinister label for what's hurting the country than "globalist elites" one that channels universal rage—liberals will be up against something harder to beat than mere bullshit.



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92 MINUTES WITH ...

Glenn Close

Considering Norma Desmond with the once-again star of Sunset Boulevard.

BY CARL SWANSON

great characters ever written for a woman, certainly a woman of a certain age," says Glenn Close, dressed for comfort in all black as we walk to lunch at Cafe Cluny after dropping off her loval white Havanese, Pip, at her apartment. Pip was wearing a collar that read BAD TO THE BONE, and he coordinated well with Close's short, wig-friendly natural coif; they go most places together, it seems. "And now," Close says, "I'm a woman of a certain certain age." And she's back playing Desmond on Broadway.

ORMA DESMOND IS one of the

Close turns 70 in March, which makes her, for the record, 20 years older than Desmond, Sunset Boulevard's opulently delusional has-been starlet turned murderous cougar. She won a Tony 22 years ago for her first turn as Desmond in Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical, when she was only of a certain age.

The new version—as Desmond would insist, it's a return, not a comeback—is a pared-down one directed by Lonny Price. It lacks the original's over-the-top production values, in which Close co-starred with one of those elaborate mechanical sets where entire rooms would be lowered from the ceiling. This time around, there's a 40-piece orchestra in the middle of the stage, which the actors spend a great deal of energy avoiding. "I think I climb up and down more stairs in this one than I did in the original," she says with mock weariness. "In some ways, I think my costumes were so fabulous because they had to compete with the set. And now it's obviously much more focused on the characters."

As it happens, Close kept the lavish outfits, designed by Anthony Powell—a series of Orientalist statement pieces, many in animal prints or featuring tassels or fur poufs—in her personal archive (only taking one dress out, one year, she tells me, for a Christmas party), which came in handy for the 2017 version's limited-budget production: They've just decided to raid her closet and re-use the old ones. "The funny thing is that we had to fit some of them," she says. "It felt so wrong: It was like I was getting into my grandmother's clothes." She even had the monkey mannequin from the original production—Sunset opens with Desmond mourning her deceased simian pal. "He had a nice refurbishment. He has a penis and little balls and nipples. It's fabulous."

The musical, based on the 1950 Billy Wilder film, is one of those Hollywood stories that Hollywood likes to tell itself about how corrupt it is to be in Hollywood. In it, Desmond is not only considered a pitiable throwback at 50-the star Gloria Swanson's actual age at that time-but was put out to pasture 20 years earlier, at 30. Close didn't even get her break in film until she was in her mid-30s, in The World According to Garp. But before you think Hollywood's ageism for women had changed much by the '80s: In that movie, she was hired to play Robin Williams's mother, despite being only four years older than he was.

Part of what made Sunset provocative was that Desmond had taken up with a vounger man. At least, I say, that doesn't bother people so much anymore. Close eyes me skeptically. "Don't you think you have a knee-jerk reaction to that?" she says. "I think it has to do with perception of older women's bodies: 'How can someone young and hard be with someone whose skin isn't hard anymore?'

But none of that is necessarily what interests her most about the musical. "What it says about women is self-evident and almost subliminal," she explains. "What makes it so relevant is what fame can do to people, the cruelty of it. I think it's as accurate a picture of Hollywood now as it was in 1950." She laughs a bit nervously. "I don't know if you should quote me on that."

CLOSE KEEPS her distance from me-literally, because she can't afford to get even a tiny bit sick if she's singing every night. She has often played formidable women and has a particular talent for conveying imperiousness as a cover for some other, more desperate and insatiable, need. Part of this is the natural Wasp reserve that goes along with that Pilgrim jawline, those assessing eyes, the fact that her grandparents founded Connecticut's exclusive Round Hill Country Club. But her history is more complicated than that: When she was young, her physician father enlisted the family in a right-

wing movement called Moral Re-Armament, and Close toured the world as part of its musical cavalcade, Up With People. When I interviewed her a few years ago for New York, she told me, "It was a cult, where everyone was told to think alike, and that's devastating." After she got out, at age 22, "I decided that I would not trust even my instincts. Because I didn't know what they were. Everything had been dictated. But it also gives you a huge sense of looking from the outside in, and that has been very good as an actor."

Back at Cluny, present day, she looks out the window. "You see people in the street and you think, Do you know what you look like? That was my idea for my original Norma: When she looked in the mirror, she wanted to see herself as her youngest and most beautiful self and she was doing whatever she had to do to maintain that illusion. That very, very pale skin and the '20s heavily kohled eyes. And people looked at her and thought, Oh my God, this kind of gorgon. But she sees something else. But that's totally different from the Norma I'm doing now." This time, she plays Desmond as a case study in accelerating delusion, who believes that she is actually turning back into her younger self as her imagined comeback progresses.

Desmond is a camp icon, as is Close: Saturday Night Live's recent Kellvanne Conway Fatal Attraction skit-a 30-year-old bunny-boiler nobody can forget-shows the pop indelibility of Close's best work. Lately, people have been obsessed with the steely manipulations of her character on Damages, the lawyer Patty Hewes, whose plot lines often involve what powerful women have to give up to succeed. (Possibly related: Hillary Clinton saw Sunset recently.)

At the performance I saw, two middleaged gay couples near me, strangers to one another, started talking during intermission: They'd all seen the original production, and while they had their issues with this one's crowded stage ("It's like they're trying to dance in a kitchen," one said), they loved Close. "She's been nominated for an Oscar so many times and never won," said one. "She's an underdog." (It's true: six times passed over.) As the second act gets under way, there is a scene in which Close visits the Paramount lot (67-year-old spoiler alert here), mistakenly thinking her old friend Cecil B. DeMille is interested in her comeback. She is recognized by one of the veteran stagehands, who says, "Let's get a good look at you," and puts the spotlight on her. She turns, with regal assurance, into the light, and the man next to me catches his breath and says in awe to himself: "Now, that's why I came."



 $Clockwise\ from$ top left, Melania Trump in British GQ; Melania in the Oval Office on February 15; Ivanka Trump at $the \, In auguration$ on January 20; Ivanka in Arena magazine.



Brand Names: Amy Larocca

Ivanka and Melania, Inc.

What, exactly, are the First Lady and First Daughter trying to sell?

IT'S BEEN A ROUGH MONTH for the Trump women and their ability to, as Melania's representatives put it, "launch a broad-based commercial brand" that could garner "multimillion-dollar business relationships." The news that Nordstrom would be walking away from Ivanka Trump's clothing brand after it said "sales have steadily declined," was, at the very least, a public-relations blow to Ivanka's brand, which insists that business is booming. And in Melania Trump's lawsuit against the Daily Mail for suggesting that she worked as an "elite escort" in the "sex business," she emphasizes the potential damage to her ability to cash in on a situation (being First Lady) she sometimes appears to only barely endure.

Despite their similar physical presentations (long legs, long hair, big chests, fitted clothing), Melania and Ivanka have sought to establish incredibly different brands, particularly in the years since Ivanka's conversion to Orthodox Judaism. At present, they've got a Betty-and-Veronica thing going on: Melania is the mysterious brunette whose pre-politics work as a model centered on bikinis



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and lingerie, private jets, and what might happen when one gets naked on top of a large fur throw. Once she posed in sunglasses, underwear, and boots with a handgun on the wing of an airplane; in another shot she was in a swimsuit on a white leather banquette inside the same jet with a briefcase full of jewels. The message was always sex-dangerous sex, and nottraditional-matrimonial sex.

After Melania got married in 2005, she was photographed inside her gilded penthouse pushing a gilded pram. If her brand to this point has been about the relationship between sex and money (bathing suits plus jets plus golden rooms plus fur), the new turn was suggesting that the right marriage (or, perhaps, high-stakes, in-your-underpants jewel heist) would enable you to cover your apartment in gold leaf and spend afternoons in nothing but your husband's big tuxedo shirt. Her husband's stated positions on gender support this notion—"There's a lot of women out there that demand that the husband act like the wife ... It's just not me"-and once upon a time it was an idea the Trumps seemed proud of. Back when the family exhibited a sort of in-on-thejoke, gleeful knowingness about themselves, Melania is said to have answered the question Would you have married Donald Trump if he wasn't rich? with "If I weren't beautiful, do you think he'd be with me?" So little has been seen or heard from Melania, both during the campaign and since the inauguration, that there hasn't been much to indicate a new direction as First Lady, apart from one halfhearted mention about the problem of cyberbullying.

By contrast, the current version of Ivanka the Brand is based, oddly, on chastity. Today's Ivanka seeks to present herself as pure. Her social-media posts frequently include her children, always bathed in conspicuous markers of Good Taste. And she has consistently pushed the idea of herself as a "passionate advocate for the education and empowerment of women and girls," though there hasn't been much meat in that sandwich as of yet, just cutting a campaign commercial in which she described motherhood as the most important job a woman can have, then quitting the company she founded in order to move to Washington to support her husband and father in their official capacities, but nevertheless turning up in the Oval Office for photo ops despite having no official White House role. Before her marriage, things were different. Back then, much photography of Ivanka focused on her body, her chest heaving out of dresses and over the boardroom table, or with a businesslike suit hiked up to reveal the top of her stockings, and, once, with a leather



Ivanka with husband, Jared Kushner, in New York City; Melania at Trump Tower.

riding crop in hand. She posed oiled up in a swimsuit on a construction site for Harper's Bazaar, a pneumatic drill placed suggestively between her legs. In another photograph, she lounged on that same site in a ballgown beside topless men in hard hats. It all read like an ad for an office-based porno—"Would you like to inspect my documents, sir?" But since Jared, Judaism, and motherhood, she has sought something else—something about being a modern-day working mother who has no problem raising three children on a series of white couches. She publishes odes to her husband and delights in her young son crawling for the first time inside the White House while she wears a black turtleneck and pants. Her signature Eau de Parfum recently hit No. 1 on Amazon's best-seller list, with the roll-on version not far behind.

Ivanka has had a certain amount of success marketing herself, particularly when the price point is low (her finejewelry line was recently dropped by Neiman Marcus, which cited poor sales). But even ardent fans of the brand itself would be hard-pressed to describe its offerings as original (she is currently being sued by Italian shoe brand Aquazzura for copyright infringement involving the claim that her namesake company has produced direct copies of at least three Aquazzura designs in Chinese factories). Her successes have always been a matter of branding as opposed to a reflection of good design. The Ivanka customer could certainly do just as well at Reiss.

Before the election, Melania's attempts to monetize herself had been rocky. Her

first foray was "Melania Timepieces & Jewelry," a line that launched exclusively on QVC in 2010, which she described as affordable versions of her own expensive stuff (it was all manufactured in China). It was widely reported that the line sold out in 45 minutes. In 2012 came the foray into "caviar-based" anti-aging skin care. which she described testing on her young son, Barron, and also hawked to Dennis Rodman on Celebrity Apprentice. This line began as a venture in tandem with New Sunshine LLC, a beauty company in Indianapolis that also manufactures bronzer for the Kardashian brands and JWoww from Jersey Shore. The owners of that company (friends of Donald Trump's) became involved in a lawsuit against one another-it's complicated and sordid and involves treacherous threesomes-and Melania's face cream faded away.

But the idea that Melania is newly concerned with her ability to make some money in the future raises another possibility, particularly for members of the Free Melania movement: that she might, in fact, be looking ahead to a future where she's consigned to a life dictated by the terms of whatever prenuptial agreement she signed as the third wife of a man who was not vet president.

A post-Donald Melania brand, a sister-actually-doing-it-for-herself kind of thing, fronted by an independent Melania, a hardworking immigrant who got mixed up with the wrong guy before seeing the error of her ways. Now, that's a brand with potential.



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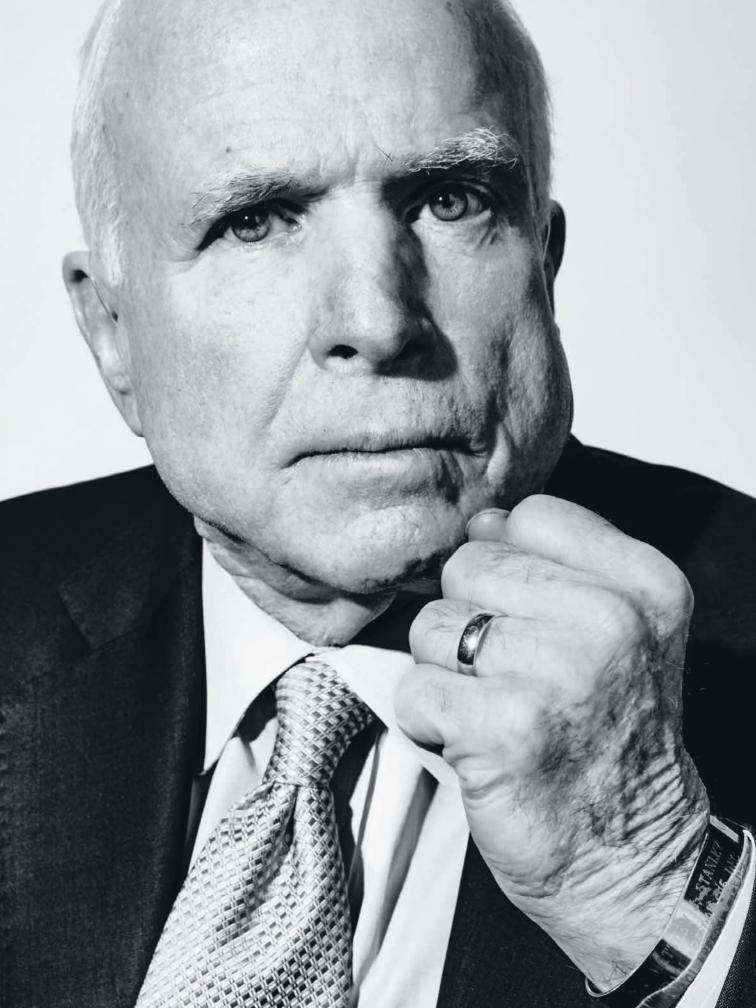
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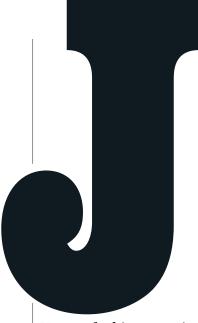
NEW VORK

John McCain (ambivalently, agonizingly) takes on the president.

BY GABRIEL SHERMAN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NIGEL PARRY





OHN MCCAIN was hustling down the hallway in the Russell Senate Office Building with the purpose of an Aaron Sorkin character. It was not yet two weeks into Donald Trump's presidency, and McCain had already become the fiercest Republican critic of the new administration. While party leaders like Paul Ryan were contorting themselves to defend even Trump's most ill-conceived executive orders, McCain had been, for a member of the president's party, on fire: He had criticized Trump for banning immigrants and refugees from seven Muslim-majority countries, for his failed first mission in

Yemen, for his suggestion that he might lift sanctions against Russia; he even took diplomacy into his own hands, reaching out to Australia

to assure the country of our continued friendship after Trump had bizarrely confronted its prime minister in their introductory phone call. By many measures, there is no one better positioned to challenge Trump from within his own party. The socalled maverick was just reelected to the Senate by a 13-point margin; at 80 years old, he has both significant stature and nothing to lose. Still, for McCain, opposing Trump is not a simple matter. For one thing, it's tricky to challenge a vengeful president who has taken to Twitter to accuse McCain of "emboldening the enemy" and "trying to start WWIII." For another, McCain is not a Republican in Name Only; he is a true believer, an elder of the tribe. He does not exactly relish being deemed the loyal opposition.

"What? What!" McCain barked as he ran into a throng of reporters.

"Some people are saying you're Trump's No. 1 nemesis," a reporter said. "Is that the role you're trying to stake out?"

McCain shook his head. "It's very convenient for the media to say that," he grumbled. "If interpreters who worked for us in Iraq are not allowed into the United States, then I'm going to speak up. If that makes me a nemesis of the president of the United States, then you can label me as such."

"They want a scenario of, quote, 'confrontation,'" McCain told me as we stepped into the elevator. McCain was on his way to lunch in the Senate Dining Room with his friend Lindsey Graham, the other Republican Trump critic in the Senate whom many Democrats look to with hope. He found Graham at a corner table in the back.

"A group of 'em stopped me and said, 'Are you Trump's nemesis?'" McCain recounted. "I said, 'That's such a convenient thing.'"

"It's actually boring," Graham said. "There are a lot of sins in life, but the one that's intolerable is being boring. I hate boring."

McCain shook his head at the notion that just because he had the temerity to criticize the president, congressional Democrats thought they could recruit him to their cause. "These are the same Democrats that shredded me in 2008," he said. "I get along with the Democrats, but please, I'm not their hero. They're trying to use us. We will work with them, but have no doubt, their agenda is not our agenda."

Yes, lest anyone forget, McCain and Graham, like many of their Republican brethren, came into this administration almost giddy with the possibility of what could be enacted with both chambers of Congress and the White House under GOP control. McCain said he was enthusiastic about Trump's plans to slash regulations and increase military spending, and he is a fan of Defense Secretary James Mattis, with whom he said he'd spoken nearly a dozen times that week. He is also gleeful about Trump's conservative Supreme Court nominee, Neil Gorsuch, who stopped by the table with Kelly Ayotte, the former Republican senator (and Trump critic) from New Hampshire, who is helping Gorsuch through his confirmation process.

"Judge! How are ya?" McCain said, bolting up to shake Gorsuch's hand.

Graham called across the table: "Anybody who wants to poison the water and adulterate the food is a good man for me!"

Gorsuch and Ayotte gave Graham panicked looks.

"Didn't you hear what Nancy Pelosi said?" Graham asked, referring to the House minority leader's comment that Gorsuch should be considered a lousy pick by anyone who breathes air or drinks water. "She said if you eat it or drink it, he's bad!"

Gorsuch forced a relieved smile, getting the joke.

"The Democrats are just off the reservation. They're crazy the way they're behaving," McCain said to Gorsuch. "As for hearings, I've never seen anything like this. Just keep your flak jacket on. Steady as she goes."

No one knew it at the time, but this congenial lunch was perhaps John McCain's last sanguine moment about the Trump administration. In the two weeks since, he has watched as allegations about Russian involvement in the election—and possibly in American foreign policy—picked up steam, and as Michael Flynn was forced to resign as national-security adviser after revelations that he improperly discussed sanctions with the Russian ambassador (and then lied to the vice-president about it). To McCain, these are red-line issues. No matter how much he likes the prospect of deregulation, the compromising of America's sovereignty was pushing him closer to the barricades.

"The severity of this issue, the gravity of it, is so consequential because if you succeed in corrupting an election, then you've destroyed the foundation of democracy," he told me later. "So I view it with the utmost seriousness. I view it more seriously than a physical attack. I view it more seriously than Orlando, or San Bernardino. As tragic as that was, the far-reaching consequences of an election hack are certainly far in excess of a single terrorist attack."

Now McCain is renewing his calls for a bipartisan select committee to look into Trump's ties to Russia, which could ultimately put pressure on the Justice Department to appoint a special prosecutor-a probe that could get perilous for the president. While he is meeting with resistance from party leaders so far, McCain plans to use his role as chair of the Armed Services Committee and ex officio member of the Intelligence Committee to push for answers. The Trump administration's viability rests on the support of a Republican Congress, and what John McCain is doing, carefully but with growing fervor, could shake its foundations.

THE STORY OF McCain's captivity in Vietnam has been told so many times it can now be rendered in shorthand: 1967, a bombing raid over Hanoi, his plane shot down, both arms and a knee broken, capture, torture, the prospect of early release refused on principle, an ordeal that lasts for more than five years, much of it spent in solitary confinement, during a war that most of the country had already given up on. It's the story that made McCain's political career, that's been trotted out in six Sen-



"I get along with the Democrats, but please, I'm not their hero. They're trying to use us. We will work with them, but have no doubt, their agenda is not our agenda."

ate campaigns and two presidential bids. But it also undeniably shaped McCain's view of the world and America's place in it. "I fell in love with my country when I was a prisoner in someone else's," he said during his nomination acceptance speech at the 2008 Republican convention. "I loved it for its decency, for its faith in the wisdom, justice, and goodness of its people. I loved it because it was not just a place but an idea, a cause worth fighting for. I was never the same again; I wasn't my own man anymore; I was my country's."

McCain believes in the idea of American exceptionalism, that the United States has a responsibility to be a force for good in the world and to confront repressive regimes. The Trump doctrine—to the extent that one exists—is quite different: American foreign policy should be dictated by nationalist selfinterest at almost any cost. During the 2016 campaign, Trump advocated for reintroducing torture as a means of extracting information, killing terrorists' families, and seizing Iraq's oil. He derided international institutions such as NATO and the U.N. and cheered when Britain voted to pull out of the European Union. He praised brutal strongmen from Saddam Hussein to Vladimir Putin, whom he's called a more impressive leader than Barack Obama.

McCain has been arguing for years that Putin's Russia is a global menace that must be confronted. "Russia's leaders, rich with oil wealth and corrupt with power, have rejected democratic ideals and the obligations of a responsible power," McCain said during his 2008 RNC speech. "They invaded a small, democratic neighbor to gain more control over the world's oil supply, intimidate other neighbors, and further their ambitions of reassembling the Russian empire." He sees Russia as a bully with designs on rolling back the spread of democracy in Eastern Europe and controlling the Middle East with Iran, fundamentally threatening America's place in the world. "Putin won't stop until the cost of going forward is too high," McCain told me.

The senator has challenged presidents of both parties when their foreign-policy directives ran counter to his own. In his first term in Congress, he criticized Ronald Reagan's decision to station peacekeeping Marines in Beirut with minimal defenses, which resulted in the deaths of 241 service personnel when a suicide bomber drove straight into the barracks. His battles with George W. Bush over tax cuts, torture, and U.S. strategy in Iraq became the stuff of Washington lore. And during the Obama years, McCain was one of the president's fiercest foreign-policy critics, finding fault with his decision to pull troops from Iraq and his refusal to enforce his "red line" on Syria after Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons against his people.

And yet it would be grossly inaccurate to characterize McCain as a man of pure principle. He's too complicated for that. What makes him inspiring—and infuriating—to people on both sides of the aisle is that, more than most politicians, his political acts span a particularly wide distance between courage and expediency. He is capable of true heroism and conspicuous political cowardice. Over the years, he's flip-flopped on some of his signature issues, from unfunded tax cuts to immigration reform to upholding Roe v. Wade. He's often on the phone, dialing up friends and advisers to gauge their opinions and weigh the risks and rewards of various courses of action.

This is how it came to be that the same McCain who cares so deeply about America's standing in the world also cynically named as his '08 running mate Sarah Palin, thus arguably ushering in the era of Trumpism that he now finds so troubling. He still defends the choice. "The media went after her like I've never seen," he told me. "They said she said, 'Oh, I can see Russia from here.' Well, Russia is not that far from Alaska! They destroyed her in a way I will never forgive them." In private, he has been more candid. "I regret running a small campaign," he told a friend.

Still, according to his advisers, McCain's reaction to Trump is mostly from the point of view of his better angels. To an extent far greater than McCain himself will say, they describe McCain as finding Trump to be a true threat to the republic. McCain speech-writer Mark Salter said the Trump administration presents a challenge to the senator's core values. "McCain has always had empathy and compassion for oppressed people. It affects his views on torture and the way we should conduct ourselves in the world. It's anathema to the Trump-Bannon-Sessions worldview. That's not really Realpolitik—it's fanatical. It's bleak. Take their oil? Kill their

families? It's like a cartoon villain and is against everything John McCain stands for."

The antipathy between the two started during the campaign when McCain criticized Trump for calling Mexicans "rapists," attacking an Indiana-born judge of Mexican descent, and denigrating the Muslim parents of a slain Iraq War soldier. Trump said McCain wasn't a "war hero" because he'd been captured by the North Vietnamese and so couldn't fight ("I like people that weren't captured," said Trump). Trump adviser Steve Bannon's media arm, Breitbart, has gone after McCain repeatedly, even claiming he created ISIS. "Bannon, who I don't know, was clearly doing the stories," McCain told me. On top of that, Trump's financial backers, Robert and Rebekah Mercer, donated heavily to a PAC backing McCain's pro-Trump primary challenger.

Though many expected McCain to take a firm stand against Trump the candidate, he refused to join the Never Trump movement led by Mitt Romney. "Romney was pissing on Trump in a way that almost made you feel bad for Trump," one McCain adviser told me. Some McCain associates said he was worried about reelection; others that it was party loyalty that kept him from publicly opposing Trump. Whatever the case, it wasn't until the Access Hollywood tape leaked in October that McCain announced he wasn't voting for Trump. Like most of the political Establishment, he thought Hillary Clinton was going to win. "We had several discussions prior to the election about his hope he would be able to work well with Hillary Clinton," said McCain's friend Grant Woods, an Arizona lawyer.

When Trump won instead, McCain decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. It's hard to imagine, but McCain saw something of himself in the new outsider president, according to Woods. McCain had been reviled by the party's base much as Trump had been rejected by the GOP Establishment. "Only eight years ago, John was the nominee of the GOP and wasn't the first choice of a lot of the party diehards," said Woods. "He and his allies made the point that he won the nomination fair and square. That's a complicating factor in his mind."

McCain wanted to work with Trump. During the transition, Trump called McCain and asked for recommendations for Defense secretary. McCain suggested

David Petraeus, Mattis, and Avotte. ("She didn't support me!" Trump told McCain.) McCain has supported all of Trump's Cabinet picks-Rex Tillerson, Jeff Sessions, Betsy DeVos, Tom Price, and Scott Pruittsave one, budget director Mick Mulvaney, whom he views as anti-military. "I've always given presidents the benefit of the doubt on their nominees," McCain told me. "With Obama, there were a number of nominees I had concerns about that I voted for. I think elections have consequences."

Beyond that, McCain recognizes the sway Trump has over a significant swath of the Republican electorate. "There is frustration out there that to me is understandable. There's a lot of friends of mine who are older white males that contact me all the time and say, 'Stick with Trump! What's the matter with you, John?' I said, 'Well, we have some disagreement about trade,' and they say, 'You don't care about America!' I try to be nice, but they're fired up."

McCain thinks an increasingly divided nation is a bigger worry than the possibility of the Trump administration's turning into an authoritarian regime. "I just don't think it's possible in our society. There's too many checks and balances. The danger is not Trump perverting our Constitution or taking too much power; the danger is the polarization of America."

Of course, the two dangers are not unconnected: The country's polarization leads senators and congressmen to fear being primaried by more Trumpian candidates, and that in turn leads them to forget all about checks and balances. So far, Republicans in both houses have rallied around the new president's appointments and policies. Even those who criticized Trump during the campaign, like Ted Cruz and Jeff Flake, are mostly falling into line. When I saw Cruz in the days after Flynn's resignation, he stuck with the party line, saying how happy he was with Trump's conservative Cabinet picks. And Flake, though he issued a statement against the travel ban, has been generally supportive as well: "In terms of regulations, repeal two for every one? I'm excited about a lot," Flake told me.

For his part, McCain has wrestled with when and how to respond to Trump's statements and policies. Recently, he told his former presidential-campaign strategist John Weaver: "I can't be the car alarm that always goes off. If I am, I'm not effective." Still, McCain is sounding the alarm more and more frequently. The senator issued a statement blasting Trump's decision to abandon the Trans Pacific Partnership trade deal. "I just think we made a terrible mistake," he told me. "We've consigned 60 percent of the world's economy to China." And of course there was his critical statement about the Trump-authorized Navy SEAL raid in Yemen that resulted in a SEAL's death, some 30 Yemeni casualties including women and children, the destruction of a \$75 million aircraft, and the end of U.S. ground operations there. "These are challenging times, and I have to go my own way," McCain said. "It's not disloyalty to the party."

Those acts of open criticism have put McCain in Trump's crosshairs. When McCain spoke out about the botched raid, Trump fired off a series of tweets: "Sen. McCain should not be talking about the success or failure of a mission to the media. Only emboldens the enemy! He's been losing so long he doesn't know how to win anymore." Although McCain has 2 million Twitter followers, he rarely uses the medium to respond to Trump directly. Instead, he relies on his social-media army of campaign volunteers, which he calls Troll Team Six. "They attacked and responded to every attack," McCain said. "To a large degree it neutered the campaigns against me."

Even for someone who is always keenly aware of the political calculus, navigating the Trump administration is challenging. For one thing, you never know where the president is going to come down on anything. "I don't know what he's going to do," said McCain. "Look at his stance on torture. Or everything. He's been on all sides. He said intelligence groups are like Nazis, but then he said they're the greatest in the world. So I have to judge him on what he does."

In the meantime, McCain is feeling pressure from all sides. He took heat from friends for defending Flynn in the weeks before he resigned because of revelations that he had lied about his conversations with the Russian ambassador about U.S. sanctions. "What am I supposed to say? I can't be bad-mouthing everyone over there," McCain told an adviser. But when McCain does openly criticize Trump, he often finds himself on his own. He's complained to friends that fellow Republicans aren't backing him up. "I keep looking behind me, and there's no one there," he recently told an adviser. When Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell nixed McCain's initial request for a select committee on Russia, McCain groused to a friend that "fucking Mitch ain't gonna do it!" (McCain denied saying this.)

If McCain is a lone dissenter, his opposition could get less and less traction. His power rests in his ability to persuade his fellow Republicans, but remaining relevant is also personal for him. He has seen it happen before—life leaving soon after power did. The commanding wooden desk in McCain's office belonged to his predecessor, Barry Goldwater, who barely won reelection during his final campaign. "When he left Washington, he never came back," McCain said. Next to the desk, McCain displays a photograph of his grandfather on the deck of the USS Missouri when the Japanese surrendered during WWII. The day after returning home from the Pacific in 1945, he died.

McCain is constantly weighing his legacy, torn between doing what it takes to stay effective inside his party and choosing the right moments to go his own way. He is a deeply ambivalent mayerick. Still, McCain's friends and advisers say this fight is the one he was made for. "Whether McCain likes it or not, history has prepared him for this moment," Weaver told me. "I talked to him just after Christmas, I said, 'I know, John, vou've been through a lot in your life, but the country's never needed you more than it does now. We live in dark times.' And he said, 'Boy, you don't know how dark it is."

numbers that accompanied Trump's erratic first weeks in office, some Republicans say it's only a matter of time until skeptics like McCain can break with Trump without political consequences and even pull other members of the party with them. "Based on my private conversations with Republicans, at first the feeling was, 'We want to make this work.' But after the first week it was, 'Yikes, this isn't going to work," said Weekly Standard editor-at-large Bill Kristol. "The calculus is: 'We don't want to be accused of doing him in, but we don't want to go down with the ship either."

IVEN THE SLUMPING poll

Trump's bizarre appearance at CIA headquarters the day after assuming office seemed to be a major inflection point. "The inauguration speech was bad. People were rattled," Kristol said. "But on Saturday morning, people were sort of saying, 'Well, maybe that was the last gasp of the campaign. He's going to the CIA this afternoon, and he's going to make up with the intelligence community.' But then he goes and spends 15 minutes screaming about crowd size and attacking reporters. For insiders in Washington, that CIA speech was very big." Not incidentally, that speech may have further alienated the intelligence community, which now seems to have little reluctance to leak information to the press.

When I saw McCain two days after the CIA episode, it was one of the first things he brought up: "I mean, most observers, whether they're supporters or opponents, believe he should have gone and praised the CIA. Instead, he wandered off into areas that are just not appropriate."

Like Kristol, McCain thinks it will be easier to oppose Trump as his poll numbers go down. "One thing politicians look at are ratings, and his ratings are going to continue to decline," (Continued on page 82)

WHY EVER STOP PLAYING VIDEO GAMES

MANY AMERICANS
have replaced work hours with
game play—and
ENDED UP HAPPIER.
Which wouldn't surprise most gamers.
By Frank Guan





the evening of November 9,

having barely been awake to see the day, I took the subway to Sunset Park. My objective was to meet a friend at the arcade Next Level. ¶ In size, Next Level resembles a hole-in-the-wall Chinese restaurant. It does indeed serve food—free fried chicken and shrimp were provided that night, and candy, soda, and energy drinks were

available at a reasonable markup—but the sustenance it provides is mostly of a different nature. Much of Next Level's space was devoted to brilliant banks of monitors hooked up to video-game consoles, and much of the remaining space was occupied by men in their 20s avidly facing them. It cost us \$10 each to enter.

I had bonded with Leon, a graphic designer, musician, and Twitter magnate, over our shared viewership of online broadcasts of the Street Fighter tournaments held every Wednesday night at Next Level. It was his first time attending the venue in person and his first time entering the tournament. I wasn't playing, but I wanted to see how he'd do, in part because I had taken to wondering more about video games lately-the nature of their appeal, their central logic, perhaps what they might illuminate about what had happened the night before. Like so many others, I played video games, often to excess, and had done so eagerly since childhood, to the point where the games we played became, necessarily, reflections of our being.

To the uninitiated, the figures are nothing if not staggering: 155 million Americans play video games, more than the number who voted in November's presidential election. And they play them a lot: According to a variety of recent studies, more than 40 percent of Americans play at least three hours a week, 34 million play on average 22 hours each week, 5 million hit 40 hours, and the

average young American will now spend as many hours (roughly 10,000) playing by the time he or she turns 21 as that person spent in middle- and high-school classrooms combined. Which means that a niche activity confined a few decades ago to preadolescents and adolescents has become, increasingly, a cultural juggernaut for all races, genders, and ages. How had video games, over that time, ascended within American and world culture to a scale rivaling sports, film, and television? Like those other entertainments, video games offered an escape, of course. But what kind?

In 1993, the psychologist Peter D. Kramer published *Listening to Prozac*, asking what we could learn from the sudden mania for antidepressants in America. A few months before the election, an acquaintance had put the same question to me about video games: What do they give gamers that the real world doesn't?

The first of the expert witnesses at Next Level I had come to speak with was the co-owner of the establishment. I didn't know him personally, but I knew his name and face from online research, and I waited for an opportune moment to approach him. Eventually, it came. I haltingly asked if he'd be willing, sometime later that night, to talk about video games: what they were, what they meant, what their future might be—what they said, perhaps, about the larger world.

"Yes," he replied. "But nothing about politics."

IN JUNE, Erik Hurst, a professor at the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business, delivered a graduation address and later wrote an essay in which he publicized statistics showing that, compared with the beginning of the millennium, working-class men in their 20s were on average working four hours less per week and playing video games for three hours. As a demographic, they had replaced the lost work time with playtime spent gaming. How had this happened? Technology, through automation, had reduced the employment rate of these men by reducing demand for what Hurst referred to as "lower-skilled" labor. He proposed that by creating more vivid and engrossing gaming experiences, technology also increased the subjective value of leisure relative to labor. He was alarmed by what this meant for those who chose to play video games and were not working; he cited the dire long-term prospects of these less-employed men; pointed to relative levels of financial instability, drug use, and suicide among this cohort; and connected them, speculatively, to "voting patterns for certain candidates in recent periods," by which one doubts he meant Hillary Clinton.

But the most striking fact was not the grim futures of this presently unemployed group. It was their happy present—which he neglected to emphasize. The men whose experiences he described were not in any meaningful way despairing. In fact, the opposite. "If we go to surveys that track subjective well-being," he wrote, "lowerskilled young men in 2014 reported being much happier on average than did lowerskilled men in the early 2000s. This increase in happiness is despite their employment rate falling by 10 percentage points and the increased propensity to be living in their parents' basement." The games were obviously a comforting distraction for those playing them. But they were also, it follows, giving players something, or some things, their lives could not.

The professor is nevertheless concerned. If young men were working less and playing video games, they were losing access to valuable on-the-job skills that would help them stay employed into middle age and beyond. At the commencement, Hurst was not just speaking abstractly—and warning not just of the risk to the struggling working classes. In fact, his argument was most convincing when it returned to his home, and his son, who almost seemed to have inspired the whole inquiry. "He is allowed a couple of hours of video-game time on the weekend, when homework is done," Hurst wrote. "However, if it were up to him, I have no doubt he would play video games 23 and a half hours per day. He told me so. If we didn't ration video games, I am not sure he would ever eat. I am positive he wouldn't shower."

Y FRESHMAN YEAR, I lived next door to Y, a senior majoring in management science and engineering whose capacity to immerse himself in the logic of any game and master it could only be described as exceptional. (This skill wasn't restricted to electronic games, either: He also played chess competitively.) Y was far and away the most intrepid gamer I'd ever met; he was also an unfailingly kind person. He schooled me in Starcraft, let me fiddle around on the PlayStation 2 he kept in his room while he worked or played on his PC. An older brother and oldest child, I had always wanted an older brother of my own, and in this regard, Y, tolerant and wise, was more or less ideal.

Then, two days before Thanksgiving, a game called *World of Warcraft* was released. The game didn't inaugurate the genre of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), but given its enormous and sustained success—augmented by various expansions, it continues to this day—it might as well have. Situated on the sprawling plains of cyberspace, the world of *World of Warcraft* was immense, colorful, and virtually unlimited. Today's *WoW* has countless quests to complete, items to collect, weapons and supplies to purchase. It was only natural that Y would dive in headfirst.

This he did, but he didn't come out. There was too much to absorb. He started skipping classes, staying up later and later. Before, I'd leave when it was time for him to sleep. Now, it seemed, the lights in his room were on at all hours. Soon he stopped attending class altogether, and soon after that he left campus without graduating. A vear later, I learned from M, his friend who'd lived next door to me on the other side, that he was apparently working in a big-box store because his parents had made him; aside from that, he spent every waking hour in-game. Despite having begun my freshman year as he began his senior one, and despite my being delayed by a yearlong leave of absence, I ended up graduating two vears ahead of him.

Y's fine now, I think. He did finally graduate, and today he works as a data scientist. No doubt he's earning what economists would term a higher-skilled salary. But for several years he was lost to the *World*, given over totally and willingly to a domain of meanings legible only to other players and

valid only for him. Given his temperament and dedication, I feel comfortable saying that he wasn't depressed. Depression feels like an absence of meaning, but as long as he was immersed in the game, I believe that his life was saturated with meaning. He definitely knew what to do, and I would bet that he was happy. The truth is, as odd as it might sound, considering his complete commitment to that game, I envy this experience as much as I fear it. For half a decade, it seems to me, he set a higher value on his in-game life than on his "real" life.

What did the game offer that the rest of the world could not? To begin with, games make sense, unlike life: As with all sports, digital or analog, there are ground rules that determine success (rules that, unlike those in society, are clear to all). The purpose of a game, within it, unlike in society, is directly recognized and never discounted. You are always a protagonist: Unlike with film and television, where one has to watch the acts of others, in games, one is an agent within it. And unlike someone playing sports, one no longer has to leave the house to compete, explore, commune, exercise agency, or be happy, and the game possesses the potential to let one do all of these at once. The environment of the game might be challenging, but in another sense it is literally designed for a player to succeed—or, in the case of multiplayer games, to have a fair chance at success. In those games, too, players typically begin in the same place, and in public agreement about what counts for status and how to get it. In other words, games look like the perfect meritocracies we are taught to expect for ourselves from childhood but never actually find in adulthood.

And then there is the drug effect. In converting achievement into a reliable drug, games allow one to turn the rest of the world off to an unprecedented degree; gaming's opiate-like trance can be delivered with greater immediacy only by, well, actual opiates. It's probably no accident that, so far, the most lucid writing on the consciousness of gaming comes from Michael Clune, an academic and author best known for White Out, a memoir about his former heroin addiction. Clune is alert to the rhetoric and logic of the binge; he recognizes prosaic activities where experience is readily rendered in words and activities like gaming and drugs, where the intensity eclipses language. Games possess narratives that have the power to seal themselves off from the narratives in the world beyond it. The gamer is driven by an array of hermetic incentives only partially and intermittently accessible from without, like the view over a nose-high wall.

In Tony Tulathimutte's novel Private Citizens, the narrator describes the feeling near a porn binge's end, when one has "killed a week and didn't know what to do with its corpse." An equally memorable portrait of the binge comes from the singer Lana Del Rey, who rose to stardom in 2011 on the strength of a single titled "Video Games." In the song, Del Rey's lover plays video games; he watches her undress for him; later, she ends up gaming. Pairing plush orchestration with a languid, serpentine delivery, the song evokes an atmosphere of calm, luxurious delight where fulfillment and artifice conspire to pacify and charm. The song doesn't just cite video games; it sounds the way playing video games feels, at least at the dawn of the binge—a rapturous caving in.

OF COURSE, it was not video games generally that removed Y from school but, allegedly, one specific and extraordinary game. In much the same way that video gaming subsumes most of the appeals of other leisure activities into itself, World of Warcraft fuses the attractions of most video games into a single package. It's not just a game: in many ways, it's the game of games. Set in a fantasy universe influenced by Tolkien and designed to support Tolkienesque roleplaying, the game, digitally rendered, is immeasurably more colorful and elaborate than anything the Oxford don ever wrote: If The Lord of the Rings books are focused on a single, all-important quest, World of Warcraft is structured around thousands of quests (raids, explorations) that the player, alone or teaming with others, may choose to complete.

Whether greater or lesser, the successful completion of these quests leads to the acquisition of in-game currency, equipment, and experience points. Created by the Irvine-based developer Blizzard (in many ways the Apple of game developers), WoW is rooted in an ethos of self-advancement entirely alien to that of Tolkien's Middle-Earth, where smallness and humility are the paramount virtues. There is little to be gained by remaining at a low level in WoW, and a great deal to be lost. The marginal social status of the gamer IRL has been a commonplace for some time-even for those who are, or whose families are, relatively well-off. What a game as maximalist and exemplary as WoW is best suited to reveal is the degree to which status is in the eye of the beholder: There are gamers who view themselves in the light of the game, and once there are enough of them. they constitute a self-sufficient context in which they become the central figures, the successes, by playing. At its peak, WoW counted 12.5 million subscribers, each of them paying about \$15 monthly for the privilege (after the initial purchase). When you consider how tightly rationed status is outside the game, how unclear the rules are, how loosely achievement is tied to recognition, how many credentials and connections and how much unpleasantness are required to level up there, it seems like a bargain.

Of course, there are other games, and other reasons to play beyond achieving status. Richard Bartle, a British gamedesign researcher and professor, constructed a much-cited taxonomy of gamers based on his observations of MUD, an early text-based multiplayer game he cocreated in 1978. These gamers, according to Bartle, can be subdivided into four classes: achievers, competing with one another to reap rewards from the game engine; explorers, seeking out the novelties and kinks of the system; socializers, for whom the game serves merely as a pretext for conversations with one another; and killers, who kill. It isn't hard to extend the fourfold division from gamers to games: Just as there are video games, WoW chief among them, that are geared toward achievers, there are games suited to the other three branches of gamers.

In many major games of exploration, like Grand Theft Auto or Minecraft, the "objectives" of the game can be almost beside the point. Other times, the player explores by pursuing a novel-like narrative. The main character of the tactical espionage game Metal Gear Solid 3 is a well-toned Cold War-era CIA operative who finds himself suddenly in the forests of the USSR; the hero of the choose-your-own-adventure game Life Is Strange is a contemporary high-school student in Oregon, and her estrangement results from her discovery that she can, to a limited extent, reverse time. These games are all fundamentally single-player: Solitude is the condition for exploring within games in much the same way that it is for reading a novel.

While explorers commune with a story or storyteller, socializers communicate with one another: The games that serve as the best catalysts for conversation are their natural preference. Virtually any game can act as a bonding agent, but perhaps the best examples are party games like Nintendo's Mario Party series, which are just board games in electronic form, or the Super Smash Brothers series, in which four players in the same room select a character from a Nintendo game with which to cheerfully clobber the other. The story, in these games, isn't inside the game. It's between the players as they build up camaraderie through opposition.

The ultimate games for killers aren't fighting games so much as first-person shooters: *Counter-Strike* when played in competitive mode obliges you to play as one member of a team of five whose task is to eliminate an enemy quintet. The teams take turns being terrorists, whose task is to plant and detonate a bomb, and counter-terrorists, whose task is to deny them. What beauty exists, is found only in feats of split-second execution: improbable headshots, inspired ambushes, precisely coordinated spot rushes.

What's odd is that across these groups of games there's perhaps as much unity as difference. Many of the themes blend together. Achievement can be seen as a mode of exploration and seems as viable a basis for socializing as any other. Socializing can be grouped with achievement as a sign of self-actualization. And killing? Few things are more ubiquitous in gaming than killing. Each one of the trio of novel-like games cited above forces the player-protagonist to kill one or more of his or her closest friends. Even a game as rudimentary as *Tetris* can be framed as an unending spree of eliminations.

PERHAPS PSYCHOLOGICAL types are a less useful rubric than, say, geological strata. As much as games themselves are divided into distinct stages, levels divide the game experience as a whole.

The first, most superficial level is the most attractive: the simple draw of a glowing screen on which some compelling activity unfolds. There will always be a tawdry, malformed aspect to gaming—surely human beings were made for something more than this?—but games become more than games when displayed vividly and electronically. Freed from the pettiness of cardboard and tokens, video games, like the rest of screen culture, conjure the specter of a different, better world by contrasting a colorful, radiant display with the dim materials of the dusty world surrounding them.

We turn to games when real life fails us.

Second: narrative. Like film and television, many video games rely heavily on narrative and character to sustain interest, but just as those mediums separated themselves from theater by taking full advantage of the camera's capacity for different perspectives, video games distinguish themselves from film and television in granting the viewer a measure of control. What fiction writing achieves only rarely-the intimate coordination of reader and character-the video-game system achieves by default. Literary style pulls together character and reader; technology can implant the reader, as controller, within the character.

Third: objectives, pure and simple. Action games and platformers (like *Mario*) in which the player controls a fighter; strategy games in which the player controls an army; grand strategy games in which the player controls an empire; racing games in which the player controls a vehicle; puzzle games in which the player manipulates geometry; sports games; fighting games; SimCity: These are genres of games where plot is merely a function of competition, character is merely a function of success, and goals take precedence over words. Developing characters statistically by "leveling up" can feel more important, and gratifying, than developing characters psychologically by progressing through the plot. The graphics may or may not be polished, but the transactional protocol of video games—do this and you'll improve by this much—must remain constant; without it, the game, any game, would be senseless.

Fourth: economics. Since every game is reliant on this addictive incentive system, every gamer harbors a game theorist, a situational logician blindly valorizing the optimization of quantified indices of "growth"—in other words, an economist. Resource management is to video games what African-American English is to rap music or what the visible sex act is to pornography—the element without which all else is unimaginable. In games as in the market, numbers come first. They have to go up. Our job is to keep up with them, and all else can wait or go to hell.

And there is something sublime, though not beautiful, about the whole experience: Video games are rife with those Pythagorean vistas so adored by Americans, made up of numbers all the way down; they solve the question of meaning in a world where transcendent values have vanished. Still, the satisfaction found in gaming can only be a pale reflection of the satisfaction absent from the world beyond. We turn to games when real (Continued on page 83)



 $Images from \textit{Javier Laspiur's "Controllers"} series, in \textit{which he photographed himself with each video-game system he played over the years, beginning with \textit{Teletenis in 1983} and ending \textit{with Playstation Vita in 2013}. \textit{The composite image that opens this story was built by Laspiur from these images}.$

As American as Refusing to Stand for the National Anthem







ATE LAST YEAR, George Gittens, who goes by Dr. Natural, got a call from Nessa Diab, the host of Hot 97's afternoon show. Dr. Natural is a holistic-health advocate in Brooklyn who has long dreadlocks and maintains a raw, vegan, alkaline diet. Diab was hoping Dr. Natural would speak at an event she was putting on with her boyfriend, a professional football player. "I said, 'Cup-ernick?'" Dr. Natural said recently. "Who's Cup-

ernick?" Diab clarified that her boyfriend was the San Francisco 49er who had knelt during the national anthem to protest racial injustice and police brutality in America, causing dozens of other athletes to join him in solidarity and then-candidate Trump to suggest he find another country. "I didn't know his name," Dr. Natural said. "I just knew him as the guy who took a knee."

Early on the Saturday of Martin Luther King Jr. weekend, Colin Kaepernick, the guy who took a knee, walked onto a stage at the Audubon Ballroom, on West 165th Street, flanked by a floor-to-ceiling mural depicting Malcolm X. Kaepernick was hosting his second Know Your Rights Camp, and explained the venue's significance to the 240 young people in attendance: In 1965, Malcolm X was assassinated here while delivering a speech of his own. "There's a lot of people out there that don't want to see you succeed," Kaepernick told the crowd. "But the people in this room do."

Kaepernick was joined by three of his 49ers teammates at the all-day event, which covered the intersectional bases of modern activism. In addition to Dr. Natural's presentation on the environmental importance of filtering your water and using a squatty potty, there were sessions on the history of policing, financial literacy, and college admissions. Carmen Perez, the executive director of Gathering for Justice, to which Kaepernick had recently given \$25,000 as part of his pledge to donate a million dollars to social-justice organizations across the country, led a role-playing exercise for engaging with police. Dr. Natural didn't believe Diab when she said they could get more than 200 kids to show up on a Saturday morning, so he hadn't brought enough pamphlets on "maintaining a positive mental attitude." "Tim sure some of the motivation was to meet Kaepernick himself," Dr. Natural said. "But, hey, whatever works."

Throughout the sessions, Kaepernick sat to the side, listening and taking notes, before returning to the stage to present the campers with several items to take home: swag from his endorsers (Nike backpack, Beats headphones), paperback copies of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, guides to eating vegan in New York—Kaepernick gave up meat and dairy a year ago—ancestry.com subscriptions to trace their roots, and T-shirts matching his own, which read I know my rights on the front and listed ten of them on the back, including you have the right to be brilliant.

It had been five months since Kaepernick first sat during "The Star Spangled Banner," and the Audubon was many literal and figurative miles from the 70,000-seat NFL stadium where he launched his protest and from the cover of *Time* magazine, where he ended up. But the aftershocks were everywhere. The NFL playoffs were then careering toward a Super Bowl in which the two teams came to personify America's sociopolitical fissures—the winning Patriots,

led by friends of Donald Trump, and the Falcons, from Atlanta, where more than half the city's population is black—and many of the commercials seemed to have been cooked up in a social-justice seminar rather than an ad agency. None of the players protested the anthem, but half a dozen Patriots, so far, have broken with the story line that their team equals Trump, and have said they won't attend the White House celebration of their victory because, as one of them put it, "I don't feel welcome in that house."

After decades of professional athletes largely choosing, as LeBron James put it, in 2008, "to keep athletics and politics separate," Kaepernick's protest was a culmination of several years in which they had begun to do just the opposite. In some ways, the superstars were just waking up alongside their generation, particularly as Black Lives Matter ushered in what now looks like the country's most significant protest era in decades. But athletes also have enormous cultural and economic influence, and have started to understand how to leverage that for something more than selling sneakers. Leagues, teams, and brands are trying desperately to keep up. Earlier this month, when Under Armour's CEO called Donald Trump "a real asset" to the country, Stephen Curry, the Golden State Warriors star, whom Morgan Stanley has estimated to be worth as much as \$14 billion to Under Armour, told the press he agreed with the assessment, "if you remove the '-et." After Curry spoke to Under Armour's CEO, the company released a statement walking back its support. "If I can say the leadership is not in line with my core values," Curry explained, "then there is no amount of money, there is no platform I wouldn't jump off." A few days later, Nike released a 90-second ad called "Equality," in which Serena Williams, Kevin Durant, and LeBron James appear in black and white as Michael B. Jordan asks, "Is this the land history promised?" Nine years after James spoke of a separation between sport and politics, he stood on a basketball court in Nike gear and made clear that times had changed. If we can be equals here, James said, at center court, "we can be equals everywhere."

WHEN KAEPERNICK'S protest first landed on the front page, in late August, and he suddenly became America's most famous—and controversial—activist, he went looking for help. His path to activism had been a lengthy one, urged along by Harry Edwards, a UC Berkeley sociologist who consults with the 49ers on diversity issues and had been encouraging him to read James Baldwin and others as a way of educating himself. No one had noticed when Kaepernick spent much of the previous year posting Malcolm X quotes and social-justice memes on Instagram, or when he sat for the anthem during the 49ers' first two preseason games. But after a reporter got

The Political Arena

A Brief History of Athletes Protesting



DECEMBER 26, 1908Jack Johnson knocks out a white Canadian boxer to become heavyweight champion of the world.

AUGUST 9, 1936
To Hitler's
displeasure, Jesse
Owens wins four
gold medals at the
Berlin Olympics.

APRIL 15, 1947 Jackie Robinson breaks baseball's color barrier when he starts at first base for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

a tip from a team official and asked Kaepernick about it—"I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color"—the quarterback found himself at the center of a firestorm. Kaepernick talked to Edwards, and Diab, who had long been outspoken on policing and other issues, put Kaepernick in touch with, DeRay Mckesson, of Black Lives Matter. Michael Skolnik, an activist in Brooklyn who often helps celebrities figure out how to become effective activists, talked to Kaepernick two days after his protest. "The first thing I saw was that he knew his shit," Skolnik said. "What he didn't know was that the movement has multiple layers of work, so the question is, where do you want to be involved?" Kaepernick told Skolnik that, for starters, he wanted to donate a million dollars. "I said, 'Okay, that's nice,'" Skolnik said. "But don't think your million dollars is gonna stop cops from killing black people."

Kaepernick also talked to the Knicks' Carmelo Anthony, who has quietly become one of the sports world's most socially conscious stars. After the 2015 death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, where Anthony grew up, he went to Maryland and joined a protest in the streets. "Well, you're courageous," Anthony says he told Kaepernick. "But now is the hard part, because you have to keep it going. So, if that was just a onetime thing, then you're fucked."

There is a rich and varied history of athlete activism, from Jackie Robinson, whom Martin Luther King Jr. credited with helping to launch the civil-rights movement by integrating baseball in 1947, to Tommie Smith and John Carlos, whose radical Black Power salutes at the 1968 Olympics became the most iconic sports-meetspolitics moment of the 20th century-in part because activism soon faded in sports, as it did nationwide. After the '60s, athletes waged battles for higher pay and better treatment, but campaigns for off-the-field issues were rare. Athletes became brands, and brands didn't do politics. "If I stand on a platform, I'm gonna be speaking for O.J.," said O.J. Simpson, the most famous black athlete of the 1970s, referencing Smith and Carlos's Olympic protest. In 1990, Michael Jordan declined pleas from Arthur Ashe and others to endorse Harvey Gantt, a black candidate for Senate in Jordan's home state of North Carolina, despite the fact that he was running against Jesse Helms, a notorious racist. "Republicans buy sneakers, too," Jordan reportedly said.

The superstar athlete as a neutral avatar of corporate America persisted well into the new century. In 2007, Ira Newble, a no-name reserve for the Cleveland Cavaliers, asked his teammates to sign a letter condemning China's involvement in the genocide in Darfur.

All but three casually signed on to oppose the slaughter, but one of the abstainers was a 22-year-old LeBron James, already well on his way to becoming America's most famous athlete. "It's basically not having enough information," James explained, though Newble and others speculated it may have had something to do with James's Nike relationship and the company's ties to China.

Which makes it all the more surprising that, five years later, James helped launch the modern athlete-as-activist movement. On February 26, 2012, Trayvon Martin was getting ready to watch James, Dwyane Wade, and Chris Bosh, the three best players from his favorite team, the Miami Heat, play in the NBA All-Star Game, when he put on a hoodie to go buy some Skittles. Martin's killing took place just 20 miles from the game, but even as the story grew, reporters covering the team didn't consider bringing it up with James. "We didn't ask him about the issues of the day," said Brian Windhorst, an ESPN reporter who has covered James throughout his career.

A few weeks later, Gabrielle Union, the actress who is now married to Wade, made a call to Michael Skolnik, who was working with Martin's family. Union was seeking advice on how to draw attention to the issue, and they began talking about getting James and Wade involved. (Many male athletes seem to have been coaxed down the road to wokeness by the women in their lives.) "I was like, 'Whatever you can get them to do: Write his name on their shoes, take a selfie'although I don't think selfie was a term at the time-'that would mean the world," Skolnik said. Union took the ideas to Wade, who talked with James about what to do. On a road trip in Detroit, James and Wade gathered their teammates and persuaded them to pose for a photo with their official Miami Heat hoodies up, as Martin's had been. James posted the picture to Twitter, and suddenly Trayvon Martin wasn't just the top story on MSNBC but on ESPN, too: Windhorst, who was living in Florida, said he had never even heard Martin's name before James posted the photo.

"That picture was John Carlos and Tommie Smith for our generation," Skolnik told me recently from his office in Brooklyn. (He now runs a branding agency that puts on social-impact campaigns, but his bona fides were burnished by seven years as political director for Russell Simmons.) In 2012, the Black Lives Matter movement had not yet formed, there was little recent precedent for athletes'



AUGUST 28, 1963
Boston Celtics superstar Bill Russell participates in the March on Washington.



Russell, Jim Brown, Lew Alcindor (Kareem Abdul-Jabbar), and other prominent black athletes appear with Muhammad Ali in support of the boxer's refusal to serve in Vietnam.

speaking out, and players had no idea how their teams, or the league, might respond. Smith and Carlos, for instance, had become pariahs after the Olympics. At the time, the only other controversial social issue with even limited traction in the sports world was marriage equality. Hudson Taylor, who runs Athlete Ally, which advocates for LGBTQ rights in sports, told me that just two years ago he was talking to a prominent NBA player who said he was in favor of marriage equality, but that he was Christian and worried about losing fans. Brendon Avanbadejo, a Baltimore Raven, was one of three NFL players who spoke out in support of gay marriage, but his campaign received limited attention, positive or negative, until 2012, when a Maryland state senator wrote to the Ravens requesting that the team "inhibit such expressions from your employee." The story caused an uproar, stoked by an article Minnesota Vikings punter Chris Kluwe wrote, for Deadspin, in which he memorably assured the senator that married gay couples "won't magically turn you into a lustful cockmonster." Less than a year later, Jason Collins became the first openly gay player in any major American professional sport.

But Trayvon Martin's death was a particularly galvanizing moment for black athletes, and other NBA players followed the Miami Heat's lead, posting similar photos or arriving at games wearing hoodies. Skolnik recalled bringing Sybrina Fulton, Martin's mother, to the Knicks locker room at Carmelo Anthony's request. Anthony was initially speechless in front of Fulton and gave her a jersey that he had signed I AM TRAYVON. Fulton burst into tears. "She said, 'Why do they care about me?'" Skolnik said. "She just couldn't grasp the idea that these famous athletes were so touched by her."

The years after Martin's death found athletes speaking out with increasing regularity. In 2014, after TMZ posted audio of Donald Sterling, the owner of the Los Angeles Clippers, making wildly racist remarks, James quickly declared, "There's no room for Donald Sterling in the NBA," and Clippers players wore their warm-up shirts inside out, hiding the team logo, before their next game. Two days later, the league banned Sterling for life. That November, five St.

OCTOBER 16, 1968
Tommie Smith and John Carlos raise their fists on the medal stand at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City.

Louis Rams walked onto the field holding their hands in the air, to honor Michael Brown, who had been killed in Ferguson, and after Eric Garner's death in Staten Island, a number of NBA players wore shirts that read I CAN'T BREATHE onto the court, including James and members of the Brooklyn Nets. The shirts should have drawn a fine for violating the league's dress code, but NBA commissioner Adam Silver decided against levying penalties.

Social media allowed players to share their concerns with the public instantly and easily. It also meant they were sitting in locker rooms together watching videos of young black men being killed, leading many to wonder, despite their personal success, how much better things had gotten for black people in America. "The only reason Mike Brown, who was seen as a big hulking black man, was dead in the street, as opposed to LeBron James, who is a big hulking black man, was that LeBron James was not there," Edwards said.

IT ALSO HELPED that a (relatively) young black sports obsessive was in the White House. President Obama saw athletes not only as friends but as potential allies, and when he took office, he revamped the Office of Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs with liaisons to dozens of different constituencies, including the obvious ones—the LGBTQ community, Christians, Native Americans—but also to the sports world. The White House maintained a roster of players, like NBA stars Chris Paul and Grant Hill, who could be counted on to join various campaigns. ("It closely correlated to who golfed with the president," one former staff member said.) NBA teams in town to play the Washington Wizards asked for White House tours, which the administration tried to turn into recruiting events: When the Detroit Pistons visited last year, for instance, the president met with them in the Roosevelt Room to solicit their support for his My Brother's Keeper mentoring initiative. Other athletes used their face time with the president to push their own causes, and when James and the Cavaliers celebrated their 2016 championship at the White House in November, they talked about police brutality with Obama behind closed doors. Some players even reached out on their own: Kobe Bryant regularly texted ideas for various campaigns to White House staff members.

At first, the White House mobilized athletes primarily for uncontroversial causes, like the First Lady's "Let's Move" fitness campaign, but as players began to demonstrate an increasing outspokenness during Obama's second term, the administration started asking for support on more controversial topics. "Health care was the first one where athletes actually said no," Kyle Lierman, who led outreach to the sports world for the White House



the University of Wyoming football team are thrown off the team after asking their coach if they could wear black armbands during a game against BYU. (African-Americans weren't then allowed to become priests in the Mormon church.)



OCTOBER 1, 1991
After the Bulls win the NBA Championship,
Craig Hodges wears a dashiki to the White House to protest racial injustice in America.

MARCH 13, 1996
The NBA fines Denver
Nuggets guard
Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf for
protesting the national
anthem and calling the
flag "a symbol of
oppression, of tyranny."

from 2010 to 2014, said. "It was initially like pulling teeth." As the White House desperately tried to hit its health-care enrollment goals, President Obama made a rare personal call to James, asking him to lend his voice to the campaign; a member of James's management team said that while James supported the ACA, Obama's personal request was the reason he agreed to help. "Once LeBron came out for us, it created the space for other athletes to jump in," Lierman said. The following week, he sent an email to a number of prominent athletes, highlighting James's PSA, and dozens wrote back offering to help. Eventually, the administration began using sports stars as advocates who, unlike Hollywood celebrities, were mostly able to sidestep charges of elitism and more directly communicate with specific regions. In 2015, Milwaukee boosted its ACA enrollment more than any of the 19 other cities targeted by the White House, which the administration credited in large part to the fact that a number of players from the Bucks, the local NBA team, had been persuaded to support the initiative.

Speaking out had now become almost an obligation. In 2015, after a grand jury declined to indict two Cleveland police officers

involved in the death of Tamir Rice, activists launched a "No Justice, No LeBron" campaign, urging James to protest by refusing to play. But when James was asked about the campaign, he replied, "To be honest, I haven't really been on top of this issue, so it's hard for me to comment." It was meant as a responsible reply to a complex situation, but some fans were disappointed, and the same reporters who hadn't thought to ask James about Trayvon Martin's death were now surprised that he would be unaware of a political issue roiling his city. One of James's confidants says that, today, whenever James sees a piece of news that interests him, he notifies an assistant, who will respond with four or five articles for him to read on the topic.

Aside from the Sterling incident, it had been hard to get athletes to act collectively. But last summer, after the deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile within a day of each other, Carmelo Anthony decided it was time. "I'm calling for all my fellow ATHLETES to step up and take charge," Anthony said on Instagram, posting a photo of a press conference from 1967 at which Bill Russell, Jim Brown, and Lew Alcindor, who later changed his name to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, joined Muhammad Ali to express their support for Ali's objection to being drafted during the Vietnam War. In 2014, William Rhoden, then a New York *Times* sportswriter, called that press conference "the first—and last—time that so many African-American athletes at that level came together to support a controversial cause."

Anthony has a regular group text with James, Wade, and Paul, and the quartet spent the following weekend coming up with a plan. They were scheduled to attend the Espys, ESPN's annual awards show, the following week, and a member of James's team told ESPN the players wanted to make a joint statement at the top of the broadcast. The four players spoke to an Espys writer who helped distill their group text into a forceful call to action, which they read together onstage. "As athletes, it's on us to challenge each other," Wade said. "The conversation cannot stop as our schedules get busy again ... It won't always be comfortable. But it is necessary."

The impact was swift. Two days after the speech, Nike's CEO put out a statement explicitly supporting Black Lives Matter and citing the appearance by James, Anthony, and Paul as an instigating factor. (He left out Wade, who isn't a Nike athlete.) A week later, Michael Jordan announced that he would be donating \$1 million to both the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the Institute for Community-Police Relations, a law-enforcement advocacy organization whose head was so surprised by the donation

that he called to make sure it had come from *that* Michael Jordan. "I know this country is better than that," Jordan said of the recent killings. "I can no longer stay silent."

UT KAEPERNICK'S statement, six weeks later, rang out louder than anything from the NBA, despite the fact that he was far from the first athlete to protest the national anthem. "I cannot stand and sing the anthem," Jackie Robinson wrote, in 1972. "I know that I am a black man in a white world." Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf, a guard for the Denver Nuggets, was suspended by the NBA in 1996 for refusing to stand during the

song, and David West, a forward for the Golden State Warriors, recently told the Undefeated, ESPN's new website covering the intersection of race and sports, that he has stood two feet behind his teammates during "The Star Spangled Banner" for so long that he has forgotten when he first started doing it.

Kaepernick, however, was the first player to bring such a protest to the National Football League, America's modern pastime. The NFL has long been conservative, with a fan base that is overwhelmingly white—African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans all watch the NBA in higher percentages than whites—and has been far less receptive to its players' involvement in activism. "The NFL doesn't want you to talk about anything other than football," says

FEBRUARY 9, 2003

As the United States begins its invasion of Iraq, **Steve Nash** wears a shirt that says "No War. Shoot for Peace" during shootaround.

2004

Carlos Delgado remains in the dugout during "God Bless America" to protest the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

MAY 5, 2010

In direct response to Arizona's strict immigration laws, the **Phoenix Suns** wear "Los Suns" jerseys.



MARCH 23, 2012

LeBron James and the **Miami Heat** post a photo with their hoodies up to honor Travyon Martin.

APRIL 27, 2014

Los Angeles Clippers players protest owner
Donald Sterling's racist
comments by wearing
their warm-ups inside out
to hide the logo.



Chris Kluwe, who has claimed that he lost his job in part for being outspoken about marriage equality. Where NBA teams have a dozen players, all of whom more or less know one another's (often similar) political beliefs, an NFL locker room has more than 50 players from a variety of backgrounds. While some NFL owners were supportive, the majority are conservative—even Shahid Khan, the Muslim-immigrant owner of the Jacksonville Jaguars, voted for Trump—and at least one reportedly insisted that his players stand for the anthem. One anonymous front-office executive called Kaepernick "a traitor."

The NBA, meanwhile, has largely supported players' protests, even on the court, and many coaches, most of whom are white, have recently been turning their press conferences into political lectures. A few days after the presidential election, Gregg Popovich of the San Antonio Spurs spoke for five minutes about his disappointment with the state of American politics, stopping a reporter who interrupted him to ask another question. "I'm not done," Popovich said. "I'm sick to my stomach thinking about it." Compare that to a press conference at which Bill Belichick, whose New England Patriots were preparing to play the Seattle Seahawks, briefly addressed the fact that Trump had recently read a laudatory letter from him at a rally, then deflected follow-ups:

Reporter: "Your team's always been good at keeping outside distractions on the outside, given the nature of this presidential race ..."
Belichick: "Seattle."

"Did you find it—"

"Seattle."

KAEPERNICK'S disruption of America's song, during America's game, had opened him up to attacks. A Houston-area cigar lounge called the Man Cave started using his jersey as a doormat, and even Ruth Bader Ginsburg called Kaepernick's protest "dumb and disrespectful," before later apologizing. Kaepernick found plenty of outside support, as his jersey became the NFL's top seller-he was fortunate to be in San Francisco rather than a more conservative NFL city-and several teammates joined his protest. (Kaepernick began taking a knee rather than sitting, as he had initially, on the advice of a retired football player and military veteran, who felt it seemed more respectful.) But only 50 or so of the league's 1,700 players took knees or raised fists alongside him. Several teams made unified statements of solidarity, but no white NFL player joined Kaepernick, and Megan Rapinoe, of the U.S. women's soccer team, was the only white athlete from any major professional sport to take a knee. The rest of the NFL either disagreed with Kaepernick's message or with his methods, or feared the consequences. Brandon Marshall, of the Denver Broncos, lost several endorsements for kneeling, and other players admitted the stress was difficult to bear. "I had a conversation with a player who knelt with Colin during week one, and he calls me and says, 'How many weeks do I have to kneel?'" Skolnik said. "I was like, 'You gotta go the distance, buddy. You're not gonna get up soon.'"

But even with limited participation, Kaepernick's protest had opened the debate over policing and race relations to a wider audience. "I was kind of dumbfounded, to be honest with you," Anquan Boldin, a veteran wide receiver for the Detroit Lions, told me about the outcry over Kaepernick's protest. Boldin had been speaking out on policing for nearly a year, ever since his cousin was shot and killed by a plainclothes officer, but he had struggled to find an audience. "I can't believe it takes somebody like Kaepernick to kneel during the national anthem for people to talk about a problem that has been going on for years," Boldin said.

Boldin didn't take a knee, but the example of Kaepernick's protest made room for athletes to get involved in a variety of ways. During the season, Boldin started a group text that grew to include more than 80 players, all of whom wanted to do something but had no idea what or how. "I don't think guys know where to start," Boldin said. "It's one thing to do work in your community, but it's another thing to set up meetings with Capitol Hill." In 2013, Boldin went to Senegal with Oxfam, which had spent years lobbying Congress to hold a hearing on mining issues in West Africa with no success. He offered to visit D.C. to drum up support for a hearing, and within two weeks, it was on the schedule. "It was a wake-up moment for me in terms of understanding the power we have," Boldin said.

Boldin wanted to go back to Capitol Hill to talk about policing, so he turned to Andrew Blejwas, a political-communications specialist who had organized the Oxfam trip. Boldin recruited four other players, including Josh McCown, a white quarterback, and Malcolm Jenkins, of the Philadelphia Eagles, who had raised a fist with Kaepernick. Blejwas set up meetings in November with four different congressional offices, the Congressional Black Caucus, and, with the help of the NFL Players Association, the White House.

The players were quick political studies. "First off, these guys are brilliant—learning plays is not easy," Blejwas said. "They synthesized the ideas that we were talking about much better than we did." Boldin and the others also knew why they had been granted an audience, and how to play the game, with long-term gains in mind. After one congressman spent most of their visit talking about a bipartisan softball game he coached, the players signed a softball and mailed it to him; when progressives criticized them online after they posed

NOVEMBER 29, 2014

Ariyana Smith, a basketball player for Knox College, lies on the court for four minutes and 30 seconds to symbolize the amount of time (in hours, not minutes) Michael Brown was left lying in the street after he was killed.



NOVEMBER 30, 2014

Five members of the **St. Louis Rams** — take the field with their hands in the air to protest the killing of Michael Brown.



DECEMBER 14, 2014

Cleveland Browns wide receiver **Andrew Hawkins** wears a shirt saying "Justice for Tamir Rice and John Crawford," after the two are shot and killed by police officers. On the back it reads "The Real Battle for Ohio."

APRIL 30, 2015 NBA players wear "I Can't Breathe" shirts quoting Eric Garner. for a picture with Paul Ryan, who emerged for the photo op after leaving the actual meeting to his staff, the players brushed it off. "Don't think these guys don't know what's going on," Blejwas said. "They know they have to get that next meeting." Boldin's group is currently planning a return trip to D.C. in March, with more players, in the hope of presenting testimony to the House Judiciary Committee on criminal-justice reform. (Lierman, the former White House liaison, as well as two former State Department officials, is launching a separate consultancy to accommodate the growing number of athletes who want to get more involved in the political process.) The most difficult thing, Blejwas had found, was getting people in D.C. to realize that Boldin and the others were capable of doing serious work. Before Boldin's first appearance to give testimony in D.C., one person involved in setting up the hearing asked Blejwas, "Do you know if Anguan ... can he read?"

"An NFL player can help achieve all these important objectives, and people will still be like, 'Why don't you just do a PSA?'" Blejwas told me. "It's like, 'No, we're trying to do work. We're not trying to get on TV. You can really move the needle if you just trust that this 32-year-old black man can read."

F COURSE, professional athletes have only so much direct electoral power. An ESPN survey found they favored Hillary Clinton by nearly two to one. (Kaepernick didn't vote.) Persuading athletes to publicly get behind a candidate can sometimes be more difficult than getting them to back a cause: Michelle Kwan, the former figure skater, who did surrogate outreach for Clinton's campaign, said a number of Olympians told her that they supported Clinton but that their endorsement deals, which they rely on more than basketball or football players, prevented them from saying so. She helped persuade Chris Paul to tweet that he was With Her, and LeBron James wrote an endorsement in an Ohio newspaper two days after his boss, the Cavs' owner Dan Gilbert, hosted a Trump fund-raiser. James also stood next to Clinton at a rally in Cleveland during the campaign's final week. "I was one of those kids and was around a community that was like, 'Our vote doesn't matter," James said, explaining his own political transformation. "But it really does."

But even the most popular man in Ohio couldn't deliver his home state, and the sports world is unlikely to embrace the Trump White House as it did Obama's. "If you think any NBA team will show up at the White House for a photo op with Trump, you're crazy," Edwards said. Trump has shown little interest in sports beyond his own golf courses and inviting the Patriots' owner to dine with the Japanese prime minister at Mar-a-Lago. (As one indicator of how White House outreach might look different, a person briefed on the hiring process said the administration was considering Andrew Giuliani, Rudy's son and a former minor-league professional golfer, as its sports liaison.) Shortly after Trump's victory, LeBron told his wife, "I think we're going to have to do more," according to Sports Illustrated. A number of people suggested to me that Trump's policies might, in fact, awaken even the sleepier parts of the sports world, like Major League Baseball, none of whose players joined Kaepernick's protest but nearly a third of whom are Hispanic and might be inspired to speak up if Trump continues to pursue a border wall or other aggressive immigration restrictions. (Adrian Gonzalez, a Mexican-American player for the Los Angeles Dodgers, refused to stay at a Trump-branded hotel last season.) The newly established sense that athletes can, and should, use their cultural cachet to promote political change seems to have emboldened others to speak out on subjects that hew less closely to their own identity politics. Days after Trump's inauguration, Kaepernick tweeted his support for protesters at Standing Rock and his opposition to abortion restrictions, and earlier this month, several NFL players backed out of a government-sponsored trip to Israel after pressure from activists who argued it was likely to present a skewed view of the Palestinian situation. Two members of the Detroit Lions showed up at the Women's March on Washington in January (while James gave the protest a shout-out on Twitter), and this past weekend's NBA All-Star Game was moved from Charlotte to New Orleans in protest over the state's discriminatory bathroom law, a switch supported by Stephen Curry and Chris Paul, both North Carolina natives. "Some things are bigger than the game," Paul said.

What has emerged is a generation not only willing to shine a light on injustice but prepared to make concrete demands. "Carmelo and Steph are fantastic examples of guys who can really be a huge loss to a brand by walking away," said Sherrie Deans, an executive with the National Basketball Players Association. "But even guys who can't do that are saying, 'If you're gonna be a brand partner of mine, I need you to acknowledge the totality of who I am." Brands seem to want to be on the right side of history, too, and social responsibility has become a central part of many athletes' self-presentation: When James posed for a Sports Illustrated cover naming him the magazine's 2016 Sportsman of the Year, he wore a safety pin as a signal of his allyship.

But as athletes begin to recognize their control over the means of production, and to demonstrate a willingness to act collectively, the next phase of their activism may most closely resemble what happened in 2015 at the University (Continued on page 84)

APRIL 30, 2015

Carmelo Anthony marches in Baltimore after Freddie Gray dies in police custody.





NOVEMBER 8, 2015

The University of Missouri football team says it will not play in an upcoming game unless the university president resigns over his slow response to racial incidents on campus.



JULY 13, 2016

Carmelo Anthony, Chris Paul, Dwyane Wade, and LeBron James speak at the 2016 Espys to encourage fellow athletes to speak out against racial injustice and police brutality

AUGUST 26, 2016

Colin Kaepernick's protest makes headlines for the first time.

OCTOBER 2. 2016

DeSean Jackson wears cleats with police caution tape.



JANUARY 21, 2017

Hope Solo and two members of the Detroit Lions participate in the Women's March on Washington.

JANUARY 29, 2017

WNBA player Breanna Stewart protests President Trump's executive order on immigration at LAX.

FEBRUARY 8, 2017

Stephen Curry forces Under Armour to back off its CFO's statement that Trump is "an asset.

FEBRUARY 9, 2017

Six members and counting of the Patriots say they will protest any White House celebration of the team's Super Bowl victory.



Whether you are looking to redecorate your entire home or just a corner of a room, we're here to help. In addition to our complimentary in-store design service, you'll also save 10% on any order above \$5,000 through February 28, 2017.







turned out, the most anticipated collection at New York Fashion Week set the bar for the whole season. Raf Simons's debut at Calvin Klein was wonderfully imaginative—and as real as your uncle from Texas. Under a ceiling of streamers and pom-poms (by the artist Sterling Ruby), Simons and his longtime right hand, Pieter Mulier, went for broke with Americana.

There were coats fashioned from antique quilts, austere leather jackets based on 1940s sheriff's gear, and sharp pantsuits in those saturated hues—deep blue, purple, green—that Simons loves. There were references to Midnight Cowboy and Studio 54-namely, an acidvellow fake-fur coat with a rhinestone belt and vinyl protective cover³ that had everybody talking. Mulier says, "You don't think of Calvin Klein as an ironic brand, so we wanted to inject some. The vinyl is basically covering something that isn't precious at all." The color was a nod to the influence of Stephen Sprouse, the sparkle belt to that of Halston.

Some wondered later if Americana wasn't too easy a theme. But if this isn't an ideal moment to interpret American culture, then when would be? Someone like **Jeremy Scott** will always go for literal references—his Jesus pants⁴ and sequined As seen on TV tops were a hoot. It was as if the lights of Vegas had melted on his pretty white shag runway. But Simons's parade wasn't simply romantic. It was haunting and expansive, too—like movies that depict sun-bleached hellholes on the Fourth of July.

Simons exposed the enormous opportunity for fashion to begin reflecting the tensions and hopes colliding on the American stage. The expression doesn't have to be obvious. Indeed, it should be subtler







than, say, the anti-Trump slogans on the models' underwear at LRS. But even beyond the more overt signs of dissent at some shows, it was obvious that the roiling political scene, not to mention the protests and Women's March, has put designers in a more reflective mood. "It's a sober time," Narciso Rodriguez told me after his forceful show, with its melding of modern tailoring and subtle sexuality, achieved with veiled arms and shoulders or tiny, ladderlike insets. "You want to see beautiful things that inspire people, and not a lot of nonsense."

That certainly describes the pretentiously understated luxury of Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen at the Row (they included a white shirt with the word hope woven into the sleeve), and the low-watt funk of **Eckhaus Latta**. Despite their differences, both sets of designers seemed to sense this was a moment not to be too designery. Zoe Latta said that she and Mike Eckhaus stopped working in November, discouraged by the election, then began again in January, with less concern than last season about ticking commercial boxes.

The results were wonderfully serene and indifferent, with boiled knits, slate-colored satin pants, soft fleece tops in soda-pop colors⁶ that draped nicely in back, and a print made from recycled ivory brocade on which Latta and Eckhaus had placed tiny photos of random stuff, including portraits. Used for a suit and a mini-shift, the print seemed so personal—were the photos mementos?—yet coldly, gracefully abstract.

The Row was all in solids—black, navy, white, warm brown—and most of the looks involved masculine tailoring, shown with paddock-style boots. It became clear that what the Olsens are offering is a wardrobe: a slouchy black pantsuit and one with a more narrow fit; a long belted wool-leather coat,⁷ and a duster in crisp stonewashed denim. This adaptable way of dressing is hardly new for the Olsens or fashion, but the sisters are hitting it again at the right time.

The clothes at **Proenza Schouler** looked similarly easy, even though Jack McCollough told me this was the brand's "antiease collection." Especially desirable were the many coats in leather with fleece trim, a pair of silver metallic pants, and a gorgeous black wool dress, simple and long in the body, with one sleeve seeming to detach at the shoulder.

Of course, despite all the colliding moods and tensions, there were some wonderful moments of creativity and fun. What else is Fashion Week for? **Christian Siriano**'s glamorously curvy models. Baja East's pajama party. **Rosie Assoulin**'s playful and fresh takes on tweeds and glen plaid, 10 and her girlish flounces and prints.



Marc Jacobs

Ryan Roche's memorably killer knit dress in warm cherry, 11 with a defined waist and puffed sleeves gathered at the wrists. Joseph Altuzarra's over-the-top capes and dresses, 12 inspired by Flemish and Dutch portraits and shown with pearltrimmed, old-school ski boots. Coach's unintentionally amusing mash-up of hiphop and prairie. Michael Kors's irresistible rich-bitch suits and furs, 13 presented as a live classical orchestra played pop hits. Marc Jacobs's incredible indoor/outdoor show on Park Avenue, an ode to the city, with a bounty of cool fur-trimmed jackets and accessories. 14

The week's other big event was the debut of Laura Kim and Fernando Garcia as the new creative directors of Oscar de la Renta. Their hiring was a complicated event (both worked with the late designer for years, then left after missing out on the top job; started their own label, Monse; then finally returned amid a lawsuit against Kim), and so was their ambitious plan of back-to-back shows. The set was a corridor of doorways, paved by black and white tiles, which were surrounded by sparkling gray curtains for the Monse show. But just as the Oscar segment began and despite practice runs by its creator, Stefan Beckman-part of the automated curtain got stuck and refused to draw back.

"It is what it is," said a remarkably sanguine Kim at the after-party that evening.

Although she and Garcia are mature beyond their years and the right choice for Oscar, the curtain snafu revealed a rookie mistake: They'd taken on too much at once. Kim and Garcia should've dialed back their zeal and concentrated more; a number of looks recalled Raf Simons at Dior. It would also be nice to see more overall ease in the Oscar collection—lower the height of the heels! The most modern thing today in fashion is a bit of polish without obvious effort.

Where Garcia and Kim succeeded was in giving Oscar a more youthful imprint without losing the brand's uptown identity: This was especially clear in cocktail clothes. 15 They also get their mentor's feeling for over-the-top numbers, like a coat dress in sheared mink and fox with a crystal gardenia-buckle belt.

If Kim's Zen-like calm at the party and ability to take criticism are any indication, my bet is they'll have things fully figured out by next season.

> CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT. Thom Browne, La Perla, Adam Selman, and Christian Siriano.











BEST BETS

FIRST LOOK

On March 17, General Pants Co. opens a denim-focused shop of Australian brands (29 Howard St.).



Buck Palmer: Men's gold cuffs (\$385) and unisex silver triangle pendants (\$95).



Ksubi women's: One-piece denim boiler suits (\$205), straight narrow light-wash jeans (\$205), and slip dresses (\$260).

Zanerobe: Men's waffle flight joggers (\$99) and mock-neck sweaters (\$109).



cutoffs (\$89), dusty-pink bomber jackets (\$169), and unfinished business tees (\$39).

Ksubi men's: Black ripped jeans (\$240), cropped light-wash denim (\$240), and tees that read "Rock 'n' Roll Ruined Everything" (\$79).

ASK A SHOPCLERK

Huda Quhshi opens the women's-only salon Le'Jemalik (6915 Fifth Ave., Bay Ridge).



Is anything different about styling hair to wear beneath a head scarf?

"Not really, we just want a place to feel comfortable taking our scarves off. We'll do haircuts (from \$25), highlights (from \$120), and halal nails. Muslim women aren't allowed to pray while wearing regular polish, so we use a special one that allows oxygen and water to touch the nail beds. It's approved for praying, and it makes nails stronger too."

THREE IN ONE

Equilibria is a café, pharmacy, and holistic-care shop (320 Bedford Ave., Williamsburg).



\leftarrow SNACK

The front café offers lavender gelato (\$4), vegan raspberry oat bars (\$4), and wellness remedies like "The Guardian," meant to revitalize the immune system with eucalyptus and ginger (\$3 per cup).

$SHOP \rightarrow$

The middle of the space is reserved for Eastern holistic medicines and organic goods like raw-cacao facial scrubs (\$16), sage cleansing milk (\$60), and organic peppermint focus mist (\$16).



\leftarrow HEAL

In the back is a Western pharmacy with an on-site compounding lab where the pharmacist works with your doctor to transform pills into ointments or liver-flavored biscuits for dogs.

2x2

Poufs

Pull one up for the Oscars party.

STRUCTURED

FLOPPY

LIVING ROOM



Diamond motif. \$249 at westelm.com.



Michael Felix, from \$800 at Calliope, 349 W. 12th St.





Lil' Pvar alphabet, \$220 at anthropologie.com.



Marrakech triangles, \$83 at smallable.com.

IRL

Peter Manning NYC, the e-tailer specializing in clothing for men under five foot eight, opens a fit shop (933 Broadway).



"We're on the top floor of three townhouses that have been combined with wood floors, exposed-brick walls, and the remnants of old fireplaces. It's meant to look like a private atelier, because not every guy needs us, and the shop is about education and problem-solving; that's why people come in person. I'll be there explaining that your armholes should be tighter because that elongates you, like on our lambskin leather jackets (\$495). We'll have every style and size to try on, but no inventory. But if there's an emergency and you need a suit tonight, we can make it happen."

TOP FIVE

→ Interior designer Todd Hase (111 E. 7th St.) opens a showroom for his exotic-wood coffee tables and curvy sofas.



"I named this lamp (\$450) after the Rue du Dragon in Paris. The linen shade creates a really warm, inviting light.



"For this coffee table (\$1,900), we've inlaid an exotic wood called macassar ebony into the darker wood. It's made from one tree branch."



"People love that you can face any direction while sitting in this **chair** (\$2,300). You can also push two together to make a cute love seat.'



"This demilune (\$3,200) can be done in any finish, from classic stained wood to lacquered robin's-egg blue."



"This **sofa** (\$5,500) doesn't have any square corners, so it can easily be floated in a room. It becomes very modern with a Lucite table in front of it.'

THE LOOK BOOK

MARK MAURICE

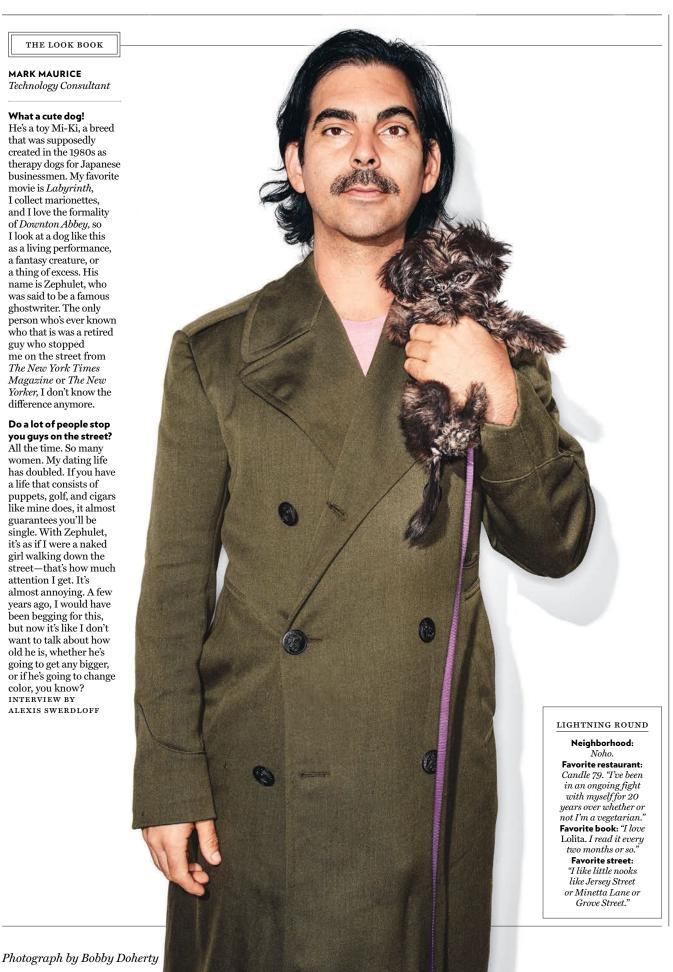
Technology Consultant

What a cute dog!

He's a toy Mi-Ki, a breed that was supposedly created in the 1980s as therapy dogs for Japanese businessmen. My favorite movie is Labyrinth, I collect marionettes, and I love the formality of Downton Abbey, so I look at a dog like this as a living performance, a fantasy creature, or a thing of excess. His name is Zephulet, who was said to be a famous ghostwriter. The only person who's ever known who that is was a retired guy who stopped me on the street from $The \ New \ York \ Times$ Magazine or The New Yorker, I don't know the difference anymore.

Do a lot of people stop you guys on the street?

All the time. So many women. My dating life has doubled. If you have a life that consists of puppets, golf, and cigars like mine does, it almost guarantees you'll be single. With Zephulet, it's as if I were a naked girl walking down the street-that's how much attention I get. It's almost annoying. A few years ago, I would have been begging for this, but now it's like I don't want to talk about how old he is, whether he's going to get any bigger, or if he's going to change color, you know? INTERVIEW BY ALEXIS SWERDLOFF



When the President Is Your Landlord

What it's like to live in the New York apartment buildings bearing Trump's name.

BY NICK TABOR

OR THE PAST 34 YEARS, Trump Tower has been the principal symbol of our new president's real-estate empire and the embodiment of his brand: husky security guards stationed at every doorway, the vast lobby gleaming with marble and gold, and, more recently, lots of photos of power brokers (a reluctant Mayor de Blasio, a triumphant Steve Bannon) boarding the gold elevators for conferences with the then-president-elect. Missing from those photos: Trump Tower residents coming home after a day at work, saddled with Citarella bags. Then there are the thousands of New Yorkers living in Trump-branded towers that span the city from Soho to the Upper West Side. The buildings vary widely in design and type of resident (and in Trump's relationship to them—he does not own the majority of the properties but manages

most), but glimpses beyond the revolving door are rare, so that few outside the real-estate world know the differences between, say, the Miesian modernist architecture of Trump World Tower and the Art Deco remnants of Trump Parc or between the rose-colored walls and vaulting doorways of Trump Palace and the sleek, steely look of the lobby at Trump Place. In an effort to learn more about life inside and whether it's changed since Trump's election, we went directly to the residents. Their responses were surprisingly diverse: Some love Trump and his politics; others loathe him. Some think their property values are about to tank; others expect them to rise. Some say there's been no discernible change in atmosphere; others claim to feel the tension in the hallways. But there's one thing every single resident we spoke to agreed on: The buildings are very, very clean.



PROPERTIES

Trump Parc Is Very Clean ...

LEANLINESS IS like an obsession: They clean in the morning, they clean in the afternoon, and it's always perfect. So when I heard he was running for president, I thought, Well, if he does onethird of the good job that he does running the building, we will be in very good shape. When you leave in the morning, of course, you have your newspaper at your door. If for any reason it's not delivered, you just call downstairs. 'No problem!' Within 20 minutes, you've got a paper. One Sunday here, my neighbor upstairs had a guest. Her bathtub was draining, and I had water coming from the ceiling of the bathroom. The guest had left, and the owner of the apartment wasn't there. I had important people coming over for my business that week. I was literally hysterical. I called the staff and said, 'I have Venice in my bathroom. I have the Niagara Falls coming from the ceiling.' Tuesday afternoon, when I came home, my bathroom was painted, and it was cleaner than my cleaning lady leaves it. It was spotless."

> -SUSANA GALLI. $media\ producer$

... But Are the Walls Too Thin?

HE SECURITY and rules here at Trump Parc are ironclad-you're not allowed to drive a nail into your wall anytime after 4 p.m.; you can't make any noise—but the construction is shoddy. Thin walls. Plumbing is terrible. Everything was done to cut corners but to make it look really beautiful. I mean, the apartments are gorgeous. But that doesn't mean that you'd look underneath. If you have a plumber come look at

it, he's going to say, 'Who the hell did this? This is like spit and chewing gum.' I said to a friend that if you sneeze in Apartment 4A, they say "God bless you" in 37C. I think the name Trump, whether it's on the marquee or off. is completely and totally irrelevant. I've heard that people like his name on there. They can call it Tarantula Arms for all I care. At the end of the day, it's a terrific apartment, and it's a wonderful, wonderful place to live. I've seen people in the elevator with a real-estate agent, and they say, 'Do you live here?' And I say, 'Yes. Buy now. Buy now. It will be Christmas. or Hanukkah, whichever it is, every day of your life.' That's one of the most descriptive things I can say: Every day is Christmas."

-ANONYMOUS

You Meet a Lot of Widows and **IBM** Employees at the White Plains **Trump Tower**

E NOT ONLY have an indoor pool and a gym and a children's playroom and a lounge and business center, but right next to the condominium is a ninestory parking garage. It's owned by the City of White Plains, but on top of that parking garage, on the rooftop, the condominium owns that, and we have this gigantic recreation deck, which has two tennis courts, an outdoor swimming pool, ten barbecue grills, a basketball court, a big playground for the kids, and a putting green. We have heard that there are certain buildings in Manhattan where there are demonstrations, but no one has ever demonstrated here. There have been some unit owners who have come forward expressing their desire to have

the name removed from the building, but it's a minority. Everybody that lives here—it's a lot of IBM and MasterCard employees and widows, way more women than men-likes the building the way it is, so no one wants to rock the boat."

> -ALAN NEIDITCH, retired lawyer

At Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue, the Protesters **Have Made Some** of the Ladies "Very, Very Upset"...

сот то кноw Donald from being in the building. We knew him when he was married to Ivana, we saw the kids growing up. Melania speaks a little Italian, not so much, but she understands, and so we became friends also with Melania. I was with Trump at a tea-party rally way back, I think it was 2011, in Boca Raton. I helped him start various Facebook groups: Women for Trump, Mothers for Trump, Working Mothers for Trump, the Genius Women for Trump, and a whole host of other ones. During the primary, the atmosphere at Trump Tower did not change so much. But unfortunately, right after the nomination, it started to. Especially toward the end, when the Secret Service started to get involved and then the mayor closed the street, it started to become very uncomfortable for a lot of people. I personally don't care. But some of the ladies. especially the ones that come from a different country or a different background, they're not used to that kind of treatment, and so some of them are very, very upset. As for property values, in the last 15 to 20 years, Trump Tower has gone up 5, 6, 7 percent almost every year. It's always gone up. Even in 2008 and 2009, it went up 2 percent, and then it went down because

of the crisis. I know because I'm on the association's board. The prices are good. There might be a little break between now and when people are going to start to feel more comfortable about the building, just because of this uncertainty. There are a couple of people who are selling their units because they don't particularly care for all the protesters. But also because they don't particularly agree with Mr. Trump's position. But there's always been units for sale at one point or another, so it's not a big thing."

> -GUIDO LOMBARDI, real-estate developer, who also has a unit in Mar-a-Lago

... But Not All the Ladies

HERE ARE now Secret Service members all over the building. They sit in the stairwell. And now you have to drive to Madison Avenue to have your car sniffed before you can drive it in and drop off any packages. There's a scanner on 56th Street. If you're walking in there with packages, you have to put them through, like an airport. And you know what? That may be a little trouble, but it sort of becomes fun. I've got five people with machine guns on one side of me while the protesters are screaming. It makes me feel very important. I've never had that kind of protection in my life. Plus, Trump has been really cool, like at one board meeting I attended: People were complaining about some expensive wallpaper he wanted to put in the hallways. He said, 'Look, I'm going to put wallpaper on one of the floors, and I want you to go and look at it, and next time tell me whether it's beautiful or not.' And, of course, now we have the wallpaper."

> -ELAINE RIGOLOSI, Columbia professor



In Trump World Tower, Some Residents Are Worried About Property Values

WASN'T CRAZY about the Trump name when I bought it, but I just thought the apartments were so great. I had been seriously thinking about selling before Trump's candidacy, and it clarified things when he started running. I am worried that the Trump name has hurt its value. My family says, 'You have to get out of that building. It's just not appropriate.' I send out emails when people are coming here, saying, 'Please don't blame me for the name on the door.' And they understand when they get here. I never refer to it as the Trump Tower; I only refer to it by its address. I've discussed

this with a few neighbors—I felt safe—who feel the same as me. But I have found myself talking in the elevator to somebody about Trump, negatively, and seen somebody else scowling at me. But I can't say anything but good things about the staff. Not only are they always there to help, but they do it with a really warm, welcoming, and caring attitude."

—JAMES TUFENKIAN, carpet designer

At 140 Riverside, Trump's Name Is Gone

T USED TO BE that in every taxi I took to my house,
I'd say, 'You know he does not own this building. He's

got nothing to do with it.' My husband would laugh at me, saying, 'They don't care.' I said, 'Well, I care.' Every single taxi, I used to tell them,

'Trump doesn't own it, and not only does he not own it, he has nothing to do with it,' because he didn't for years anyway. I'll tell you, I was proud when we were on the news because we got his name off the front of the building. Now I don't have to feel embarrassed in front of taxi drivers who drop me off, because it just plain old says 140 Riverside. I will tell you one other thing, though: Knowing how everybody in New York hates Donald Trump, I've been thinking to myself, Oh, maybe they won't raise my rent as much this year. I'll be getting my new lease any minute now, and we'll see."

— SUSAN KLAUSNER, semi-retired home stylist

A Few Blocks Away, at Trump Place, It's Still There

OLITICS ARE NOT discussed in my circle. When I tell people I live here, it kind of ends the conversation. It's a one-liner without a response. I say, 'Yeah, we still live in a Trump building.' That's the end of that discussion. I didn't sign the petition to get Trump's name removed. Who cares, you know? It's a building with a name on it. I didn't rent here because it was a Trump building. What if he ends up doing okay as president? There's always that option. Then everybody would want the name back on the building."

> —JACK ROUSE, design-firm owner



So How Has the **Trump Presidency Affected Property Values?**

"MOST OF HIS properties were built in the late '80s and early '90s as

luxury buildings, but what defined luxury then is not what defines luxury now. So the buildings from that era-Trump Palace, Trump International, Trump Parc-are on the upper end of the mid-tier or at the lower end of luxury. That means that they're actually positioned well in terms of what's selling now. But for Trump Tower, where you have to go through security to get to the front door, this might become an issue. The rental market is much more responsive to outside changes [like Trump's becoming president] because of faster-moving transactions-so if these apartments go up or down in value, you're going to see it in the rental market first, and you're going to

> see it starting about now." -JONATHAN MILLER, appraiser

"I'M GETTING PEOPLE anticipating a bit of a bump because of his prominence. Everybody likes to hear about Trump when they come in. 'Does he come here often?' 'How often does he come around?' This and that. I think people only see it as an extra edge. Maybe before he was elected, people might have been worried about it, that he wouldn't succeed, and then it's got the name of Trump. Once he became president, demand just shot up to a whole other level."

-NEIL SINGH. broker for Trump Parc

"TRUMP WORLD TOWER is a quiet building. It's surrounded by parks. And the Trump brand is still very popular globally. But the luxury market has just fallen off. I had my best year last year, and this year it's nothing. Nothing! I've lowered an apartment from \$6.4 to \$5.6 million. I've never

seen it drop like that. And yet the economy is cruising along. The stock market is fine."

-DEBRA STOTTS, broker for Trump World Tower

PROPERTIES



Trump International Hotel & Tower

1 Central Park West

TRUMP'S INVOLVEMENT:

Managed by the Trump Organization.

HISTORY: It was built in 1969 to house the offices of Gulf and Western In 1995 Trump converted it into a residential space: The architects Costas Kondylis and Philip Johnson did away with the dark glass walls and installed columns and spandrels with gold-bronze glass. "A 1950s International Style glass skyscraper in a 1980s gold lamé party dress," said the New York Times.

THE APARTMENTS:

The lower 17 floors are hotel condos, while the upper floors are traditional two- and threebedroom condos.

AMENITIES: Room service and cleaning for condo residents: swimming pool, gym, and Jean Georges delivery from downstairs.

ON THE MARKET:

Apartment 47BC, a six-bedroom, for \$34.5 million.



Trump Tower

725 Fifth Avenue

TRUMP'S INVOLVEMENT:

Managed and partly owned by the Trump Organization.

HISTORY: Built on the site of the Bonwit Teller department store. which Trump purchased in 1979. When he had it demolished, Trump destroyed two Art Deco friezes that the Metropolitan Museum of Art had wanted to preserve. Preserving them would have delayed the process by two weeks.

THE APARTMENTS: The condo owners consist

largely of investors who rent them out and moguls from overseas. Trump himself lives in a penthouse on the 66th floor, and his corporate office is on the 26th. It was also the setting of The Apprentice and the site of his campaign headquarters.

AMENITIES:

Terraces, 60-foot waterfall, various Trump restaurants.

ON THE MARKET:

Apartment 50B, a twobedroom for rent for \$10,000 a month.



Trump Place

120, 200, 220, and 240 Riverside Boulevard

TRUMP'S INVOLVEMENT: Managed by the Trump Organization.

HISTORY: In 1974, Trump first optioned this stretch of land along the Hudson River between 59th and 72nd Streets. His dream of a "Television City" never materialized, and he ceded a controlling interest to Chinese investors. Construction began in 1997, and Trump

held onto a 30 percent

stake. His company still

manages each building,

except 120 Riverside.

THE APARTMENTS:

Mostly two-bedrooms, but the older structures-200 and 220-have more familyfriendly four-bedrooms. Where most of the Trump buildings have gold finishes, in these buildings it's platinum.

AMENITIES: Pet spa and roof deck (at 120 Riverside), pools, fitness centers, valet garage.

ON THE MARKET:

Apartment PHA, for \$12.1 million.



Trump Parc 106 Central Park South

TRUMP'S INVOLVEMENT:

Managed by the Trump Organization.

HISTORY: Trump bought the Barbizon Plaza Hotel (built in 1930) in 1981 with the intention of tearing it down, but that provoked an uproar. He ultimately relented and instead converted its 1,400 rooms into 340 condos.

THE APARTMENTS:

The first 21 floors have smaller units and are uniform, but the upper 17 vary in design. (One broker says they were cut up "like a jigsaw puzzle" during the conversion.) Owners range from globe-trotters who use the studios during visits to the city to year-rounders in the penthouses.

AMENITIES: Maid service, valet, proximity to Central Park.

ON THE MARKET:

Apartment PH, with a private elevator landing, for \$9.5 million.



Trump Soho 246 Spring Street

TRUMP'S INVOLVEMENT:

Managed by the Trump Organization.

HISTORY: Construction plans were announced on The Apprentice and supervised by the winner of the show's fifth season. Sean Yazbeck. Since more than two-thirds of the hotel-condo's units went unsold when it opened in 2010, the developers lost the building in a foreclosure. The new buyer, CIM Group, announced in 2015 that it would essentially treat the building as a hotel.

THE APARTMENTS:

Because of the hotel-condo setup, the building's units (mostly studios and one-bedrooms) can be inhabited by their owners for only 120 days a year. The rest of the year. they're rented out as hotel rooms.

AMENITIES: Bocce court, spa, seasonal nool deck

ON THE MARKET:

Apartment 2108, a 500-square-foot studio, for \$790,000.



Trump Palace Condominiums

. 200 East 69th Street

TRUMP'S INVOLVEMENT:

Managed by the Trump Organization.

HISTORY: The New York Foundling Hospital occupied the site from 1959 to the mid-'80s, when its administrators decided to downsize. Trump purchased the site for \$60 million and had the ten-story hospital building razed with the intention of building a small cinema in its place. (When the zoning permit didn't come through, he built a 54-floor granite tower instead.)

THE APARTMENTS:

The condos range from studios to penthouses, and even most of the smaller ones have balconies. Residents are perhaps the most varied of any Trump building: young folk and pied-à-terre owners in the studios, families in the larger units.

AMENITIES: Health club, storage spaces, rooftop deck.

ON THE MARKET:

Apartment PHC, the full-floor penthouse, for \$9.95 million.



Trump Park Avenue

502 Park Avenue

TRUMP'S INVOLVEMENT:

Managed by the Trump Organization.

HISTORY: It opened in 1929 as the Viceroy Hotel but was quickly renamed the Cromwell Arms. It has been occupied over the years by Delmonico's, the disco Regine, and Christie's. Trump bought it in 2001 for \$115 million.

THE APARTMENTS:

The 525 rooms were made into 120 condos and eight penthouses, each with oak floors and marble

countertops. Units on the third and fourth floors, where the hotel's ballrooms used to be, have 15-foot-tall ceilings. and it feels like a classic prewar apartment building.

AMENITIES: Fitness center, maid and laundry service.

ON THE MARKET:

Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner's ' starter apartment," 6G, for \$4.1 million. (They still own the penthouse, where they were living until they moved to D.C.)



Trump Parc East 100 Central Park South

TRUMP'S INVOLVEMENT: Managed by the Trump Organization.

HISTORY: Built the same vear as the adjacent Barbizon and snapped up by Trump in the same 1981 transaction

THE APARTMENTS:

It has a similar design and feeling as the old Barbizon but with fewer units per floor and a smaller lobby. "It feels more boutique," said Ginger Shukrun, a broker who has shown condos there. But like

its sister building, it appeals to outof-towners who drop in to New York City infrequently.

AMENITIES: Bike room, cold storage (for groceries), wood fireplaces in some apartments.

ON THE MARKET:

Apartment 6A a two-bedroom with views of Central Park from every room and a wood-burning fireplace, for \$2.995 million.



Trump World Tower

845 United Nations Plaza

TRUMP'S INVOLVEMENT: Managed by the

Trump Organization.

HISTORY: Trump bought the site from the United Engineering Trustees in 1997. Over the objections of neighbors and the Municipal Art Society, the developers started construction on a 72-story building there in 1999. For a short time after it was finished in 2001, it was the tallest all-residential tower in the world.

THE APARTMENTS:

It has large condos, with ceilings up to 17 feet high in the penthouses. Many residents come and go for U.N. business, and others are families lured by the amenities (which were meant to compensate for the noncentral location).

AMENITIES: Vaulted wine cellar, pool, and spa (with massages).

ON THE MARKET:

Apartment 11H, a onebedroom with limestone floors, for \$2.195 million.





> IN ADDITION TO marble walls. gold fixtures, and crystal chandeliers, zebra print (pillows, rugs, chaise longues) seems, based on current real-estate listings, to be ubiquitous at the city's various Trump buildings.



White Gold Butchers

THE UNDERGROUND GOURMET

The Raw and the Cooked

At White Gold, April Bloomfield's butcher-shop-restaurant, meat is all. BY ROBIN RAISFELD AND ROB PATRONITE

White Gold Butchers 375 Amsterdam Ave.,

at 78th St.

212-362-8731 whitegoldbutchers.com

F YOU ARE EVEN a halfway ambitious chef these days, it's not enough to cook food and sell it. You must mill your own flour, grow your own herbs, churn your own butter, apply your own tattoos (well, maybe not that), and butcher your own meat. April Bloomfield is a very ambitious chef, with six restaurants on two coasts; a farm in Cornwall, England; and, as of this past October, a butcher shop on the Upper West Side. Given her restaurants' prodigious burger output (an estimated

75,000 per year at the Spotted Pig alone), you will understand why she and her business partner Ken Friedman wanted to control the sourcing and production of her meat supply. So she employed in-house butchers Erika Naka-

mura and Jocelyn Guest to break down animals and grind burger meat at the Breslin and Salvation Burger, respectively, until they all got the idea and the location to give the women and their handiwork a home of their own-a place that would function not only as a purveyor of sustainably raised, nose-to-tail beef, pork, and poultry but also as a slyly delicious neighborhood restaurant in disguise.

White Gold isn't shy about announcing its mission statement. There's a retail case filled to the brim with all manner of rib eyes, short ribs, lamb shanks, rosy-pink strip steaks, and beef marrow bones. The air is perfumed with the heady scent of bone broth infused with winter spices. Chickens twirl on rotisseries, fresh-from-the-oven porchettas rest on open-kitchen counters, meat pies and sausage rolls beckon from warming cases. Even the wallpaper in the bathroom is meatthemed. Taken as a whole, the effect on the

> devout carnivore is overwhelming, like how it would be for a grizzly bear to wake suddenly from its winter nap not in an empty cave but behind the smoked-salmon counter at Zabar's.

If there's a flaw in this business model, it's Bloomfield herself. With a kitchen whiz like that behind the enterprise, why buy ingredients you have to lug home and cook yourself when you can let her crew feed you virtually any time of day? White Gold serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with the common theme, of course, being meat-house-cured, smoked, ground, grilled, and confited. Morning is for egg sandwiches (with housemade

bacon, ham, or sausage); lunch expands on the theme. If you have the time, opt for a hot sandwich rather than one of the ready-mades: meatballs enriched with pork fat and drizzled with a cheesy sauce; a snappy hot dog tucked into a buttergriddled lobster-roll bun and dressed with mayo and kimchee; or a chopped cheese, which here approximates a super-crumbly cheeseburger infiltrated by pickles and chiles. The potato pasty would ruin even Yonah Schimmel for knishes. And there's always a nourishing soup and a bright, herby salad for those who strive for balance in their diet. With its tufted black leather banquette, high-top and wall-ledge seating, and a smattering of groceries, the space feels like a cross between a lounge, a luncheonette, and a general store.

At 5:30, though, a switch flicks and the shop becomes a bona fide restaurant, a Spotted Pig for stroller moms and Upper West Siders of a certain age. Instead of a bar and a late-night scene, there are prospective diners sipping mugs of mulled wine along the butcher counter. The offbeat setting is part of the charm. That and the classic Bloomfield gastropubby menu, as executed by chef de cuisine Robert Flaherty. Because of the context, certain items seem compulsory: We went for a plate of aggressively seasoned porchetta topped with a crackling so big we ate it with our hands like a piece of toast, and a juicy New York strip, its beefy flavor enhanced by anchovy vinaigrette. This being a Bloomfield joint, though, just as much flavor is crammed into an unassuming slice of sourdough, oiled and grilled and topped with horseradish-laced kefir

"U.G." STAR SYSTEM: ☆☆☆☆ THE CATEGORICAL BEST; ☆☆☆ EXCELLENT; ☆☆☆ GENERALLY DELICIOUS; ☆☆ VERY GOOD; ☆ NOTEWORTHY

cream and mushrooms. And the surprise signature dish may very well be Flaherty's riff on pommes Anna: three mini Rubik's Cubes of potato sliced into 25 micro-layers (yes, we took a cube home and put it under the microscope), then twice-cooked in beef fat. At White Gold, you see, it's all about the meat and the fat, even when it's a potato.

IN BRIEF: A&E Supply Co. (548 Fourth Ave., at 15th St., Gowanus; 718-635-3388) may sound like a hardware store, but it is in fact shaping up to become Brooklyn's estimable answer to White Gold-a grass-fedwhole-animal butcher shop that doubles as an all-day restaurant. We say "shaping up" because chef Adam Harvey and partner Ennio Di Nino had yet to launch their ambitious full-fledged dinner menu at press time. But the space (long wooden communal table, copper-top dining counter, and cozy bar) is big and handsome, the service is friendly, and judging by a couple of recent pit stops, the butcher-shop grub is terrific. At lunch, we tucked into a fantastic rareroast-beef sandwich with lots of mayo on sourdough from Runner & Stone, a Nashville-style hot-chicken thigh with cabbage slaw on white toast, and a bowl of Pittsburgh (a.k.a. Italian) wedding soup that was the kind of dish that, on a cold day, prompts you to say goofy things like: "This is all I'm going to eat until spring." For a return bar-menu visit on Super Bowl Sunday, we were impressed as much by a sheet tray of loaded nachos, more of that soup, and an iceberg-wedge salad with morsels of Buffalo-chicken confit as we were by Tom Brady's strange, superhuman abilities. And a well-crusted dry-aged rib eve was every bit as good as you'd hope to find at your friendly neighborhood butcher-shop-restaurant.

SCRATCHPAD

WHITE GOLD BUTCHERS: One star for the fun, unusual setting; one for the takeout savory pies and rotisserie chicken; one for the polished gastropub cooking; plus a bonus star for the beef-fat potatoes.

BITES

IDEAL MEAL: Sourdough toast with mushrooms, strip steak with chicories, beeffat potatoes, éclair. NOTE: Like the menu, the rotating list of beer, wine, and cider is short and sweet with plenty of personality.

OPEN: Daily. PRICES: Appetizers, \$7 to \$14; main courses, \$16 to \$29.

THE DISH

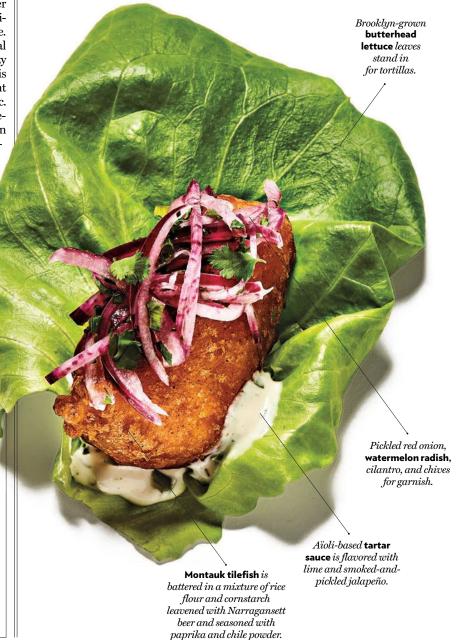
Fried Fish Lettuce Wraps

Why Untitled chef de cuisine Suzanne Cupps calls them Fried Fish Lettuce Wraps when she might have gone with Fried Fish Lettuce Cupps, we don't know. But they are, she says, her favorite item on the menu. Ours, too. Think Baja-style tacos without the tortillas. They're exceptionally crisp and light, and local to boot. The tilefish, caught off the coast of Montauk, is in plentiful supply. And the torti-

lla impostor is a sweet and pristine leaf of Gotham Greens butterhead lettuce grown year-round on a rooftop in Brooklyn. At dinner, you can order these little mouthwaterers by the piece. But who could possibly stop at one?

R.R. & R.P.

On the menu at **Untitled** at the Whitney Museum; \$5; 99 Gansevoort St., nr. Washington St.; 212-570-3670





PREVIEW

Where (And What) You'll Be Eating Next

If winter is beginning to seem endless, take heart (and sustenance) in these newcomers, all poised to arrive before spring's first ramp.

BY ROBIN RAISFELD AND ROB PATRONITE

Tuck Into Enrique Olvera's Pambazo

Don't be fooled by Atla's fancy newconstruction digs: Cosme's Noho spinoff is Chef Olvera's version of a casual neighborhood joint, serving Mexican-inspired, locally sourced breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Much of the seating is counter, and much of the cooking is "healthy," including flaxseed chilaquiles, kale tamales, and split-pea tlacoyos. Of particular note is the pambazo, a salsa-dipped, crisp-fried sandwich filled with potato and chorizo and eclipsed in these parts by tortas and cemitas. → 372 Lafayette St., at Great Jones St.; no phone yet; early Mar.

Get Souvlaki to Go and Paella to Stay

The owners of the eclectic Forgtmenot and home-style-Greek Kiki's have constructed two new kitchens to feed their Two Bridges neighborhood: Monroe (49 Monroe St., nr. Market St.; 917-472-7732; late Feb.), housed inside a former glass factory, looks to Italy, France, and Spain for menu standards like

eggplant Parm, seafood paella, and niçoise salad (and closer to home for a hot dog and a burger); Sherman's (named for its venerable shoe-store predecessor) is a Greek gyro rotisserie grill, slinging souvlaki sticks, pita sandwiches, and rotisserie chicken, with an emphasis on takeout and delivery. → 121 Division St., nr. Orchard St.; 646-861-2941; late Feb.

Order "J-Steak" by the Gram

Le Relais de Venise L'Entrecôte and Tad's get some budget-beef competition in the form of Ikinari **Steak**, a Japanese chain that keeps prices low by making you eat standing up, ensuring quick turnover, though this first American branch has ten seats for the weary. The choice-grade, wet-aged beef ("J-Steak," as they call it) is cut to order and priced per gram, with 200- and 300-gram minimums. Rib eye, sirloin, and fillet are served à la carte with corn and house steak sauce; the "wild chuck-eye" lunch combo includes salad, soup, and rice for \$18. → 90 E. 10th St., nr. Third Ave.; 917-388-3546; late Feb.

≯Q&A

Jean-Georges Vongerichten

With the imminent opening of abcV, his first meatless restaurant, the superchef has been thinking a lot about plant matter.

What cuisine has the best vegetarian food?

Asian and Middle Eastern countries, where, historically, meat was considered a luxury, resulting in vegetarian dishes that are complex and complete.

If you were a vegetable, what would you be? Asparagus, because they are tall and skinny. What's the last vegetarian dish you ate? Kitchari for breakfast from abcV. This Ayurvedic recipe contributed by Deepak Chopra promotes healing, digestion, and well-being.

What was your most memorable vegetarian meal? I visited a monastery in Japan where the monk prepared wild greens from the mountains, homemade tofu, and a variety of roots and

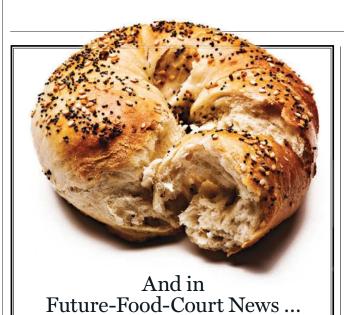
vegetables I had never seen or heard of before. They served the meal with condiments and a lot of pickled vegetables as well as a medley of rice and grains.

What vegetable do you hate? I don't hate any vegetable

in particular, but I tend to have a hard time digesting raw red bell peppers.

What vegetable is always in your fridge? You can find Windfall Farms' greens and avocados in my refrigerator year round.

lf you were to go vegetarian, what would be the hardest thing for you to give up? Sushi. I eat it three times a week. → 38 E. 19th St., nr. Park Ave. S.; 212-475-5829



Hard Times Sundaes' Andrew Zurica, burger flipper and hot-dog fryer extraordinaire, has been boning up on traditional bagel-making with a master from Mill Basin Bagel Cafe. The plan is to open a commissary to sell wholesale, as well as supply his forthcoming Dekalb Market stand, Andrew's Classic Bklyn Bagels by Hard Times Sundaes.

Besides the bagels, Zurica will make all the spreads and salads in-house. 138 Willoughby St., nr. Flatbush Ave., Downtown Brooklyn; early spring.

Eat Like the Cast of 'Wicked'

Randy Stricklin-Witherspoon began his professional cooking career by feeding the stars and backstage crew on the Broadway shows where he worked as a dresser. That led to a catering company and, now, SpoonfedNYC, a Hell's Kitchen duplex with a performance stage and a menu inspired by the chef's South Carolinian upbringing. To wit: candied pork belly and Brussels sprouts, chicken-fried meatloaf, and blackened red snapper with grits. There are plans for a Sunday gospel brunch and outdoor dining when it warms up. → 331 W. 51st St., nr. Eighth Ave.; 646-368-1854; late Feb.



Ikinari Steak in Japan.

Visit the International House of Tacos

In his downtime from cooking fusion Indian food at Tapestry, Suvir Saran has developed a menu of global tacos for the bar, ranging from the vegetarian Shimla to a Peruvian-inspired shrimp and Korean-style short rib. These recipes also form the basis of Unico, a new Queens taqueria where Saran and his partner, Roni Mazumdar, invite customers to choose their filling and format (taco, wrap, enchilada, or bowl). Unique to Unico: a southernfried-chicken taco, a riff on al pastor, and black rice with masala beans. >> 31-31 Thomson Ave., Long Island City; 718-433-3888; late Feb.

Expand Your Salad-Bar Horizons

When you grow up working in your father's collection of Smashburgers and Dunkin' Donuts franchises, opening a farm-to-table, vegetable-centric salad spot could be seen as a form of rebellion. But two sets of siblings have done just that, evolving their dads' fast-food partnership into the Sweetgreen Age. Field Trip has the requisite reclaimed-wood tables, "marketplace" of artisanal snacks, and signature salads and bowls, which include the Greek Beet with

baked falafel and feta, the Good Earth with quinoa and tofu, and the Curry Freek Bowl with grilled chicken and curried chickpeas. → 213 W. 35th St., nr. Seventh Ave.; 212-967-6770; early Mar.

Gorge on **Crab Nachos With** Sea-Urchin Queso

For certain downtown chefs, you'd think the idea of cooking above 14th Street was tantamount to working the steam table at Rikers Island. "I'm nervous as hell," says Empellón's Alex Stupak about his maiden midtown voyage-a twofloor, 150-seat, flagship branch of his mini Mexican-inspired empire. The trick, he says, is designing a menu to suit all tastes and pocketbooks without sacrificing creativity. And so along with the signature guacamole and seven salsas, get ready for hash-brown tacos with tomatillo ketchup, crab nachos with sea-urchin "queso," and \$125 Japanese-wagyu fajitas with black-pepper mole. → 510 Madison Ave., at 53rd St.; 212-367-0999; early Mar.

How About Some Classic French Tamales?

Speaking of creative Mexicaninspired cooking, Craft alum Akhtar Nawab is all for it. At his new 37-seat Alta Calidad, he's picking up where he left off at La Esquina and Choza Taqueria with



small plates and large-format dishes, plus pig's-feet carnitas, two takes on queso fundido, and a tamale filling inspired by the French cheesy-mashed-potato dish aligot. → 522 Vanderbilt Ave., at Dean St., Prospect Heights; 718-622-1111; late Feb.

Eat Hand to Mouth

L.A.'s **KazuNori** claims to be the first restaurant of its kind (thus its subtitle, "The Original Hand Roll Bar"). Whether or not this is true, New Yorkers will have a chance to measure its nori-wrapped rice and fish against the local competition once the first Manhattan branch opens near Madison Square Park. As at sister restaurant Sugarfish, the crispy seaweed is specially harvested, the sauces are housemade, and The signature rice is warm and loose. The temaki will be served à la carte or in four set menus, and all seating is at the bar to ensure not a moment is wasted between production and consumption. → 15 W. 28th St., nr. Broadway; no phone yet; early Mar.

TRENDLET



A Fish With Legs

Chefs are increasingly hooked by the elegant lure of Dover sole.

Culinary nostalgists have repopularized the prime rib, the French dip, and, more and more, the Dover sole, a totem of Continental fine dining and tableside service. This fine flatfish can be found on the menus of newfangled traditionalists like Le Coucou, Fowler & Wells, and 4 Charles Prime Rib. At **Blue Ribbon** Federal Grill, in the AKA Wall Street hotel, brothers Bruce and Eric Bromberg will serve their version meunière (flour-dusted and butter-sautéed, in the style of the miller's wife), with Riesling and capers, on a polyglot menu also populated by Louisiana crawfish, tandoori chicken, and truffle chawanmushi with potato purée. 84 William St., at Maiden Ln.; 212-337-0404; late Feb.

VULTURE OSCARS 2017

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Glass Ceiling

Sally Field has coveted the role of Amanda in The Glass Menagerie for years. As it turns out, she's tackling it on Broadway at just the right moment. By Jada Yuan EALLY, WHAT ELSE is there to talk about? This blustery winter evening, as Sally Field arrives at a quiet restaurant in Greenwich Village, thousands of Yemeni bodega owners are gathered on the steps of Brooklyn's Borough Hall to protest President Trump's immigration order. Field turned 70 two days before the election and spoke at two protests on Inauguration Eve, and she's feeling weird not being out there with them. "Not just weird, but is it wrong?" she wonders. She sheds a black coat, black backpack, and black velour scarf to reveal a mood-appropriate all-black outfit, and locks eyes with the waiter: "I'd like a glass of Chardonnay—ASAP."

The need for wine isn't just Trumprelated. Since January 2, the acting legend has been rehearsing six days a week for one of the most demanding roles in American theater: strident, bigdreaming matriarch Amanda Wingfield in Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie, which will be, astoundingly, only her second time on Broadway. (Her first was replacing Mercedes Ruehl in Edward Albee's The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia? in 2002.) Her call time is usually around noon. "But Sally, I think, is rehearsing 24 hours a day," says her director, Sam Gold (of Fun Home). "She comes in having already done the play three times in her living room."

One luxuriously sipped glass of Chardonnay is her "end-of-the-day ritual," along with watching Rachel Maddow, Lawrence O'Donnell, and Turner Classic Movies, to stop her *Glass* dialogue from running through her head. Is it also her coping mechanism for the new world order? "Oh, boy, I hope we don't all become alcoholics!" she says. "No, I think we have to do a lot more than that to get through it. A glass of wine in the evening is not gonna cut it."

Rehearsing kept her from protesting the travel ban at JFK, though she takes solace in the notion that under this administration, performing the work of a canonized gay playwright in the most LGBTQ-celebratory swath of America is itself an act of resistance. "I do think, in a Pollyanna way, to be here on Broadway, doing Tennessee Williams's words—with who he was and what he stands for—this is a good place for me to be right now," says Field.

Field wasn't always this progressive. She grew up in a Republican family in Pasadena, with a Hollywood-stuntman stepfather who campaigned for Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign. And being a hippie passed her by while she was charming the masses on TV sitcoms starting at age 18, as a surfer girl on *Gidget* and the titular airborne sister on *The Flying Nun*, and then becoming a young mother. "I just watched," she says. "It was like being down the hallway listening and not being in the room."

"There aren't a lot of quintessentially complicated, powerful characters in American literature for older women."

Field has three sons, screenwriters Peter and Eli Craig, 47 and 44, and Columbia screenwriting grad student Sam Greisman, 29, plus two teenage grandaughters and three younger grandsons. Sam is gay. "I have a child who's deeply threatened and frightened by all this. My other sons are frightened for their children," she says. "And the people who voted for Trump aren't? I just don't understand! What are you seeing and thinking?"

It wasn't until her 30s that she had a political awakening upon winning her first Oscar for playing a union activist in 1979's *Norma Rae* and befriending director Martin Ritt, a champion of socially conscious stories who'd once been black-balled for alleged communist ties. She'll probably always be better remembered, however, for the infamous "You like me!" 1985 Best Actress speech she made for *Places in the Heart*. How does she feel about being so linked to that one extemporaneous moment? "First of all, I was winning my second Oscar, so I'm allowed to say anything I fucking want," says Field, laughing.

Now she needs a cheeseburger and fries in addition to that Chardonnay. "I can't believe I'm having a cheeseburger. I've, like, never had a cheeseburger, ever!" Really? "No, just not in a long time. I'm just so hungry and I'm dying!"

Five years ago, Field bought a twobedroom in the Village—fulfilling her lifelong dream of being bicoastal—and has been tearing through restaurants and theater and museum shows with a zeal usually reserved for NYU freshmen. (Case in point: She tells me that after the opening, she and her Glass cast vowed to "get shitfaced" every night.) Spending her 70s onstage in New York was on Field's bucket list, too. "She's always said this was the time in her life when she wanted to do it, when her children were grown and she was able to pick up and really commit," says her good friend Tricia Brock, a TV director. Plus, Brock adds, "the stage is where the roles are for older women, where it's possible and they are admired." Glenn Close (see page 16) and Bette Midler will both be on Broadway at the same time as Field, who's already had a fun dinner with Midler. "I'm where I want to be right now, and I'm very excited," says Field, "though I'm too old to feel this brand-new at something."

Amanda is Field's first meaty role since she played an eccentric office worker with a crush on a much younger colleague (Max Greenfield) in 2015's delightful movie Hello, My Name Is Doris and her Oscar-nominated turn opposite Daniel Day-Lewis in Steven Spielberg's Lincoln three years before that. She'd had to fight to play Mary Todd Lincoln, given that she was nearly two decades older than her character by the time the opportunity came about. Doris, likewise, was passion-driven—a shoestring indie. released to little fanfare, that made its budget back 14 times over, in a year when many movies starring a woman over 65 (Maggie Smith's Lady in the Van, Helen Mirren's Woman in Gold, Judi Dench's The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, Meryl Streep's Ricki and the Flash) defied box-office expectations.

If a renaissance of older actresses in Hollywood was supposed to come from that, it never did, and Field sounds disillusioned with a film industry that only seems to care about comic-book stories. "I just feel like American film is folding in on itself like a house of cards, going boom, boom, boom," she says. Even this vear's more diverse Oscars are frustrating because they represent just a handful of movies that got good reviews and backing and feel to her like they were all released in one week at the end of the year. "I got irritated, like, 'Wait a minute, why don't they spread them throughout the year, and why aren't there more of them?"

Throughout all of this, Amanda has loomed large for her. Field sampled the coveted part once before to rave reviews in 2004 as part of a Tennessee Williams festival at the Kennedy Center in D.C., but never felt like she got her fix. (Already, this revival's rehearsal period is four times longer than that production's entire run. And Field is signed on until at least July 2.) Back then, Field had her hopes of carrying on with Amanda dashed by a Jessica Lange version that was headed to Broadway. "And then Cherry Jones, bless her heart, came in," says Field about the 2013 production that got seven Tony nominations, "and I thought, Oh, I'll never do that."

So deep was her longing to play Amanda that when Brock once told her she was going to see Glass somewhere, Field blurted out, "No! It's mine!" "She's just always talked about it as the role of roles," says Brock-Lear for aging actresses, if you will. And when Field and I meet, it's clear she's read multiple Tennessee Williams biographies. She tells me how he'd written the play both for and about his domineering mother, Edwina, and the power she had over him, as well as his sister Rose, who'd had a lobotomy just before his career took off and whose loss he never got over-or forgave his mother for. "There aren't a lot of really quintessentially complicated, powerful characters in American literature for older women," Field says. "It isn't a sentimental look at a mother. She's so filled with contradictions and complications, as human beings are. There are very few women written that way in literature. They don't exist."

So for 13 years, her producer friend Scott Rudin brought her other juicy theater roles, only to have her turn them down. "I'd just always been saying, 'All that is great, but I keep comparing it to how much I want to do Glass," says Field. "That was the problem. I couldn't get over my hurdle of wanting to do it again. I felt

The Menagerie **Dream Team**

The Glass Menagerie offers four plum roles, attracting stellar casts. Of the seven previous Broadway productions, which foursome would be the all-time greatest? Consulting reviews and experts, we investigate:

THE PRODUCTION	AMANDA	том		LAURA		GENTLEMAN CALLER
2017 OPENING: Mar. 9	Sally Field	Joe Mantello	Ma	adison Ferris		Finn Wittrock
2013 OPENED: Sep. 26 PERFORMANCES:	Cherry Jones	Zachary Quinto	Celia	Keenan-Bolg	er	Brian J. Smith

LAURA: Three of the leads in this production earned Tony nominations, and the fourth—Zachary Quinto—was described by the Times' Ben Brantley as "the finest Tom I've ever seen." For our dream team, we'll select Keenan-Bolger. As New York wrote, she is "revivifying an iconic role. She is the show's soul and organizing principle."



THE GENTLEMAN CALLER: Brian J. Smith in 2013 was lauded, John Heard in 1983 got mixed reviews, and the Paul Rudd in 1975 is not the Paul Rudd you're thinking of. But we'll pick a dark horse: Kevin Kilner, a matine handsome take on this dreamy (literally) role, described by one critic as "the real discovery of this production."



TOM: With apologies to Zachary Quinto, our dream-team slot for Tom goes to a young Rip Torn, whose virile take was widely celebrated but also highly polarizing. Critic Roger Boxill, in an essay on the play, described Torn's portrayal as "a wild, brooding, quirky, homosexual Tom who flung his words at the house like accusations." Among critics, "those who attacked it were inclined to do so without reserve; others were as absolute in their esteem."



AMANDA: This role, sometimes called the King Lear for actresses, has inspired iconic performances, from Jessica Tandy (who'd previously originated the role of Blanche DuBois on Broadway) in 1983 to Cherry Jones in 2013. But the pick here has to be Laurette Taylor, the stage legend whose career was revived by this role. The New Yorker once called her performance "the greatest ever by an American actor." Maureen Stapleton, who later played Amanda twice, praised her as "perfect." In 1945, a critic agreed: "I never hope to see again, in the theater, anything as perfect."

like I hadn't really gotten to do it." And what would that feel like? "This," she says. "It's just a difference in the duration, the production, and everything about it."

She caught a break when Gold fell in love with the play after directing a 2015 production in Dutch in Amsterdam and decided he had a new take that could justify reviving it just three years after its last blockbuster revival. As Field explains, Glass was Williams's first successful play, and even contemporary productions are based on how it was performed back then, as a new form of theater known as a "memory play," created by this unknown upstart. "None of the actors knew how to wrap their brains around it, and because Tennessee was new, they didn't trust him," says Field. "So they ad-libbed things and changed his original intent."

The result has been a long history of Amanda interpreted as an overbearing hysteric, harping on her (probably closeted) son, Tom, about the factory job he hates and her disabled daughter, Laura, about an ideal of marriage that may never happen. With Field, Gold says, "I want to redefine Amanda," inviting empathy for her circumstances as a single mother in the Depression, living in a tenement you have to climb a fire escape to enter, while raising two children, one of whom not only has a physical impairment but also debilitating social anxiety. "Amanda can be a character you associate with being out of touch and living in a fantasy," says Gold, "and that was never going to happen with Sally. She grounds it in her instinct of what it's like to be a mother struggling for the success of her kids." Adding another layer is Gold's casting of only the

second performer on Broadway to use a wheelchair, newcomer Madison Ferris, as Laura (alongside Joe Mantello as Tom and Finn Wittrock as the gentleman caller)her disability and the way it ties the family down and to one another made real.

Reading through the play now, it seems eerily on the nose. It's set in 1937, when, according to Tennessee stand-in Tom, narrating his past, "the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind. Their eyes had failed them, or they

"It isn't a sentimental look at a mother. She's filled with contradictions and complications, as human beings are."

had failed their eyes, and so they were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy." He also uses the phrase "all the world was waiting for bombardments,' describing revelers at the dance hall across the street making out behind ash bins, oblivious to what was about to descend on them. Franco's Spain was in the midst of its civil war; Hitler was about to acquire Austria; violent labor movements were disrupting Chicago, Cleveland, and St. Louis; and Amanda, "a little woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place," was busy creating a world of alternative facts in her own home, wherein she disallowed anyone from using the word cripple to describe Laura, and there's still a shrine to her alcoholic charmer of a husband who'd left them bereft.

Tom is drifting through in an angry haze, but for Field this is really a play about the plight of women and how not much has changed. "Amanda had so few choices," Field says. "No education, or not a lot of it. No family backing. You just had to figure out how to get through this, to keep your children alive the best way you can." And each time she or Laura sees a crack in the ceiling they might crawl through, they are met with a harsh blow designed to mire them in the helplessness of a society that will not allow them to escape their circumstances. "What is there left but dependency all our lives?" Amanda laments.

A few days after we meet, Field will enter into an actor's form of dependency: performing in front of an audience she cannot control or predict, one that may wish for Field not as she is, but as she once was in Steel Magnolias, Forrest Gump, and Mrs. Doubtfire. She's not worried Vice-President Pence will show up like he did for Hamilton ("I somehow don't feel he'll be heading right toward The Glass Menagerie. Why do I not feel that?"), but it might be great if a few Trump-voting ladies saw it and walked away with a better sense of the pain that can come from misunderstanding one another's differences. Does she really think they'd be any more interested in Glass than Pence would be? "Well," she says, laughing, "they may come to see me."

THE CLARIFICATION

Addressing potential pop-culture confusions.



Remy Ma

Remy Ma is a Grammynominated rapper whose new album, Plata o Plomo, a joint album with Fat Joe, was released earlier this month. Ma is part of Fat Joe's crew, Terror Squad, and rose to stardom in part after appearing on the reality show Love & Hip-Hop: New York.



Rémy Martin

Rémy Martin, known for Cognac Fine Champagne, is named for the French winemaker who founded the company in 1724. According to its website, "the House of Rémy Martin will forever be intertwined with the lands of Charente." It's is also intertwined with Remy Ma-it's her former rap name.



Remy Zero

This pop band, formed in the early 1990s, wrote the song "Save Me," which served as the theme for the long-running CW show Smallville. The band's front man, Cinjun Tate, was intertwined with TV star Alyssa Milano, though not forever-their marriage lasted less than a year.



Remy (the Rat)

Remy is the main character in Ratatouille, an animated Pixar film about a rat who longs to become a celebrated chef in a French restaurant. Remy, whose voice is provided by Patton Oswalt, rises to culinary stardom when his trademark ratatouille charms a curmudgeonly critic.





Later, Haters

The cast of *Girls* on the end of the show—and what they thought of all the controversies along the way.

GIRLS airs Sundays on HBO.

T'S HARD TO separate Girls, the show, from all the controversies that have surrounded it, whether it's debates about diversity on TV, or body politics, or complaints about the likability of the characters themselves. On the occasion of the show's final season, its four stars-Lena Dunham, Allison Williams, Jemima Kirke, and Zosia Mamet—sat down with Vulture TV editor Gazelle Emami to discuss the critiques that hit home and the ones that simply irked them most.

After Girls premiered, there was a backlash, and many people didn't seem to get the humor of the show. At times, it's been difficult to judge the show as a show, outside of all these surrounding critiques.

Lena Dunham: No one ever wants to talk to us about craft. They just ask, "What does it feel like to have people hate you?"

Zosia Mamet: And "Why do you get naked so much?"

Why do you think Girls struck such a

LD: We never resisted the criticism. We

were like, there's a conversation about diversity that needs to happen in this industry, and if we're going to be the show that starts that conversation, we're thrilled to have the job. I tended to think we were capturing something that was real about life as a young woman, but not necessarily capturing what was real about everyone's life as a young woman. That being said, there is a really fascinating phenomenon we face, unlike male television creators: We were never given the benefit of the doubt. So the idea that we

might understand the humor of our show—that our show might be a commentary on the attitudes of white middleclass women, that we were self-awarewas completely disbanded based on the notion that we were somehow four idiotic white women incapable of understanding what we were performing or writing.

Jemima Kirke: That everything was said at face value.

LD: We're so lucky to have had so much cultural conversation about it, but I would be lying if I didn't say that it was frustrating to have the most talented cast, the most talented crew, who show up every day and push their boundaries, and then basically to be treated as if we were the cast of *The O.C.*—it was ludicrous.

Allison Williams: Constantly, we're referred to in articles about the show with our real names—like, "Allison Williams gets her ass eaten" is not a thing that's happened.

LD: I've always felt the need to be like, "I accept every criticism. Thank you so much for watching the show. I'm so grateful." Now that the show is ending, I feel like I'm finally ready to blow it up a little bit and be like, "You know what, fuck all y'all." I've made mistakes as a person. I've said things I regret, but at the end of the day, we spent six years making a piece of art that completely busted open the way women were allowed to behave on TV, and I'm not going to apologize for it.

JK: But what about a mistake? Do you have to apologize for a mistake as an artist?

LD: I think I have to apologize if I say something dumb in an article.

Girls has been a show many are willing to comment on without having seen it.

LD: Our ratings aren't high enough for how many people are pissed about the show.

AW: Most people are very willing to tell me that it's not for them.

LD: My favorite thing is, before I got off Twitter, I would see these tweets that were like, "I fucking hate Lena Dunham, but I can't wait for *Girls* to come back. It's my favorite show." If you like the show, you like me, because my show is me. If you've got a huge problem with me but the show gives you great pleasure, you need to reexamine.

ZM: I think our show came out at a time where the world was yearning for something of this ilk—and in many ways it opened the door for so much that has happened since in terms of women in entertainment. But because it was a first, it was under an incredibly strong microscope. I remember Judd [Apatow, the show's executive producer | said something in our first season: "People are either going to love it or they're going to

hate it, but they're going to talk about it, and that's what's important." Okay, yes, some people are adoring it, and it's literally making some people enraged. But they're talking about it, and they're talking about the things that we want them to talk about.

As actors on the show, did you ever have to do something as a character that made you recalibrate who your character is? Something that made you change your understanding of your character?

JK: Well ... I had to date Adam. So that was a difficult one.

LD: Forced to date Adam Driver!

AW: Every time Marnie slept with someone else's ex.

LD: One of her favorite hobbies. It wasn't even always someone else's ex.

AW: No, it was often. Desi was Clementine's boyfriend. Ray was Shosh's ex. Elijah was your ex. Then in the final season, she's cheating once again. She's a fucking mess. Every time she did it, I had to be like, "Lena, why? People already hate Marnie so much.'

LD: Jemima was really upset about that Adam story line because something people would be surprised to know about Jemima in real life is, despite her lush persona, despite her naughty Britishness-

JK: I'm extremely neurotic.

LD: And moral.

AW: The other thing to note is, I cannot stress enough how un-20s our collective 20s have been as people. All we've done is work. We've been in pretty much the same relationship for the duration of the show. In that weird sense, I would say I lived my 20s through Marnie's experience of them because mine felt a lot more like a classic 30s decade.

Which character has matured more than the rest in these seasons?

AW: I'd say Shosh.

LD: She's the one who goes the distance.

AW: Especially by the end of six.

LD: We really gave it to her. She deserved it, and she got it.

Who has matured the least?

LD: Most of us are still neck and neck. We're all doing our darnedest. I always make this joke: I want to leave like a campsite-better than you found it. I really think we did it.

AW: I feel like we ended it the way Hannah would leave a campsite.

LD: Which is kind of better.

AW: Like kicking dirt over a stillsimmering fire [laughs].

LD: One hundred percent. I like leaving it open for our movie.

ZM: But like, maybe putting flowers over the embers that might catch fire.

IN THE ROOM

Inside the spaces where culture is made. BY JORDAN LARSON

When the Dirty Projectors front man David Longstreth set up his studio in L.A. to work on his new self-titled album, he had two things on his mind: change and stability. So he started by erecting a shrine to his teenage musical idols as a reminder of who he was and who he might still like to become. "I was looking for all kinds of advice, you know?" says the 35-year-old singer and guitarist. He settled on an eclectic holy trinity— Missy Elliott, Joni Mitchell, and Beethoven—to watch over his sound/mixing. But his wall of fame is constantly changing—Miles Davis, Stravinsky, and the 12th-century saint and musician Hildegard of Bingen have all cycled through—



with Mitchell as the only permanent occupant. "She knew herself really early on," he says. "The music that she's made attests to this curiosity about life and music and a willingness to just/keep growing." In addition, the setup is mobile: The desk has wheels, and the walls are nothing but ten-foot sound baffles. When he needs a change of scenery, he just moves the desk. "I'd hit a wall and think, What can I do to get beyond it?" he says. "Well, maybe start by just reconfiguring the space. You can trick yourself, in a good way."



Rise of the Neo Rom-Com

Romantic comedies didn't die. They evolved. By Fen Chaney

O UNDERSTAND what the modern rom-com-as exemplified by Crazy Ex-Girlfriend, just renewed for season threeis subverting, let's flash back to what some refer to as the golden age of the contemporary romantic comedy: the 1990s and 2000s. That 20-year period gave us hit movies starring Julia Roberts (Pretty Woman, My Best Friend's Wedding, Notting Hill, Runaway Bride) and Adam Sandler (The Wedding Singer, 50 First Dates); hit movies directed by Nora Ephron and Nancy Meyers (Sleepless in Seattle, You've Got Mail, What Women Want,

Something's Gotta Give); and unexpected hits (While You Were Sleeping, My Big Fat Greek Wedding). Many of the movies during this robust rom-com moment were terrific; more were not. The bad ones, and sometimes often the good, fell back on conventions so frequently repeated they turned into the tropes that defined the genre. There were tons of meet-cutes, grand gestures, love triangles, happily-ever-afters, changes of hearts on or very close to wedding days, and women whose lives were finally made complete because of a guy, sometimes one who actually said, out loud, "You complete me."

In the current decade, Hollywood has continued to produce some traditional bigscreen romantic comedies, but the numbers are definitely down. Consequently, the genre's obituary has been written more than once. A 2013 Hollywood Reporter article officially declared the rom-com's time of death, pointing out that studios and big stars were no longer interested in those kinds of projects. But while all of that has been happening, elsewhere the rom-com has been liberated to try new things and upend some of those old conventions. Within the past three or four years, films and TV shows have focused on female characters trying to establish their own identities-and their pursuit of romantic and sexual relationships illuminates that process, rather than serving as the ultimate narrative goal.

On HBO's Insecure, Issa's uncertainty about her relationship with her live-in boyfriend, Lawrence, is explicitly intertwined with a lack of self-confidence and uncertainty about her future. The same can be said about Gretchen on You're the Worst or Rebecca on Crazy Ex-Girlfriend, whose romantic journeys dovetail with their experiences in therapy. In fact, if you choose any of the major rom-com tropes, you can find examples of films and TV shows from the past five years that have flipped it on its head while simultaneously flipping the bird at traditional ideas about romance. You want a meet-cute? Here, try a one-night stand that results in an unexpected pregnancy (Knocked Up or Amazon's Catastrophe). You want a rom-com about a wedding?

The Seven **Best Romantic Comedies** of the **Past** Decade

DESPITE REPORTS to the contrary, the rom-com hasn't faded away-it's just adapted and expanded to TV. Here are the best recent entries to the neo-rom-com genre, on big screen



Ex-Girlfriend (2015-)

"When you call her crazy, you're just calling her in love." That line from the theme song is a fair summary of what Crazy Ex-Girlfriend is about: the wrongheaded idea, perpetuated by romantic comedies, that women will do anything to snag a man. But what this show smartly lampoons are the fairytale clichés that brain-



Her (2013) A richly constructed, absurd, and sobering narrative that's just right for these digital times. The romance between Theodore (Joaquin Phoenix) and Samantha (voice of Scarlett Johansson) is really a courtship between a man and his Siri or Alexa, but it leads to flirtation, sexual attraction, and even genuine feeling, raising the question: Can a man love a woman when the woman is not real?



Worst (2014-) Gretchen (Aya Cash) and Jimmy (Chris Geere) hook up in the first episode of You're the Worst after grudgingly attending a wedding. Then these two horribly selfish, unethical people teach each other to find the better angels in their natures-no, wait, that's not what happens at all. In this L.A. story, everyone is awful. That's why it's the best.



Catastrophe (2015-) Created and written by the transatlantic duo Sharon Horgan and Rob Delaney, this comedy starts with the premise of what happens when two fairly reasonable people have vacation sex and accidentally conceive a baby-then decide to keep it and raise it together. Catastrophe expertly keeps its characters tethered to harsh reality, while somehow keeping faith in the myths of romance as well.



Knocked Up (2007) Hailed as an instant classic upon its release, this movie set the template for the next generation of rom-coms. Sex here isn't a consummation of romance; instead, it happens early and awkwardly. Most influentially, Knocked Up is unafraid to get depressing, showing all the ways both single life and domesticity can crush a person's soul.

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Well, you can try *Bridesmaids*, which is actually about the complex, enduring love between two BFFs, played by Kristen Wiig and Maya Rudolph, instead of two people about to be wed. Eager to be swept up in fairy tales and grand gestures? *They Came Together*, the rom-com send-up starring Amy Poehler and Paul Rudd, is here to tell you they are bullshit, and so is *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, a show that constantly inflates romantic fantasy balloons and then swiftly pops them with a sharp needle and a song.

Which brings us to the most interesting trope that current rom-coms have subverted: the happy ending. When we invest in a story about two people in love, we are programmed to expect it to conclude with the two of them together, living their snuggly-wuggly best life. Not so in the neo-romcom. The first season of Master of None ends with Dev (Aziz Ansari) and Rachel (Noël Wells) splitting up. You're the Worst, the FX comedy committed to the bleak theory that love is a lie, took an optimistic turn at the end of its most recent season, with a major character proposing to another. But mere seconds after it happened, the bride-to-be was ditched by the guy who'd just asked for her hand. Even a pretty conventional Hollywood release like last year's How to Be Single has a streak of female independence in it; Dakota Johnson's character finds that she's ultimately happiest when standing alone, with no guy by her side at all. All of which means, ironically, that the rom-com genre itself, far from expiring, might be finding its own happy ending after all.

COLLECTION (ROBERTS)

EVERETT

CW (CRAZY EX GIRLFRIEND); PARAMOUNT/COURTESY

PHOTOGRAPHS: MICHAEL DESMOND/COURTESY OF THE



Bridesmaids (2011) The movie earned attention for being a box-office smash that was both female and filthy. But what was most remarkable about Bridesmaids was its focus on friendship-the falling out and rekindling of feeling between the bride (Maya Rudolph) and her blundering maid of honor (Kristen Wiig), who share a much more obvious chemistry than the soon-to-be husband and wife.



Obvious Child (2014) Just as Donna (Jenny Slate) is about to tell a one-night stand that she's pregnant and has decided to get an abortion, he holds a butter packet between his palms, warming it for her. It's an innocent and disarming momentwhich describes this prickly comedy as a whole. Obvious Child, like its star Jenny Slate, offers the perfect mix of cutesy and caustic.



Runaway Starlets

Why don't modern A-list actresses do rom-coms anymore?

By Kyle Buchanan

N THE BEGINNING, we had Julia Roberts and Meg Ryan. Roberts, often referred to as "America's Sweetheart," lent her girl-next-door star power to hits like *Pretty Woman*, *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *Runaway Bride*, and *Notting Hill*. Ryan gave the genre *When Harry Met Sally* and *You've Got Mail*. In time, they begot Sandra Bull-ock—of *While You Were Sleeping*, *Two Weeks Notice*, and *The Proposal*—and Reese Witherspoon, who faithfully starred in *Sweet Home Alabama* and *Just Like Heaven*. In the land of the rom-coms, these women were smiling stewards: Meet-cutes were had, misunderstandings were worked through, and mixed-up matches became couples by the final reel.

Whom do we have now?

The new class of A-list actresses has shown little interest in this kind of movie. Jennifer Lawrence is known for franchise films and Oscar-caliber dramatic work, and the closest she's come to a traditional rom-com is probably *Silver Linings Playbook*. Years ago in *Crazy, Stupid, Love,* Emma Stone sparkled, but now she'd rather work with up-and-coming auteurs than star in the next *Bridget Jones*. New recruits like Margot Robbie, Brie Larson, and Shailene Woodley have no romantic comedies on their docket. For years, this was a genre that would mint superstars. Now actresses are content to bypass it entirely. While Katherine Heigl may have hoped to become the next Julia Roberts, it's safe to say that Margot Robbie doesn't aspire to become the next Heigl.

Instead, the current strategy for stardom follows the blueprint established by Lawrence, who was nominated for her first Oscar at age 20 for the indie Winter's Bone. Emma Stone is only 28, and she's already starred in three films nominated for Best Picture, one of which won that prize (Birdman) and another of which seems poised to (La La Land). If these actresses so much as flirt with the rom-com genre, it's strictly under the auspices of award-friendly directors like David O. Russell who once said, "When people called Silver Linings Playbook a romantic comedy, my head snapped." In a way, the A-list's absence from rom-coms has allowed the genre to find new life, powered by unexpected stars in off-kilter movies like Trainwreck, Obvious Child, and the recent Sundance sensation The Big Sick, about a Pakistani-American culture clash starring Kumail Nanjiani and Zoe Kazan. These movies use the rom-com structure as a Trojan horse to get unfamiliar faces—and ideas—onto the big screen. With or without A-list actresses, great work is once again being done in the rom-com genre. It deserves our, and their, attention. ■

The CULTURE PAGES

RITICS

Matt Zoller Seitz on Legion ... Christian Lorentzen on J. M. Coetzee ... David Edelstein on Get Out.



TV / MATT ZOLLER SEITZ

Head Trip A Marvel mutant discovers his powers in Legion.

LEGION IS A TRIP: brainy, tight, yet so decadently inventive that I found myself laughing out loud at the sheer audacity of the damned thing. The first three episodes of this X-Men-styled mutant melodrama are superb, and the pilot in particular is an all-timer, but the whole thing is so aesthetically fresh that I could see myself continuing to watch it even if it suddenly became dumb as hell, just to

see what new storytelling trick showrunner Noah Hawley and his collaborators have up their puffy magicians' sleeves.

Told mainly from the point of view of a telekinetic loner named David Haller (*Downton Abbey*'s Dan Stevens), this is a fractured, highly subjective saga, jumping around in time from the hero's childhood through his present incarceration in a mental hospital

LEGION FX. WEDNESDAYS

and ahead to events that won't be fully explained until much later. As David jousts with sinister jailers, befriends a blissed-out wiseass played by Aubrey Plaza, and becomes smitten with a beautiful loner named Sydney Barrett (Rachel Keller) who says she doesn't like to be touched, he also travels deep inside his own tortured mind, revisiting, and in some cases revising, the story he'd presented to us and others, discovering contradictions and lies, filling in gaps created by trauma or repression, and otherwise making sense of himself.

Along the way, *Legion* packs a season's worth of cinematic technique into the first few episodes. It finds ways to suggest alternate, in some cases still-theoretical, modes of perception, including consciousness-

swapping (truly dazzling because so much of this is conveyed through the actors' performances) and tours of other people's memories (the characters' avatars enter specific recollections and move around inside them, like tourists who've been permitted to loiter onstage during a play; they can also run particular moments forward and back like a YouTube clip). There are long single-take action sequences where six or seven things are happening at once and you have to decide what to look at, soundless outbursts of telepathic mayhem scored to operatic pop and rock, and (yes, really) a dance number. Everything but the kitchen sink. Well, there's a kitchen sink in here, too, come to think of it. Mr. Robot seems austere in comparison, yet also paradoxically less focused. I never get the sense here that the storytellers are just trying things out, riffing or expanding a moment because they're digging it. The whole thing seems very purposeful and exact, even if that doesn't come across right away. You think, That was random, then ten minutes or two episodes later you realize, Oh, right, that's what that was about.

The plot, drawn from the comic by Chris Claremont and Bill Sienkiewicz, is standardissue superhero-conspiracy stuff, with David being packed off to an asylum. I'm not spoiling anything by telling you that David spent his entire life thinking he was mentally ill but is actually an Incredible Hulk of psychic violence, and that the powers he thought he possessed and the bizarre images he kept seeing were just figments of a damaged mind; all this is put across in the first few minutes of the pilot, a fiendishly vivid, compressed montage of David's childhood and adolescence that is articulated, like most of Legion, mainly through images, sound, and music, rather than through dialogue or voice-over narration.

Hawley, who wrote and directed the pilot, is a novelist first and foremost, but unlike many filmmakers who made their bones in literature, he realizes that words are but one tool in a filmmaker's kit. The control exercised here over tone and point of view as well as chronology is extraordinary; it continues in the next two episodes (albeit on a smaller scale) and is articulated in a genuinely cinematic way. Time jumps, shifts of perspective and attitude, even small adjustments in power dynamics between characters are conveyed through cuts, camera movements, dissonant sound effects, unexpected bits of music, and so forth, rather than by having somebody walk onscreen and announce it, which is how probably 90 percent of television dramas, including good ones, would do it. (Even Jessica Jones, which had some extraordinary stretches of subjective filmmaking, wasn't this experimental;

much of the story was still conveyed in traditional scenes of people talking until the point had been made.)

Like Hawley's sister FX series Fargowhich plays like an homage to every Coenbrothers film ever made as well as every piece of art that fed the Coens' imaginations, yet somehow manages to maintain its own peculiar identity—Legion should never be turned into a spot-the-influences drinking game, because it would make your liver explode. Suffice it to say that two of the most prominent influences here are the least expected: Wes Anderson, whose deepfocus, often symmetrical compositions,

mid-century analog designs, and retrohipster soundtracks infuse even the most dire set pieces with pop fizz; and Bob Fosse (Cabaret, All That Jazz), who fractured his film narratives into glittering pieces without confusing the viewer. My major complaint at this early phase is that the show spends more time looking back (into the hero's past) than ahead (to whatever the future will bring for him and his mentors and colleagues). Westworld and Mr. Robot suffer from this same problem, but at least Legion has figured out a way to make the information-delivery process kinetic and exhilarating, not to mention charming.

BOOKS / CHRISTIAN LORENTZEN

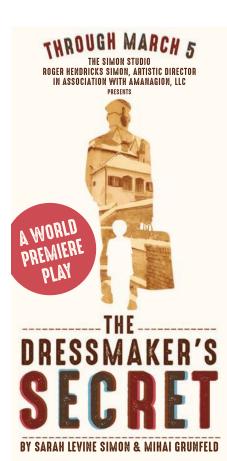
The Apathy of J. M. Coetzee
Reading his novels
by the light of indifference.

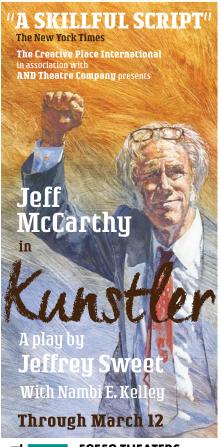
IN 1974, J. M. COETZEE applied to South Africa's Ministry of the Interior to become an official state censor of literature. A few months later, he was informed that his application had been turned down. Coetzee had returned to South Africa in 1971 after a stint studying and teaching in America, having been unable to renew his visa after being arrested at a faculty protest at SUNY Buffalo against police presence on campus, a charge later overturned. He joined the University of Cape Town as a professor and in 1972 filed a report to his department head on books that were banned by the state but that he regarded as crucial to his research and teaching. The list of authors is long: William Faulkner, Richard Wright, Vladimir Nabokov, Norman Mailer, James Baldwin, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer, Pablo Neruda, even Nikolai Gogol, among many others. "[You] may be interested to look over the following condensation of how our censors have impoverished our lives," he wrote to his boss. What, then, was he up to a couple of years later, already the author of the novel Dusklands, in trying to join the apparatus of repression?

The South African scholar David Attwell tells this story in J. M. Coetzee and the Life of Writing: Face-to-Face With Time, an engrossing 2015 study of the author's manuscripts, now held at the University of Texas at Austin. Attwell quotes Coetzee telling a friend that he was merely calling the authorities' bluff. Coetzee had been working on a manuscript, later abandoned, narrated by a censor, and Attwell concludes that Coetzee's "odd flirtation" with becoming a censor was a way of "arranging for life to imitate art." In the drafts, Coetzee ponders what sort of writer he wants to be. It's a mental exercise illuminating in its strange premises. "Fiction, being a serious affair," Coetzee writes, "cannot accept prerequisites like (1) a desire to write, (2) something to write about, (3) something to say. There must be a place for a fiction of apathy toward the task of writing, toward the subject, toward the means."

It's an astonishing idea—apathy as a source of, not an obstacle to, seriousness. Surely it's an anti-novelistic quality, but it rings true to Coetzee's work and the cold, cerebral, disinterested character of many of his heroes: an apathy of self-protection. It cuts against our traditional ideas of inspiration, all the way back to the supernatural notion of the

THE SCHOOLDAYS OF JESUS BY J. M. COETZEE. VIKING. 272 PAGES. \$27.





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muse possessing and speaking through the poet. Then again, what if in this equation the poet were an apathetic partner? To remove the supernatural element, what if we conceive of the author as the apathetic servant of a story and its characters? For that matter, why should the characters necessarily be passionate players themselves? After all, they're in a story they never asked to be a part of.

Four decades later, Coetzee is an author of Olympian distinction, the 2003 Nobel laureate and twice the winner of the Booker Prize. Attwell gleans from his reading of the manuscripts that Coetzee's books tend to have autobiographical beginnings and evolve toward greater levels of fictionality. So it's likely that his move to Australia—he emigrated from South Africa in 2002—informs his 2013 novel *The Childhood of Jesus* and now its sequel, *The Schooldays of Jesus*. These books follow a set of refugees settling in a strange land. They are austere narra-

tives, elemental in their treatment of daily life, with the barest tissue of realistic detail. There is action-murder, theft, escape from authorities-but the bulk of these books is taken up by discussions of the nature of appetite, work, family bonds, sexual desire, etc. Many scenes have the qualities of miniature Socratic dialogues. Their pleasures are pure, as Coetzee has cleared away modern prejudices and stripped his characters' phil-

osophical conversations to a skeletal core. Wrapping these dialogues in the skin of plots with a few absurd swerves, some of them too preposterous for a B-movie script, may all be part of what one character calls "a very deep joke."

Both novels are narrated in the third person and follow the thoughts of Simón, a man "no longer young" who has taken responsibility for a 5-year-old orphan named Davíd. Simón sees it as his task to find David a mother, and he persuades Inés, an attractive and aristocratic-seeming young woman he sees one day playing tennis, to take on the role. The ease with which she accepts motherhood of a stranger is one of the book's weird swerves, but also a testament to the boy's charismatic power. He's a chess prodigy, he's headstrong, and everyone can sense that he's special and that, as he says, he's been given the wrong name. David must be at some deep or deep-joke level the Jesus of the title. He proves too much for his teachers, and Simón and Inés pull him out of school, putting themselves on the wrong side of the otherwise well-meaning authorities.

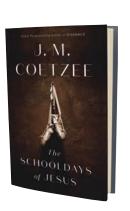
Schooldays picks up here, with the trio's arrival in a provincial city. The novel's action centers on Davíd's enrollment as a boarder in the Academy of Dance and the murder of his teacher Ana Magdalena by Dmitri, the janitor of the museum that houses the school. The novel's intellectual poles are passion and rationality. Ana Magdalena and her husband Juan Sebastián's mystical instructions in music and dance—which involve a form of numerology, channeling numbers from the heavens—are the idealized form of passion, and Davíd, now age 6, becomes her brightest student. He's also charmed by Dmitri, who shows David and the other students pornography and will tell anyone who listens of his obsession with Ana Magdalena. Was the crime a rape-murder or a crime of passion committed by Dmitri against his secret lover?

When Dmitri is put on trial, the courts allow him every opportunity to mitigate

his sentence, finally committing him to the city hospital's mental ward, from which he easily and repeatedly escapes, to further taunt Simón: "Can you understand what it was like to be with a woman, to be with her in the fullest of senses, I put it delicately, when you forget where you are and time is suspended, that sort of being-with, when you are in her and she is in you-to be with her like that and yet be aware in a corner of your

mind that there is something wrong about all of it, not morally wrong, I have never had much truck with morality, have always been the independent type, morally independent, but wrong in a cosmological sense, as if the planets in the heavens above our heads were misaligned, were saying to us *No no no?* Do you understand? No, of course you don't, and who can blame you."

His rants, deranged and criminal as they are, still prick something in Simón's mind, leaving him ever less certain of his place in the world and the right way to guide Davíd through it. Of course, nothing is resolved in Coetzee's Jesus novels; we emerge as from a Platonic dialogue, a novel of Dostoyevsky, or *Don Quixote*the texts Coetzee is rewriting—with more questions than when we entered, suspicious of our passions and unsure of the protections of apathy. But there's a stark beauty to these novels of ideas and the haunting images that infuse them: a young boy pondering a bird with a broken wing, a beautiful woman turned blue by death, an old man trying to dance.





Daniel Kaluuya in Get Out.

MOVIES / DAVID EDELSTEIN

White Fright Get Out is terrifying, socially conscious horror.

JORDAN PEELE'S Get Out is the satirical horror movie we've been waiting for, a mash-up of Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? and The Stepford Wives that's more fun than either and more illuminating, too. Daniel Kaluuya plays Chris, a black photographer who travels to an affluent suburb with his white girlfriend, Rose (Allison Williams), to meet her family. Before they leave, he learns she hasn't told them he's black, and he's a bit nervous—and so are we, given that the movie opens with a young black man getting snatched from a suburban sidewalk and thrown into a white car playing the '30s music-hall ditty "Run, Rabbit, Run" ("Run rabbit-run rab-

bit / Run! Run! "). No worries, though. Rose's parents, Dean (Bradley Whitford) and Missy (Catherine Keener), turn out to be conscientious liberals and hugely welcoming. Dean tells Chris he'd have voted for Obama a third time. And Dean is mindful of the awkwardness Chris feels in the presence of their black housekeeper and gardener, who are a couple. Dean insists that the two have been with them a long time and that they're like family. He's not far off.

GET OUT DIRECTED BY JORDAN PEELE. UNIVERSAL PICTURES.

This is Peele's directorial debut, but it feels like the work of someone who has been making features for years. He uses the wide screen like John Carpenter in Halloween, to lull but decenter you. His "Boo!" moments make you jump and then laugh at yourself for jumping-then steel yourself to jump again. His surrealist sequences are gorgeously lyrical, his gore, when it finally comes, Pollock-splattery. His years crafting sketches for Key & Peele have taught him the difference between

parody and satire. There are plenty of savory horror tropes, but Get Out wouldn't work as well if, in the real world, white people weren't so unconvincing in their assurance that black people have little to fear apart from those fascist-racist cops and their fascist-racist Republican enablers. Peele is after less obvious targets: rich white liberals as black soul-suckers.

The performances are devilishly clever heightened but without a whisper of camp. Whitford's Dean is too chummily direct to be hiding anything, right? A villain would be more evasive. Keener is the psychiatrist as warm, tousled Earth Mother: Should Chris fear the way she gets into his head into the feelings he has about his own mom, killed in a hit-and-run accident so many years before-or welcome her attempt to get him to confront his repressed guilt? Caleb Landry Jones, one of the more interestingly weird actors in movies, plays Rose's brother, who can't seem to control his competitive instincts and always wants to start some kind of street fight. The vivaciously pretty Williams makes Rose the biggest mystery. She picks up on the strange, threatening vibes in the house and lets Chris know he's not imagining anything. A true conspirator would assure him that everything's okay. But she's in there helping him sort out what's real and what's imagined. She really cares.

Kaluuya, a Brit, is a perfect hero for a movie like this. Chris registers on some level that he's a character in a horror movie—he can't believe how bizarre these people are behaving—but the dislocation is deeper and more disabling. LilRel Howery is Chris's boisterous TSA-agent friend who tells him not to go into suburban white people's houses, which is a twist on white people telling innocent girls not to walk down dark urban streets. Get Out is a ludicrous paranoid fantasy, but that doesn't mean it's not alive in the unconscious. Having it out there in so delightful a form helps us laugh at it together—and maybe later, when we've thought it over, shudder.



Tell us about the tooth-drilling scene.

"You know what it's like in the dental chair. When the metal hits our tooth, the smoke that comes out when they drill, the smell of your tooth burning ..."



 $Edited\ by\ Jennifer\ Vineyard$

Verbinski



"I didn't have to act much for that one. It was terrifying."

"I wasn't scared of

DeHaan

"It's just really important to pierce the membrane, to go a little too far. We just got as close as possible.'



Verbinski



going to the dentist before, but I'm overdue for an appointment. I'm avoiding it now!" DeHaan

SCREENING OF A CURE FOR WELLNESS, HOSTED BY THE CINEMA SOCIETY AND PRADA LANDMARK SUNSHINE AND MR. PURPLE. FEBRUARY 13.

TANGENT

"Quick Morgan Freeman story. I was about 23, we were doing Shakespeare in the Park. I had about two lines. So I said, 'Mr. Freeman, I've been thinking. Maybe if we extend the fight ... 'He said, Look, boy, you click the $sword\ three\ times, I\ stab\ you, you$ die, you get the hell off the stage." —Denzel Washington





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SELECTED SHORTS

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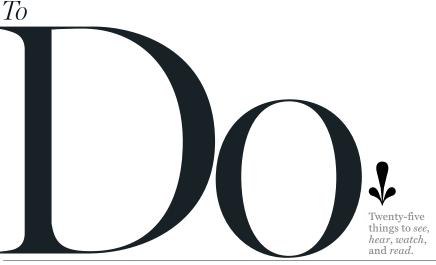
short story collection. With readings by Broadway and Hollywood actors.

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The CULTURE PAGES



FEBRUARY 22-MARCH 8

1. See Joanna Malinowska's Not a Metaphorical Forest

Humans and nature collide.

Canada, 333 Broome St., through March 12.

A beaver lodge made of discarded Christmas trees worms its way into your mind, while a row of tools made by the artist tunes you into this totally doit-yourself eccentric visionary. Funny and philosophical, the works by Malinowska are a reminder that with only imagination and will can human beings change the world. JERRY SALTZ

2. Watch The 89th **Annual Academy Awards**

Referendum on the red carpet.

ABC. February 26.

More so than any Oscars ceremony in recent memory, this one feels like a Rorschach test of American viewers, pitting the white, middle-class visions of Manchester by the Sea and La La Land against the predominantly African-American worlds of Fences and Moonlight. Jimmy Kimmel probably isn't the ideal host to navigate this cultural minefield, but MATT ZOLLER SEITZ what can you do?

POP

3. Listen to **Dirty Projectors**

With an assist from Solange.

Domino Records, February 24.

In the past five years, Dirty Projectors has shrunk from five members to one and moved from the East Coast to California. (See story on page 69.)

The band's new self-titled album sees singerguitarist David Longstreth sorting through the fallout of a breakup that nearly broke his band as well. CRAIG JENKINS

THEATER

4. See Dear World

Hello, Aurelia!

York Theatre Company at St. Peter's, February 25 through March 5.

If the Bette Midler revival of Hello, Dolly! is the season's main course of Jerry Herman, the fascinating Dear World is an ideal appetizer. Based on Giraudoux's The Madwoman of Chaillot, this musical about a loon who saves Paris from greedy businessmen first opened on Broadway in 1969, while Dolly was in its fifth year. Tyne Daly stars. JESSE GREEN

CLASSICAL

5. Go to Guitar Marathon

In praise of the ax.

92Y, February 25.

The classical guitar is among the most intimate of instruments, but with a little judicious amplification, it turns into a two-handed chamber ensemble of enormous range. This festival showcases the guitar's intrusions into other instruments' terrain, with transcriptions that range from Mussorgsky to Prince. JUSTIN DAVIDSON

THEATER

6. See Zamboni Godot and Lunchtime

Return to the planet of the Apes.

The Brick, March 2 through 18.

Theater of the Apes, dedicated to "original,

symphonyspace.org 95TH & BROADWAY

affordable, comic work most commercial producers would find laughable," has only one previous credit, but it's a good one: Urinetown. Now the company is resurfacing with Ayun Halliday's updated, all-female take on Waiting for Godot, set in modern hells like the DMV office. It plays in rep with Lunchtime, a cautionary play about salad bars by Urinetown's bookwriter and co-lyricist, Greg Kotis.

MOVIES

7. See Love & Taxes

Wonky with a satirical edge.

In theaters March 3.

For 30 years, monologuist Josh Kornbluth has been a beloved fixture in San Francisco, where I saw the precursor to his hilarious Red Diaper Baby in 1987. (I became a friend after that—but am objective!) Now he and his brother have adapted one of Kornbluth's monologues into a fun feature, which charts his years as a tax scofflaw and his decision to grow up and learn about the tax code. DAVID EDELSTEIN

POP

8. Listen to VOIDS

Snapshots of restlessness and loss.

Suicide Squeeze Records, March 3.

Math-rock legends Minus the Bear may have parted with founding drummer Erin Tate during the making of their sixth album, but the shake-up seems to have rejuvenated the group, which soldiered on with longtime drum tech Kiefer Matthias to craft the band's first effort in years. c.J.

9. See A Cure for Wellness

Don't drink the water.

In theaters now.

Gore Verbinski's return to goth-horror is so hyperstylized it's easy to miss the critique of capitalism behind all the fever-dream imagery. And what imagery-every shot is hypnotic, from sealed sensory-deprivation tanks to bathtubs full of eels.

STORYTELLING

10. **Go to** Pop-Up Magazine Live journalism as theater.

Town Hall, March 2.

The folks from California Sunday Magazine's liveevent series return to New York for another night of multimedia storytelling, music, and photography onstage. Contributors will include journalists from Texas Monthly and NPR's "All Things Considered." Sold out; check secondary ticket outlets.

11. See Idomeneo

A masterpiece, reinvigorated.

Metropolitan Opera, March 6 through March 25.

Mozart's opera of Cretan royalty has lain dormant since 2006, but now music director emeritus James Levine leads a revival of Jean-Pierre

Ponnelle's 1982 version—the only one the company has ever staged. The cast includes some of Levine's favorite collaborators, including Matthew Polenzani in the title role of the returning warrior king and Alice Coote in the crossdressing role as his son.

12. Read Down City

A daughter seeks the truth.

Grand Central, March 7.

Leah Carroll's investigative memoir is a complex portrait of the crimes and addiction of her parents, as well as a story of survival. Did Carroll's mother-murdered at the age of 30-inform on the Mafia? Was her father's terrible end a suicide or the result of alcoholism? Carroll's unsentimental prose is heartbreaking.

13. Watch I Don't Feel at Home in This World Anymore

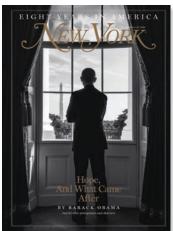
Complications, as they say, ensue.

Netflix, February 24.

Melanie Lynskey plays a depressed woman who teams up with her super-intense weirdo of a neighbor (Elijah Wood) to solve and perhaps even avenge the burglary of her house. Written and directed by Macon Blair, this Sundance Grand Jury Prize-winning drama expertly hits the comedy-drama sweet spot.







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SEE THIS NOW: 'YEN'

A lost-boy social drama asks significant moral questions.

WHO'S TO BLAME for Hench and Bobbie? The two boys, 16 and 14, live alone in a rundown "social housing" block in a London suburb, with one shirt between them and only what food they can nick. Their mother is mostly absent, with problems of her own. In this terrific, breakneck new play by Anna Jordan, the identification of the boys with their victimizing mother is perhaps a bit overdrawn, but it's just the beginning of a wild ride. The story opens up with the arrival of a Welsh girl named Jennifer who lives in a nearby flat and is worried about the boys' woefully neglected dog. She feeds all three the first proper food they've had in ages, and, in a scene of exquisite tenderness, treats Hench (played by Manchester by the Sea's Lucas Hedges) to the first responsibly loving touch he's probably ever had. Jordan wisely refuses to give us the do-over we (and the characters) desperately want in the second half; lives of poverty and abuse get few mulligans. Still, the roles are immensely actable, and, in MCC's production, immensely acted. JESSE GREEN

At MCC Theater through March 4.

CLASSICAL

14. See BostonSymphony Orchestra

A Russian affair.

Carnegie Hall, February 28.

If Dmitri Shostakovich spent his whole career struggling with the rewards and dangers of being a famous Soviet composer, his student Sofia Gubaidulina bided her time, writing music of sublime but unauthorized strangeness that leaked to the West before it was recognized at home. Teacher and disciple are united in this program that includes her new concerto for violin, cello, and a Russian accordion called the bayan; also, Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7.

MOVIES

15. See John Wick: Chapter 2

This one's gory.

In theaters now

After a truly terrible and campy opening action sequence, Chad Stahelski's sequel to the 2014 Keanu Reeves shoot-'em-up settles down into one of the darkest bloodbaths you'll ever see. As assasins pursue the onetime "bogeyman," the violence is hard-core, and it's choreographed in long takes with balletic—and scream-at-the-screen—precision. Common, Ian McShane, and Lance Reddick give delightful support, but Stahelski's near-tragic tone never wavers.

ART

16. See Shara Hughes's

Lamenting, Sighing, Weeping

She should do a gigantic banner.

Gallery Met at the Metropolitan Opera, through May 13.

Organizer Dodie Kazanjian pulls off curatorial home runs in this special, secret gallery, a jewel in the crown of the Metropolitan Opera. This ravishing show of Shara Hughes's Technicolor paintings is part fantasy, part Post-Impressionist revival, and a whole lot of reverie and love. J.S.

CLASSICAL

17. See New York Philharmonic

Three nights of exquisite sound.

David Geffen Hall,

March 1 through 3.

As the orchestra prepares for a new music director, outgoing conductor Alan Gilbert is spending the season making sure his legacy remains fresh in the mind, leading Leonidas Kavakos in a new violin concerto by Lera Auerbach, one of several female composers the orchestra has highlighted this season. She's in good company: Mahler's Fourth Symphony closes out the program. J.D.

воок

18. Read Autumn

Prophecy from across the pond.

Pantheon

How long will it take for fiction to make sense of the fever nightmare of the new administration? Until then, we have this postcard from the future, via Ali Smith's speed-written masterwork on the post-Brexit world (published in England in October). The story of a professionally insecure lecturer and her 101-year-old friend is impressionistic and deeply personal, but it's also about a polarized, troll-infected society.

BORIS KACHKA

MOVIES

19. Go to Jordan Peele: The Art of the Social Thriller

All your favorites together.

BAMcinématek, through March 1.

In preparation for the release of his new film *Get Out* (see page 72), *Key & Peele's* Jordan Peele presents this series that has no real theme but still gives you a chance to watch some great movies on BAM's nice big screen. Who can resist another go-round with Hitchcock's *Rear Window* or Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (both on February 26) or Kubrick's *The Shining*? D.E.

BOOKS

20. Read The Evening Road

A picaresque vision.

Little, Brown

Laird Hunt sets his story in 1930 Indiana on the

night of a lynching, following two women whose lives collide—one a "cornsilk" (white) traveling with people to the "rope party," the other a "cornflower" (black) looking for her white lover. More bonkers Americana than straight historical fiction, the novel illuminates its time better than any staid sepia period piece ever could.

B.K.

TV

21. Watch The Good Fight

Nevertheless, she persisted.

CBS All Access.

The Good Wife was so much more than just the story of Alicia Florrick, as this spinoff makes clear by centering on Christine Baranski's Diane Lockhart, caught in a moment of free fall. Just as everything in her life crumbles, she becomes the heroine we need for these troubled times, and thanks to the new platform, now she can swear, too.

THEATER

22. See Willie Stark

Huey Long sings.

The Paley Center for Media, February 25.

Along with 1984 and It Can't Happen Here, it may be time to reread Robert Penn Warren's All the King's Men, about a corrupt Huey Long-like demagogue battling impeachment. Better yet, hear it sung: A Great Performances telecast of Carlisle Floyd's opera Willie Stark, produced by Houston Grand Opera in 1981 and directed by Harold Prince, gets a rare and relevant screening this month at the Paley Center.

J.G.

POP

23. Hear Thundercat

 $A\,go ext{-}to\,bassist\,steps\,out.$

Irving Plaza, March 3.

Having collaborated with everyone from Kendrick Lamar to Suicidal Tendencies, L.A.'s most prolific bassist, Stephen "Thundercat" Bruner, is hard to pin down. Generally, his performances stick to the outré funk laid down by Parliament—imagine an even more virtuosic Bootsy, with pipes to match.

CLASSICAL

24. Go to In C

Big-band Minimalism.

(Le) Poisson Rouge, February 27.

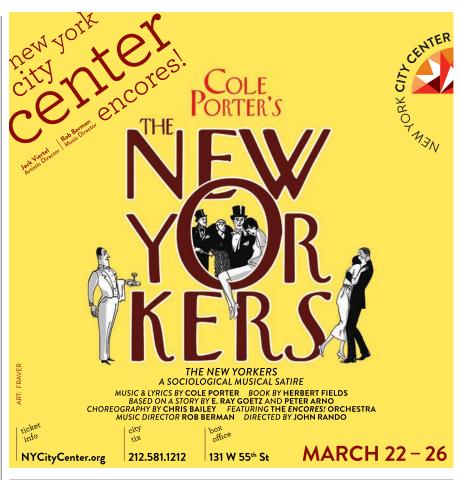
Terry Riley's 1964 salvo *In C* remains one of contemporary classical's most striking pieces, filled with conflict, joy, and a whole lot of polyrhythm. For their annual birthday concert, Darmstadt Essential Repertoire revisits the work with 34 musicians, including avant-metal drummer Greg Fox.

POP

25. See Homeshake

Adventures in indie pop.

Sunnyvale, 1031 Grand Street, Bushwick, February 22. Guitarist Peter Sagar was the first mate to Mac DeMarco's never-ending tour of NSFW antics and stoned daydream pop. Pivoting to R&B as Homeshake, Sagar sets himself apart with expert use of a drum machine and a wobbly falsetto just vulnerable enough to draw you closer.

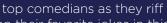






SOLUTION TO LAST ISSUE'S PUZZLE

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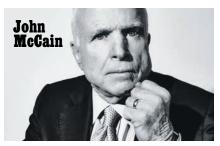


on their favorite jokes in this limited-run podcast.

Jesse David Fox and today's

Germon Google Play





CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

he said. "That means members of Congress will be more likely to resist things they do not agree with rather than roll over."

Already, a handful of other Republican senators—Graham, Roy Blunt, Bob Corker—are calling for Flynn to testify in Senate investigations on administration communications with Russia. (House Republicans remain much more circumspect.) Whether they persist in their pursuit of the truth, whatever it may be, and whether they can bring enough pressure to bear on congressional leadership to impanel an independent investigation, is undoubtedly the biggest test of the congressional check on executive power.

Proving that a foreign government helped install Trump as president would be a history-making feat—not to mention possibly lead to impeachment proceedings. So it is by no means McCain's stated goal. "We're clearly not there yet," he told me.

"McCain is a savvy political operator," a former adviser said. "He sees a critical mass building demanding investigations. He weighs in at the decisive moment to turn it to calls for a select committee, and ultimately he'll be the person that tips it to calls for an independent-counsel investigation." If that happens, who knows what will be found? Suspicions are both dire and plausible. It was, after all, an independent counsel looking into Whitewater that led to the Monica Lewinsky scandal. "If it's found that there was collusion between senior officials in the Trump campaign and the Russian Federation, is that a criminal act? It puts us in uncharted waters," said the adviser.

McCain has been tracking the Russia issue since shortly before Thanksgiving, when he ran into Sir Andrew Wood, a former British ambassador to Moscow, at the Halifax Security Forum, a foreign-policy conference. Wood tipped McCain off about the now-infamous dossier that claimed Putin had compiled embarrassing information on Trump that could be used for blackmail, as well as allegations that the Trump campaign coordinated with Kremlin officials. "I didn't know what to make of it," said McCain, "but everyone knows the Russians do use women and sex when people go to Russia. It's an old KGB honeypot."

When McCain returned to Washington, he received a copy of the dossier. The next day, he delivered the documents to FBI director James Comey. "I said, 'It's very important. You're the person I want to give this to,'" McCain recalled. Comey gave McCain the impression he'd already been looking into it.

Since then, the drumbeat of news on the subject has gotten faster. On January 5, McCain held a widely attended hearing on Russian cyberoperations in which the thendirector of national intelligence, James Clapper, testified that Russia's pro-Trump strategy included "hacking ... classical propaganda, disinformation, fake news." On February 8, McCain attached his name to a bipartisan bill that would require Trump to get Congress's approval to lift Russian sanctions. On February 10, CNN reported that U.S. intelligence agencies had confirmed several pieces of information in the dossier. More damning, U.S. intelligence also found-and leaked-that Flynn had discussed sanctions with Russia's ambassador and later lied about it to Pence. The cover-up led many to suspect Flynn had undermined the Obama administration by communicating to Russia that the soon-to-be-installed Trump administration would come to a more favorable decision on the sanctions.

"I liked Flynn," said McCain. "But obviously this is an example of the dysfunction." Now, he said, there are questions that need to be answered: "When did Flynn know about anything to do with Russian interference? Why was there a gap of X number of days between the president being told and no action taken? What is the extent of the relationship between Flynn and the Russians?"

I asked McCain why most of his fellow Republicans aren't speaking up about Russia's election interference and Trump's potential Russian ties. "I frankly don't know," he said. "It's not a chapter of *Profiles* in Courage."

McCain's call for an independent commission will only get louder. While there are numerous Senate investigations in motion or being called for, the only way to coordinate efforts and see the big picture is to impanel a select committee. McConnell fears a select committee would derail the GOP agenda. But McCain continues to push. "After 9/11, Joe Lieberman and I proposed a select commission. It took more than a year before they finally appointed it, so I'm not giving up," McCain said. "We're going on offense on Russia," agreed Graham, who, as a member of the Judiciary Committee, is calling for oversight of the FBI's investigation into Trump's ties to Russia.

In the meantime, the world keeps spinning, and McCain worries about America's

place in it. "The national-security aspect isn't functioning," he said. "Nobody knows who's making the decisions. The Iranians are testing. The Russians are testing. They're testing this administration. Who is making the decisions when we don't have a nationalsecurity adviser?" On February 16, McCain traveled to Germany to shore up our European alliances that have been strained by Trump's close relationship with Putin. McCain compares Trump-Putin to Stalin's nonaggression pact with Hitler, in which the two dictators tried to divvy up Europe between them-which worked until Hitler decided to launch an attack on Soviet positions anyway. "Some have likened it to the Molotov-Ribbentrop spheres of influence, which said you have Eastern Europe and we have this. That doesn't work with dictators," said McCain. "Putin is a KGB colonel who is bent on restoring the Russian empire."

McCain takes Putin's global bullying personally. He points at a picture of a Russian opposition politician he keeps next to his desk. "This here is Boris Nemtsov," he said. The physicist turned liberal politician was one of Putin's fiercest critics and had become McCain's friend. They last saw each other two years ago. "He sat on that seat there, and I said, 'Boris, I don't think you should go back because they'll try and kill you.' And he said, 'I have to go back. I love my country." Upon his return, Nemtsov was shot four times from behind while crossing a bridge near Red Square. "He was murdered in the shadow of the Kremlin," McCain said.

Two days after Flynn resigned, I visited McCain again at his office. He said Flynn's ouster had caused the momentum to shift somewhat in his direction, but he was still grouchy that more Republicans weren't onboard. An hour before we met, McConnell had once again told McCain that he wouldn't approve a select committee. Since Congress remains reluctant to hold Trump accountable, McCain said it's going to be journalists' responsibility to investigate and put pressure on Congress. What will move the needle, he thinks, is "what's in the press," McCain said. "There's just too many people out there who have this information. How did this Flynn thing happen?"

Of course, relying on the press also means relying on those who leak information to the press—a position that puts McCain once again at odds with the president, who has vowed to seek out and punish "lowlife leakers." McCain acknowledged that leaks have the potential to do damage to national security. But he made a surprisingly impassioned case for them in an era when truth is hard to come by. "In democracies, information should be provided to the American people," McCain said. "How else are the American people going to be informed?"



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

life fails us-not merely in touristic fashion but closer to the case of emigrants, fleeing a home that has no place for them.

GAMERS HAVE their own fantasies of prosperity, fantasies that sometimes come true. For a few, gaming has already become a viable and lucrative profession. Saahil Arora, an American college dropout who plays professional Dota 2 under the name UNiVeRsE, is reportedly the richest competitive gamer: He has earned \$2.7 million in his career so far. But even Arora's income is dwarfed by those of a handful of YouTube (and Twitch) broadcasters with a fraction of his talent: Just by filming themselves playing through games in a ludicrously excitable state for a young audience of fellow suburbanites, their income from ads and subscriptions adds up to earnings in the mid seven figures. The prospects for those who had gathered at Next Level that chilly November night were not quite so sunny. The fightinggame community (FGC), which has developed around one-on-one games like Streetfighter, and for which Next Level serves as a training ground, has yet to reach the popularity of multiplayer online battle arenas (MOBAS) like Dota 2, or firstperson shooters, such as Counter-Strike. (The scene is taking steps in that direction: 2016 marked the first year that the Street Fighter V world championships were broadcast on ESPN2 as well as the first time that an American FGC player-Du Dang, from Florida-took the title over top players from Japan.)

Still, according to a veteran of the community (16 of his 34 years), Sanford Kelly, the fighting-game community scene has a long way to go. Though he personally isn't fond of Street Fighter V, the latest iteration in the series, his energies are devoted to guiding the New York FGC to become more respectable and therefore more attractive to e-sports organizations that might sponsor its members: "We have to change our image, and we have to be more professional." Compared with other branches of American e-sports, dominated by white and Asian players, the FGC has a reputation that's always been more colorful: It's composed primarily of black players like Kelly, Asian players like his longtime Marvel rivals Justin Wong and Duc Do, and Latino gamers, and its brash self-presentation is influenced by the street culture that gave rise to hip-hop. With a typical mixture of resignation and determination, Kelly internalized the fact that, locally and nationally, his scene would have to move away from its roots to move to a larger stage. But the competitive gaming economy had already reached the point where, as the streamer, commentator, and player Arturo Sanchez told me, the earning potential of the FGC were already viable. "So long as you don't have unrealistic ambitions." Between the money gleaned from subscriptions to his Twitch channel, payments for streaming larger tournaments, sponsor fees from businesses that pay for advertising in the breaks between matches, crowdfunding, merchandise, and YouTube revenue, Sanchez is able to scratch out a living, comfortably if not prosperously, as a full-time gamer.

Next Level itself is not financially selfsufficient: Without additional income, including from its co-owner and co-founder Henry Cen (a former day trader), it couldn't pay the rent. "Only rich countries can have places like this," says the bespectacled and crane-thin Cen. "You wouldn't see this in Third World countries." He describes the people who make up the majority of New York's FGC as coming from blue-collar families: "They're not the richest of people. There are some individuals that are, but most people that do have money, they want to do something more with their money." He's relatively pessimistic about the possibility of becoming a professional gamer: Considering the economic pressures on FGC members and the still small size (roughly 100,000 viewers at most) of the viewing audience, it's a career that's available only to the top "0.01 percent" of players. Family pressures to pull back from gaming are strong: Even Justin Wong, one of the happy few who succeeded in becoming a professional, reportedly hid the fact from his family for a long time. "His family did not accept him as a gamer, but recently, they have changed their opinion," says Cen.

"Because he started bringing in money," I speculated.

"Yes. If you're doing gaming, especially if you're an Asian, your progress in life is measured by only one thing: money."

LIKE PROFESSOR HURST, I was interested in the political valence of gaming: Was there something fundamental to the pastime that inevitably promoted a dangerous politics? I was intrigued by the data Hurst

cited, and during the recent campaign and immediately after, a number of writers noted the connection between Trump supporters and the world of militant gamertrolls determined to make gaming great again through harassment and expulsion. But as a gamer myself, I found this ominous vision incomplete at best: Most gamers weren't Trump-adjacent, and if Trumpism corresponded to any game, I thought, it was one that, in its disastrous physicality, could never become a video game: not Final Fantasy but Jenga. (Jenga is now on Nintendo Wii, I'm told.) On the other hand, I've never found it easy to trust my own perceptions, so I reached out to friends and acquaintances who were also gamers to learn from their experiences.

Though none of us is a Trumpist, no discourse could unite us. We were trading dispatches atop the Tower of Babel. We got different things out of gaming because we were looking for different things. Some of us greatly preferred single-player games, and some could barely stand to play games alone. Some of us held that writing about games was no more difficult than writing about any other subject; some of us found, and find, the task insanely difficult. Some of us just played more than others-Tony Tulathimutte listed 28 games as personal favorites. He and Bijan Stephen, also a writer, both had a fondness for secondary characters. (Stephen: "I love the weird helpers like Toad and the wizards in Gauntlet—not because they're necessarily support characters but because they've got these defined roles that only work in relation to the other players.") Meanwhile, Emma Janaskie, an associate editor at Ecco Books, spoke about her favorite games' main characters, especially Lara Croft. Janaskie's longest run of gaming lasted ten hours, compared with Stephen's record of six hours and Tulathimutte's of 16. When likewise queried, the art critic and gaming writer Nora Khan laughingly asked if she could go off the record, then recalled: "I've gotten up to take breaks and stuff, but I've played through all of Skyrim once," adding parenthetically that "Skyrim is a 60-to-80-hour game."

Janaskie and Tulathimutte made strong avowals that gaming fell squarely within the literary field (Tulathimutte: "Gaming can be literary the same way books can be. DOS for Dummies and Tetris aren't literary, but Middlemarch and The Last of Us are, and each has its purpose"); I found the proposition more dubious.

"It seems to me that writers get into games precisely because it's almost the antithesis of writing," I said to Khan.

"Absolutely," she said.

"When you're writing, you don't know

what the stakes are. The question of what victory or defeat is—those questions are very hard to pin down. Whereas with a game, you know exactly what the parameters are."

"Yes. I wouldn't say that for everyone. Completing a quest or completing the mission was never really very interesting to me personally. For me, it's more meditative. When I play *Grand Theft Auto V*, it's just a way to shut off all the noise and for once be in a space where I don't need to be critical or intellectualize something. Because I'm doing that all the time. I just go off and drive—honestly, that's what I do in real life, too. When I just want to drop out of the situation, I'll go and drive outside of the city."

I wouldn't trade my life or my past for any other, but there have been times when I've wanted to swap the writing life and the frigid self-consciousness it compels for the gamer's striving and satisfaction, the infinite sense of passing back and forth (being an "ambiguous conduit," in Janaskie's poignant phrase) between number and body. The appeal can't be that much different for nonwriters subjected to similar social or economic pressures, or for those with other ambitions, maybe especially those whose ambitions have become more dream state than plausible, actionable future. True, there are other ways to depress mental turnout. But I don't trust my body with intoxicants; so far as music goes, I've found few listening experiences more gratifying or revealing than hearing an album on repeat while performing some repetitive in-game task. Gaming offers the solitude of writing without the strain of performance, the certitude of drug addiction minus its permanent physical damage, the elation of sports divorced from the body's mortality. And, perhaps, the ritual of religion without the dogma. For all the real and purported novelty of video games, they offer nothing so much as the promise of repetition. Life is terrifying; why not, then, live through what you already know-a fundamental pulse, speechless and without thought?

FTER COLLEGE GRADUATION, once I'd been living back home unemployed with my father for a few months, he confronted me over the dinner table with a question. Given the vast sums of time he'd witnessed me expend on video games both recently and in my youth, wouldn't it be right to say that gaming, not writing, was what I really wanted to do with my life?

I responded that my goal was to become a writer, and I meant it. But first I had to pause a few seconds to be sure. It's true that the postgraduate years I spent jobless with my father laid the foundation for what I can do as a writer. I read literature, read history, studied maps, watched films and television, listened to music. I lifted weights in the basement. I survived my final episode of clinical depression and finished translating a mid-19thcentury French poet who laid the foundation for literary modernism. But when I was too weak to do these things, and I often was, that so-called writer (zero pitches, zero publications) was, in Baudelaire's phrase, a "drunkard of his own blood" obsessively replaying the video games of his adolescence-so as to re-create a sense, tawdry and malformed but also quantifiable, of status advancement in an existence that was, by any worldly standard, I knew, stagnant and decrepit. It didn't matter that the world, by its own standards of economic growth, was itself worn down and running on fumes. Regardless of the rightness of the world, one cannot help but feel great individual guilt for failing to find a meaningful activity and position within it. And regardless of whether it benefits one in the long run, video games can ease that guilt tremendously in the immediate present.

The strange thing is that that guilt should be gone now. I have made a name as a writer. Yet I can't say that I've left the game. In the weeks after writing my first major piece, a long book review, I fired lasers at robots in space for 200 hours. Two summers ago, I played a zombie game in survival mode alone for a week; eventually the zombies, which one must take down precisely and rapidly lest one be swarmed, started to remind me of emails. A few months back, I used a glitch to amass, over the course of several hours, a billion dollars in a game where there's nothing to buy besides weapons, which you can get for free anyhow. I reinstalled the zombie game on Election Night.

Is it an addiction? Of course. But one's addiction is always more than a private affair: It speaks to the health and the logic of society at large. Gaming didn't impact the election, but electing to secede from reality is political, too. I suspect that the total intensity of the passion with which gamers throughout society surrender themselves to their pastime is an implicit register of how awful, grim, and forbidding the world outside them has become—the world that is gaming's ultimate level, a space determined by finance and labor, food and housing, race and education, gender and art, with so many tests and so many bosses. Just as a wrong life cannot be lived rightly, a bad game cannot be played well. But for lack of an alternative, we live within one, and suffer from its scarcity.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 41

of Missouri. After a series of racist events on campus, to which administrators had responded slowly, the football team declared it wouldn't play an upcoming game unless the university president resigned. "I had been taking a sports-management class that semester, and I learned how much money we make the university," Ian Simon, one of the protest's leaders, told me recently. Regular students had been protesting for weeks to no avail, but after the football team got involved, the president was gone within 48 hours.

KAEPERNICK, FOR HIS part, was spending February announcing more donations, including one to a group in Brooklyn that helps homeless veterans, and tweeting out daily Black History Month lessons. The quarterback may become a free agent next month, and it remains to be seen which teams might be interested in signing him. He spent one of his rare off days last season taking the GRE.

Even if Kaepernick never plays again, he's already done enough for the Smithsonian's National Museum of African-American History and Culture to acquire his jersey and cleats. "Kaepernick took the bullets," Wade Davis, the cornerback turned activist, told me. "He is the Muhammad Ali of this era. He took some hits from a shotgun, so the next guy will take bullets from a .22, and the next guy gets hit with a sling." But even if he devotes himself to full-time activism, Kaepernick's reach will never be as great as it has been as an NFL quarterback. Simon, from the University of Missouri, went to last year's Espys, where James, Wade, Anthony, and Paul spoke, but he was passed over in the NFL draft. He isn't sure how the protest affected his status, but he said that every team asked him about it, and when I talked to him earlier this month, he was settling into a new job at the front desk of a family medical practice in Texas. There were many issues Simon wanted to speak on, but it was harder to get an audience. "I think about that a lot," Simon said. "You can stand on the corner and preach all day. But if your message can't reach the right people, it's just words in the wind."

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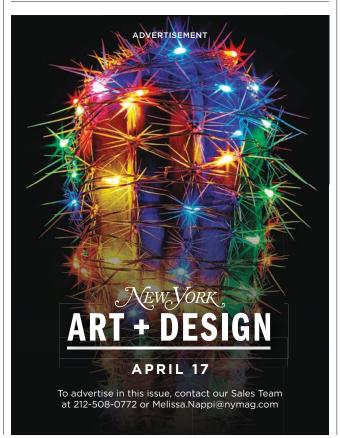
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Year of the Rooster

New York Crossword by Cathy Allis

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- Jerry Stiller's comedy partner
- Waterfowl lure
- Breakfast chain acronym
- 15 Defect
- Blacksmith's block 19
- 20 "Have __ day!"
- "Hamlet" soliloquy starter 21
- 22 Swanky
- Rooster who sang "You Are So Beautiful"?
- 25 Manipulative person
- 26 Low-pH stuff
- 27 Comparable to a cucumber
- 28 Rooster moving along after his neutering?
- Taken a spill 31
- Saltimbocca meat
- 35 Projecting shelf
- 36 Basilica recess
- Stephen of "Michael Collins" 40
- 41 Degs. for many CEOs
- Skater Midori
- Charge for a rooster's crest-trimming?
- Start to remove, as a shirt
- 53 Covent Garden architect Jones
- 54 Deems
- 57 Not easily shaken

- 58 Deadlock
- Gauchos' weapons
- 62 Blood: prefix
- 64 It's thrust at Olympics
- 65 What a naked rooster will do?
- "Hercules" spinoff princess
- Former New York mayor Beame
- Real
- Rooster frequenting the Palais Garnier?
- 82 Out of the area
- 83 Kitten-lifting spot
- 84 Quick Draw McGraw, e.g.
- 85 Wiedersehen"
- 87 Loathe
- "Colorful" Revolutionary War 90 soldier
- 93 Depression-era photographer Dorothea
- Takes action to ensure
- With 114-Across, small rooster's last stand?
- 100 Tail
- 101 To-do-list item
- 103 Slipperiness exemplar
- 104 Sandbox set
- 105 "The March King"
- 109 Kimono sashes

- 111 Royal Stewart, e.g.
- 114 See 97-Across 117 Puffs piece
- 122 Choral voice part
- 123 Buster Brown's dog
- 124 Banish, as a rooster?
- 127 Louis-Dreyfus TV title
- 128 Ivan the Terrible, for one
- 129 Kmart's parent corporation
- 130 Somewhat, slangily
- 131 Slips up
- 132 Roosters' mothers
- 133 Upside trait
- 134 Endured

Down

- 1 Goya subject
- Slugger Slaughter
- "Sans" opposite
- Wealthy, in San Juan
- 5 Standoffish
- 6 N. (Mont. and Minn. neighbor)
- Suffix with ethyl
- "Odyssey" sorceress
- Depiction of a wet septet
- 10 Shrill bark
- 11 Apple music app
- 12 Showy-leafed landscape plant

- 13 Ohio alma mater of Lena Dunham
- Land of the Amazon's source
- 15 Morsel on a box with a Kellogg's rooster
- 16 Perfectly intelligible
- 17 Giving a pink slip
- 18 Cheese-wheel chunk
- 24 Light-colored cigar 29 Eggs Benedictus?
- 30 Power to influence
- 32 Moon vehicle, for short
- Rodent in experiments
- Fighting or working hard
- 37 Overwhelming fear
- 38 Biathlete, in part
- 39 Brain-wave readout, briefly
- 42 Mormon-owned Utah sch.
- 44 "Very funny" TV sta.
- 46 Spider's "handiwork"
- 47 Mexican money unit
- 48 Gomer Pyle's grp.
- Comics-style giggle 50 Wrapper's roll
- 51 Horatian creations
- 52 "Science Guy" Bill
- Bandit
- 56 Some M.I.T. grads
- 60 Charlie Chaplin's last wife
- 61 Greg Evans comic strip
- 63 Spay, say
- 66 Daisy-family members
- 67 Widely known
- 68 Channel showing 127-Across
- 69 Top Olympic medals, in Barcelona
- Van Morrison song Honey"
- 74 Cloyingly cutesy
- 75 Loathe
- 76 Lemony, maybe
- 77 Big oaf
- "Will be all?"
- 79 More in demand
- 80 Wound up costing
- 81 Zero
- 82 Annoying pop-ups 86 Charges for services
- 88 Poach, perhaps
- Whole lot "60 Minutes" airer 91
- 92 Hardwood sources
- 94 Sternward
- 96 Put on a pedestal
- Tennis call
- 99 Send over the moon 101 Comerica Park team
- 102 Ember, eventually 105 2013 film "12 Years a
- 106 Vessel carrying crude
- 107 Out-and-out 108 Transit-schedule listings
- 110 Launched
- 112 Paquin, Faris, and Kendrick
- 113 Shaving mishaps
- 115 Imprint firmly
- 116 Bones: Lat.
- 118 Comic-revue bit
- -Japanese War
- 120 Bring to ruin
- 121 Old-time "Yikes!"
- 125 The dad in TV's "Black-ish"
- 126 L.A. winter hrs.

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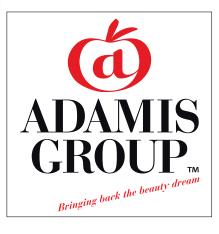
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Our reality-show presidency! Flynn lies to Pence, Trump knows but says nothing ..

... Mar-a-Lago, now home to global-crisis dinner theater

Omarosa Manigault

reveals a **secret tape** of a reporter who'd accused her of being a bully ...

Last year, art museums in Paris, London, and Berlin saw a drop in attendance (terror fears are partly to blame).

Those reports of migrant rape mobs in Frankfurt, Germany, on New Year's? Turns out they were a hoax.



off the island



The still theoretically promising Africa Center on Fifth Avenue has stalled-its director secretly quit in October.





DESPICABLE

An anti-abortion Oklahoma state lawmaker describes women as merely "hosts."



Plein Sport is accused of **plagiarizing** a previous Alexander Wang show (by Alexander Wang).

> Karlie Kloss is styled as a **geisha** in *Vogue*'s "diversity issue."

The Howard Stern Show thought it was entertainment to air a woman's call to the IRS on the show, including her tax information and phone number. (She's suing.)

The world's biggest YouTube star, a bratty Swede named PewDiePie, thinks anti-Semitism is funny. Lulz.



A 19-year-old Ohio woman was convicted of livestreaming her friend's rape on Periscope.



Patagonyuck! Fleece microfibers found to end up in the ocean, and then in



Turner's Modern and Ancient Ports:

Who gets voted next?



HIGHBROW



This says **something**: 87,000 people applied for only 104 affordable units in the Williamsburg Domino Sugar complex's first building.

> Recording Academy president Neil Portnow tells Pitchfork: "No, I **don't** think there's a race problem at all" at the Grammys.



your seafood





The legacy of Harvey Lichtenstein, who died February 11. He made BAM great and helped start Brooklyn's long transformation to global hip.

Passages Through



Israeli novelist Ayelet Gundar-Goshen's ethically ambiguous 🍝 Waking Lions.



Frédéric Beigbeder's Manhattan's Babe, a twee reimagining of the love story between young J. D. Salinger and Oona





The Guggenheim shows how it got to be the Guggenheim with "Visionaries," centered on six early patrons of the museum.



Yale to rechristen the college named for proslavery politician John C. Calhoun, for female computer-programming visionary Grace Hopper.



• Sheelah Kolhatkar's Steve Cohen shark hunt





Obama's White House

photographer Pete Souza's





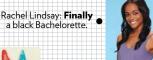
But Beyoncé and Jay Z overruled the Grammys by reminding everyone that they're **winners** in DJ Khaled's new single "Shining."





"Make America New York" hats at their show.

Adam Torres's **stirring** folk invocation "Dreamers in America," part of the project "Our First 100 Days."



Animal Collective's pretty bonkers single, Kinda Bonkers

> But that Kellyanne Conway Fatal Attraction sketch on SNL was actually bonkers.



Sinkage Life # Livin' h



The slow-burning continuous groove of Sinkane's new single, "Deadweight.'

LOWBROW

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BEN BRANTLEY, THE NEW YORK TIMES

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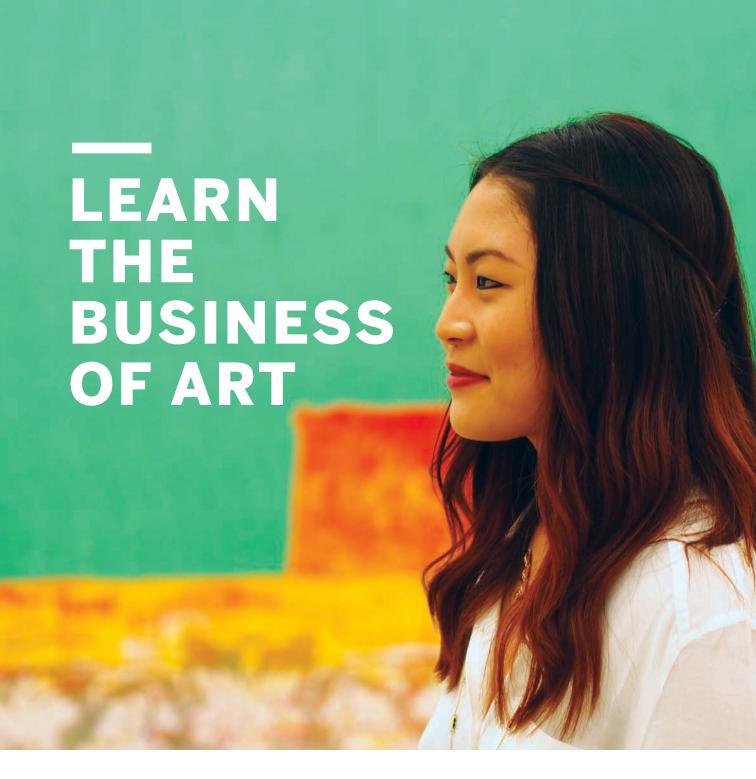
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