

Tikkun

POLITICS + SPIRITUALITY + CULTURE

(tē·kūn) To heal, repair, and transform the world.

SPRING 2014

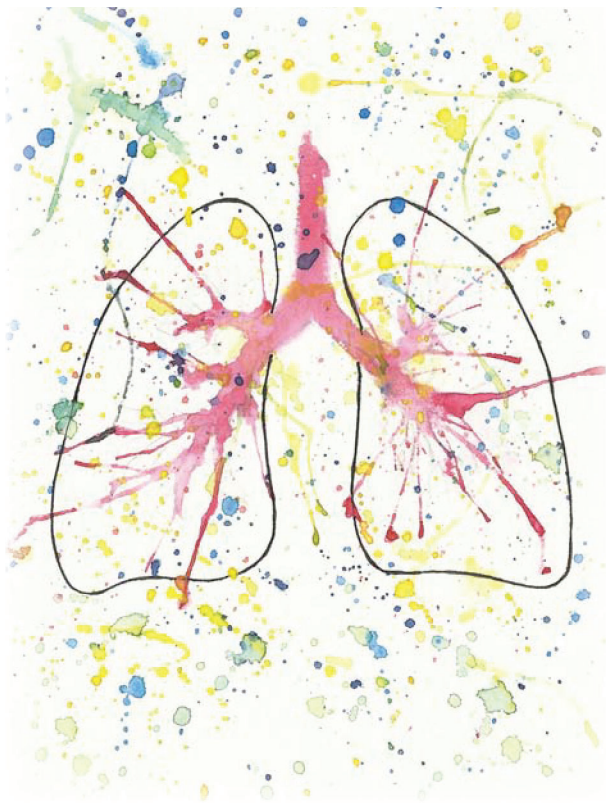
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AND CHRISTIAN
RENEWAL
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DOES
AMERICA
NEED
A LEFT?



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Suicide, Ageism, and Economic Crisis | Faith and the Metaphor Muscle
Political Poster Art | Trauma Bonds | Joyful Poems of Transience
Radical Passover Rituals | Loving-Kindness to the Thousandth Generation



Every morning, before diving into your daily activities, we invite you to try a version of this meditation—tailored to reflect what is true for your own body and reality—through speech or song.

I Am Grateful

I am grateful for my consciousness, I am grateful for my body, I am grateful for my soul, I am grateful for my life.

I am grateful for . . .

my eyes, which bring in the amazing beauty of the universe, enable me to read and to see the nuances in others' faces, and help me navigate through the world.

my ears, which enable me to hear the sounds of nature, decipher the words spoken to me by others, keep my balance, and enjoy music and song.

my nose and tongue, which enable me to taste delicious food and smell the flowers.

my tongue and larynx, which enable me to talk and sing.

my lungs, which take in the air and transform it into usable oxygen for my body and then push out the carbon dioxide that nourishes the trees and other plants.

my heart, which pumps blood through my body day and night, without me having to pay attention, delivering nourishment and oxygen to every part of my body.

my digestive system—my jaw, mouth, teeth, and saliva, which prepare the food I ingest; my esophagus, stomach,

and all the bacteria and enzymes that transform food into energy for my body; and my liver, gallbladder, intestines, kidneys, and bladder, which work together to eliminate from my body all that I do not need.

my bones, which give shape to my body; my skin, which helps regulate my temperature and contains my body; my legs, which carry me into the world; and my arms and hands, which enable me to lift, pull, gesture, write, reach out to others, and enjoy the many sensual pleasures of touch.

my reproductive system, which may enable (or has enabled) me to choose to bring new life into the world (*speak the names of your children if you have any*), and which allows me to experience sexual pleasure and fulfillment.

my nervous system and brain, which coordinate all the parts of my body and allow me to assess and respond to the world around me, and for my mind, which allows me to imagine how the world may be healed and to develop strategies to actualize my vision of the kind of world I want to see.

Add here your own list of other things for which you are grateful.

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Visit tikkun.org/left2014 for online-only articles associated with this issue's special section on "Does America Need a Left?" Don't miss these lively contributions from David Banks, Howard Brick, Maxine Chernoff, Ron Eglash, Ann Ferguson, Rebecca Kaplan, Alice Kessler-Harris, Bethany Moreton, Kurt Newman, Bruce Robbins, Clarissa Rojas, Blair Taylor, and others.

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A NOTE ON LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We welcome your responses to our articles. Send letters to the editor to letters@tikkun.org. Please remember, however, not to attribute to *Tikkun* views other than those expressed in our editorials. We email, post, and print many articles with which we have strong disagreements because that is what makes *Tikkun* a location for a true diversity of ideas. *Tikkun* reserves the right to edit your letters to fit available space in the magazine.

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE CROSS

I was sad when I read the Fall 2013 letter to the editor from Lawrence Swaim, who seemed to characterize Christianity in America, in fact all organized religion, by “the hijacking of mainstream Protestantism by conservative evangelicalism and the suppression of social-justice Catholicism by Republican bishops.”

Where, I thought, does my little Episcopal church in Penn Yan, New York, fit in—along with the Methodist church in town, the Baptist church in town, and the Roman Catholic church in town, all of which do their best, in a poor and rural area, to live out Jesus’s teachings on compassion and justice? Tomorrow I will go to church for our weekly study group, which is reading and discussing *The Rich and the Rest of Us: A Poverty Manifesto* by Tavis Smiley and Cornel West. This type of study informs many things we do, including personal political action of members, a weekly peace vigil on a busy street corner, fundraising for projects in Africa and Haiti, and a Closet of Hope that provides fashionable clothing for women in transition. The Baptist church hosts a food bank and a backpack program that provides weekend lunches for children who get lunches in school during the week. These are just a few examples.

If Mr. Swaim and others should think, “Oh, well, that is an exception,” they should rethink. There are millions of such “exceptions.” It is counterproductive to these efforts to think that only trends that make headlines count. Mr. Swaim and others might benefit from looking around their own towns to see all the wonderful works that are being done by churches.

—Joan Mistretta, *Hammondsport, NY*

LAWRENCE SWAIM RESPONDS:

Christians in mainstream Protestant churches are increasingly willing to offer fearless witness for racial and economic justice, justice in Israel/Palestine, and against Islamophobia. It’s important to acknowledge this because progressive people of faith are so often criticized both by the secular Left, on the one hand, and by the Religious Right on the other.

Yet what is one to do about the survey of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life that revealed that 62 percent of white evangelicals in America believe that torture is often or sometimes justified? And then there is the Religious Right in the state of Kansas, where I was raised, which uses its base in conservative evangelical churches to justify the most blatantly evil kind of voter suppression.

I follow a path of spirituality that can describe evil as a behavioral system, as I have tried to explain in my book *Trauma Bond: An Inquiry into the Nature of Evil*. Ultimately I see systemic evil arising from a society-wide addictive disorder animated by shared traumatic memory. We must find new ways to transform the human personality, with spirituality as a big component.

Your little Episcopal church in Yates County sounds beautiful, as does the village of Penn Yan itself. Wherever I go, I love to visit such small churches—Episcopalian ones most of all. The reason is simple: I love Anglican liturgy, thought, and culture. But tell me honestly, Joan, would I not be betraying whatever gifts God has given me if I did not use that gift to denounce evil as I see it? That I also need to do so more thoughtfully at times, and do it more in love than in anger, I would hasten to agree.

THE SPIRITUAL TRUTH OF JFK

I’m afraid that the editor has made a tremendous mistake in reprinting Peter Gabel’s article lauding Olive Stone’s movie *JFK* on tikkun.org. Gabel praises *JFK* as a laudable effort to open up American culture to the liberating Kennedyesque ’60s cultural shift by creating a “counter myth” to the “myth” created by the Warren commission to “nail down the repressive culture of the ’50s” before it all got out of hand. The key sentence is this: “It doesn’t really matter who killed Kennedy.” Au contraire! It matters tremendously who killed Kennedy. The enormous outpouring of paranoid conspiracy theories that followed the assassination has led to a level of cynicism and distrust of government since the event. I would argue that Oliver Stone did a tremendous disservice with *JFK*, adding to that cynicism and alienation. If you want the final word on the reality behind the assassination, read Vincent Bugliosi’s 1,600-page book *Reclaiming History: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy* or, if that is too much, read Gerald Posner’s *Case Closed*. They may be less hip on the psychosocial, cultural analysis, but they are much better on the facts. It does very much matter who killed JFK.

—Roger Brindle, *Sausalito, CA, and La Paz, Mexico*

PETER GABEL RESPONDS:

The critical point of my essay is to understand the psycho-historical dynamics that give meaning to the Kennedy assassination and to learn to use this type of analysis as a way of understanding what is happening in the world more generally. My emphasis is on the *meaning* of the assassination itself as a traumatic disruption of a longing, a hope for a more idealistic world, the opening up of desire that JFK was able to manifest, and also the *meaning* of the violent counter-reaction to him by the inherited

MORE LETTERS

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system of the denial of that desire—denial that was cemented in the fear-saturated culture of the McCarthyist, organization-man world of the 1950s.

Social dynamics of a very powerful kind led to the death of JFK, whether Oswald shot him alone or whether a group was involved. The same is true of the murders of Martin Luther King and, in my opinion, Bobby Kennedy, which also occurred because of the enormous conflicts generated by the lyricism and hope elicited by these people and the movements they spoke for.

The rush to “keep it to a lone gunman” itself has a social meaning, the desire to prevent us from collectively seeing and recognizing the social factors at play, the conflict between the longing for a loving socially connected world and the overpowering identification that alienated humanity has with everything remaining normal within the system. That was the point of my piece and the reason for my saying the key fact is not whether it was Oswald alone or a group.

A longer version of the exchanges above, as well as numerous other letters to the editor, can be found at tikkun.org/letters.

Tikkun magazine is . . .

. . . a vehicle for spreading a new consciousness. We call it a spiritual progressive worldview. But what is that?

What Do You Mean by “Spiritual”?

You can be spiritual and still be an atheist or agnostic. To be spiritual, you don’t have to believe in God or accept New Age versions of spirituality. You don’t need to give up science or your critical faculties. We use the word “spiritual” to describe all aspects of reality that cannot be subject to empirical verification or measurement: everything pertaining to ethics, aesthetics, music, art, philosophy, religion, poetry, literature, dance, love, generosity, and joy. We reject the notion that everything worthy of consideration to guide our personal lives and our economic and political arrangements must be measurable.

What’s a Spiritual Progressive?

To be a spiritual progressive is to agree that our public institutions, corporations, government policies, laws, education system, health care system, legal system, and even many aspects of our personal lives should be judged “efficient, rational, or productive” to the extent that they maximize love, caring, generosity, and ethical and environmentally sustainable behavior. We call this our New Bottom Line.

Spiritual progressives seek to build “The Caring Society: Caring for Each Other and Caring for the Earth.” Our well-being depends upon the well-being of everyone else and also on the well-being of the planet itself. So we commit to an ethos of generosity, nonviolence, and radical amazement at the grandeur of all that is, and seek to build a global awareness of the unity of all being.

If you are willing to help promote this New Bottom Line for our society, you are a spiritual progressive. And if you are a spiritual progressive, we invite you to join our Network of Spiritual Progressives at spiritualprogressives.org.

Tikkun

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A Living Wage—Not a Minimum Wage

AT THE CURRENT minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, a full-time worker makes only \$15,080 in a year—well below the poverty line for a family of three. So it's nothing but good news that President Obama signaled in December 2013 his support for Democratic lawmakers' push to raise the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour. In truth, we need more than just a raise in the minimum wage: we need a living wage and a guaranteed annual income for anyone who is unable to work, for whatever reason.

In an op-ed titled "Better Pay Now," *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman made an impassioned plea for a raise in the minimum wage. Even amid its Great Recession, America is a much richer country now than it was forty years ago, Krugman argued, but that wealth hasn't reached the hands of workers: "The inflation-adjusted wages of non-supervisory workers in retail trade—who weren't particularly well paid to begin with—have fallen almost 30 percent since 1973." He added that raising the minimum wage has been shown to have "little or no adverse effect on employment, while simultaneously increasing workers' earnings." Meanwhile, conservative commentators have been mounting opposition to the proposed wage along predictable lines.

The debate here is typical of American politics. Both sides work within the framework of what is "realistic" given the extraordinary power of the 1 percent to shape public discourse. Joining those with a more expansive view of what is possible, *Tikkun's* interfaith Network of Spiritual Progressives has issued a call for liberals and progressives to switch their focus from a "minimum wage" to a "living wage."

What Is a Living Wage?

According to the Living Wage Action Coalition, a living wage is a "decent wage":

It affords the earner and her or his family the most basic costs of living without need for government support or poverty programs. With a living wage an individual can take pride in her work and enjoy the decency of a life beyond poverty, beyond an endless cycle of working and sleeping, beyond the ditch of poverty wages.

The seven factors that the coalition uses to calculate the basic cost of a safe and decent standard of living are housing, food,

child care, transportation, health care, taxes, and other basic necessities (which in some cases include elder care or care for immigrant families' overseas parents or children).

Dr. Amy Glasmeier, the Department Head of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT, has developed a living wage calculator that estimates a living wage for different cities based on the current cost of living there. Glasmeier cautions that her calculator, which you can access at livingwage.mit.edu, is designed to provide a bare minimum estimate of the cost of living for low-wage families—not an estimate for a middle-class standard of living. According to her living wage calculator site:

The realism of the estimates depend on the type of community under study. Metropolitan counties are typically locations of high cost. In such cases, the calculator is likely to underestimate costs such as housing and child care. Consider the results a minimum cost threshold that serves as a benchmark, but only that. Users can substitute local data when available to generate more nuanced estimates. Adjustments to account for local conditions will provide greater realism and potentially increase the accuracy of the tool.

For example, a living wage for a single adult in Los Angeles is \$23,640. If that wage earner also supports a second adult, the amount needed is \$35,769. And if he or she supports another adult and one child, the amount needed is \$44,972. In Minneapolis the figures in these respective circumstances would be \$20,147, \$31,805, and \$38,823. In San Antonio, Texas, those figures would be \$18,008, \$28,904 and \$36,148. (These figures are for 2013 and would have to be automatically tied to the annual cost of living and inflation.)

A Guaranteed Annual Income

Can employers be expected to pay all of a living wage? In most cases, large corporations would not be put out of business by being required to pay a living wage. But there may be some cases in which they would be, so we propose that the Living Wage Act we support include two other features:

1. A guaranteed annual income for anyone employed at a lower wage than the living wage and for those unable to work for whatever reason. This guarantee from the government would ensure that wage earners receive the

difference between what they are being paid and the living wage needed for their particular town, city or region. The guaranteed income should be available to anyone willing to work, as well as those who are over age sixty-five and retired. In addition, social security benefits should be raised to the level of a living wage for those whose existing benefits put them at a lower income level, unless they have other sources of income that take them above the level of a living wage.

2. The creation of a Living Wage Board. Such a board should be created in each city and empowered to rule whether a local business is telling the truth if it claims it would be forced to reduce its employees were it to pay living wages. The boards would examine the businesses' income, wealth, and profit margins for investors. If the local board concluded that the business could pay, it would have the power to enforce the implementation of the higher wages. And in cases where the board agreed with the contention of the business in question, it could then authorize the

national Living Wage Board to activate the guaranteed annual income process mechanism and thereby supplement the employees' income up to the level of a living wage. Businesses judged to be exaggerating their inability to pay the living wage would be subject to fines by the Living Wage Boards.

Our task as spiritual progressives is to introduce and fight for ideas and programs that reflect genuine caring for all human beings and for the planet itself, regardless of whether or not they are deemed politically realistic. Our job is to transform the economic and political systems so that they embody our new bottom line of love and caring, generosity and kindness, ethical and environmental responsibility, and awe, wonder, and radical amazement at the grandeur and mystery of the universe. My motto: You never know what is possible in the political and economic world until you struggle for what is desirable. ■

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Pope Francis and the Christian Renewal He Seeks

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY and the interfaith Network of Spiritual Progressives are rejoicing at the new vision that Pope Francis has articulated for the Catholic Church. It is becoming increasingly apparent that Francis is a meaningful ally in the struggle for a world of economic justice, generosity, and love. His attempts to transform the Catholic Church might yield a return to the path championed by Vatican II and Pope John XXIII.

Francis's teachings resemble in many respects the teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi, who was famous for his commitment to ordinary people of the laity, to animals, and to nonviolence.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, the apostolic exhortation he released in November 2013, Pope Francis explicitly denounces "the tyranny of capitalism." His prophetic statement goes far beyond the critiques articulated in the last fifty years by most other liberal religious leaders and intellectuals because he names the system that must be transcended, as so many liberals and progressives have not been willing to do.

There are hundreds of thousands of local do-good projects attempting to combat specific injustices or assaults on the environment that are rooted in the capitalist system. Typically, the leaders of these projects focus on isolated issues,

thinking that they will be more effective and less marginalized if they avoid talking about capitalism or providing a vision of an alternative. As a result, most of the people who get involved in these projects do not see the systemic nature of the problem they are addressing or see that they need to be in active alliance with those who are engaged in similar struggles around slightly different issues. As a result, few join a movement or party that brings all of the issues together. Even if progressive activists win a single struggle (for example, the struggle against fracking or the campaign for a higher minimum wage), the capitalist system has in the meantime made ten times as many new outrageous advances that have to be fought. In the face of these challenges, people give up, not realizing that they have so many potential allies.

It's only when we articulate a shared worldview that unites all the different struggles that we can transform all of our potential allies into actual partners in the struggle to heal and transform our world (*tikkun olam*). That is precisely what *Tikkun* and the Network of Spiritual Progressives are doing with our proposed new bottom line, our call for a world of love and generosity, our magazine, and the program we have developed to train would-be spiritual progressive activists to help others see that a world of peace, justice, environmental

sanity, love, and generosity is possible (check out this training program at spiritualprogressives.org/training).

We are seeking to train spiritual progressives who might someday create a new political party that would use the kind of language articulated by Pope Francis in these selections from *Evangelii Gaudium*:

53. Just as the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say “thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape.

Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a “disposable” culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s under-side or its fringes or its disenfranchised—they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the “exploited” but the outcast, the “leftovers.”

54. In this context, some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting. To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase; and in the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us.

No to the new idolatry of money

55. One cause of this situation is found in our relationship with money, since we calmly accept its dominion over ourselves and our societies. The current financial crisis can make us overlook the fact that it originated in a profound human crisis: the denial of the primacy of the human person! We

have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. *Ex* 32:1–35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption.

56. While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control. A new tyranny is thus born, invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules. Debt and the accumulation of interest also make it difficult for countries to realize the potential of their own economies and keep citizens from enjoying their real purchasing power. To all this we can add widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions. The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule. . . .

No to the inequality which spawns violence

59. Today in many places we hear a call for greater security. But until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples is reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence. The poor and the poorer peoples are accused of violence, yet without equal opportunities the different forms of aggression and conflict will find a fertile terrain for growth and eventually explode. When a society—whether local, national or global—is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programmes or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquility. This is not the case simply because inequality provokes a violent reaction from those excluded from the system, but because the socioeconomic system is unjust at its root. Just as goodness tends to spread, the toleration of evil, which is injustice, tends to expand its baneful influence and quietly to undermine any political and social system, no matter how solid it may appear. If every action has its consequences, an evil embedded in the structures of a society has a constant potential for disintegration and death. It is evil crystallized in unjust social structures, which cannot be the basis of hope for a better future. We are far from the so-called “end of history,” since the conditions for a sustainable and peaceful development have not yet been adequately articulated and realized.

60. Today’s economic mechanisms promote inordinate consumption, yet it is evident that unbridled consumerism combined with inequality proves doubly damaging to the social



Pope Francis visits the São Francisco De Assis Na Providência Hospital, an addiction treatment facility in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, that offers free medical care to the poor.

fabric. Inequality eventually engenders a violence which recourse to arms cannot and never will be able to resolve. This serves only to offer false hopes to those clamouring for heightened security, even though nowadays we know that weapons and violence, rather than providing solutions, create new and more serious conflicts. Some simply content themselves with blaming the poor and the poorer countries themselves for their troubles; indulging in unwarranted generalizations, they claim that the solution is an “education” that would tranquilize them, making them tame and harmless. All this becomes even more exasperating for the marginalized in the light of the widespread and deeply rooted corruption found in many countries—in their governments, businesses and institutions—whatever the political ideology of their leaders.

If we didn’t know about his busy schedule at the Vatican, we’d think Pope Francis was spending his days reading Michael J. Sandel’s book *What Money Can’t Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*, Jerry Mander’s *The Capitalism Papers: Fatal Flaws of an Obsolete System*, Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda’s amazing book *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (reviewed in the Winter 2014 issue of *Tikkun*), my books *Spirit Matters* and *The Left Hand of God*, Peter Gabel’s book *Another Way of Seeing*, or Matthew Fox’s *Letters to Pope Francis and Occupy Spirituality*.

Pope Francis is not the messiah. He is unlikely to break with the history of the Catholic Church on issues like abortion and homosexuality, and it remains to be seen if he can be moved to alter the imposition of celibacy on the clergy—a ban that has no historical basis in the teachings of Jesus. People of all faiths need to stand strongly behind Catholic feminists as they decide how and when to present the demand that Francis allow women to be ordained as priests and consecrated as bishops and cardinals, or to insist that the Church openly and consistently fight against the patriarchal assumptions that have shaped it for these past 1,800 years. We support similar struggles against patriarchal practices in Judaism and Islam.

It is unlikely that Francis is going to do much on these central issues unless massively pressed to do so. But with enough pressure, new horizons appear. Imagine if a million Catholic women and their Catholic male allies demonstrated outside the Vatican for weeks on end, insisting that Jesus never deprived women of equal standing and that Jesus’s support for women was part of his original religious revolution. That or something comparable might actually move Pope Francis. The fact that we can even imagine such a movement swaying the pope makes Francis a remarkable figure.

Does Francis have the courage to use his power to insist that Catholics give priority to the need to replace capitalism with a system that has a new bottom line of love and generosity? Will he order his bishops and priests to tell their laity that in choosing which politicians to vote for they must give priority to those who champion the needs of the poor and powerless, immigrants, and victims of oppression?

Pope Francis could do so much to nurture the revolutionary promise of the Catholic Church. As a first step, he could take figures like Matthew Fox (who was a Catholic priest until he was silenced and expelled by Cardinal Ratzinger), Hans Küng, Dominican Father Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino, Leonardo Boff, and John Dear and make them cardinals of the Church. He could invite Catholic women leaders like Joan Chittister and Sister Simone to meet with him in the Vatican. And he could invite many of the courageous nuns who have fought for justice for the poor against patriarchal practices to participate in a weeklong yearly gathering where the most radical voices inside the Catholic Church could inform him on issues like women’s rights, the environment, and social and economic justice. Such a gathering could even draw together spiritual progressives from other religions too. *Tikkun* would be happy to be part of that! ■

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The *Tikkun* Passover Supplement

This is meant as a supplement to the traditional Haggadah, not as an alternative to it.

A more full version of this supplement can be found online at tikkun.org/passover.

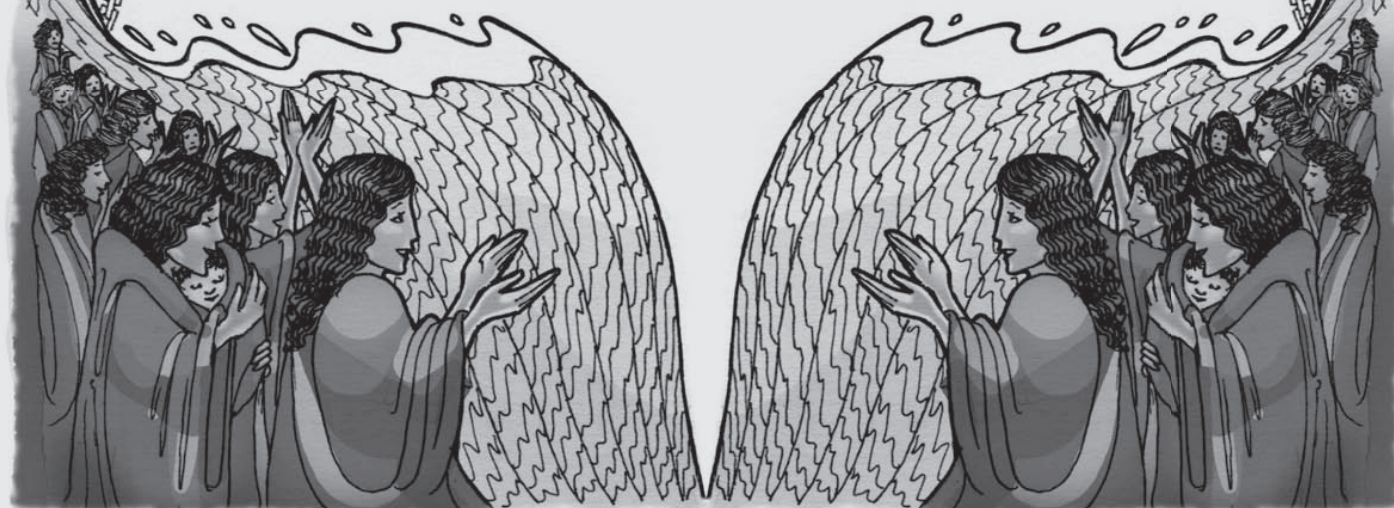
A NOTE TO NON-JEWS: Jesus was a Jew, and the Last Supper was a Seder. Our supplement affirms the liberatory message that is part of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and is found in many other religious and spiritual traditions as well. You may find some of this ritual helpful if you create your own rite to celebrate the key insight of all the spring holidays of the world: that rebirth, renewal, and transformation are possible, and that we are not stuck in the dark, cold, and deadly energies of winter. Judaism builds on that universal experience and adds another dimension: it suggests that the class structure (slavery, feudalism, capitalism, or neoliberal imperialism) can be overcome, and that we human beings, created in the image of the Transformative Power of the Universe (God), can create a world based on love, generosity, and nonviolence.

Kadesh

Before blessing the wine, read this together:

We are the descendents of a people that have told a story of liberation from slavery and placed that story at the very center of our religion, most of our holidays, and the Torah read each Shabbat. We took upon ourselves the task of telling the people of the world that nothing is fixed, that the world can be fundamentally transformed, and that together we can build an economic, political, social, and cultural reality based on love and generosity, peace and nonviolence, social and economic justice, and caring for each other and the world. That is our inherited calling as the Jewish people.

We do not come to this task with the arrogance implicit in suggesting that we already have lived a life that fully embodies these values. In fact, the trauma of hatred against us that our message engendered in ruling elites—who hate anyone who teaches that society can be freed from class oppression—has led many of us to run away from our highest spiritual vision and try to be “a nation like all other nations.” In the process, some of us have ended up working with and benefitting from the institutions of exploitation and oppression. This occurred in the Middle Ages, when Jews were offered very limited options and some ended up as tax and rent collectors and the most visible face of the feudal lords whom we served. And it is



also true in the modern capitalist period, in which some of our brethren have become the moguls of Wall Street, investment bankers, corporate lawyers, media tycoons, and political operatives serving the status quo of Western imperialism.

Yet there has also been a core of our people who have managed not to allow fear to dominate our consciousness, and who in various ways have tried our best to remain true to the liberatory vision of Judaism. We are proud that even at a time when some Jews preach that our narrow self-interest should lead us to support a preemptive war against Iran and a solidarity with the 1 percent, the overwhelming majority of Jewish people continue to vote for liberal candidates for public office who, when they are at their best, provide a bulwark against the most reactionary forces in our world. These voting patterns have made Jews the most reliable electoral ally for people of color in Western societies, despite the loudmouths whose racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia continue to get disproportionate media attention.

As we lift our cup of wine to say the prayers for sanctification of this joyous holiday, we recommit ourselves to the struggle for a world in which our society's rationality, efficiency, and productivity are judged by how much our economic, political, corporate, educational, legal, and medical systems tend to increase the amount of love, caring, kindness, generosity, and awe and wonder at the grandeur and mystery of the universe. We recommit ourselves to judging the rationality or efficiency of societal policies and institutions on how much they either undermine or sustain the way of life generated by capitalist culture in which we see other human beings as means to our own ends rather than as manifestations of the holy who deserve to be treated with loving respect and openhearted kindness.

Ur'chatz

As we wash our hands, we imagine washing away all cynicism and despair. We allow ourselves to be filled with the hope that the world can be transformed in accord with our highest vision of the good.

Karpas

We eat a vegetable and sing of spring and hope, rejoicing in the bountiful blessings of the earth as it renews itself. We are all too aware that environmental damage is increasing rapidly. The free market, in a relentless fury to amass profits, has generated tens of thousands of corporate ventures and products that, as a whole and with some notable exceptions, have combined to do incalculable damage to the life-support system of the planet. While some have falsely come to believe that individual acts of earth-caring can change the big picture, the reality is that the life support system of the planet can only be saved through a transformation of our entire economic system. We need to create an economic system that no longer relies on endless growth or promotes the notion that

well-being comes from accumulating and owning things and experiences, and that each of us should be maximizing our own well-being without regard to the global consequences of our personal actions. Ecological sanity cannot be achieved without global economic justice.

We approach the earth not only as our sustainer, vital to our personal survival, but also as a scared place worthy of our respect and awe.

After dipping a fresh vegetable in the saltwater of our tears (tears for the earth and for the past suffering of our people) and saying the blessing, it now becomes appropriate to eat anything vegetarian, including vegetarian chopped liver, baba ghanoush, hummus, vegetable soups, and rice dishes (following the Sephardic custom). The idea of starving ourselves until the first half of the Seder is completed is a distortion that has no legitimate foundation in Jewish law. Let us eat fully of the vegetarian dishes so we can be fully present to the Seder's messages.

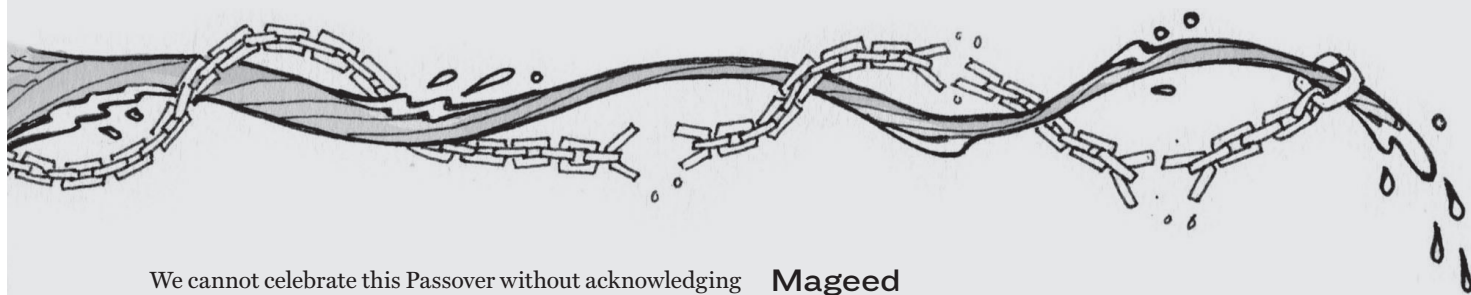
Yachatz

We break the middle matzah in half, acknowledging our own brokenness and recognizing that imperfect people can usher in liberation. There's no sense waiting until we are totally pure and psychologically and spiritually healthy to get involved in *tikkun* (the healing and repair of the world). It will be imperfect people—wounded healers—who heal and transform the world, even as we simultaneously commit to doing ongoing psychological and spiritual work on ourselves. Whenever we fail to do this inner work, our distortions paralyze our social transformative movements.

The broken Matzah may also be seen as symbolizing the need for the Jewish people to give up the fantasy of running and controlling all of Palestine, when in fact what we need is a two-state solution or one state with equal rights for all.



Rachel Shayne Edelstein (rachelshayne.com)



We cannot celebrate this Passover without acknowledging the biggest distortion in Jewish life today—the often blind worship of the State of Israel in an era when Israel has become the current embodiment of Pharaoh-like oppression for the Palestinian people. We do not accept any account that one-sidedly blames the Jewish people or the Palestinian people for the development of this struggle, and we urge those who embrace such accounts to read *Embracing Israel/Palestine: A Strategy for Middle East Peace* (tikkun.org/eip). But we do recognize that at this moment it is Israel that has vastly greater power and hence greater responsibility to make dramatic concessions.

Such a concession could entail Israel's decision to no longer stand in the way of the Palestinian people's creation of an economically and politically viable Palestinian state in almost all of the West Bank and Gaza. Or it could entail offering Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza a "one person, one vote" democracy within Israel, allowing Jewish settlers to stay in the West Bank while gradually allowing Palestinians who wish to live in peace with Israel to return from their Diaspora to a Palestinian state that is adequately funded to provide them with a standard of living equivalent to the median living standard in Israel. Or it could entail Israel's decision to allow the Palestinians who fled or were forced out to gradually return to their homeland inside the borders of pre-1967 Israel (perhaps 20,000 to 30,000 returnees a year, but only in a context in which Israel eliminates all discrimination on the basis of nationality or religion, separates synagogue from state, and gives full and equal rights to everyone living within its borders). If Palestinians return at a gradual rate such as this, their return will not trigger such feelings of fear among Israelis who are still reeling from the Holocaust and feel the need for the protection of a state of their own.

We then lift the matzah and proclaim: "This is the bread of affliction. Let all who are hungry come and eat." This is the spirit of generosity which is the authentic Jewish spirit, so we must reject all those who tell us that "there is not enough" or that "we cannot afford" to end global and domestic poverty, hunger, homelessness, inadequate education, and inadequate health care. There is enough, we are enough, and we can afford to share.

Mageed

We tell the story of our liberation struggle with embellishments! First we let the children ask the four traditional questions. Then we ask these four additional questions for the adults (and discuss our answers in small groups before going on):

1. Do you believe in the possibility of human liberation or have you given up on that Jewish vision?
2. Do you believe that people care only about themselves, or is it possible to create a society that rewards and nourishes our capacities to care for each other?
3. Do you believe that safety and security in this world come only from building stronger armies and stronger anti-terrorist systems, or do you think that safety for us, for Israel, and for anyone can be achieved through building a world of love, generosity, and social and economic justice?
4. Have you seen something change that at first seemed impossible to change? What lessons have you drawn from those experiences?

Continue this discussion over dinner. Now we turn to telling the story of the Exodus, and include the recitation of the plagues as we dip drops of wine or grape juice from our cups in remembrance of the suffering of our brethren the Egyptians. And we say:

While we have every right to celebrate our own liberation, as does every person on earth, our cup of joy cannot be full when we are the cause of the suffering of another people. We pray to live to the day when our own freedom and liberation will no longer be linked to the suffering of others.

Motzi Matzah

We hold up a substitute for the Pesach sacrifice of a lamb. As we hold up this vegetarian substitute for the shank bone, which may be a roasted Paschal Yam or Pachal Beet, we remind ourselves to draw closer to the spiritual reality of the universe—a process that in ancient days was supposedly facilitated by animal sacrifice.

We pick up the matzah, which Jewish mystics associate with disconnecting from chameytz (the leavened and expansive parts of bread that to the mystic symbolizes the never-quenched expansiveness of ego). Every time we eat the matzah during the eight days of Passover, we will remind

ourselves of our spiritual commitment to overcome ego and let go of pretense so that we can see the world and ourselves as we really are.

Maror

We eat the bitter herbs. As we eat the horseradish or other bitter vegetables, we remember that the struggle for liberation is not a party. If we insist that it always must “feel good,” we will remain stuck in the oppressive reality of today, because the 1 percent and those who work for them can always guarantee (through their armies, police forces, homeland security, and spying forces) that there is much pain in store for us, including loss of livelihood, jail, or assassination.

Korech

On a bit of matzah, we put the bitter herbs together with charoset. We combine the bitter herbs with charoset (a dish made from apples, nuts, and wine) to remember that our own love and generosity can make the struggle not feel impossibly bitter.

Shulchan Orech

Eat dinner!

Tzafun

Find and eat the Afikomen. This piece of the matzah, which was previously broken off and hidden, symbolizes the part of each of us that is split off and must be reintegrated into our full being for us each to be a whole and free person.

Barech

As we recite the blessing after our meal, we recommit ourselves to transforming global and economic arrangements in such a way as to ensure that the delicious foods we ate together tonight will be equally available to everyone on the planet and that no one will lack delicious and healthy food.

After the blessing, as we drink the third cup of wine or grape juice, we remember the suffering of our people during the Holocaust. We remember tonight our millions of sisters and brothers who perished at the hands of the Nazis and of the many willing executioners among the peoples of Eastern Europe. And we also remember the Jewish martyrs throughout the ages who were oppressed, beaten, raped, and murdered by European Christians. We do this despite our despair at those Jews who have illegitimately used the memory of our suffering to legitimate the oppression by Jews of the Palestinian people, or to justify insensitivity toward others who are suffering in the world today. Tonight we also recall with deep appreciation the many non-Jews who did stand up for Jews, who risked their lives to save Jewish lives, and who remained true to the best values of their own ethical and religious traditions.

Sing songs of hope for spiritual and political transformation (e.g., We Shall Overcome, Imagine, Ode Yavoe Shalom).

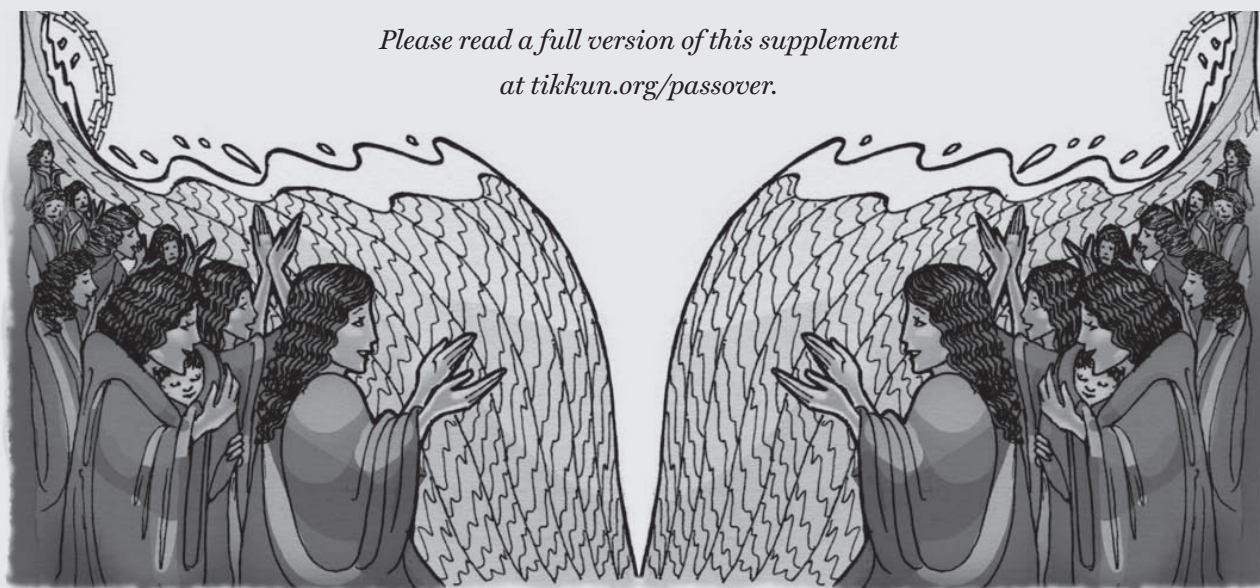
Hallel

Sing songs of praise to Goddess of the universe.

Nirtza

We say: Next year in a world of peace, justice, love, and generosity—*L’shanah ha’ba!* ■

*Please read a full version of this supplement
at tikkun.org/passover.*



Rachel Shayne Edelstein (rachelshayne.com)

Loving-Kindness to the Thousandth Generation

BY ANA LEVY-LYONS

WHEN THE NEWS of Bashar al-Assad's chemical weapon attack on the people of Syria first came into focus, many of us in the United States, not knowing what to do with the rage and pain, called for a punitive counterattack. For a brief while it seemed inevitable, and everyone was bracing for the deployment. The idea proposed by President Obama was that our response be brief, forceful, and narrowly targeted. We would respond to Assad's spray of violence with a laser of violence. The matter would remain within the bounds that we set and that would be that. But many of us feared that it wouldn't exactly work out that way. Jesus, Mahatma Gandhi, and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. teach that it rarely does work out that way. Violence doesn't like to sit neatly inside the lines we set for it. The color bleeds and gets everywhere.

Now the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical and Weapons and the United Nations are working together to oversee the destruction of Assad's chemical weapons stockpile. But this is not so easy either. Look at our own history: as part of an international treaty, the United States pledged back in 1997 to destroy all our chemical weapons in ten years. (That's amazing in and of itself.) But it's seventeen years later now, and we've still got them. And it's actually not for lack of trying; it's really hard to get rid of chemical weapons once they exist. There are health and environmental factors. You can't transport them, so separate destruction facilities have to be built for each arsenal. We've built nine separate destruction facilities so far and spent \$35 billion, and we're still not done. For every \$1 it costs to make a chemical weapon, it costs \$10 to destroy it.

Like a genie in a bottle, violence and the implements of violence can take on a life of their own. They proliferate. They bloom. They become, in some ways, larger than their creator.

How Violence Proliferates

The story of Fritz Haber is a chilling example of how the tools of violence take on a life of their own. Haber was a twentieth-century German Jewish scientist who first figured out how to separate nitrogen out of the air. As a German patriot who hadn't experienced much anti-Semitism, Haber was happy to help Germany's military aims in World War II and help them he did. With Haber's technique, Germany was able to make nitrogen bombs out of thin air, while the allied forces had to import their nitrogen



Tools of war can take on a life of their own, harming their makers in unpredictable ways. Our country is still struggling to safely dispose of the chemical weapons it stockpiled in the early twentieth century. Here, a woman assembles gas masks during World War I in the United States.

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Violence can proliferate, but love has an even stronger power to ripple outward. When school administrator Antoinette Tuff persuaded an armed twenty-year-old to put down his gun by expressing empathy for him, she didn't just save the lives of her students—she sent reverberations of her love through the entire community.

from abroad. Without Haber, Germany would have failed years earlier. Haber also figured out how to weaponize chlorine and personally supervised its use as a chemical attack on the front. Then he turned his attention to creating pesticides (which are also chemical weapons)—one in particular named Zyklon-B.

The tragic irony of the story is that, as brilliant a scientist as Haber was, he misunderstood one of the fundamental principles of life: he mistakenly believed that a vector or agent of death can be confined to its intended purpose and its intended target. He believed that none of what he had created would get on *him*. But his wife committed suicide when she learned of the horrors he had wrought with his chlorine gas. Their young son found her body and later killed himself as well. And Zyklon-B, the pesticide, ended up being used by the Nazi regime in the gas chambers that killed some of Haber's own extended family and coworkers.

Pesticides are meant to kill specific insects and yet they kill Jews at Auschwitz, they kill children in India when they accidentally wind up in a school lunch, and they kill the bees we need to pollinate our food crops. Guns are meant to kill deer and bears, and yet they kill thirteen civilians in a D.C. Navy Yard. Had Fritz Haber imagined the use to which Zyklon-B would be put, he probably never would have created it. And yet we can never imagine the effects of our own actions. We can never fathom our own power.

Violence, ill will, dishonesty, and disregard for the earth proliferate like a virus, uncontrollably and unpredictably. We can't anticipate their scope except to know that it will be beyond what we could possibly foresee. There is a poignant moment in the Hebrew Bible that speaks to this same principle. After the Israelites have escaped from Egypt through the Red Sea, wandered in the desert, and arrived at Mount Sinai to receive the commandments, God warns them, "I, the Lord your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject me."

Liberals tend to dislike that quote because it sounds like God is punishing children for things their parents did. But when you look at the world, it's true—that's how things work. Whether or not you think of God as the agent of it, children suffer because of the things their parents do. There is a transfer of pain across the generations. The rejection of God, or call it the inability or refusal to access goodness and love, is never contained to one action or one person: it always affects the world to the third or fourth degree of separation.

When a parent is violent, abusive, absent, or simply doesn't know how to love, that pain often transfers to the children, the grandchildren, the great-grandchildren. So many of us are third and fourth generation inheritors of pain like that. Even in a single lifetime, if we are told as children that we are ugly or stupid, or bullied for being gay or handicapped, it can resonate across the decades. Violence and evil don't stay put in history or geography—they breed and multiply.

The Ripple Effect of Loving-Kindness

But what saves the day here is that goodness and love also breed and multiply. This is literally the good news of faith. Our religious traditions teach us that yes, hate proliferates, but that love proliferates exponentially more. The Hebrew Bible passage that I quoted earlier doesn't end where I ended it. Here's the full quotation: "I, the Lord your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject me, but showing loving-kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love me and those who keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:5).

(continued on page 57)

Laura Beckman (laurabeckman.com)

Political Posters for the Twenty-First Century

A Spotlight on the Justseeds Artists' Cooperative

BY PAUL VON BLUM

IN *APARTHEID WALL*, artist Eric Drooker's contribution to a collective political poster project called *Imaging Apartheid*, a determined man with a sledgehammer attacks the wall erected by the Israeli government in the West Bank.

Language matters. Drooker, a Jewish New Yorker transplanted to Berkeley, deliberately uses the controversial term “apartheid wall” preferred by many Palestinians and some Israeli critics rather than “security fence” or similar terminology preferred by the present Israeli government. Whether or not one agrees with the use of “apartheid” to describe the situation in the West Bank, one has to appreciate the provocative force of this political poster—and the important questions it raises.

Drooker's poster invites viewers to see how the wall in effect annexes Palestinian territory without negotiations, thereby hindering serious talks regarding a peaceful settlement with a just resolution for both Israelis and Palestinians. Widely condemned by human rights organizations and the United Nations, the wall is a daily reminder of the humiliations of a seemingly endless occupation. The poster advocates the destruction of this barrier that has wreaked havoc on the daily lives and health of Palestinian women, men, and children, who are hindered from traveling freely on lands that supply their subsistence.

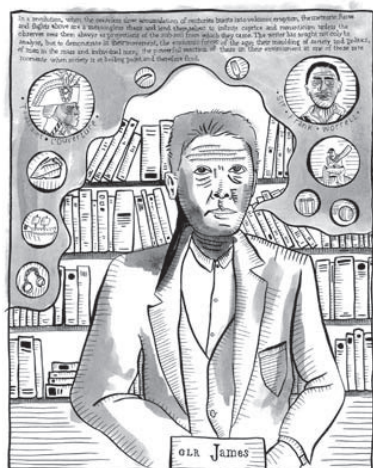
By creating this image, Drooker—a longtime socially conscious painter, graphic novelist, and cover artist for the *New Yorker*—joins a large body of progressive Jews and others who have criticized oppressive Israeli policies. His sledgehammer imagery takes part in a growing tradition of artistic opposition to the wall that includes British guerrilla artist Banksy's critical and moving paintings on the wall itself. It's a tradition that has gained momentum through the work of groups like the Justseeds Artists' Cooperative, the worker-owned collective that organized the *Imaging Apartheid* project to which Drooker contributed this image. *Imaging Apartheid* brought together many prominent artists who created political posters calling attention to oppressive Israeli policies in the occupied territories. Exhibited and distributed originally in Montreal, these works are now being circulated through numerous activist distribution networks.

It is projects such as *Imaging Apartheid* that prove that, despite the cultural changes



Apartheid Wall by Eric Drooker.

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Colin Matthes's portrait of Brazilian environmentalist Chico Mendes, Dylan Miner's depiction of socialist theorist C.L.R. James, and Nicolas Lampert's portrait of labor activist Elizabeth Gurley Flynn were all created for *Firebrands*, a book of miniposters about radical figures in the Americas.

of this digital age, the political poster—a venerable, centuries-old medium of visual social commentary—remains a powerful part of activist culture in North America.

From the nineteenth century to the present, political posters have been effective in bringing activist messages to large audiences throughout the world. However, since they're most often produced by lesser known or unknown artists (with the exception of Kathe Kollwitz, Pablo Picasso, Ben Shahn, and a handful of other famous artists who occasionally used this medium), political posters are usually consigned to the margins of conventional art history. That's why, in these pages, I'd like to offer a brief recent history of this genre and introduce readers to some of the most inspiring political poster art in North America today, namely, the works of the Justseeds collective and of Canadian artist Jesse Purcell.

A Brief History of the Political Poster

In the early part of the twentieth century, aggressive posters accompanied the struggles of working men and women in organizing labor unions and resisting economic oppression in many countries around the world. Militant posters were likewise prominent in campaigns for women's right to vote. The Soviet and Mexican revolutions generated a large body of political posters, and the Spanish Civil War catalyzed some of the finest political posters in the early twentieth century.

The politically tumultuous 1960s also generated thousands of political posters throughout the world. In Cuba, for example, the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Africa, Asia, and Latin America produced colorful political posters supporting liberation movements on multiple continents. In France, during the abortive revolt in 1968, students and workers created hundreds of designs against the regime of President Charles de Gaulle. Also in 1968, students and workers in Mexico and Czechoslovakia produced hundreds of provocative posters condemning the Mexican government and the Soviet invasion respectively. And the South African anti-apartheid struggle generated another body of powerful artwork.

In the United States, artists in the '60s reinforced activists' commitment to their political efforts through posters on racial justice, women's rights, gay liberation, the war in Vietnam, and the growing crises in the natural environment. More recently, they have created posters about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, homelessness, racial profiling, mass incarceration, immigrant rights, and more. In the last two decades, the Los Angeles-based Center for the Study of Political Graphics has helped solidify the stature of the political poster as a chief expression of socially conscious art by collecting, documenting, and exhibiting domestic and international political posters.

Since 1998, a key organization producing powerful and provocative political posters has been Justseeds, a decentralized cooperative that consists of roughly twenty-five artists from throughout North America. With a strong commitment to an egalitarian society, an environmentally responsible economy, and other social justice goals, the cooperative strives to embody its ideals through its consensus decision-making process. Its collaborative art installations in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, and elsewhere serve as a counterweight to the elitist arrangements of mainstream museums and galleries.

A powerful example of the Justseeds cooperative's work is *I Am Trayvon Martin and My Life Matters*. Created by Melanie Cervantes, Santiago Armengod, and Jesus Barranza, this poster presents the young man whose life was brutally taken by George Zimmerman on February 26, 2012, in Sanford, Florida. While the poster expresses outrage against Zimmerman's "not guilty" verdict in July 2013, the intimacy of its portrayal also expresses a deeper message about the humanity and individuality of Trayvon Martin and other victims of racial violence such as Latasha Harlins, Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, and Oscar Grant. No one should forget that these victims were human beings whose young lives were aborted prematurely. They were people with hopes and dreams and aspirations for the future. Their lives mattered.

Colin Matthes (colinmatthes.com), Dylan Miner (dylanminer.com), and Nicolas Lampert (machineanimalcollages.com)



Radical History Portraits

One of the Justseeds cooperative's most significant projects was its 2010 book entitled *Firebrands: Portraits from the Americas*, which used a series of miniposters to present an array of radical and progressive figures—including those excluded from traditional history books. Appropriately dedicated to the late progressive historian Howard Zinn, *Firebrands* is the visual counterpart to Peter Dreier's splendid 2012 book *The 100 Greatest Americans of the 20th Century: A Social Justice Hall of Fame*. In addition to highlighting iconic figures like W.E.B. Du Bois and Emma Goldman, this visual almanac of people's history also features figures not so well known to the general public. Examples include Grace Lee Boggs (1915–), a longtime Chinese American social and political activist and intellectual, drawn by Bec Young; Luisa Capetillo (1879–1922), a Puerto Rican labor activist, feminist, and radical journalist, drawn by Molly Fair; and Florynce Kennedy (1916–2000), a radical lawyer who defended feminist and black radical causes throughout her long legal career, drawn by Alec “Icky” Dunn.

To give a sense of the aesthetics of the miniposters in *Firebrands*—and how they serve as valuable sources of historical correction—I have included three examples in this article: Nicolas Lampert's portrait of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Dylan Miner's portrait of C.L.R. James, and Colin Matthes's portrait of Chico Mendes.

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (1890–1964) devoted her entire life to political activism and has been largely forgotten even in historical accounts of American labor. Flynn was an effective Industrial Workers of the World organizer and speaker, organizing strikes throughout the United States. She later helped found the American Civil Liberties Union and was an active leader of the Communist Party, serving time in prison during the notorious Smith Act prosecutions of the McCarthy era. IWW songwriter Joe Hill dedicated his song “The Rebel Girl” to her. Lampert's portrait of Flynn depicts her in front of Hill's musical score, complete with his handwritten dedication to one of the most significant figures in American radical history.

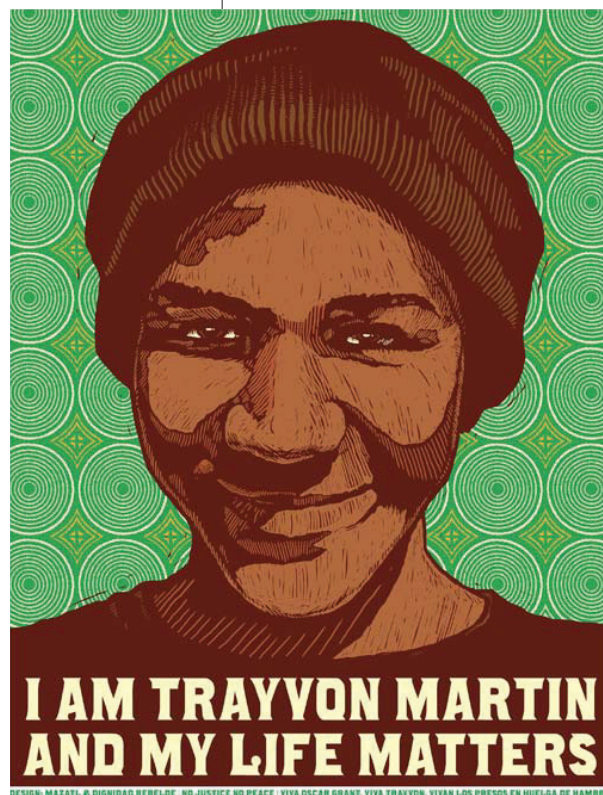
Miner's portrait of C.L.R. James (1901–1989) appropriately places him in front of a library, surrounded by other symbols and persons influential in his life. It encourages readers to learn more about this Trinidadian activist and intellectual whose huge contributions to Marxist theory and anti-colonial activism made him a powerful figure in twentieth-century socialist thought. Miner gestures at James's early writings on cricket, in its historical and social context by including an image of Sir Frank Worrell, a famous cricket player from the West Indies, at the upper right. At the upper left is Toussaint L'Ouverture, the leader of the Haitian Revolution.

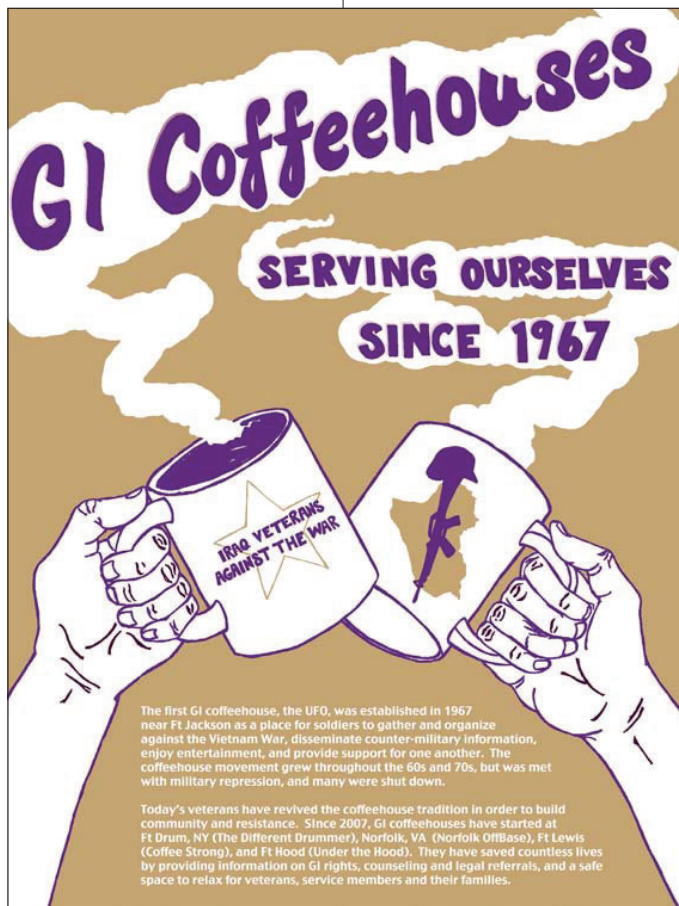
Matthes's portrait of Chico Mendes (1944–1988) portrays a poster of the murdered Brazilian leader hovering over a large group of his activist followers: a deliberate message, as the text suggests, that killing the leader does not kill the struggle. Mendes, a Brazilian rubber tapper turned environmental activist, organized a union of poor and indigenous workers to challenge the rapacious cattle ranchers who were destroying the Amazon rainforest. He developed an international reputation for his fusion of human rights and environmental work. Matthes's portrait emphasizes that Mendes's murder ended his life but not his cause.

Art on War and Migration

In addition to creating *Firebrands*, Justseeds has produced collective portfolios of posters on themes such as *War is Trauma* and *Migration Now!*

I Am Trayvon Martin and My Life Matters by Melanie Cervantes, Santiago Armengod, and Jesus Barranza.





GI Coffeehouses
by Molly Fair and
Dignity Not Detention
by Melanie Cervantes.



Conducted in collaboration with Iraq Veterans Against the War, the *War is Trauma* project grew out of a campaign to stop the deployment of traumatized troops. Some of the portfolio works are from Justseeds and allied artists while others are from Iraq veterans themselves. Molly Fair, a Justseeds Collective member, produced one of the most significant historical works in the *War is Trauma* series. Fair's poster, *GI Coffeehouses*, highlights the powerful linkage between the anti-war efforts of Iraq veterans and their Vietnam War veteran predecessors. The poster's text provides the relevant historical context, explaining that the first GI coffeehouse was established in 1967 and soon became a major locus of organizing efforts for soldiers opposing the war. Iraq soldiers have revived the tradition, and like the earlier Vietnam military resisters, the contemporary coffeehouses have been invaluable sources of legal, medical, and psychological information. Above all, they have provided a safe space for military members and their families who dared to resist the Iraq War. Fair's poster celebrates the historical continuity within veterans' anti-war efforts.

The *Migration Now!* portfolio focuses on the inhuman policies of deporting human beings who have no formal documentation to be in the United States. Many of these works express solidarity with immigrants in this country. Others offer critical visual commentaries about how law enforcement agencies like the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) abuse detainees, break up families, terrorize undocumented persons, and commit other human rights outrages.

Some of the most compelling works in this series call specific attention to individual victims of brutal immigration policies. For example, *Dignity Not Detention*—a poster by

Molly Fair (justseeds.org) and Melanie Cervantes (dignidadrebelde.com)

Oakland artist Melanie Cervantes—highlights Nazry Mustakim, a green card holder from Singapore who was incarcerated for ten months in a Texas detention center because of a previous drug conviction that made him ineligible for release on bond. Thanks in part to the relentless advocacy of his wife, Hope, he was finally released. By presenting an image of the couple involved in this case, Cervantes's poster focuses attention on the consequences of repressive legal policies on real human beings, showing how mandatory detention disrupts families and wrecks human relationships.

A Feminist Take on the Occupy Movement

One of the most dynamic members of the Justseeds Collective is Oakland artist Favianna Rodriguez. Her prolific works on feminist, pro-immigration, anti-racist, and anti-war themes have brought her to national attention as a major political artist of the early twenty-first century. Her striking feminist poster *Occupy Sisterhood* was part of the Justseeds Occuprint project, which supported the international Occupy Movement.

One of thousands of Occupy posters throughout the world, this piece celebrates the particular work of women in the movement. This colorful poster offers a sharp critique of patriarchy that is alive and well throughout government and dominant institutions. The subtitle, moreover, underscores its central point: the war on women is a war on everyone. The backlash against reproductive rights and the media-generated hostility toward feminism work to the profound disadvantage of everyone, not merely to women alone. As Rodriguez's poster proclaims, the assault on women represents an attack on humanity. Her poster's message matches the legitimately angry expression of the woman depicted.

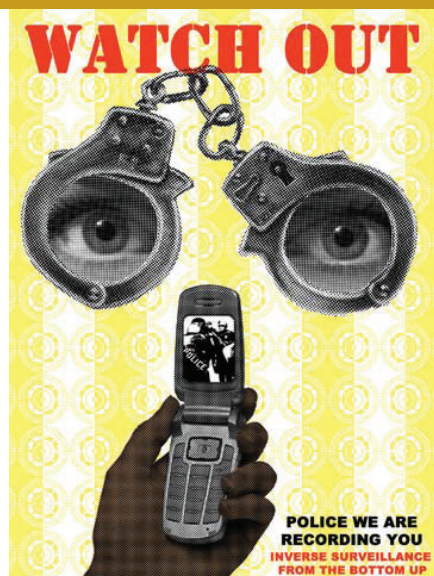
A Canadian Perspective

Jesse Purcell, the Justseeds collective's lone Canadian artist, uses his art to raise awareness on topics about which U.S. audiences are too often ignorant. Most U.S. residents are scarcely aware that Canada has an extremely conservative prime minister, Stephen Harper, who is an advocate of fossil fuels, an opponent of tough environmental regulations, and a supporter of increased defense spending, all at the cost of serious human and social priorities in Canada. Likewise, U.S. residents are often ignorant of Canada's long history of progressive resistance, including its progressive social democratic party, the New Democratic Party, which has achieved several local and provincial electoral victories and is presently the official opposition party in the national government.

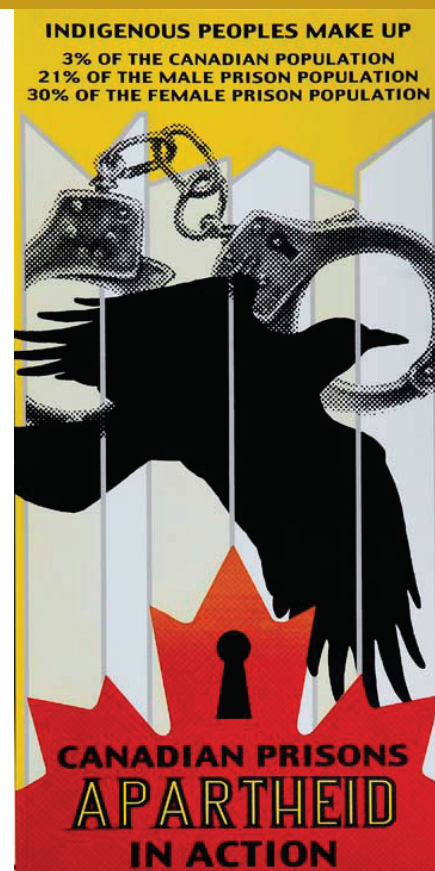
Purcell's poster art helps redress this paucity of knowledge—and curiosity—about Canada. Like other Justseeds artists, he made several miniposter contributions to the *Firebrands* book, emphasizing the hidden figures of Canadian resistance history. His work on Albert "Ginger" Goodwin (1887–1918), for example, draws attention to a key early twentieth-century labor organizer in British Columbia whose 1918 murder by a police officer made him a labor martyr like many of his U.S. counterparts. Purcell also drew a miniposter of Dr. Henry Morgentaler (1923–2013), a Holocaust survivor who immigrated to Canada and



Occupy Sisterhood
by Favianna Rodriguez.



Watch Out and Canadian Apartheid by Jesse Purcell.



performed more than 5,000 unsanctioned abortions before the decriminalization of the procedure in Canada in 1988. And he contributed a portrait of indigenous leader Harriet Nahanee (1935–2007), who was instrumental in organizing the Pacheedaht and Squamish peoples to oppose highway extensions into native lands in British Columbia—geography that included environmentally sensitive wetlands.

Prisons and Surveillance

Purcell has also used his art to draw attention to issues of incarceration and police surveillance. His poster *Canadian Apartheid* (part of the Justseeds Prison Portfolio Project) features appalling data from Canada's national statistics agency about the number of indigenous prisoners in Canada. As the poster proclaims, the disproportionate percentage of indigenous men and women behind bars in Canada reflects a *de facto* apartheid arrangement that puts First Nations residents behind bars instead of guaranteeing them humane treatment, cultural respect, and adequate public and private resources.

The comparison to the U.S. incarceration system is unnerving. As Michelle Alexander reveals in *The New Jim Crow*, an American caste system of incarceration has locked away a huge number of African Americans (and Latinos), reinforcing our country's dishonorable history of racism and oppression. Like Canada, the United States seeks to avoid its structural problems through its repressive operation of criminal law and imprisonment. Jesse Purcell's poster on this issue should galvanize concerned citizens in both nations to pay closer attention to this troubling feature of social life in the contemporary era.

Purcell's poster on police surveillance, *Watch Out*, calls dramatic attention to an issue of increasing danger and concern throughout the world: the assault on civil liberties increasingly carried out by police forces against all citizens and especially protesters, which will doubtless increase with the improvement in drone technology and comparable information-gathering devices. In Canada, the surveillance (*continued on page 58*)

Jesse Purcell (justseeds.org)

What Do the Suicides of Fifty-Year-Old Men Reveal?

The Public Health Emergency Exposes an Economic and Existential Crisis

BY MARGARET MORGANROTH GULLETTE

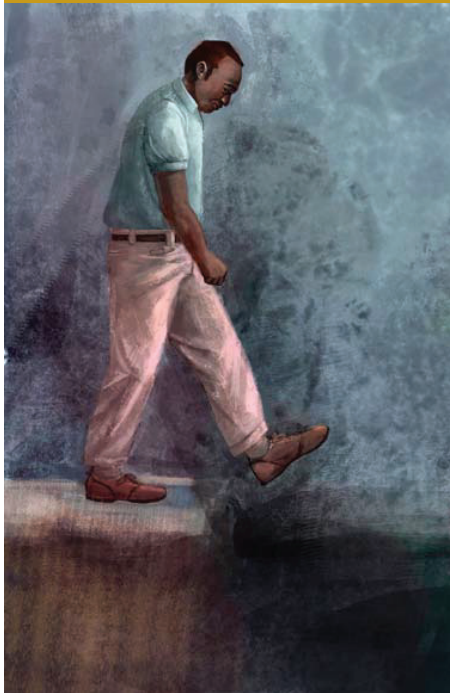
OVER THE PAST DECADE of devastating recession and feeble recovery, there has been a sharp rise in suicides of men aged fifty and over—almost 50 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. From 1999 to 2010, rates of suicide overall have gone up, but the steepest rise was for midlife men: those who used to be thought of as prime-age workers at the peak of their experience and ability. In that decade, the suicide rates for men aged fifty to fifty-four rose from 20.6 per 100,000 to 30.7 per 100,000.

Although thousands of individuals ended their lives in such terrible circumstances (6,733 men aged forty-five to forty-nine in 2010 alone), over the entire decade American media (including newspapers, magazines, and TV) reported only about thirty instances of the startling self-slaughter, plus sensational murder-suicides in which an unemployed person killed a spouse and children. A number of reports did, however, point to the high risk of unemployment and its consequences for this age group. A Baltimore man, aged fifty-nine, lost his job at the steel mill at Sparrows Point where he'd worked for thirty years when it closed after cycles of downsizing. He took a class to improve his prospects but couldn't get into a retraining program. He felt he was a failure. According to a 2013 article in the *Baltimore Sun*, "His wife said, 'The system is the failure,' but she couldn't convince him," and he shot himself. A Petaluma man, aged fifty-five, the city's chief building official, shot himself the week before his employment would have ended. A hedge-fund manager, aged fifty, killed himself soon after his fund lost 43 percent in the collapse of the stock market.

MARGARET MORGANROTH GULLETTE is the author of *Agewise: Fighting the New Ageism in America*, from which this article is adapted and updated. She is a resident scholar at the Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis University.



As unemployment rises, middle-aged men are increasingly turning to suicide. If we don't elect a government willing to address this crisis, younger people may lose the prospect of valuing their own aging. Illustration by Brian Stauffer.



"Many people don't know about midlife discrimination, which means they blame themselves rather than capitalism," Gullette writes. "We should fear ageism, not aging." Illustration by Fiona Ostby.

Economic Despair

Even taken together, these reports provide little information about the deep sources of this public health emergency. Few describe people who were depressed before their economic troubles began. And most depressed people do not commit suicide. Many scholars believe that rising unemployment and its consequences—not prior mental health conditions—are responsible for a large share of excess deaths. ("Excess deaths" means those above what would have been expected if suicides had continued to rise at the same rate as before 2006.) One blogger, Susie Madrak, writes sarcastically to those who don't get the economics of suicide for baby boomers, saying, "Yes, losing your job, your house, your life savings, your health insurance and any semblance of economic security might have something to do with it."

Suicide rates are rising in other countries suffering economic downturns, including some countries with higher rates than ours. (Japan's male suicide rate rose rapidly in the 1990s and again after 2009, as economic turmoil hastened the loss of the practice of "lifetime" jobs.) American rates are higher than those in Western Europe, a culturally comparable region, in part because our safety nets are weaker. According to a multinational team of public health, sociology, and suicide prevention experts writing in the respected British journal, *The Lancet*, for each percentage point rise in U.S. unemployment, there is an almost full 1 percent increase in U.S. suicides. The rate of unemployment between 2007 and 2010 increased 3.8 percent, up to 9.6 percent. Suicide is now the fourth leading cause of death among men in their middle years. According to a study published by Kerry L. Knox and Eric D. Caine in the *American Journal of Public Health*, it's responsible for "greater premature mortality than other important and well-funded public health problems," like heart disease. But "the substantial burden faced by this group has not been translated into a . . . public health priority."

Men's suicide rates are typically many times higher than women's. Perhaps men have higher rates, therapist Paula J. Caplan suggests, because unemployment "eats away at their sense of traditional masculine notions of identity, since men are expected to define themselves by their paid work more than women are expected to do so." Caplan, the author of *They Say You're Crazy*, adds, "For many men there is the further shock of suddenly being victims of ageism on top of these other sources of despair."

At fifty, people should be rising toward their peak, not hearing stereotypes like "deadwood" and "inflexible" and labels like "geezer," which abound. Victims may not understand that ageism is a bias, believing instead that no longer being young—no longer being desired as workers—is their own individual failure. Masculinity, long understood to isolate men and prevent them from talking about feelings, may carry a component of shame for merely aging. Women may better understand that the failure lies with "the system" (like the wife of the Baltimore man) or be better cushioned psychologically. They nevertheless suffer similar drastic economic circumstances in their middle years, and some fare worse. On average, women experience age discrimination ten years earlier than men, while in their forties; they are underemployed at higher rates, and they are poorer. The entire age group is at risk.

The Jobs Crisis for Midlife Workers

Even as employment statistics improve in general, data indicate that the United States has an intractable jobs crisis for people once treated as privileged boomers—people over forty-five but not yet sixty-five. (People over sixty-five—the age at which Social Security and Medicare rescue many millions—were *not* at increased risk of suicide.) The bottom is dropping out, not yet for younger workers, but for the worker with experience.

People who are considered "too old" can be forcibly retired or harassed out. Even with tenure, professors can be needled by administrators who want to get rid of them and hire cheap adjuncts. Boomers are blamed for everything. For example, *Newsweek* reports

Fiona Ostby (fionaostby.com)

that “indebted parents are not leaving their jobs, forcing younger people to put careers on hold,” thus blaming them for continuing to work. But if boomers *can’t* work, they are blamed for being unproductive. If older people have debt, it’s presented as their fault (not the fault of uninsured illness, declining income, or children’s needs). Damned if we do, damned if we don’t.

Despite anti-discrimination legislation protecting people over forty, bias is rife. The Supreme Court has made it harder to win suits. It made it legal for states to discriminate by age in *Kimel v. Florida Board of Regents*. Sixty-four percent of AARP respondents think that people over age fifty face age discrimination in the workplace. Midlife workers typically cost more than young ones, so while a company firing them may suffer from losing their knowledge, patience, diligence, and mentoring abilities, its bottom line (initially) doesn’t suffer. In cases since the Supreme Court’s decision in *Hazen Paper Co. v. Biggins*, the ageist defense that the decisions were based on “cost, not age” has been devastating plaintiffs. Pragmatism and protected prejudice form a vicious spiral downwards that spells doom for workers in their middle years. These circumstances constitute “middle ageism,” a form of prejudice that is an under-recognized crisis.

Unemployment starts a chain of disasters. People who lose jobs at midlife typically stay unemployed longer and earn much less afterward if they do find work. One researcher found a 40 percent higher likelihood of getting interviewed if you were thirty-five to forty-five than if you were over fifty, even with similar resumes and more experience. Some employers now don’t even look at resumes of people who are unemployed. And at midlife people stay unemployed far longer than their adult children, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics: forty-six weeks, compared with twenty weeks for those aged sixteen to twenty-four. That’s six months longer. Some have been out of work long term—over six months. Some have run out their unemployment checks. Boomers, so often touted as bumptious and well-to-do, have a 10 percent poverty rate between the ages of forty and fifty, when they should be approximating their peak wage.

A study from Rutgers’ Heldrich Center estimates that of the approximately 10 million workers downsized since 2008, 2.8 million were between the ages of forty-five and fifty-nine. By the end of 2011, only 22 percent of them had recovered fully—i.e., found new jobs that restored their previous standard of living. A middle group was forced to “downsize” their lives, perhaps permanently. Some 48 percent described being “devastated.”

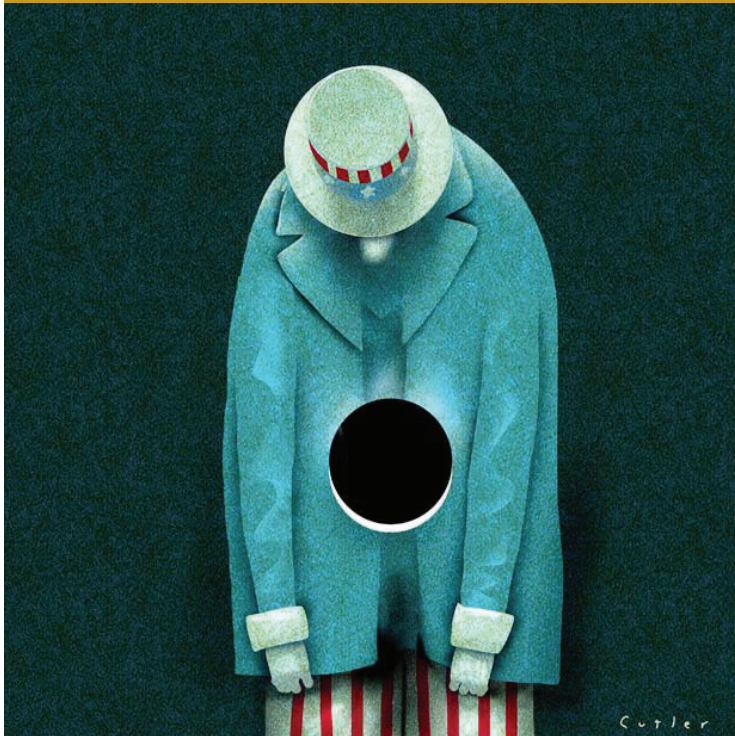
Downsized and Devastated

Desperation can grow as people struggle with financial burdens that are over their heads, with no end in sight. Middle-aged people often head a family at its highest point of need, when the children are not yet earning money, or have boomeranged back home; or when old parents need care. Or the kids are working when the parent is not.

The long unemployed spend down savings and drive up their credit card debt, as the powerful documentary *Maxed Out* (2006) shows through painful stories. Because of high interest and fees, predatory lenders like banks can keep us paying until we die, as Senator Elizabeth Warren, then an expert on bankruptcy at Harvard Law School, pointedly declares in the film. When banks decide to foreclose, people lose their family homes. Debt prison is almost an invitation to suicide for those who foresee never emerging. In *Maxed Out*, two adult children mournfully describe how

People who lose jobs at midlife “stay unemployed longer and earn much less afterward,” the author writes. Those who fail to re-enter the workforce may enter old age in debt, often blaming themselves for what should be understood as a structural problem. *Old Man in Sorrow on the Threshold of Eternity* by Vincent van Gogh.





At fifty, people should be rising toward their peak, gaining respect as mentors to the young. Instead, middle age often shows us the emptiness at the core of the American dream. Illustration by Dave Cutler.

their mother had hidden her debts from them and then driven her car into a deep river, apparently hoping never to be found.

What the newspapers' stories can't tell us about are all the other intimate degradations—the “fringe banes” that make unemployed people who fear they are unemployable feel miserable or despairing. Sex lives end. Families disintegrate. Intrafamilial violence rises. Friends stop talking to them, embarrassed. Their children can't continue their education. Parents fear becoming dependent on adult offspring in old age. Some midlife adults move in with their elderly parents. Any of this can be felt as shameful.

In addition, health suffers. Of the 46 million people without health insurance, almost a fifth were recently boomers between the ages of forty-nine and sixty-seven. Many may now be able to get Obamacare. Up until now, however, many have been postponing tests and medical care because they lost insurance. Not all make it to Medicare. Between the ages of fifty-five and sixty-four, nearly 11 percent die, more than any other uninsured age group. The lower the socioeconomic class—and hence the less cushion available from family and savings—the higher the risk of suicide. The British Samaritans' research suggests that

middle-aged men from disadvantaged backgrounds are up to ten times more likely to kill themselves than men living in Britain's most affluent areas, the *Independent* reports. Additionally, like the Baltimore man who felt he was a failure, many people don't know about midlife discrimination, which means they blame themselves rather than capitalism. We should fear ageism, not aging.

Perhaps only fiction—or satire—can forcefully render such disastrous emotional consequences. The savvy film *Up in the Air* (2009) shows the brutal humiliations of losing a job: George Clooney, as a hatchet man brought in to fire people he doesn't even know, has to teach a young woman how to take over his job. In Donald E. Westlake's provocative thriller novel, *The Ax* (1997), protagonist Burke Devore, a man laid off in a tiny specialized field, knows that if one opening occurs, many others will seek it. It would be rational, he decides, for him to kill *them*, not himself. To get a job, Devore becomes a serial killer. A reader of *The Ax*, curiously, may want him to succeed.

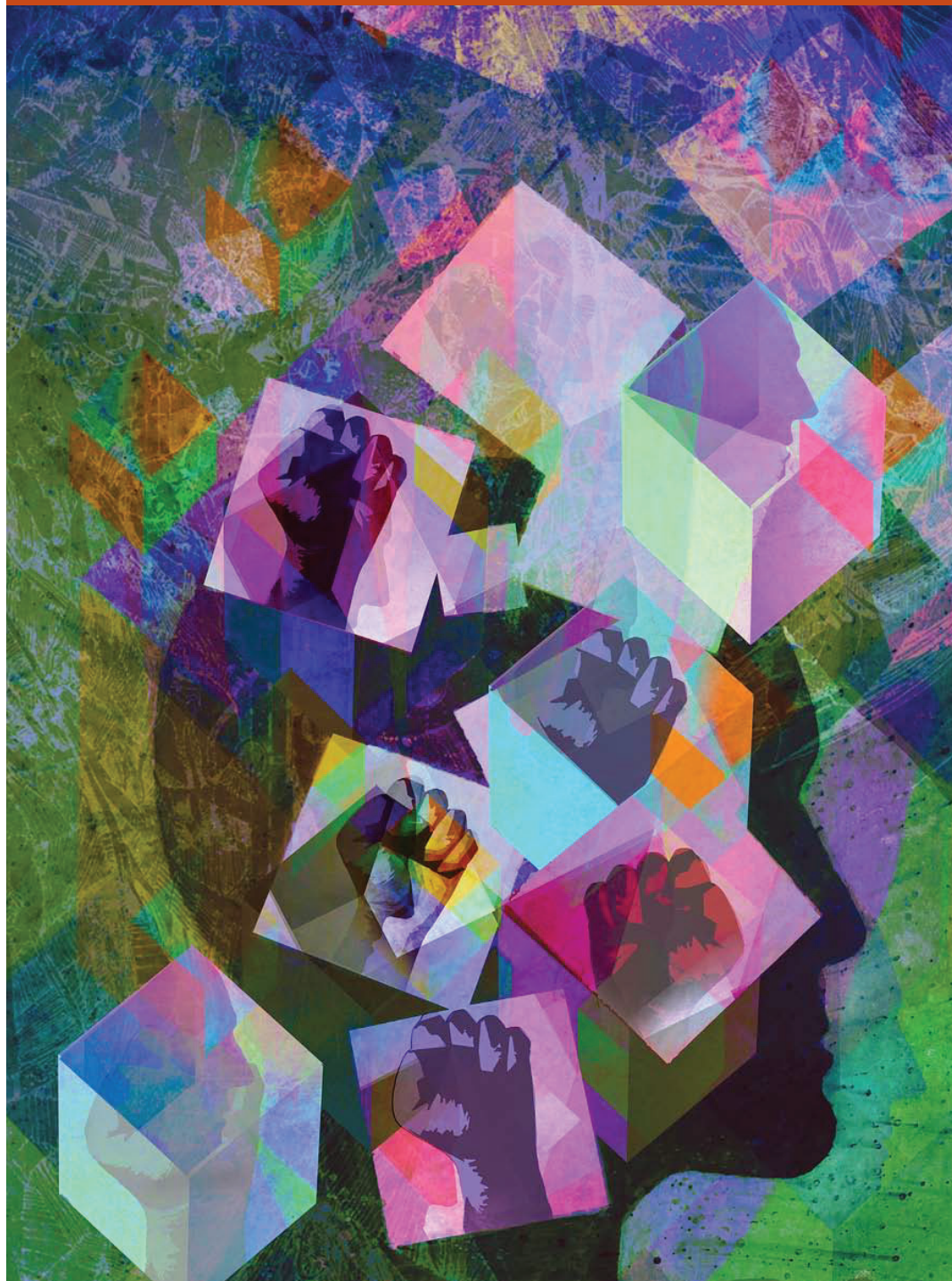
Middle Ageism Is a Feature of Capitalism

The savaging of midlife workers (women as well as men) is not just a phenomenon of the last ten years. It is a long-term crisis. Middle ageism causes the victims to get dismissed when they should have long productive lives ahead. (“Encore careers,” indeed.) They should be receiving respect as coaches and mentors to the young. They should be able to help their adult children to pursue education or buy starter homes.

Instead, capitalism is failing to create enough “good jobs at good wages” as promised by Bill Clinton in the 1990s—though he did little to prod American and international business owners to produce them. The '90s worsened a situation that had been going on since the late '70s. As Robert Reich's fascinating documentary *Inequality for All* shows, while the costs of living went up, the jobs went overseas; technology eliminated humans. Since at least 1980, the future of the life course for every cohort has been assaulted by the drive to weaken labor, seniority, and social welfare. As the boomers got older, many increasingly ran into job scarcity, weakened unions, downsizing, outsourcing, loss of manufacturing jobs, coerced early retirement, unemployment, and bankruptcy because of globalizing and privatizing capitalism. A third of Americans raised in the middle class fall out of it as adults, the Pew Report estimated in its 2011 report, “Waking Up from the American Dream.” (continued on page 59)

Above: Dave Cutler (davecutlerstudio.com)

Does America Need a Left?



The American Left is sprawling and diffuse, comprising thousands of social justice and environmental groups, labor unions, and radical media sites. It knows what it opposes, but it rarely articulates a shared vision of the world we want. Contributors to this special section debate the Left's relation to liberalism, the historical gains and failures of the U.S. Left, and the ecological catastrophe ahead. Don't miss the web-only articles on this topic: visit tikkun.org/left2014. And visit tikkun.org/covenant for *Tikkun's* vision of a political approach that speaks to the heart.

Robert Hunt (roberthuntstudio.com)

Does America Need a Left?

An Introduction

BY RABBI MICHAEL LERNER

IF AMERICA HAD a viable Left, we wouldn't be witnessing the systematic dismantling of the advances of the New Deal, which sought to protect the poor, the working class, and the middle class from the worst consequences of the capitalist marketplace.

Ever since the decline of the social movements that surged up in the 1960s and early 1970s, America's ruling elites have been engaged in an overt class war against the middle and working class of American society. Those elites have used the threat of moving their investments overseas to disempower the labor movement, scare voters into accepting reduced taxes on corporations and the rich, and curtail environmental protections. They have done so in the name of preserving jobs, even as manufacturing jobs have declined and workers have increasingly been forced into lower-income service sector jobs or into unemployment. Meanwhile, the two-party political system has increasingly been dominated by the wealthy, so that the Democratic Party of the second decade of the twenty-first century often embraces the economic agenda of Wall Street and the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans (a recent example being the budget deal of December 2013 that cuts off unemployment benefits for over a million people and reduces food subsidies and other supports for the poor, including many who are working but underpaid).

The research of the Institute for Labor and Mental Health—which inspired the creation of *Tikkun* in 1986—has shown that there are two major ways in which people in the United States are disempowered by the ideology of our economic system. First, we are caught in a pattern of self-blame due to the capitalist idea that we all can make it if we really try, and that we have no one to blame but ourselves if our lives do not feel fulfilling. Second, we have internalized the selfishness and materialism of the capitalist marketplace in a way that undermines our loving relationships and families.



The U.S. Left alienates many with its dry language of rights and policies. Powerful change may follow once the Left starts speaking to the heart. Illustration by Michael Woloschinow.

Whenever we express yearnings for a world of love, kindness, generosity, harmony, and peace, those yearnings are dismissed as utopian or unrealistic, leaving us feeling disempowered and unable to change the world we live in.

So, of course America needs a Left.

But the kind of Left that America has had in the past decades is part of the problem. That Left has framed its critique through a narrow economic and political discourse of “rights,” while ignoring the deep psychological and spiritual pain that keeps so many Americans from even imagining the possibility of some larger social transformation. That’s why *Tikkun* and its readers developed the Network of Spiritual Progressives, with its call for a new bottom line of love, generosity, caring for each other, and caring for the earth.

Marxists have identified “the critical contradiction” of capitalism as its inability to satisfy material needs. We recognize this as one important dimension of what’s wrong with capitalism. Yet we believe that the critical contradiction lies elsewhere: in the way that capitalism undermines love, caring, generosity, and ethical consciousness, turning everything into a commodity for sale. Indeed capitalism has proved itself willing to destroy the life-support system of the earth for the sake of short-term economic growth, teaching us to see each other in narrow utilitarian terms while reducing our capacity to see each other as embodiments of the sacred. It is the inability of capitalism to deliver a world based on love of each other and of the earth that is its ultimate weak spot.

Unfortunately, speaking to the heart has not been a strength of the American Left. Please read our Spiritual Covenant with America at tikkun.org/covenant to see what a Left could look like if it took the emotional and spiritual needs of Americans as seriously as it has taken more narrowly framed economic and political needs. ■

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER is editor of *Tikkun*, national chair of the Network of Spiritual Progressives (spiritualprogressives.org), and rabbi of Beyt Tikkun Synagogue in Berkeley, California (beyttikkun.org).

Michael Woloschinow (marlenaagency.com)

Why the Left Needs America

A Response to Eli Zaretsky's *Why America Needs a Left: A Historical Argument*

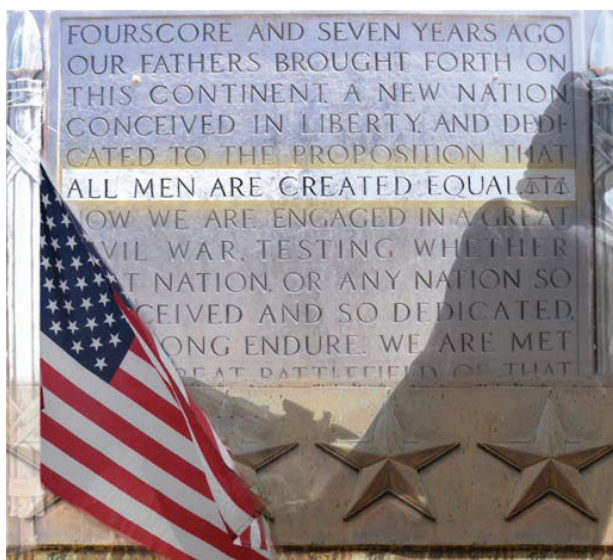
BY JAMES LIVINGSTON

THE AMERICAN LEFT has succeeded where it matters. Contrary to what most left-wing intellectuals in the West fervently believe, the Left hasn't disappeared. It has instead infiltrated, even saturated, every level and every sphere of social life. The most cherished demographic among advertisers now thinks that socialism is kind of cool and that capitalism is kind of gross. Books by Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn are both recreational reading and gospel truth for everybody under fifty.

The Left, in other words, is an extremely variegated social, intellectual, and political phenomenon. It's not made of mere radicalism. So it comes and goes, it waxes and wanes, but it never expires. The fact that as of this moment we can't point to a concrete instance of its organized *political* presence—a movement, a faction, a party, a cadre—doesn't mean it's over and done. In my view, that political invisibility might be the measure of its significance, simply because the nature of politics has changed. Where it was once a matter of state-centered campaigns, elections, and party platforms, it's now a more diffuse *cultural* scene, where the Left has been winning the wars of ideological position since the 1970s.

When I presented this idea—the notion that the Left has largely succeeded in its aims—in a graduate course I taught at Rutgers on the history of capitalism, the students were astonished. They could see only a shift to the right of the political spectrum in their lifetimes. Like most left-wing intellectuals, including their academic advisers, they assumed that their cause has long since been lost—that their voices barely register in the politico-cultural wilderness that is America. And to believe otherwise, they insisted, to assume that the cause of the Left has become the mainstream, would be to relinquish any claim on their standing as intellectuals who can speak truth to power.

In response to a challenge issued by those graduate students, I published an essay in the left-wing journal *Jacobin* titled



"If all humans are created equal, then justice for all becomes the condition of the liberty of each," Livingston writes. "That is the legacy of the American Revolution."

"How the Left Has Won." In that essay, I tried to explain the Left's plaintive will to powerlessness in historical terms.

Here I want to examine something more specific and perhaps more insidious in the Left's case against itself: the "political unconscious" residing in the notion that the development of socialism, progressivism, or radical democracy requires a resolute cadre of leftists dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism. In other words, either a dedicated, organized, anti-capitalist Left exists to answer Rosa Luxemburg's question (socialism or barbarism?), or the cause of social and political progress toward democracy will be thwarted.

On merely historical grounds, I find this notion specious at best. Insisting that all is lost without an organized

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Today's leftist social movements all "began by imagining a community that lives up to the principles of liberty and equality on which the American nation was explicitly founded," the author writes. *Declaration of Independence* by John Trumbull.

anti-capitalist Left is a way of congratulating the true believers and beautiful souls who won't compromise with the world as it actually exists—it's a way of avoiding this world in the name of the next. But it's worse than that. It's a residual form of Leninism because it posits an alliance between workers and intellectuals as the crucial condition of effective anti-capitalist movements and politics, just as Lenin did in "What Is To Be Done?"—his canonical polemic of 1902, the blueprint for every vanguard party of the last century. This Leninist idea has become part of the Left's political unconscious, spreading the idea that only an alliance with the well-educated can liberate workers from their limited visions of the future, and thus create a passage beyond the embarrassments of late, naked, neoliberal capitalism.

You don't have to be a Marxist to be a Leninist by this definition. Richard Rorty, Christopher Lasch, Thomas Frank, and Nelson Lichtenstein, each a brilliant critic of late capitalism, are good examples of moderate, liberal devotion to the idea of a polite, eggheaded vanguard, without which the proles must get distracted, confused, besieged, and eventually succumb to the terminal disease of false consciousness. On the other side of the political spectrum, Niall Ferguson presents the same intellectual credentials in touting China, where the vanguard Communist Party still stands in for the state, as a vigorous alternative to the welfare-ridden lassitude

of the Western democracies. Ferguson and his counterparts on the Left agree that intellectuals are the most important of people—they differ only on what these intellectuals' stated goals should be.

So the question is, why do academics and intellectuals want to believe, on the one hand, that they're more superfluous than Oblomov, the Hamlet of the nineteenth-century Russian novel, and on the other, that they're like Lenin in exile, just waiting for the next crisis to prove that they're indispensable to the Revolution?

Left-Wing Insistence on the Death of the Left

"The Left is Dead, Long Live the Left." That's the new refrain of left-wing intellectuals in the Western world, no matter what generation they come from—from T.J. Clark and Richard Wolff to Michael Kazin and Jeffrey St. Clair, even unto Corey Robin and Bhaskar Sunkara. With the publication of *Why America Needs a Left: A Historical Argument*, Eli Zaretsky now adds his voice to this refrain.

They're all saying the same thing: the Left has expired, but without it we are lost. So they begin to sound like the medieval clerics who chanted "The King is Dead, Long Live the King" to fortify belief in the legitimacy of dynastic

succession—to claim, by analogy to the death and resurrection of Christ, that although the monarch's body had expired, his sovereign majesty was intact.

Closer to home, the new refrain of left-wing intellectuals sounds like a more recent but no less religious genre—the Puritan jeremiad from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that evolved into the self-help manuals of the twentieth century. In these self-lacerating sermons, preachers first recalled that the original settlers had pursued their errand into the wilderness in a humble, communal state of grace. Then they asked why their congregations had fallen so far and so fast into pride, avarice, and individualism. The old-time spirit has expired, these excitable preachers exclaimed, and yet it is still with us, if only we can learn from the piety and humility of previous generations.

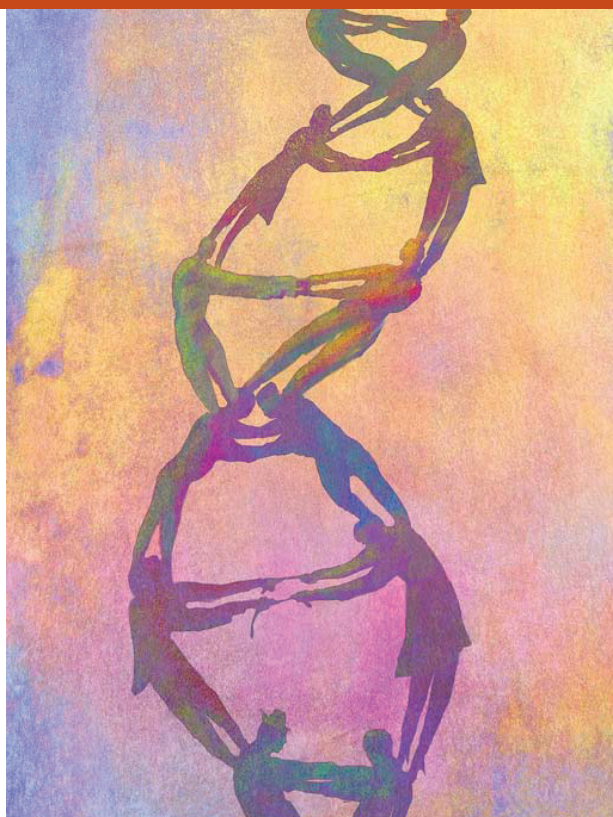
In its current incarnation, the jeremiad goes like this. The Left, understood as an explicitly anti-capitalist movement, was slowly executed along with “actually existing socialism” in the former Soviet Union and the formerly Red China. Meanwhile, without the relentless pressure this Left once brought to bear on parliamentary democracies, the liberals who had built a welfare state fell prey to free-market ideology. The neoliberal nightmare necessarily followed. But all is not lost, according to this left-wing jeremiad. If the Left can reinvent itself—if it can become a real *movement* as in the glory days of the 1930s or the 1960s—why, then the redemption of democracy, or at any rate the protection of parliamentary democracy against the oligarchs, becomes possible. According to this narrative, the old-time spirit is still with us, if only we can learn from previous generations.

There are variations on these themes. *Tikkun*, for example, hopes to create a “spiritual politics” by making the transcendent urges and religious connotations of these themes explicit. But the uniformity of the complaint is striking—it's as if everyone is copying from a master text.

Here is a small sample of the regulative premise, that of course the Left is dead:

Kazin: “At a nadir of the historical left, perhaps utopia could use a few words in its defense.” Robin: “Modern conservatism came onto the scene of the twentieth century in order to defeat the great social movements of the left. As far as the eye can see, it has achieved its purpose.” Clark: “Left, then, is a term denoting an absence, and this near non-existence ought to be explicit in a new thinking of politics.” Sunkara: “It goes without saying that socialism has no place within the mainstream American political landscape.” Zaretsky: “The New Left did not succeed and the country began to abandon the ideal of equality, and with that much of its moral standing. As a result, the great crisis [that] opened up in the 1960s was never resolved, and still awaits resolution today.”

According to these theorists, then, to revive the Left is to learn from radical movements that changed things fundamentally in the past. It is to reconstitute the sensibility of,



Is the Left slowly dying, or has it saturated our lives so fully that we don't even notice its ideals at work within and around us? Illustration by Michael Woloschinow.

say, the Popular Front, when Communists mattered, or to relive the harrowing experience of the abolitionists, when the fate of the nation was at stake. So the *historical* dimension of the argument about and for the Left as such becomes crucial—and the obvious question becomes not whether but *how* did radical movements make a difference in the past? Before addressing this question with Zaretsky's assistance, however, we'd better ask, are these organized radical political movements as necessary as the proponents of the “Left is dead” jeremiad insist?

The Left Doesn't Need a Political Party to Be Strong

Does the Left really need a unified movement or a political party to change the socioeconomic structuring of our society? It's true that socialism was installed in the twentieth century in countries where great movements led by leftist intellectuals fought for it. But capitalism happened less intentionally, emerging in countries where great movements led by bourgeois intellectuals fought for something else, the notion that everyone—almost everyone—had rights because “all men are created equal.” These early modern revolutionaries didn't even know what capitalism was, let alone promote it as their political agenda.

Some abolitionists believed the Constitution was “a pact with the Devil because it seemed to sanction enslavement,” Livingston writes, but they nevertheless “told a story of national redemption” rooted in the Constitution. Illustration by Bryan Collier.



Why then do we need an organized Left to get us beyond capitalism? Or, to put the same question in other, more provocative ways: What makes us think the Left has disappeared because it has no affiliated social movement outside of Occupy Everything at its disposal, or because it has no political party pushing its anti-capitalist line? Has the existence of a Labour Party—never the proxy for a socialist movement, anyway—served the good old cause of class struggle in England since 1980? In view of contemporary American attitudes toward race, gender, sexuality, and yes, even income inequality, how can anyone say the New Left did not succeed?

The answers are contained in the questions. The Left hasn't vanished, it has saturated every aspect of our society. Look at it this way: We're all grateful that the Communist Party was a well-organized presence in the 1930s, operating at the cultural front of the Congress of Industrial Organizations and the popular arts, but in its decided absence, in the 1960s and '70s, a New Left won almost every battle it joined without any political party pitching its line. Since then the Right has learned how to use gerrymandering and judicial activism to stall progress toward the *social* democracy promised by the Civil Rights Movement, the women's movement, and the gay rights movement—just as the South learned to stall anti-slavery movements in the 1840s, '50s and '60s. But, historically speaking, this “conservative” bid to derail the train to Jordan is a bad bet, a losing proposition.

Eli Zaretsky's Analysis of the U.S. Left

Like Michael Kazin in his 2011 book *American Dreamers*, and like all the other writers I've cited, Zaretsky defines the Left as the radical margin of American politics that *contests* the liberal mainstream by insisting on the kind of equality that exceeds the legal protection of rights assigned by courts

and constitutions to individuals. And like Kazin—who announces at the very outset of *American Dreamers* that liberty and equality are the terms of an either/or choice (“the desire for individual liberty routinely conflicts with the yearning for social equality and altruistic justice”)—Zaretsky tells the story of this Left in three long chapters, one on the abolitionists of the antebellum years, one on the Popular Front of the 1930s, and one on the New Left of the 1960s.

He goes beyond Kazin, though, and yet stays within the generic boundaries of the new jeremiad, in gladly defining the Left, so conceived, as a sect, a sort of religious order—a monkish yet militant retreat from the cruelties and the idiocies of the world, a place where a Revolution of the Saints is to be realized. The “first American Left,” the abolitionists, set the standard: “Their key innovation was what became the characteristic organizational form of American radicalism, the intensely-cathected, ideologically-motivated, uncompromising small group.”

Zaretsky also departs from Kazin in claiming that the Left's “special value lies in periods of crisis”—not moments of mere emergency, like, say, the 1790s or the 1940s. These are the times that try men and women's souls, when the nation must “look inward” and rewrite the social contract without regard to the received *liberal* tradition, the default setting that privileges pragmatism, pluralism, and private enterprise. The three periods of crisis (roughly 1830–1870, 1900–1940, 1960–2000) were formative moments in the development of American capitalism, according to Zaretsky, but the correlations remain obscure except as ritual gestures to a residually Marxist periodization drawn, as far as I can tell—the footnotes here are sparse—from the usual suspects, David Harvey, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Giovanni Arrighi.

The Left, in these terms, is a brilliant detective, a brooding diagnostician, part Holmes and part (*continued on page 59*)

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The Past, Present, and Future of the American Left

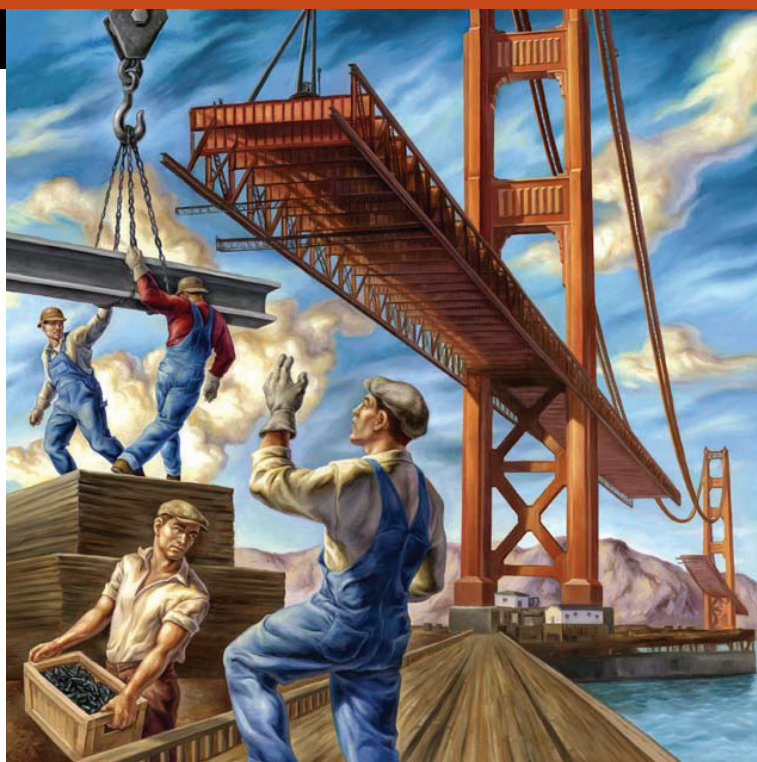
BY ELI ZARETSKY

JIM LIVINGSTON'S ESSAY ON "Why the Left Needs America" in this issue of *Tikkun* is a classic expression of American liberalism, which holds that America has no need for a Left since it is already radical, free, democratic, participatory, self-correcting, and so forth. The Left needs America but America does not need a Left, he argues. Madison, Jefferson, and the Founding Fathers are terrific; Marx is irrelevant.

Having written *Why America Needs a Left*—the book that provoked Livingston's response—to dispel these all-too-familiar bromides, I am happy to have the opportunity to rebut his claims and explain why liberalism, as we see it today, without a Left is spineless, and why the country desperately needs an ongoing, self-aware Left.

My conception of the Left is a stringent one. It has nothing to do with alliances between workers and intellectuals, Leninist cadres, political party organizations, and Livingston's other flights of fancy. I called my book "Why America needs a Left," not "Why America needs *the* Left," because I do not believe America has a self-aware Left at present, and because I do not pretend to prescribe what form any future Left should take. Whatever its form, moreover, my view is that a Left represents but *one* element of a solution to the nation's structural problems, not *the* solution as such. After all, the history of the American Left is episodic and discontinuous, flaring up only during thirty or forty years of the country's existence, and it was only in 1926 that the term "Left" in its political sense even appeared in a book title. Nonetheless, the rebirth of a Left will prove indispensable to any reversal of America's palpable present-day unwinding.

To understand my core argument, think of American history as a suspension bridge that rests on three pillars. These pillars are not stable concrete pylons, however, but rather the three great long-term *crises* of American history—those



"Think of American history as a suspension bridge that rests on . . . three great long-term crises," Zaretsky writes, identifying slavery, industry, and finance as the sources of crisis. *Building the Iron Horse* by Owen Smith.

concerning slavery, industry, and finance. Just as there have been three crises, so there have been three Lefts: the abolitionists, the Popular Front (an anti-fascist alliance of socialists, liberal Democrats, and union activists in the 1930s), and the New Left of the 1960s and '70s. Each of the first two crises ended with a structural reform: the abolition of slavery and the creation of the welfare state. In those cases, the role of the Left was to bend structural reform toward the goal of equality. The third case is somewhat more complicated, as we shall see. But taken together, the three Lefts constitute a tradition, one that we need to revive today.

Liberal vs. Marxist Views of the Left

The broad differences between Livingston's view and mine stem from the fact that he is primarily concerned with extending liberal values to those who are excluded from them, whereas my analysis derives from Marx, who argued that progress is blocked by the same *internal* capitalist dynamic that created progress in the first place. Livingston takes a progressive, linear view of U.S. history, whereas my view stresses discontinuity, conflict, and regression. According to Livingston, the revolutions that launched the modern world were about self-government and the consent of the governed. Capitalism, he informs us, was not even an issue. I argue, by contrast, that there were two revolutions in mid-seventeenth-century England—one that succeeded and one

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Abolitionist groups reached beyond the abolition of slavery toward deeper ideas of racial equality, actively incorporating escaped slaves and ex-slaves into their organizations. "This is the main reason I call them the first American Left," Zaretsky writes. Illustration by Sonja Murphy.



that failed. The revolution that succeeded removed all impediments previously suffered by men of property. The attempted revolution that failed to win its goals had promised communal property, a wide democracy, and the disestablishment of the state church. The conflict between democratic, lower-class radicals and people of property was intrinsic to the democratic revolutions, even though this did not take the form of capitalists vs. workers until the nineteenth century.

A proper conception of capitalism is critical to the idea of a Left. Capitalism cannot be reduced to the market because it also comprises the exploitative social system that organizes social labor into two classes, one of which appropriates a surplus from the labor of the other. The exploitative, deceptive, and dual character of capitalism—market and class—installs ambivalence at the center of liberalism. On the one hand, liberalism's formal or procedural understanding of equality serves to disguise exploitation. On the other, it can serve as the departure point for struggles to build a deeper, more substantive equality. The latter requires a Left. To be sure, there are thinkers, such as Ronald Dworkin or Michael Walzer, who hold that a consistent, vigorous liberalism can itself resolve this ambivalence. But they make their arguments on hypothetical grounds whereas my argument is historical and can only be refuted by a historical counter-argument.

Just as capitalism has a dual structure, one dimension of which is formal equality, the other exploitation, so the history of the United States has a dual structure. On the one side, the Revolution established national independence and enshrined the ideal of freedom, as Livingston well states. But with the abolition of slavery, America had a second birth. One

national story begins in 1776 and stands for national independence and individual freedom, including the freedom of the slaveholder to own slaves, or the freedom of the property owner to exploit the property-less. The second national story begins with Emancipation and stands for equality, without which freedom devolves into tyranny. Like a double helix, the two strands—liberal and leftist—became entwined with one another in our history. Although neither stands alone, it is only during periods of crisis that their interdependence becomes fully clear. A sequence of three long-term or secular crises provides the best lens for grasping the internal conflicts that drive American history.

Slavery: A Crisis in American History

The first American crisis was over slavery. Indeed, the whole Madisonian apparatus of factions, horse trading, and pluralism was created to keep the slavery issue *out* of politics because it was seen as "too divisive." It took the first American Left to disrupt the pluralist, "democratic" framework, and to put not just slavery but also racial discrimination against "free Negroes" on the political agenda. In the course of doing so, the abolitionists invented much of the repertoire of the subsequent American Left, including nonviolent resistance, democratic agitation, cultural and sexual experimentation, and unrelenting attempts to shame the liberal, hypocritical majority. Most importantly, and this is the main reason I call them the first American Left, they went beyond the abolition of slavery to racial equality. They cultivated Black leadership, actively incorporated escaped slaves and ex-slaves into their organizations, and developed interracial friendships,

Sonja Murphy (sonjamurphy.com)

sexual relations, and marriages. No comparable sensitivity to the problems of equality between individuals across racial lines can be found anywhere in the Founding Fathers' many weighty tomes. The idea of racial equality is a unique contribution of the first American Left.

The Civil War was a crisis that arose from a tectonic shift in the organization of capitalism from slave labor to free labor, and could be resolved only by a structural transformation: the abolition of slavery. But abolition had a built-in ambivalence: Pursued in one way, it could justify exploitation in its market capitalist form, while in another it could serve as a spur toward greater equality. America needed a Left to resolve the ambivalence of abolition in favor of equality. But the Civil War was also a crisis in U.S. *identity*. Abolitionists made it impossible for Americans to respond to slavery with equanimity and indifference, inspiring them to center their national story on the pursuit of equality, not just independence.

Crisis Number Two: The Great Depression

An analogous dynamic played out in America's second crisis, during the Great Depression and World War II. This was the crisis of industrial capitalism, manifested in a series of depressions that had begun in the 1850s and were recognized as systemic in the 1890s, when such terms as "overproduction" and "glut" entered the language. Not economic problems per se, these depressions were taken as social and political crises that could only be resolved through a structural transformation, in this case the building of a modern

state. The Great Depression of the 1930s, then, was the turning point in a long-term crisis just as the Civil War had been a turning point in a long-term crisis.

Just as slavery would have ended without the abolitionists, so a modern, administrative state would have been created without the socialists. Such a state was necessary to reform capitalism, but capitalism could have been reformed without advancing social equality. What the socialists and Communists added was a broad-based series of social democratic movements, including those among industrial workers, African Americans, immigrants, and women, which infused the New Deal with egalitarian goals. Thus, if the first American Left helped insure that the abolition of slavery would be imprinted with the ideal of racial equality, the second stamped the ideal of social equality on the welfare state.

It was only during the thirties that the idea of the Left as a permanent, ongoing radical presence was invented. To be sure, the idea had existed in Europe, which had a parliamentary system, and placed "ideological" conflict—left, center, right—at the core of its politics. But American radicals reformulated the European idea to fit the two-party system. They connected union movements, movements of the unemployed, and civil rights struggles of their day with abolitionists, early feminists, and Debsian socialists of the past in an effort to create a tradition. Inseparable from the then-new idea of a Left was the idea of crisis. The counterpart to the idea of crisis was the idea of an organized working class, i.e., an *agent* capable of transforming capitalism. While twentieth-century American reformers inspired by John Dewey stood for democratic participation and dialogue, they had not before



Thanks to leftist pressure and agitation, the New Deal's welfare programs were oriented toward egalitarian goals. This painting, *Filling the Ice House*, was created by Harry Gottlieb under the auspices of the New Deal's Public Works of Art Project.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC/Art Resource, NY

“The effects of the New Left on American society and culture have been almost incalculable,” Zaretsky writes. “An entirely new consciousness of race, gender, and sexuality has transformed language, lifestyle, and institutions.” Illustration by María María Acha-Kutscher.



attempted to organize a *counterweight* to capitalist power. This is why C. Wright Mills, asked to define his politics on the eve of the New Left, called them “to the left of Dewey.”

In addition, the New Deal launched a social and cultural revolution, which spelled the end of an older, status-bound, WASP-dominated America. The Popular Front—the anti-fascist alliance of liberals and the Left—embodied everything that “offended the pieties . . . of Middle America,” according to Steve Fraser: gaudy cosmopolitanism, “Jewishness,” flirtations with radicalism, elevation of the new immigrant, intellectual arrogance, and racial egalitarianism. The seeds of the sixties were sown there.

Crisis Number Three: Post-Industrial or Finance Capitalism

The success of the New Deal in creating a modern, democratic state and in unblocking capitalist productive forces established the context in which the New Left emerged. Of the three Lefts I have discussed, the New Left was at once the most short-lived and the most enduring. If it seemed like an explosive burst of rebellious energy that burnt out by the early seventies, it also set the contours for what remains the Left of our day. Unlike the first two Lefts, which flourished at the point when an ongoing crisis was being resolved, the New Left emerged during the opening stages of a crisis whose resolution has not yet been achieved. Let us look at the New Left from that perspective.

The starting point for understanding the structural crisis confronted by the New Left lies in the huge wave of democratization released by the New Deal and World War II. This

wave unfolded both at the level of the economy and at the level of society and culture. At the level of the economy, the New Deal’s elevation of the working class made the shift from industrial manufacturing to a high-tech, knowledge-based consumer society possible, which in turn involved a change in the dynamics of capitalism. Industrial capitalism, based on the *accumulation* of labor-time, began to give way to post-industrial capitalism, based on the *release* of labor-time. Whereas accumulation encouraged collective action and state coordination, post-industrialism was centrifugal, dispersive, and even “post-economic,” as suggested by the appearance of such terms as “affluence” and “automation” in the 1950s and “the triple revolution” in the following decade.

The shift to high-tech, market-based consumerism did not occur in a linear fashion. The depth of the blockages that had to be overcome is suggested by the explosive burst of McCarthyism, which followed the war. McCarthyism’s intense, all-consuming anti-communism was supported not only by reactionary upholders of middle-class, small-town values, but also by globally oriented capitalists. The Cold War liberals extolled by Livingston created the liberal paradigm of the late twentieth century—the politics of fear and the politics of growth—as a response to McCarthyism.

The politics of fear reflected the danger of atomic weapons and held that foreign policy was too important to be left to democratic discussion, which could easily be captured by mass hysteria. Drawing on such precedents as the U.S. invasion of the Philippines, liberals endorsed surveillance, the security state, militarization, and the fetish of secrecy. Madisonian pluralists all, they turned their backs not just on Communism but also on civil liberties (*continued on page 63*)

Enter the Alter-Left

Reviving Our Revolutionary Nerve

BY CHAIA HELLER



Occupy Wall Street protesters rally outside a Bank of America branch in March 2012. With its energizing invocation of the “99 percent,” Occupy renewed hopes for future mobilizations.

WEARY AS IT IS, the still-standing U.S. Left continues to refuse to take *no* for an answer. However, we face two prominent conundrums: How do we decipher the meaning of “revolution” during a post-socialist and particularly counterrevolutionary period in history? And how do we address an increasingly compromised natural world whose very ability to sustain organic life has been dramatically called into question?

It’s been a few hundred years since anything resembling a revolutionary tornado has touched down on U.S. soil. Whereas peoples living throughout Latin America and the Middle East are quite fluent in the idiom of revolution, U.S. leftists have relegated the notion to a poetic dustbin dwelling somewhere just to the left of the deep past. Many entertain notions of particularistic “revolutions” in domains of the human spirit, art, technology, and even sexuality, yet they

cannot expand the concept to encompass society as a whole. This loss of revolutionary memory and vision is tied, at least in part, to the collapse of revolutionary projects associated with the works of Marx.

At the same time, we are facing a monstrous expression of capitalism: neoliberal tentacles are squeezing the life out of prior attempts by progressives and radicals alike to appease its appetite to devour all things human and nonhuman. In such times, questioning the “need” for a Left in the United States is more than slightly decadent.

Moving any further to the right brings yet more crude liberalization and deregulation—and thus more dispossession and ecological destruction. Surfing the wave of leftist progressive liberalism or social democratic reformism will merely keep us treading water in the very muck we are trying to climb out of.

CHAIA HELLER has taught at the Institute for Social Ecology for thirty years and teaches anthropology at Mount Holyoke College. Heller recently published *Food, Farms, and Solidarity: French Farmers Challenge Industrial Agriculture and Genetically Modified Crops* with Duke University Press.

Leaving the Past Behind

Too often, well-meaning leftists opt for merely turning the capitalist clock backward. Many yearn for a revival of the 1930s-era New Deal, thinking back to a time when “we” enjoyed a kinder, gentler capitalism. In so doing, they romanticize a time when the state did its best to curb corporations’ ravenous demands, subsequently allowing many members of America’s white majority to enter a consumer-driven, car-crazed, working-middle class that enjoyed retirement benefits and Disneyland vacations. Sadly, the second coming of a dreamy New Deal blew up in our faces in 2006 when the bursting of the housing bubble ushered in another Great Depression, which we are still experiencing currently. Who has the time or dough to say, “see you in Disneyland” today?

U.S. leftists who long for more than a revitalized New Deal gaze upward toward Canada or set their hopes on a more European style of social democracy. Our utopian horizons are studded with starry notions of state-subsidized health care and higher education, and lengthy paid-for summer vacations. When the best dreams that leftists can muster are of European welfare states (which are currently being eviscerated by neoliberalism), we have not only lost our revolutionary nerve, but our revolutionary vision as well.

The question is not whether we need a Left, but what *kind* of a Left do we desire? What kind of Left is capable of moving us from a corrupt republican democracy to a direct democracy? What kind of Left can allow us to shift away from a capitalist system that empties out the meaning of what it means to be human? What kind of Left can create a moral economy in which citizens extend a logic of self-governance

to realms of production and distribution, creating a democratized and ecologized economy? And finally, what kind of Left is capable of cultivating a way of thinking ecologically and democratically that can guide a revolutionary process to carry us in the direction we need to go in order to survive?

Unless we are to prop up the ghost of the communist revolutionary tradition, we must think up another solution to the problem of what is to become of a Left bereft of a workable and coherent plan. Anyone donning a centuries-old garment should be willing to consider that its hemline or waistband might be due for a major alteration. And the U.S. Left might take a lesson or two by looking at what its more radical wings have been up to in the Leftist alteration department. There have been at least two riotous and instructive attempts to alter the U.S. Left that are worth taking note of in the past fifteen or so years—the anti-World Trade Organization protests of 1999 and the Occupy Wall Street movement that began in the fall of 2011.

Latin American Influences on the Alter-Left

The anti-WTO protests of 1999 (a sort of “mini-May 1968”) did not come out of nowhere. It was a series of movements that I have decided to call the “Alter-Left” that bore this Seattle-based fruit.

The Alter-Left had been growing since the 1980s, with deep roots in anti-neoliberal Latin American movements. During the 1980s, groups throughout Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Mexico began to view the leftist project through an increasingly internationalist lens, coining the term neoliberalism to describe a resurgence of the vulgar liberal individualism associated with an Enlightenment gone awry. Neoliberalism is the structure under which corporations gained rights—as “individuals”—to operate unfettered by state-determined regulations, taxes, and standards that might hinder their individual corporate freedom.

In the 1980s, countries throughout Latin America were roiling with hunger, poverty, and unemployment caused by rising debt to global loan-shark agencies such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (renamed the World Trade Organization in 1994). These agencies in turn created structural adjustment programs, strong-arming countries to trade national debt for reduced state regulations in the domains of trade, labor, and the environment (including water treatment and access).

As they organized in opposition to deregulation/neoliberalism, leftists began to alter the structure and culture of the Left, creating a novel Alter-Left. Before the 1980s, Latin American militant activity tended to emerge within labor unions or workers parties. In the 1980s, in contrast, movements were increasingly led by peasants, indigenous



The United States owes much of its current protest culture to influences from grassroots mobilizations led by peasants, indigenous peoples, and women’s groups in Latin America.



Animal rights activists in Seattle don turtle costumes to protest rulings by the World Trade Organization in 1999. "The celebratory protest culture of Seattle became a wellspring of inspiration for Alter-Leftists to come," Heller writes.

peoples, women's groups, anti-poverty activists, ecologists, and human rights activists fighting forms of dehumanization ranging from racism to heterosexism. Rejecting a central party or leadership structure, groups worked autonomously, assisting communities facing chronic poverty, landlessness, and hunger. Going beyond the Marxist idiom, groups altered leftist discourse, calling not only for workers' control, but also for democratization and citizens' rights.

Anti-WTO Protests in Seattle

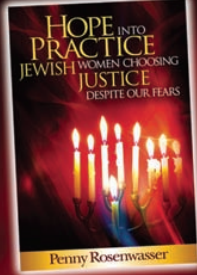
What does all of this have to do with Seattle and the U.S. Left? The U.S. Left was in deep dialogue with global anti-neoliberal activists, taking note of others' new ways of re-defining leftist political structure and goals. Indeed, by the mid-to-late 1990s, a new set of international activists and organizations gained prominence, voicing global discontent not only with state-driven economic and political policies, but also with supranational bodies bolstering neoliberal capital.

There is a clear line drawn between the 50 Years Is Enough campaign, for instance, and what has been called the Battle of Seattle. The 50 Years Is Enough project was a network of 300 grassroots groups from more than sixty-six countries that was founded in 1994 to decry the fiftieth anniversary

of the founding of supranational agencies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. By saying "enough," this network sent a message in a bottle on behalf of the down-trodden in the Global South. And U.S. activists in our very own far Left caught that bottle with both hands.

The line strung between 50 Years Is Enough and the anti-WTO protests in Seattle also runs through another key Alter-Left moment: the Zapatista uprisings of 1994. The Zapatista mobilizations sent ripples around the world, inspiring leftist political cultures globally to become increasingly international, anti-capitalist, identity driven, directly democratic in character, and ecologically focused. And meanwhile, Left-altering organizations such as Peoples' Global Action and the World Social Forum emerged, as well. The marginalized from the world over voiced solidarity against neoliberalism, its attachés (nation-states), and its ring of supranational disciplinarians.

And so when U.S. activists learned in 1999 that the WTO would be meeting in Seattle, they too joined this effort to alter the Left, throwing a signature sensibility of American "movement democracy" into the mix. By movement democracy, I mean a form of leftist organizing where activists design movement meetings, plan direct actions, and design organizational structures along directly democratic lines. Under this model, there are no leaders endowed with autonomous decision-making power. Instead, a network of small groups called "affinity groups" are each empowered to express their collective will to the larger movement via rotating delegates chosen by the groups (*continued on page 65*)



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Joining the Party for a More Powerful Left

BY JEREMY VARON



Participants in the Oakland General Strike of 2011—an outgrowth of the local Occupy movement—march to shut down the Port of Oakland in California.

OCCUPY WALL STREET posed for me an exquisite dilemma: I could agree with my radical students at Manhattan's famously subversive New School that Occupy was a revolution in the making, and thus forsake most everything I have observed about contemporary politics and have learned from my historical study of social movements. Or I could profess my sober realism and risk both seeming a downer to my idealistic students and dismissing the transformative potential of a movement whose trajectory, in its most intoxicating phases, was far from certain.

For all its sturm und drang, Occupy largely confirmed what we already knew: that millions of Americans still believe that Wall Street—not Big Government—is to blame for the country's economic woes. Occupy, in short, restored a balance of ideological conviction, reanimating an evenhanded

war of interpretation. Throughout the boisterous protests, an adage rang in my mind: If you're not a communist at twenty, you have a head but no heart; if you're still a communist at forty, you have a heart but no head.

Before either my head or heart could triumph, Occupy vanished with at best a faint trace. Its demise prompted only fleeting postmortems, while leaving behind slow-burning questions: Does America benefit from a Left, such as Occupy appeared for a flash to be? And if so, what should or can it accomplish?

How timely, then, is Eli Zaretsky's book *Does America Need a Left?* And how smart is *Tikkun* magazine for now staging a debate on precisely this question. Graced to define the debate in this issue of *Tikkun*, James Livingston answers "no," claiming that all the ideological resources a putative Left

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needs are contained within liberalism. Zaretsky retorts “yes,” pointing to the good the Left has historically done as it both separated itself from and stiffened the spine of liberalism.

My own response first questions the question, viewing it as warped by the deep structures of American politics and economy. I next discourage the habit of the Left to insist that it would be truly effective if it were only more this way than that, save to argue that the Left is best when open to a diversity of perspectives and strategies. This ecumenical spirit is informed by years of activist experience with the perils of the sectarian impulse. Equally important, I have recently seen the power of both religious and political faith to draw individuals to the cause of change, creating lifers in struggles for justice whose consummations exceed the life of any mortal. At once practical and cosmic, our cause best thrives through appreciation of the power of numbers, faiths, approaches, and opinions. Amen.

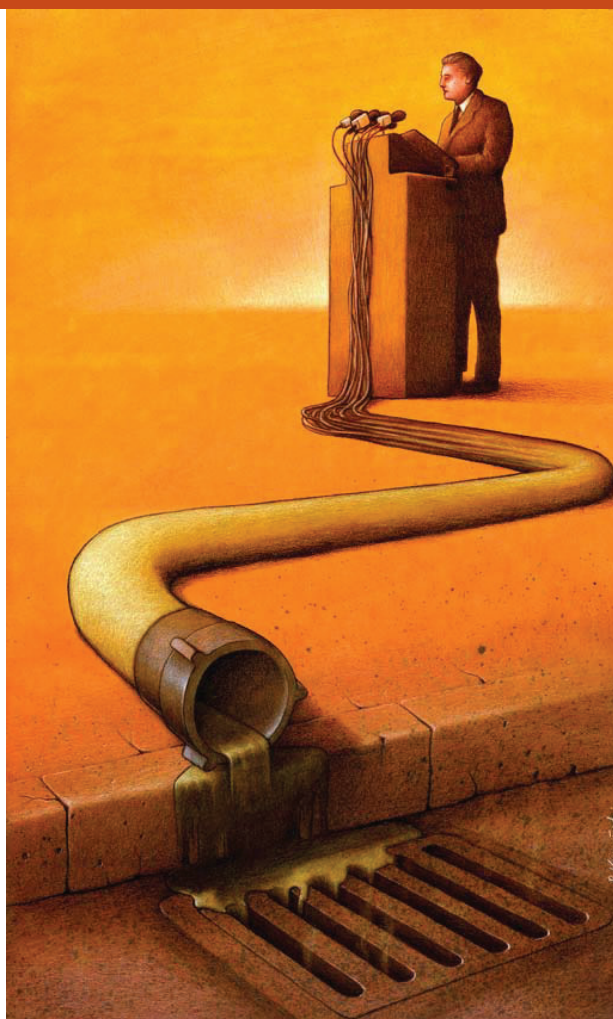
Debating the Left and Liberalism

However one may score their positions, both Livingston and Zaretsky operate within a utilitarian calculus one may question. If Americans want a Left they should have a Left, on democratic grounds alone and with the space to frame for themselves issues of efficacy. The question of utility as posed in these pages might vanish if the United States did not have a rigidly two-party, money-saturated, winner-take-all system, but instead, like Germany, one of proportional representation with meaningful campaign finance constraints. Something like an American Green Party could flourish, wielding influence absent electoral majorities, while retaining the utopian élan that can make politics so exciting, to young people especially.

Put otherwise, such an order would mean deliverance from the current, dismal options for minority movements: to stay ideologically pure and risk irrelevance at the extra-parliamentary margins; to tilt at the windmill of a third party; to buy in to the existing parties and risk selling out core values; or, as Tea Party conservatives have done, to hijack a major party, thwarting even centrist governance. That we should ask if America needs a Left is itself symptom of the derangement of American politics.

But alas, one does politics in the nation-state one has, not in which one wishes, making urgent the essence of the Zaretsky-Livingston debate: quarrels over the status and value of anti-capitalist critique in U.S. politics and the relationship between the Left and liberalism. Important to consider, but equally important to critically engage, both sides have greatest value as a spur to a more inclusive, and thus greater, power.

Livingston proceeds from the laughable premise that every leftist is really a Leninist whose ultimate fantasy is to lead the masses in overthrowing capitalism. Livingston errs by assuming that superficially Marxist arguments necessarily



Establishment liberals may speak of equality and justice, but without pressure from an active Left, their words often dissolve in a wash of hypocrisy. Illustration by Pawel Kuczynski.

come with vanguardist baggage. To be sure, Tom Frank in his iconic *What's the Matter with Kansas* cries “false consciousness” in charging that countless Americans vote against their economic interests. However provocative, such a claim may be true, and it is valid for Frank to try to persuade people to shift allegiances. As to the endgame, consider Frank’s recent edict against the gauzy anti-statism of Occupy: he suggests that what is to be done is to send progressive wonks to Washington to strengthen financial regulation. Some Bolshevik.

More deeply, Livingston seems painfully divorced from actual left-wing struggle. Many of the causes of the Left, broadly defined, over the last twenty-five years have featured critiques of capitalism without seeking its overthrow, whether as a practical goal or, for most participants, even as a background desire. The divestment movement of the 1980s attacked U.S. support for South African apartheid by questioning the right to corporate profit in a racist state. Opponents of the 1991 Gulf War properly denounced it as largely an effort to keep the Middle East safe for oil oligarchs and for Exxon. And HIV/AIDS activists fought to expose how Big



It is “both prudent and right to invite all political comers into the big tent of a dynamic and pluralistic liberal-Left political faith,” Varon writes. Illustration by Cassandra Conlin.

Pharma decides what diseases to research and not, who lives and who dies. In these efforts to fight racism, end war, and save lives—all reliant on an economic analysis—we see none of the socialism-or-barbarism absolutism that Livingston attributes to the Left. Even the alter-globalization movement, proclaiming that “Another World Is Possible,” proffered resistance to neoliberalism through debt cancellation, labor protections, and fair trade—things that together amount to a global capitalism with a more human face.

Livingston, who describes constitutional claims as the sole fount of American politics, suggests that the U.S. Left is nostalgic for socialism. I suspect that Livingston is nostalgic for a socialist Left, which he can then drown in McCarthyite drivel equating criticism of existing capitalism with anti-Americanism, deaf to the genius of the founders. Reversing himself, Livingston further entangles his argument. In one breath, today’s Left is a handful of vain intellectuals in ivory towers. In the next, leftists are most everywhere, scoring incessant victories. We should therefore learn to stop worrying and love the polity we have, he argues—no matter the existence of mass incarceration, deepening inequality, environmental ruin, and dirty wars. If this is victory, I’d hate to see defeat.

Zaretsky casts a sounder verdict on the Left, based in the intriguing thesis that its role has been to push America toward greater equality at moments of capitalist “crisis.” He thus seeks to unite disparate moments and movements into

a coherent tradition. Zaretsky’s narrative, however, has its own wobbles, leaving unclear precisely what to do with it. For starters, it is hard to see how the totality of the 1960s-era Left was the outgrowth of the “crisis of finance” that Zaretsky tells us persists to this day. Economic variables were surely at play in the movements he lauds. Jim Crow was bad for business, hastening desegregation (though this can be overstated, as segregation could be profitable as well). The productivity of white, middle-class women was stifled by the feminine mystique, spurring claims to full, economic personhood. And the advent of the information economy gave future knowledge workers like students unprecedented importance. But the civil rights, feminist, and student movements hardly had an essentially economic origin.

Moreover, the striking success of the postwar economy may have been the greater boon to New Left movements than anything we normally think of as crisis, whether by virtue of the rising expectations that come with relative prosperity; or the critique of moral alienation enabled by the liberation of great swaths of America from basic, material want; or the emancipation of desire and relaxation of social norms necessary for the transition to a consumer economy. Finally, if by crisis Zaretsky ultimately means a moment of decision at which the United States can opt for greater or lesser equality, then crisis is a permanent condition, diminishing both the concept’s historical specificity and analytic value.

Above all, Zaretsky makes it too easy to love the Left, whatever one’s affection for it. According to him, liberalism champions freedom, though rather poorly because it is unaware that truer freedom requires greater equality. The Left, he argues, delivers equality, with a virtual monopoly on the very idea. To the extent that equality is a positive good, the Left is the great hero of American history, with no need for sharing plaudits on equality’s score.

Dubiously denying liberalism any genuine purchase on equality, Zaretsky makes a mess of labels. Was the liberal Lyndon Johnson really a leftist when pushing the Great Society? Was Nixon a leftist when backing guaranteed incomes for the poor via the Family Assistance Program? And who is a leftist today? Elizabeth Warren, Al Sharpton, and Robert Reich, each with inequality-busting and Democratic Party credentials? What, finally, of President Obama, whose promise has been to empower the middle class by making the economy at least a little less unfair? Zaretsky might avoid this semantic scrum if he reshaped his question to “Does America need equality?”

A Resolute and Demanding Liberalism?

For all their disagreement, both Livingston and Zaretsky draw overly bright lines between the Left and liberalism that obscure both their continuities and how they may divide. I describe below multiple iterations, or points of origin, of the contemporary Left. Parsing the Left (*continued on page 67*)

Prospects for a Resurgence of the U.S. Left

BY BARBARA EPSTEIN



"The environmental movement has grown, but not to the point of having the capacity to reverse environmental degradation," Epstein writes. Environmental activists march in Detroit to protest its air-polluting incinerator.

THE UNITED STATES has no coherent, effective Left. Over the last four decades, since the movements of the sixties and seventies went into decline, the problem of the degradation of the environment has reached a level that threatens the existence of humans and other species on the planet. The neoliberal form of capitalism that has taken hold globally has caused the gap between the wealth and power of those at the top and the rest of us to widen dramatically, undermining the quality of life of the majority and threatening the public arena itself. Despite the depth of the economic crisis of 2008, there is no substantial movement for the abandonment of neoliberalism, the regulation of industry, or the creation of a more egalitarian economy. The environmental movement has grown, but not to the point of having the capacity to reverse environmental degradation. There are undoubtedly more people and projects devoted to economic and social justice—and to environmental sustainability—than there were in the sixties and seventies. The problem has to do with collective impact. No movements of the Left have emerged capable of making a real difference in the conditions that we face. Why is this? And what can be done about it?

A Fatalistic Approach to Gradual Crises

The weakness of the Left is partly due to the fact that these problems have come upon us gradually, allowing us to accommodate ourselves to them. The widening of the gap in wealth and power has been for the most part incremental; it is only in retrospect that one can see how dramatic the effect

has been. The same is true of the working day, which has been lengthened, for most people, bit by bit, but at no point by enough to lead to a widespread revolt. Something similar could be said about the environment. Environmental crises for the most part take place somewhere other than where one lives. Such crises are increasingly severe and increasingly common, and there is widespread awareness that at some point in the future we are all likely to be directly affected. But a future crisis does not have the mobilizing capacity of a crisis that confronts one in the present. Most people, including those who are aware of the depths of these problems, go about their business, doing what they—we—have always done, though with increasing apprehension about the future.

A widespread sense that nothing can be done is probably an even more significant obstacle to effective, collective action than the gradual character of these changes. Mobilization against a system, an institution, or a ruling elite is most likely to take place when it seems not only oppressive but also outmoded, on the way out, or at least on the defensive. The Civil Rights Movement had existed since World War II but gained momentum in the late fifties and early sixties, when the international aspirations of the United States made racism at home a serious embarrassment. Feminism likewise took hold on a mass basis when the entry of women into the labor force on a large scale placed patriarchal authority in question and gave women the leverage to demand equality. Movements for change are most likely to take hold when change seems possible, when there are levers that can be grasped, as when oppressive institutions seem ready to collapse or are widely seen as illegitimate. It helps when some of those in positions of power agree that the existing

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The Left is weakened by its deep generational divide and by the fact that “white leftists tend to know little about movements of the Left among people of color,” Epstein writes. Here, members of a Latina immigrant organization participate in a May Day rally in San Francisco.



system is not working and support change. The depression of the 1930s affected the corporate class as well as the rest of society, though not nearly as badly; fear of a continuing downward economic spiral led some among the elite to agree that changes of some sort were necessary. In the wake of 2008, while most people have suffered economic reverses, corporate profits have more than recovered. Neoliberal capitalism is thriving, at least if measured by corporate profits.

This is not to argue that movements of the Left take shape and grow only when conditions are propitious. Left-led resistance movements formed in the major ghettos of German-occupied Central and Eastern Europe, despite the fact that the deaths of those involved seemed the most likely outcome. Slave revolts took place in the West Indies and the American South under similar circumstances. But when circumstances are difficult, oppositional movements are most likely to take hold when there are stable organizations that provide a sustained, reliable framework for action, and when such movements have compelling goals and a clear conception of how to achieve these goals—that is, a strategic perspective. The current U.S. Left has none of these.

Fragmentation and Generational Divides

The major organizations of the Left that once provided the framework for ongoing collective action and strategic discussion either no longer exist or have atrophied. There are large numbers of progressive nonprofits but few organizations that those who want to make a difference, but lack special skills or expertise, can join and work with. Among young people,

leftist activist projects thrive, but they tend to come and go. The most stable and influential institutions of the Left are its media outlets: published and online journals, radio stations, a few left-wing presses, and books with a left-wing perspective published by mainstream presses. The central role of media leads to a Left that is defined more by what people read and what opinions they hold than by their associations or their practical activity.

We have a fragmented Left held together by a vague commitment to a more just, egalitarian, and sustainable world, but in practical terms lacking a common focus or basis for coordinated action. The fragmented and fluid character of the Left reflects the fragmentation and fluidity of contemporary society: there is probably no going back to the structured and stable organizations of the past (the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, or even the Students for a Democratic Society) consisting of members who were likely to remain active and engaged for many years. But a Left based on individuals with leftist views and a plethora of frequently ephemeral projects has little ability to consider its collective direction and less influence than its numbers would warrant.

The Left is weakened especially by the deep divide between the older generation, veterans of the movements of the sixties and seventies, now in their sixties or older, and the younger generation, in their early forties or younger. The outlook and vocabulary of the older generation, shaped for the most part by perspectives ranging from Marxism to social democracy, tends to clash with the outlook of the younger generation, among whom anarchism has been a major influence. The result is little contact and less cooperation between activists of the two generations. In addition, white leftists tend to know

little about (and have little contact with) movements of the Left among people of color. And the sector of the Left that consists largely of professionals and intellectuals has little contact with the labor Left.

The most promising sector of the U.S. Left is the arena of youth activism that tilts toward anarchism and that was at the center of the Occupy movement. Activists in this arena share an opposition to all forms of oppression (racism, sexism, homophobia, and others), a dislike of hierarchy and a deep suspicion of the state, a vision of an egalitarian, cooperative, and decentralized society, and a desire to model that society in their political practice. Many would include an explicit opposition to capitalism.

The Occupy movement was shaped by the idealism, energy, and commitment of a politics influenced by what some call anarchism and others call anti-authoritarianism. Occupy's protest against the consolidation of wealth and power among the few plus the utopian quality of Occupy communities led to explosive growth of the movement and massive public support. But when police closed the encampments, the movement, as a mass movement, soon collapsed. Valuable organizing projects spun off, but these are quite different from Occupy. One may criticize Occupy activists for not having given much thought to what form the movement would take after the inevitable police closures. But the episodic, fleeting character of Occupy is shared by movements around the world: an incident sets off protest over long-standing grievances, protest mushrooms into a mass movement, the protest is repressed, and the movement collapses, having altered public discourse but leaving no organization or institution capable of bringing about social change. This is the weakness of the ascendant form of leftist or protest politics that emphasizes spontaneity and avoids organizational forms able to last.

Reasons for Hope

Where does this leave the U.S. Left? The anarchist/anti-authoritarian current can play an important role with its moral stance, compelling vision, and capacity to mobilize major protests, but it will not attract all who are drawn to the Left. Its anti-hierarchical politics and discomfort with strategy and the building of institutions needs to be balanced by a more conventional form of leftist politics that includes strategic discussion and institution building and that can attract constituencies not likely to engage directly in Occupy-like protest. According to recent polls, around a third of the U.S. population prefers "socialism" to "capitalism." It seems more likely that, to most of those who so responded, the word "capitalism" connotes the contemporary, mean form of capitalism rather than the capitalist system as a whole, as defined by Marx, and it also seems likely that what the word "socialism" connoted to most respondents had more in common with the New Deal than with the Paris Commune.

Nevertheless, these polls suggest that about a third of Americans (and a higher proportion of young people) are on the Left in a broad sense.

The Left may be well represented in the media and more generally in the cultural arena, but it is dramatically underrepresented in the world of politics—not just in the electoral arena but also in public discourse about the direction of society. Surely it is the responsibility of the existing, self-identified Left to find ways of engaging with the dispersed, unorganized constituency of the Left. Efforts to build a central organization of the Left, socialist or otherwise, are not likely to go anywhere. The Left is too deeply fragmented to suddenly unite. A more realistic plan would look toward a coalition of organizations, projects, and individuals from the various sectors of the Left. Such a coalition would hopefully be committed to building solidarity without erasing difference. A condition of entering the coalition might be opposition to neoliberalism and environmental degradation coupled with support for an environmentally sustainable society. Such a coalition would pursue harmonious relations between humans and other creatures based on cooperative relations and pursuit of the common (*continued on page 69*)



How can we build solidarity without erasing difference? Might a coalition against neoliberalism and environmental degradation be a starting place? Illustration by Dave Cutler.

Climate Disaster Demands an Ecological Left

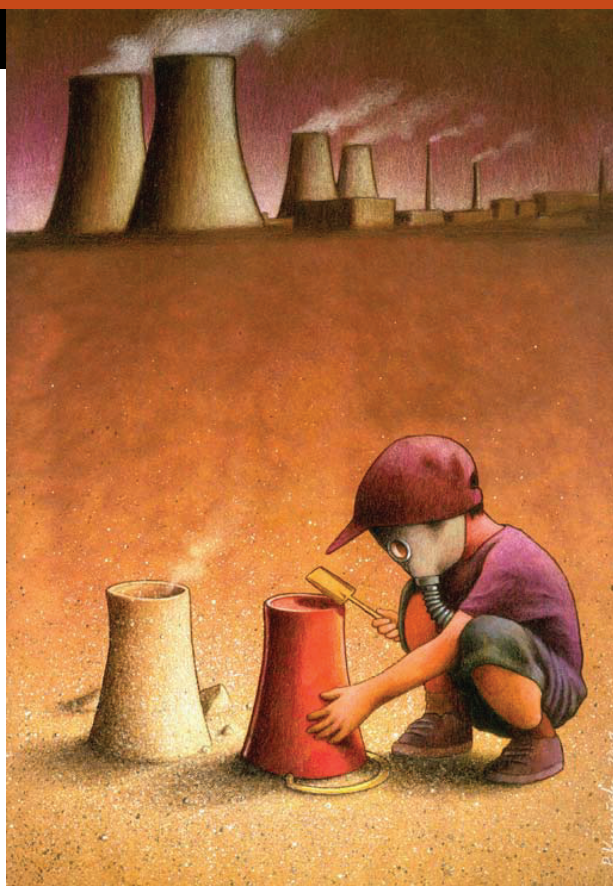
BY JANET BIEHL

THE FUTURE CATASTROPHES looming as a consequence of climate change are multiple and nearly unimaginable in their horror: Prolonged temperature spikes, scorching heat, frequent raging wildfires, and drought disaster areas. Desertification in already dry areas and elsewhere torrid downpours, severe storm surges, and extreme flash floods. Snow pack and ice sheets shedding mass. Permafrost thawing. Oceans acidifying. Sea levels rising, possibly three feet by century's end, inundating low-lying coastal areas, including those with major cities. Flora and fauna unable to cope with the changes. Species extinctions. A natural world in chaos.

We are in urgent need of a Left that recognizes the primacy of this environmental threat—and then organizes to bring about swift and radical change in response to it.

The catastrophes brought about by climate change will be not only biological and physical but also social. Rural people, displaced by extreme weather, will flee the baked countryside, perhaps for urban centers, while dwellers in flooding coastal cities will seek refuge in the interior. Climate change will exacerbate the existing social ills of our world, especially social inequalities. As always, the poor, already vulnerable, will be hurt the worst.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, climate change will “exacerbate poverty in low- and lower-middle-income countries and create new poverty pockets in upper-middle- to high-income countries with increasing inequality.” Most ominously, it warns, starvation is a real prospect for many. Frequent heat waves will reduce the yields of staple crops by up to 2 percent each decade for the rest of this century. Rising food prices will hit “wage-labor-dependent poor households that are net buyers of food” the hardest of all.



If the U.S. Left doesn't take rapid action to force ecological concerns onto the national agenda, we may soon find ourselves in the nightmare that mainland China is already experiencing: a toxic new age that forces children to wear gas masks and schools to shut for smog days. Illustration by Pawel Kuczynski.

Changing the Way We Live

Back in 2007, climate expert John Holdren gave us a useful framework for thinking about global climate change: “We basically have three choices: mitigation, adaptation and suffering,” *The New York Times* quoted him as saying. “We’re going to do some of each. The question is what the mix is going to be. The more mitigation we do, the less adaptation will be required and the less suffering there will be.”

Mitigation means preventing the worst-case scenarios by abjuring the use of fossil fuels and creating new systems of renewable energy, public transportation, and agriculture that don’t depend on them. It’s good that cities are growing because, by concentrating population, they tend to have a smaller carbon footprint than rural areas, to be more energy efficient, and to be hotbeds of sustainability innovation; however, we need to green those cities with urban farms like those in Cleveland, Chicago, and Milwaukee, yielding produce to urban neighborhoods. And to make that happen, we need a Left that sees climate activism not as an expendable

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Pawel Kuczynski (pawelkuczynski.com)

frill but as a central part of all future social and economic justice movements.

We need a Left that pushes us to radically rethink the way we inhabit the countryside. Sprawl and suburbs depend on the presence of the automobile; industrial agriculture depends on petrochemicals and on fossil fuels for shipping. We need to cluster dwellings and workplaces more tightly and locate sustainable food production facilities near the settlements where the food will be consumed. Ideally, in my view, we should move toward a configuration in which the majority of people live in small towns and cities situated near fields and small-scale farmlands. The local agriculture movement, now burgeoning in my home state of Vermont and elsewhere, is showing ways to achieve this sustainable balance.

Similarly, we must rethink the energy system in terms of renewability, decentralization, and local control. We need to consider a broad range of climate disaster mitigation strategies, both social and technological, governmental and non-governmental. Most of all, we need a social movement to exert pressure on government from the outside and to take action on mitigation. And we need actors inside the government who are capable of responding to that pressure and transforming proposed solutions into legislation.

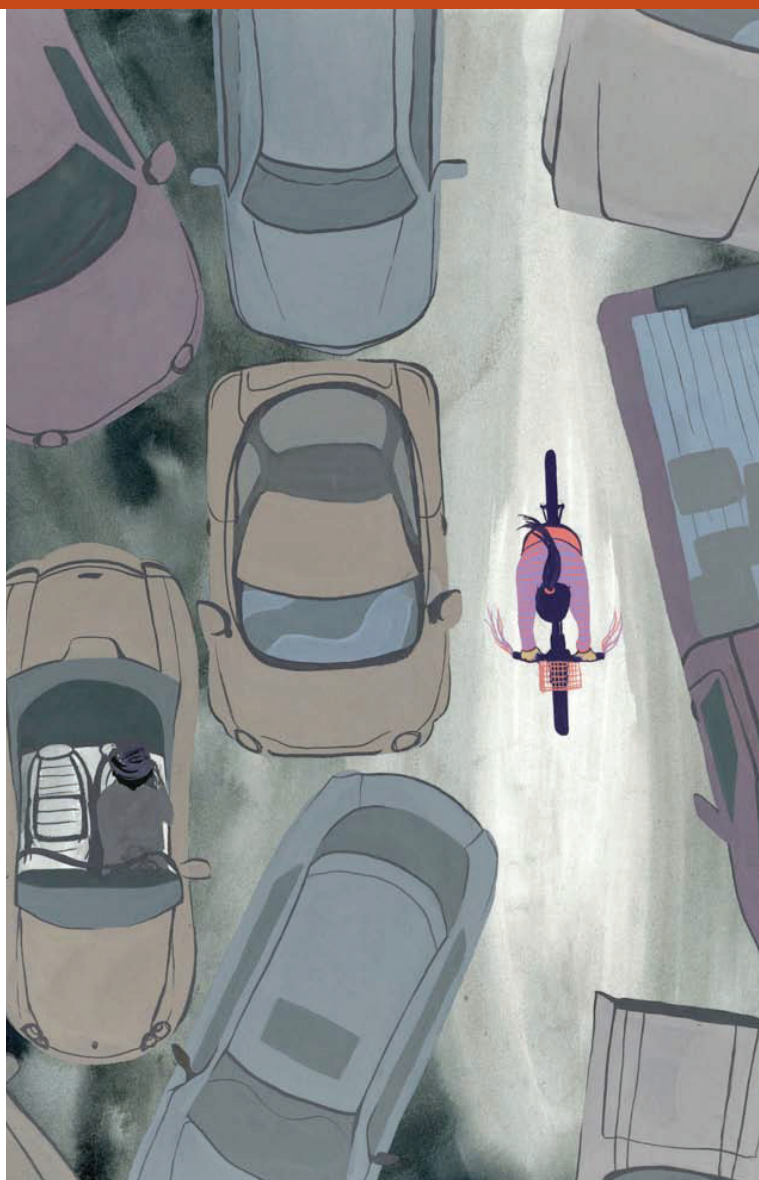
Moving Beyond Capitalism

If we were to immediately reduce carbon emissions to zero, we could prevent global temperature from rising to five degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels by century's end. But because of the accumulation of greenhouse gases already in place, climate change would still increase the global temperature by at least two degrees Celsius by 2100. So Holdren's second choice, adaptation, will also be necessary: adaptation, that is, to the horrific conditions wrought by climate change.

Even to speculate about how that might unfold is a dreadful exercise. But we surely have reason to predict that the wealthy and powerful who benefit from fossil fuel use and from our presently vast social inequality will try to hold onto their privileges and defy or delay attempts at adaptation that threaten their power. Perhaps they will try to create buffers around their air-conditioned enclaves in a futile effort to keep at bay the catastrophe and the social conflicts it will inevitably generate.

But the ultimate adaptation to climate change must be the elimination of capitalism itself, for the root cause of climate change is capitalism—an economy and a society bent on unlimited growth, extracting resources without restriction, spewing pollution, wringing every possible use out of petroleum, and ripping through the biosphere for profit. So the Left we need is not just an ecological Left, but also an anti-capitalist one.

For the sake of the common good and our common imperative of survival, the post-carbon society will have to be a



Live Simply by Caitlin Ng.

post-capitalist society. Power must be taken from the hands of those who would jettison the rest of the world to protect their personal fortunes. It must instead be lodged in a genuine citizens' democracy, one in which the people, rather than their bought-and-paid-for legislators, make the important decisions. The post-carbon society will be one whose economy is cooperative, not competitive. It will be an advanced democratic civilization that empowers people to govern themselves communally. By virtue of its humane traditions and social ideals, the Left is well equipped to advocate adaptation of this kind.

Such a radical social transformation may seem utopian, but as the social ecologist Murray Bookchin spent decades saying, we must "be realistic and do the impossible, because otherwise we will have the unthinkable." ■

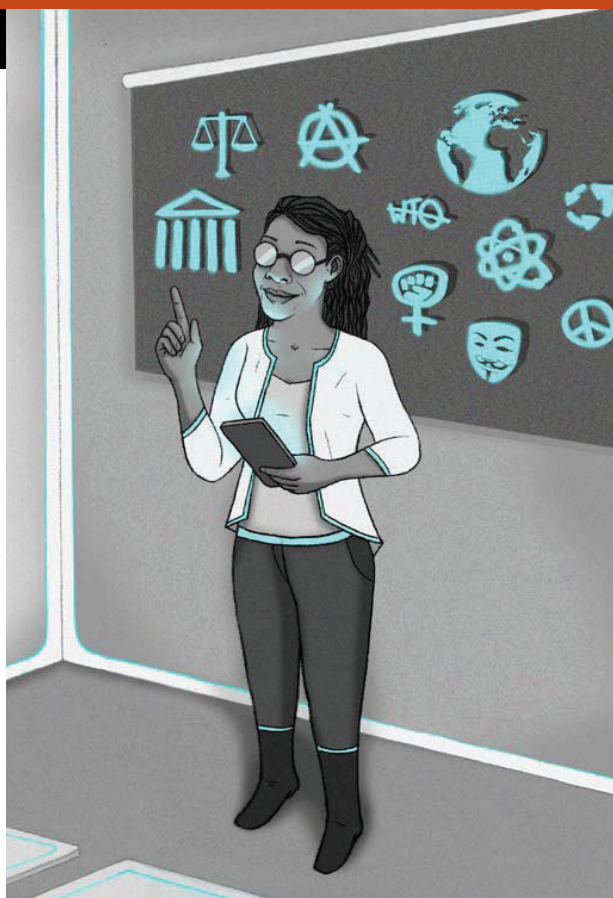
What Kind of Left Does America Need?

BY STANLEY ARONOWITZ

WE LIVE IN A TIME when the “Left” is defined by the media, scholars, and liberals as a faction of the Democratic Party that still holds the New Deal as a standard of popular aspiration. The official Left is held together by hope for a return to happier days and despair that anything else is possible. The retrenchment of the Left’s declining aspirations is fueled by the pathological fear of the Right that pervades the liberal center. Indeed, we have had no significant social reform that was not mandated by the Supreme Court since the enactment of Medicare in 1966.

The liberals have, in general, submitted to neoliberal degradations of health care, jobs, public housing, and income guarantees for the long-term unemployed (let alone the rest of us). They have not even updated Richard Nixon’s proposal for guaranteed income or fought for a serious program for combating global warming (recall it was the Nixon administration that created the Environmental Protection Administration and supported the Clean Air Act of 1970). Most recently, the idea of a national single-payer health program was abandoned when President Obama proposed a plan that would require the uninsured to buy health coverage from private insurers (who are licking their chops in preparation for the windfall). This was a surrender of the long-held perspective that health, like public education, is a right that should be paid for through public funds. “Obamacare,” the conservative alternative, has become the new banner of the official Left, even as the Right denounces its own health program.

Thus, against its own principles, the official Left became the fervent advocate of privatization. Meanwhile, the actual jobless rate continues to hover around 15 percent of the labor force, the poor grow by the minute to more than 15 percent of the population (and 32 percent of children), and the White House and Congress have no proposals to alleviate the suffering or address the issue of chronic economic stagnation. The civil rights establishment, the remnants of the labor movement, and mainstream feminist organizations dare not



“To become strong, the Left would need to launch a comprehensive educational program,” Aronowitz writes. “Education would be one of the crucial tasks of a radical political formation.” Illustration by Jeff Gomez.

challenge the White House and big business for their wholesale theft of the public interest.

As the Obama administration defends universal surveillance, shreds the constitutional guarantee of privacy, persecutes whistleblowers, and authorizes police actions against strikes and demonstrations, members of the liberal center stand silently on the sidelines, trembling in their belief that to criticize the national administration is to invite disaster from the Right. The Right is bold, while the fragmented liberal center, mistakenly coded as the Left, has lost its voice and trails behind the center-right president, showering his campaigns with millions of dollars. In return, the administration dispenses a few favors, but no real concessions to the more progressive base.

Certainly, the United States needs a Left, but it must be anti-capitalist and independent of the Democrats. It would devote itself to three distinct tasks: reviving the radical imagination, launching a comprehensive education program, and opening a conversation about the creation of a new Left political formation.

STANLEY ARONOWITZ is professor of sociology at CUNY Graduate Center. He is author or editor of twenty-six books. The latest is *Taking it Big: C. Wright Mills and the Making of Political Intellectuals*. He is coeditor of *Situations: Project of the Radical Imagination*.

Jeff Gomez (jeff.gomez.com)



Is it possible to make substantial progress on anti-war aims in the absence of a new leftist political formation? Here, peace activists outside the Pentagon protest the Iraq War in 2009.

Reviving the Radical Imagination

The anti-capitalist Left that we need would offer in-depth analyses of the trends in global capitalism and the failures and capitulations of modern liberalism, embarking on a fresh exploration of alternatives to contemporary capitalism and the institutions of representative democracy that are a smokescreen today for authoritarian rule. Not all alternatives of the past are entirely discredited or antiquated, but as Marx argued, the Left cannot draw its primary inspiration from the past.

This project calls for the revival of the radical imagination. Among its elements is an effort to reinvent democracy in the wake of the evidence that, at the national level, there is no democracy—if by “democracy” we mean effective popular participation in the crucial decisions affecting the community. Democracy entails a challenge to private property in productive activities and large-scale enterprises. We are accustomed to a minimalist definition of democracy that mainly consists of the act of voting for established political parties. In this minimalist frame, workplaces and key political decisions are left to management and representatives.

In contrast, radical democracy entails worker and citizen participation in all spheres of production, distribution, and

public life. The Left’s task is to find the appropriate forms to enable democratic self-management of key economic, political, and social institutions. This program would undoubtedly provoke severe opposition from business interests and conventional politicians. However, since the nineteenth century, radicals of many persuasions have insisted that genuine democracy must go beyond representation and toward direct participation in decision-making.

Political Education

To become strong, this emerging Left would need to launch a comprehensive educational program. This activity would entail starting a national news periodical online and in hard copy, a magazine that would include political and cultural discussion and content, and a theoretical journal for debate and longer articles that elaborate the analyses. Wherever feasible, the Left would establish schools where students (young and older) would have the opportunity to study political economy, political theory, philosophy, and culture. The cultural stream would include practical crafts such as writing, acting, filmmaking, video production, painting, and sculpture. The focus on education implies a critique of both school curricula and the influence of the mainstream media’s



The Left is hanging by a thread because of its reliance on foundations and rich donors. What would it take to persuade leftists to self-finance radical work in a serious way? Illustration by Dave Cutler.

selective news coverage and restrictions on who can contribute to op-ed columns. Education would be one of the crucial tasks of a radical political formation.

A Left Political Formation

Finally, the newly revived Left would need to initiate a discussion and intensive study of the imperative of creating a new Left political formation. Those involved would discuss whether a new party is best or whether a federation makes the most sense. (In a federated organizational structure, local affiliates would retain considerable autonomy and only submit to central edicts under unusual circumstances. This means that the organization would be built on the local affiliates rather than having been created from above.) But there is no question that without its own institution(s) the Left remains prey to cooptation by the liberal center. In this discussion, the concept of “party” should be understood as a standpoint rather than as an electoral vehicle of modest social reform without a perspective of fundamental social change, or as a centralized command apparatus in which the notion of “democratic” signifies the subordination of lower to higher bodies.

The decision to define “party” more broadly would enable all of the different elements of the Left to take part in the discussion because anarchists as well as socialists and communists have never renounced forming institutions of struggle and education. Even a federation would need to identify its standpoint, create publications, conduct educational activities, and coordinate campaigns. And even a federation could pursue a program of structural reform such as a campaign for single-payer health care or the public ownership of utilities. This political formation could make a fundamental departure from past efforts by recognizing the imperative to transform our basic economic and social institutions in an ecological way and figuring out how to integrate economic and political transformation with a serious effort to save the planet.

Ideally this organization would not reject, selectively, running for public office at the local level. But its main function would be education and agitation effected primarily through direct action rather than through campaigns for electoral representation. By direct action I mean the kind of protest and resistance conducted by the Occupy Wall Street movement, strikes, workplace occupations, (*continued on page 69*)

Dave Cutler (davecutlerstudio.com)



Women work at a WPA sewing shop in New York. Was the creation of the Works Progress Administration a long-term success or defeat for the U.S. Left?

Liberalism and the Left

BY TIM BARKER

HOW SHOULD WE conceive of the state of the American Left in the wake of the evisceration of collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin, the sequester and shutdown in Washington, corporate education reform efforts, and the ominous talk of Democratic capitulations to chained Consumer Price Index reforms of the Social Security system?

I'd like to share my own perspective on this debate, a perspective rooted in my experience as a writer and activist born after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Leftists in my generation— younger participants in the lively intellectual culture that has taken root around and beyond Occupy Wall Street in New

York City and the new radical journals (*n+1*, *The New Inquiry*, *Jacobin*, and the revitalized *Dissent*)—accept the need to work for the preservation of the United States' social welfare architecture, while also setting our sights firmly on revolutionary ends.

In other words, the emerging younger Left may be the least credulous of any in U.S. history in regard to the potential gains to be achieved by working within the system of normal politics. The one exception might be found in the labor movement, where radical young organizers with the Service Employees International Union and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees begrudgingly live

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Instead of interpreting President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society wholly as a victory, the theorists of corporate liberalism proposed that its apparent reforms were canny ploys by capitalists looking to buy off the restive working class.

with the unions' proximity to the Democratic Party, but overall the mood is one of comprehensive disgust with liberalism, whether preceded by "neo" or not.

As a result of this impatience with liberal politics, the younger Left is unlikely to find Eli Zaretsky's account of the socialist character of the New Deal project convincing. By the same token, our awareness of ever-increasing inequalities tends to make us skeptical about James Livingston's arguments that the Left has been steadily accumulating victories.

In the face of this "neither/nor" response to the conventional debate, some of us have been turning to the study of American Left intellectual history. There are yet lessons to be learned from the last generation of Left intellectuals who thought seriously about revolutionary socialism. Reflecting on the ideas of one such figure, the historian Martin Sklar, may prove useful in escaping the false alternative of Zaretsky vs. Livingston.

Martin Sklar's Corporate Liberalism Thesis

Sklar is best known as the originator of the "corporate liberalism" thesis, which he first articulated during the Kennedy-Johnson years. Nowadays, the phrase "corporate liberalism"

likely strikes readers' ears as a good first step. In the 1960s, however, especially as picked up by New Left historians Gabriel Kolko and James Weinstein, the term was derogatory in two ways. First, it portrayed liberalism not as a hopeful reform ethos, but rather as a mask for capitalist interests. Second, it depicted liberalism not as the heroic product of turn-of-the-century muckrakers and reformers, but as a new sensibility forged by capital *for capital* in order to save the capitalist system from its crisis-prone inner demons.

Sklar's presentation of corporate liberalism was always more subtle, and more politically ambiguous, than the variations favored by Kolko and Weinstein. Ultimately, Sklar's ironic vision of "corporate liberalism" would lead him to see the accretion of socialist features within the structures of capitalism itself. In the early 1960s, however, Sklar, Kolko, and Weinstein would have agreed that the true enemy of the Left was not the conservative Right, but the "liberals." In other words, the corporate liberalism thesis offered an internalist explanation for the weakness of the Left in postwar America. Proponents of this idea argued that those on the Left, by adopting liberal rhetoric and fighting for reform in (*continued on page 70*)

Culture

BOOKS

Faith and the Metaphor Muscle

Writing to Wake the Soul: Opening the Sacred Conversation Within

by Karen Hering
Atria Books/Beyond Words, 2013

REVIEW BY ELIZABETH JARRETT
ANDREW

DESPITE DEDICATING thousands of hours to teaching and generating creative writing, I still wonder whether writing is worthwhile. These days it's the environmental crisis that makes me doubt. As cities around the world face permanent flooding and species go extinct, I sit in my big red chair writing a *story*? Does this really help humans accept responsibility for the world's brokenness, or find faith enough to create a new, sustainable relationship with the planet?

For writers who share these doubts, Karen Hering's new book is heartening. *Writing to Wake the Soul: Opening the Sacred Conversation Within* offers a refreshingly socially conscious approach to writing as a spiritual practice. To grapple well with the big challenges of our times, Hering says, we need to reclaim the language of myth, metaphor, and imagination. This language speaks in poetry and parable, memory and imagination. It is the fabric of our faith traditions; it connects humans around the globe

and through time. "With metaphorical thinking we engage reason and imagination together, not to construct a plot or prove a hypothesis but to explore what is out of sight—the unknown or unnamed within us and beyond us," she writes. To answer unanswerable questions or solve unsolvable problems, we must reconnect with language big enough to hold mystery.

In the aftermath of September 11, when some commentators divided the world between those fiercely religious and those not, the poet Adrienne Rich countered, "If there's a line to be

drawn, it's not so much between secularism and belief as between those for whom language has metaphoric density and those for whom it is merely formulaic." She called for us to develop "the great muscle of metaphor, drawing strength from resemblance in difference."

"Contemplative correspondence," the writing practice Hering has developed, works to reclaim the language of faith and restore our capacity for metaphorical thinking.

Having left the conservative church of her childhood and become a



Digging by Olivia Wise.

Unitarian Universalist, Hering returns in her book to basic, doctrinally neutral words (faith, prayer, sin, love, justice, hope, redemption, grace, hospitality, and reverence) as wellsprings of fresh insight. She uses personal narrative and wisdom literature from a range of traditions to stir up new ways to inhabit these words.

Faith, she tells us, in the early teachings of many world religions, is a verb. In Buddhist texts, the Pali word for faith meant “to place the heart upon.” Because we’re more likely today to use faith as a noun, we’ve lost its active, participatory dimensions, as well as the understanding that faith is a common human characteristic: we all place our heart on *something*. So Hering invites us to write, listing the verbs that describe faith’s movement in our lives: “Consciously or unconsciously, with each day’s living, we are choosing where, and to whom, and to what we will offer our heart. In this way faith emerges from our daily choices.”

Hering’s practice helps us take these theological terms out of their hard-edged boxes so we can realize their life-giving potential. Words like “sin” can be used as wedges to drive people

apart, or they can be opened and unpacked. Paul Tillich warned against using the word sin in the plural; individual sins distract us from the larger conditions that precede sinful action. So Hering asks, “What are the conditions of the heart and the systems of society that cause us to deny or sever our connection to the earth, to others, or to the holy?” By reclaiming the relational, communicative role of language, we begin to repair our world.

The beauty of contemplative correspondence rests in how it harvests universal wisdom from personal experience. Our memories, associations, and dreams aren’t just softening agents for difficult words; they ground us in story, which is where truth resides. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston wrote of her character Janie that “She didn’t read books so she didn’t know that she was the world and the heavens boiled down to a drop.” We are each the world and heavens boiled down, and within our life experiences we glimpse a broad unity.

Hering explains that organizing her writing prompts around theological themes “is a way of zooming out from each writer’s story to notice how it shines in a sky full of stars, and how it

holds one point of many in a constellation made across time and space.” Hering’s exercises are intimate conversations with self, the holy, others in a writing group, voices present in religious teachings, and the emergent, collective narrative of our culture.

Such a writing practice exercises our metaphor muscles. It trains us to read ordinary moments for what Thomas Merton called a “hidden wholeness.” Thus it equips us for conversations across faiths and cultures and for conscious, effective, and collective action. “Naming our human experience is often a first step in transforming it,” Hering writes, “on personal levels and more broadly.” Or, as Nigerian writer Ben Okri put it, “Change the stories individuals and nations live by and tell themselves, and you change the individuals and nations.” This is worthy, holy, work. ■

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A Secular Analysis of Evil

Trauma Bond: An Inquiry into the Nature of Evil

by Lawrence Swaim
Psyche Books, 2013

REVIEW BY MARILYN GLAIM

AS A CHILD in a parochial school, I was required to memorize Exodus 20:5, in which God promises to visit the “iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate me.”

How spiteful, I thought. I didn’t think I should have to bear anyone else’s sins. Gradually, however, I came to understand the text as a statement of cause and effect rather than a spiteful threat. What it suggests, I realized, is that evil acts have lasting effects. We internalize trauma and pass it down to the generations that follow us.

Lawrence Swaim’s *Trauma Bond: An Inquiry into the Nature of Evil* takes up this difficult topic, explaining in strictly human terms what causes aggression to replicate itself and how

aggression—when rationalized, concealed, or dissembled—can become evil. Swaim also discusses how evil, in the form of intergenerational trauma, can be communicated from one generation to another.

Swaim asserts that he is “uninterested in theological or philosophical speculations about good and evil.” He starts from the premise that “evil exists” so as to explore how it is passed on through aggression. The victims of aggression often internalize it, he explains, because identifying with



The nonstop trauma of basic training orients young military recruits toward patriarchy and aggression. Here, a twenty-year-old machine gunner practices shooting in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

aggression is an authentic human orientation. This internalization is a sharp, pervasive, emotional response to aggression, in which the victim's emotions violently reorient themselves. As a result, the victim may take on an aggressive emotional orientation that he or she did not have before experiencing the violence. This is not merely an accommodation to the aggression; at some level it may include a need to conform to the aggression in an effort to defeat or survive it. The longer the violence continues, the more the victim's personality changes and the more difficult it becomes for him or her to transition back to relative normality. Thus family members subjected to years of domestic violence or soldiers experiencing the extreme violence of war during one or more tours of duty may experience personality changes that are very difficult to overcome.

Swaim insists that victims can and must become survivors and creative protagonists of their own life stories. In noting the deep emotional impact of aggression upon victims of violence, Swaim argues that "aggression and evil can best be approached as

psychological problems, since it is in the human personality that good and evil are encoded, and in human behavior that they are acted out." To help make his case for the psychological dimension of evil, he draws from a broad selection of historical and psychological texts and from his experiences as a long-time counselor at a residential treatment program in Northern California. His clients demonstrated a variety of behavioral problems that usually stemmed from aggression they had suffered, and in turn some of them inflicted aggression on other people, sank into depression, or hurt themselves through substance abuse or self-harm. It is not so much that adults become bonded to an aggressor, as that they become bonded to aggression itself, Swaim argues—and this is especially true for patriarchal men who identify with violence as a way of solving social problems.

The Traumas of War, Genocide, and Slavery

In his chapter "War and the Trauma Bond," he points out the difficulty soldiers have in breaking the bonds

of multiple forms of indoctrination. The military-industrial complex begins its relationship with young people by using the nonstop trauma of basic training to bond them to patriarchy, nationalism, and aggression. For four months, humiliation, threats, and verbal and physical abuse—not to mention sleep deprivation and insufficient food—are used to strip young recruits of all moral values they may have internalized. When they have been thoroughly indoctrinated, they are shipped off to war zones where they are likely to become both the subjects and perpetrators of violence. Violence is especially traumatic in counterinsurgency operations such as Iraq and Afghanistan, where a majority of the people killed tend to be civilians. It is small wonder that so many returning veterans (30 percent by some estimates) have internalized profound amounts of aggression and exhibit the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Unless the veterans can find an appropriate way to act out or deconstruct the aggressive emotional orientations inside of them, they may act them out violently against themselves or others.

Swaim also draws from a variety of historical periods to show how trauma bonding works at the national level. In a perceptive discussion of Germany during Hitler's rise to power, he shows how decent human beings were led to participate in the violence of the state. Hitler and the Nazis used "*trauma, control, systemic deceit and victimology*" in a focused and highly calibrated way as part of their campaign to create a society based *fundamentally* on aggression," Swaim writes. Individually and collectively, many Germans were harboring a belief that they were victims of the Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War I—a treaty that they blamed for a weak economy and their loss of honor and status in the world. As Swaim points out, Hitler knew how to use the Germans' sense of victimhood to breed anger and contempt for

anyone who could be perceived as the cause of their problems:

While victimology could create the identification with victim status on one level, the state would demonstrate its capacity for punishing opponents on the other—thus did it teach people the unique dynamics and privileges of the victim-aggressor as a primary type. In fact, Hitler used the trauma of unprecedented but irresistible state violence as a kind of political theatre to reinforce *all* elements of systemic evil, as experienced by both cowering victim and triumphant state sadist.

We know all too well how Hitler used emotional trauma as his storm troopers committed unending brutality on the streets, while the Nazis worked to consolidate the Nazi state. Hitler acknowledged this strategy himself, saying, “The great strength of the totalitarian state is that it forces those that fear it to imitate it.” Slobodan Milošević used the same methods to stir up the Serbs to commit genocide against the Bosnian Muslims. First he convinced the Serbs that they were pitiful victims; then he promised them relief through violence.

In the chapter “America and the Trauma Bond,” Swaim also applies his psychological model to American culture, exploring the trauma bonds growing out of slavery and segregation, U.S. settlers’ attacks on Native Americans, and the traumatizing culture shock awaiting immigrants to America. In the antebellum era, the powerful white Southern planters promoted the idea that they were victims of Northern aggression, and by posturing themselves as victims, they could ignore and suppress the suffering of the slaves they were themselves victimizing. When the Civil War ended, white Southerners used their feelings of victimization during Reconstruction to justify the brutal repression of African Americans, which further traumatized the former slave population; and so the traumas

were passed on through the eras of Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws, lynching, and segregation. To a great extent, American political life is still beset by the traumas of racism, slavery, and segregation.

The Psychological Dimension of Evil

Swaim offers his deepest analysis of the working of the trauma bond in “Trauma Bonding and the Milgram Paradigm,” his chapter on the most famous psychological study of the twentieth century. In it he tells the story of a young Yale professor, Stanley Milgram, who had long been fascinated with the Holocaust and the question of how ordinary Germans could have been part of the state machinery that killed 6 million Jews. He set up an experiment to discover if ordinary people could be ordered to deliver ever-increasing electrical shocks to someone in the next room whom they were supposed to “punish” to “help” them learn material more quickly. As most of us now know, nearly two-thirds of the test subjects complied fully, meaning they continued to administer lethal electrical shocks as long as they were told to do so.

This experiment has been discussed at length in popular and academic publications, but Swaim has an interesting new interpretation of the results. He sees the high level of compliance of Milgram’s subjects not as a result of character weakness or even mere obedience to authority (as Milgram thought) but as a result of the fact that the subjects were thoroughly traumatized by the unfamiliar situation, the screams of the person they were supposedly electrocuting in the next room, and the robotic commands of the experimenter. Swaim argues that Milgram created such a traumatizing and deceitful set of circumstances that very quickly (in less than an hour) a profound trauma bond was generated, causing two-thirds of the

subjects to lose all moral and cognitive agency.

As Swaim points out, those who continued to follow commands until the subject in the next room was supposedly dead or incapacitated experienced shock and horror at what they were doing but couldn’t stop following the commands of the “scientist” leading the experiment. In other words, they were so deeply traumatized that they were unable to stop following the commands of the only authority figure in the room. Although Milgram’s aftercare protocols were very good, these subjects lived for the rest of their lives knowing they were capable of killing a complete stranger for no reason, if subjected to sufficient pressure. It is small wonder, then, that people who have been subjected to longer and more devastating traumas—as victims, witnesses, or even perpetrators—find it difficult to deal constructively with *their* experiences.

Paths to Healing

Though *Trauma Bond* focuses almost exclusively on the creation of the trauma bond and its tie to systemic evil in the world, it does hint at Swaim’s abiding belief that humankind can develop positive ways of dealing with people who have internalized aggression because of violent experiences. In the sections on his work with clients in the residential treatment program, as well as in the Milgram section, he suggests that people must receive the support they need in order to recognize the manner in which past violence could be affecting them, acknowledge the strength of the bond it created, and then begin to talk about it. While it may seem a weakness in the book that more space is not given to solutions, in reality the book must be seen as part of a whole. It is the middle book in a trilogy, the first one being *The Death of Judeo-Christianity: Religious Aggression and Systemic Evil in the Modern World*, in which Swaim demonstrates how religion can

be misused to create aggression in believers. The last book will be a discussion of the ways both individuals and communities have overcome experiences with violence.

The last book in the trilogy is still in progress. In talking about the themes he plans to discuss, Swaim notes, “A ‘recovery dualism’ is required to break free of shared traumatic memory. Individuals seek to deconstruct the fears and anxieties they feel personally but sense that there are larger social contradictions that exacerbate their personal anxiety.” Individuals, therefore, will fare best if they not only seek help to deal with their own traumas but also work to create change in their societies. For example, Swaim says, a survivor of rape “seeks personal relief, but obtains it more quickly if she works with other women to oppose

patriarchy in society,” adding, “The combat veteran can deconstruct the aftereffects of war more quickly by advocating for proper treatment for all vets, and for a world without unnecessary wars.” In his next book, Swaim will deal at length with examples of recovery from internalized aggression and emotional trauma. He is working on a chapter about Rwanda and the ongoing recovery there and also plans to discuss Israel/Palestine, recovery from intergenerational Holocaust trauma, and even a fascinating case of a British soldier who was tortured in World War II but who, against all odds, achieved reconciliation with the man who tortured him.

While we might wish immediately to see a bit more of Swaim’s proposed treatment for internalized aggression, *Trauma Bond: An Inquiry into*

the Nature of Evil is successful on its own terms. It succeeds, using entirely secular and nontechnical language, in making the case for the existence of both personal and systemic evil. This is a book that adds to our collective knowledge of good and evil. It shows us how aggression replicates itself in the world and how even systemic evil can be deconstructed when people decide they must free themselves from the tyranny of past violence. ■

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Joyful Poems of Leave-Taking and Transience

Without a Claim

by Grace Schulman
Mariner Books, 2013

REVIEW BY DAVID DANOFF

GRACE SCHULMAN has always been a poet deeply rooted in place and time. Over four decades and six previous collections, her poems have returned to the familiar scenery of New York City and Long Island. She’s written about her childhood and young adulthood in the city, her parents’ time, her grandparents’ time, and the New York City of Henry James and Walt Whitman. Across the decades, the same streets and subway cars, houses and stores, theaters and museums, and beaches and harbors have set the scene. This rootedness has given her work power and depth.

But in *Without a Claim*, Schulman renounces ownership. It’s a book of leave-taking and transience, filled with poems about loss and decline, poems that look at the world intently but refuse to cling or assert dominion. The book is also filled with poems of joy and praise—but it’s a joy that is fleeting and praise for what passes.

In the title poem, she remembers moving years earlier from city to suburb, and although she clearly loves where she is living, she insists it is not hers to keep:

Raised like a houseplant on a
windowsill
looking out on other windowsills
of a treeless block, I couldn’t take it in
when told I owned this land with oaks
and maples
scattered like crowds on Sundays, and
an underground

strung not with pipes but snaky roots
that writhed

when my husband sank a
rhododendron,
now flaunting pinks high as an attic
window.

This land we call our place was never
ours.

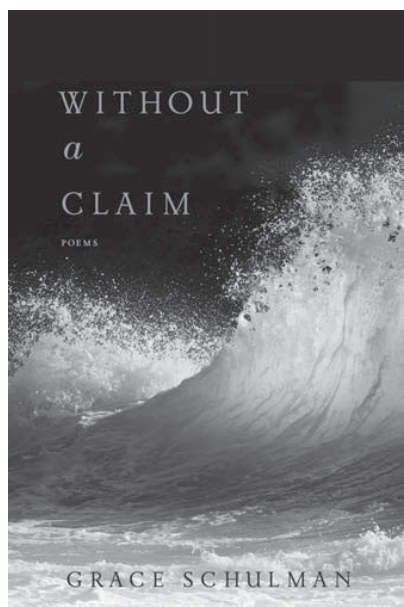
Love for the current home is shadowed by memories of the previous one, of the disruption and strangeness of that earlier move. And in spite of the roots she knows lie beneath, and the years of possession (as that rhododendron has grown and flowered abundantly), she also knows it won’t last. She knows about those who came before: the sailors and whalers, the farmers, and before them the Montauk Indians—who left their names and not much else. She identifies with those who came and went, who passed through and left little trace, thinking of her own Polish

immigrant ancestors. And it's not just the place that she knows she can't hold on to.

Duck under the elm's branches, thick
with leaves,
on land deeded to us but not to keep,
and take my hand, mine only to give
for a day that shines like corn silk in
wind.
We rent, borrow, or share even our
bodies,
and never own all that we know and
love.

Even the body is not a permanent address. But by inviting others to come and partake, by freely sharing—the body, the house, the landscape—Schulman suggests that one can achieve a measure of freedom and joy. And really, what other choice does one have?

A recurring concern throughout the book is physical frailty—her own, and especially that of her husband. In “Moon Shell,” alone on the beach, she remembers how they used to walk together. But now: “You inch forward, step, comma, pause, / your silences the wordless rage of pain.” In “Danger,” they go out together, and she describes him:



taking the high risk of this morning,
one hand on your cane, the other open
to catch honey-yellow blossoms falling
just as our shadows fall on this narrow
path.

Even on placid Long Island, ordinary life is risky; pain is never far. The best one can hope for is a certain uneasy balance between suffering and pleasure. One hand clings to a cane, while the other tries to catch falling blossoms. In “Before the Fall,” she describes the disorienting aftermath of a bicycle accident: “A stranger / lives inside this mask with slits for eyes, / this boot cast, the leg I thought I owned.” But remembering the ecstatic moment just before she fell, she exhorts herself:

Think of the rush, the salt, the taste
of wind,
the blown hair, bay of sparkling soda
water,
starry weeds the locals call bedstraw,
the miracle of all you've never lost.

There are some poems that venture away from New York City, paying visits to Derek Walcott's Saint Lucia, Gerard Manley Hopkins's Dublin, Emily Dickinson's Amherst, or the Chauvet Cave paintings. In all of these, artists or artworks are the main attraction. For Schulman, art blurs the boundaries between cultures and peoples, forging connections across time and space. She takes pride in her Jewish heritage, the Polish and Yiddish of her father and grandfather, the Hebrew liturgy, and the traditions and rituals she grew up with. But she sees no reason not to link these with Chinese poetry, Handel's *Messiah*, or Renaissance paintings. In “Havdalah,” she compares this interweaving of cultures to the “three-color fire of a braided candle.” The colors are distinct, but inseparable.

A few poems relate to places in Israel. One of these demands to be quoted in full, for the way it demonstrates Schulman's casual intensity,

her ability to set a scene and summon emotion with deft strokes, as well as her theme of seeking tenuous pleasure in the midst of terrible pain:

Hickories

Why do I write of hickories, whose
boughs
touch other boughs across a slender
road,
when our neighbor, Haneen, born in
Gaza,

cried that a missile ripped her niece
apart
in the family garden? The child's father
found her intestines stuck to a cypress
bark

and he, too, perished in the raid. Her
mother
wrote to Haneen before the news was
out,
“Help me. Take my hand.” Why do I
rave

of hickories reaching out their crooked
fingers?

Because before the fires, the child,
Lina,
was dropping almonds into a linen
napkin.

Soon she would run to offer them for
dinner.

Like Lina, I race to show you hickories,
their nuts shrunken brown globes,
soon to fall.

In the face of savagery, what can art do? It seems like effrontery to suggest it could help. But clear-eyed and honest, admitting the near futility, Schulman offers what she can. She memorializes the girl—and she also points to nature, to its beauty and eternal change, to the transient richness of fruit in the moment before it falls.

The view of the world offered in *Without a Claim* is often a bleak one, and the efforts in many of the poems to rejoice or embrace simple beauties can feel inadequate. And yet, the impossibility of the task is part of what

makes the effort so moving. In “Celebration,” the coming of spring makes her mourn for what she’s lost:

the movie theater . . .
struck down for a fast-food store; your
rangy stride;
my shawl of hair; my mother’s grand
piano.
My mother.

The poem ends with the starkness of a koan:

How to make it new,
how to find the gain in it? Ask the sea
at sunrise how a million sparks
can fly over dead bones.

Like Ezekiel’s dry bones, it seems it would take a miracle to restore what’s lost. Youth and good health, and one’s departed parents, aren’t coming back. Spring may return each year, but the actual things we loved, we have to let go of. And yet, in an image that recurs throughout the book, the luminescent plankton in the sea off Long Island spark with an eerie, implausible light. It isn’t a miracle, and yet it kind of is. It’s mysterious, unexpected. A gift. And the gift of Schulman’s poems lies in how they continually hint that maybe, even in the midst of pain and loss, we can find such a light in our own lives. ■

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LEVY-LYONS (continued from page 14)

Loving-kindness to the thousandth generation. This too rings true in our world. When you act out of love, justice, truthfulness, and respect, that goodness reverberates outward into the galaxy, touching everyone and everything. And the corollary to this is that we are the beneficiaries of goodness from long, long ago. I’m sure you

all know people who are very sane, loving people, good partners or good parents who, themselves, came from an abusive family or just a family that didn’t know how to love them or see them. And you ask yourself, “How did he turn out to be such a good partner?” “How did she turn out to be such a good mother?” “Where did he get such self-confidence?” “Where did she get such strength?” And you don’t find the answer when you look at their parents or their grandparents or the community they were raised in. The thousandth generation principle teaches that it could have been a powerful love a hundred years ago that formed a substrate of compassion, kindness, strength, and pride that transmitted silently through the generations to that person. Love can never really be contained.

You may have heard the story of Antoinette Tuff, the school administrator who encountered a gunman armed with an AK-47 entering her school. Tuff hadn’t had an easy life. She’d had tragedies and even attempted suicide. But she was able to tell the gunman that she loved him and that he was going to be all right, to reassure him, saying, “We all go through something in life.” She talked with him gently and encouraged him until he put down his weapon and everyone was safe. The whole conversation was recorded on the 911 call, and you can listen to it online. It’s absolutely breathtaking. She saved his life, her own life, and the lives of countless children in the school. So many families were saved from devastation, along with the communities around those families, and the love rippled outward a thousand times, out into the world in every direction. Those children will now grow up, many of them, to have children of their own, and grandchildren—a thousand generations—all because of the power of Tuff’s love. I hope they pass the story down as Scripture. Helen Keller says, “When we do the best that we can, we never know what miracle is wrought in our life, or in the life of another.”

And that’s what it is. We can’t possibly know the effects of our actions or exactly how they will reverberate through time and space. That information is hidden from us. But what we can do is ask ourselves: what kind of seed do we have in our hand? What is the nature of the thing we are planting and putting out into the world? If we’re making pesticides or chemical weapons, it’s easy to know that we’re putting poison out into the world. If we’re comforting an armed intruder, it’s pretty clear that we’re putting out love. But for most of us it’s not that dramatic. It’s subtle. What about the words we’re about to speak? What about the words we’re about to withhold? What about the quality of the attention we pay to people who need to express themselves? What about the food and clothing we buy? What about the way we touch someone? How do we behave with those who have no power, such as children or animals? How do we behave with those who can’t hold us accountable, such as strangers on the subway, strangers online, or homeless strangers?

We can’t possibly know the consequences of our actions, but we can form the intention that each individual step we take, each word we speak, puts goodness into the world, not pain; peace, not violence.

The striking thing about the “thousandth generation” teaching is that from the standpoint of Jewish tradition, there haven’t even been a thousand generations yet—not even now, much less when those words were written. So it’s not only about receiving love from our ancestors long ago, it’s also about love as our natural inheritance from before the world was formed. Evil is temporal and finite, bound up in human generations, but love was born in the dawn of time. This is our true inheritance. And we can have faith that when we transmit that love, when we express and manifest that love, it will live and breathe and ripple outward for a thousand generations into a future world that we can not even begin to fathom. ■

They Shoot He Scores
by Jesse Purcell.



VON BLUM (continued from page 20)

problem has been severe, especially with incidents of spying and brutality against marginalized communities throughout the nation. In July 2011, an International CopWatch Conference was held in Winnipeg, where the misconduct of Canadian police, border personnel, and other public officials was thoroughly reported. With its depiction of two eyes staring through a pair of handcuffs, a cell phone camera, and the text “police we are recording you: inverse surveillance from the bottom up,” Purcell’s poster turns the camera back upon the spies themselves. It recalls the way in which besieged Occupy protesters in the United States and Canada started recording the police who were recording them, providing a strong record of the overwhelming force employed against their efforts. *Watch Out* is an artistic warning to police and corporations that resistance to these surveillance efforts will grow and that political dissenters will record those who disrupt their organizing efforts.

The Link Between Sports and Militarism

Finally, Purcell’s poster *They Shoot He Scores* ventures into yet another realm of political inquiry, investigating the link between sports and militarism. The poster portrays Don Cherry, a right-wing Canadian hockey commentator. By posing Cherry between two assault weapons, the artist makes a deeper point about the closer, more disconcerting linkage of sports and militarism—a phenomenon that is relevant to both Canada and the United States.

The linkage is particularly apt in this case because, in addition to offering hockey commentary on his television sports show, *Coach’s Corner*, Cherry also regularly adds militaristic and conservative political commentary to his presentations. He ardently supported the U.S. war on Iraq, speaks in favor of conservative Canadian politicians, attacks environmentalists, and refers to his critics as “left-wing kooks.” By placing Cherry between two guns, with the

Canadian flag looming behind him, Purcell’s poster suggests that the pseudo-combat of the rink and gridiron encourages “patriotic” cheerleaders like Cherry to promote guns and war, while ignoring, even mocking, their profoundly dangerous implications. *They Shoot He Scores* is an effective reminder of the impact of demagogic rhetoric, especially in the age of mass communications.

I hope that this quick tour through a sampling of poster art from the Justseeds collective has offered a taste of this medium’s power to disseminate social change messages to the public. The works pictured here are a tiny fragment of the historical tradition and contemporary body of poster art from which they emerge. These works encourage other artists to add political criticism and commitment to their efforts, and they remind activists of their cultural history. They are, above all, reminders of the many struggles for justice, equality, and a more humane social order that must continue in the early decades of the twenty-first century. ■

Jesse Purcell (justseeds.org)

Our nation has been promoting market solutions that pit midlife employees against younger (or overseas) workers to drive down wages, benefits, and job protections in a race to the bottom. Maddeningly, within the nation's lopsided pro-business context, "discrimination is much more likely to be seen as legitimate and fair by gatekeepers, given their power and organizational discretion," according to a study of 2,000 verified bias cases conducted by sociologist Vincent Roscigno and his colleagues. In an economy that can't create enough jobs for all, saying you hire young people because they are cheaper doesn't go over so well. But a media-hyped concern for work for "our children" makes middle ageism seem "legitimate."

It's ironic that despite our vaunted longevity (and despite the obvious need of people over sixty-five without savings or pensions to continue working long after retirement), too many Americans suffer from a viciously truncated working life course. But the losses go even beyond the missed productivity, the lost spending power, the family disintegration, and the suicides.

Younger people learn the value of aging by observing their prime-age parents. Many youngsters in our increasingly unequal country are learning that they have less of a future than they thought. The life course is not a story of progress. The midlife is becoming a period of decline for many more. The American dream is slipping out of their hands. This is our troubled existential condition, and this crisis will continue for our children and grandchildren, cohort after cohort, unless we decide to fight these destructive conditions. Middle ageism, along with ageism more generally, has to be recognized as an ethical as well as a socioeconomic evil. Some deny the connection between midlife unemployment and suicide, occasionally opining that the boomers as a generation are uniquely liable to

kill themselves. Some have ideological objections to trying to remedy the crisis. Americans need to acknowledge the gravity of the midlife condition.

Solutions to the Crisis

Solutions that match the magnitude of the difficulties are possible, but we won't be able to pursue them until the public is aware of how much is at stake.

In states with better civil rights laws and remedies that can work around the toothless Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and sue locally. On a national level, Congress should now better fund the understaffed commission. Congress should also give age equal status to race and gender on the grounds of "disparate effects." And it should pass the Protecting Older Workers Against Discrimination Act proposed by Iowa Senators Tom Harkin and Chuck Grassley, which could override the Supreme Court's *Hazen* decision. In addition, ensuring the availability of a health insurance plan that does not penalize midlife workers with premiums two to four times higher than those of the young would prove that through public policy we value growing older.

Prevention is better than legal enforcement. After four years of a jobless "recovery," with long-term unemployment proving intractable, we need a stimulus package targeted specifically for midlife and older workers. We need to penalize companies that send jobs abroad or that deny job seekers interviews because of their age. Congress should press companies to establish policies encouraging older workers to stay on the job. (France penalizes large companies that don't.) A Pew Charitable Trusts report shows that when midlife employment goes up, rates of youth employment and wages also go up. Work need not be a zero-sum game.

These facts and stories should make citizens and the government focus sharply on midlife job discrimination,

high long-term unemployment, and the tragic alteration over the last forty years in the working life course in America. The U.S. government should be proactive in undoing this capitalist catastrophe. If the government refuses to act, if we don't elect the representatives who will reverse these savage trends, not only will misery increase, but younger people across our society will also lose forever the precious prospect of valuing aging over the life course.

We need to fight for an aging process that, as we age past youth, entails rising wages, more job security, gains in respect, an ability to help adult children, and the assumption that experience matters—"seniority," broadly defined. The working life course ought to be a story of progress that children can look forward to, workers can appreciate, and elders can look back on with pride. ■

LIVINGSTON (continued from page 30)

House, who solves the crime and cures the disease—the Left manages the crisis—by retelling the life story of the ravaged body politic, providing the counterintuitive narrative that explains its decay and permits its restoration. The Left is the omniscient narrator of a nineteenth-century realist novel (or its fossilized remnant, the police procedural on TV), describing yet standing above the grotesque bargains, details, and compromises that constitute everyday life, biding his time, knowing that when the crisis strikes, his intellectual acumen and intensely cathected affect will become indispensable.

Here is how Zaretsky describes this omniscient voice he calls the Left:

In each case, the left did not create the call for equality. That call arose, rather, from social movements, such as the labor movement, the various African-American freedom movements, and the women's movements, movements sparked by the large-scale shifts I have termed crises. . . . Although the social

movements that demand equality create new values, often surprising ones, they are not themselves on the left. The left's job is not to create these movements but to be responsive to them, to relate them to an overall telos of equality, to participate in them as a left, and to critique them when necessary from that point of view. In Karl Marx's youthful formulation, the left aims at "the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age."

This specification of the Left's role in American history could have been lifted directly from Lenin's pamphlet on why workers in his part of the world could not attain class consciousness without the political intervention of a dedicated cadre of radical (Marxist) intellectuals who would function as the leaders of a vanguard party.

Can Zaretsky really think that after Antonio Gramsci, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Václav Havel, not to mention the rest of the twentieth century, Lenin's itinerary can be reproduced here, in these United States? Does he really think that America now needs a Left that is deeply, happily, and self-consciously sectarian, and accordingly speaks, for the time being, to no one but true believers?

These aren't rhetorical questions. Zaretsky insists that he's making "a historical argument"—that's the subtitle of the book. But he carefully abstains from the actual history of this country.

What's Missing: A Discussion of the American Revolution

To be an American is to argue about what it means to be an American. That mere truism is a result of the fact that Americans have never shared a national origin, a linguistic affinity, a religious sensibility, or a racial identity. All they have in common is the stories they tell themselves about how they got to be inhabitants and citizens of the indispensable nation. And these stories are *always* already about

the founding—"original intent," if you will—because the American Revolution changed everything by acting on three outlandish claims.

First, "all men are created equal." Second, the source of sovereignty was "we, the people"—not the king, the state, the government, the cabinet, or the prime minister, *not even the nation itself*. Because state and civil society were now divided according to the modern (liberal) principle of consent, supremacy belonged in society, with the people "out of doors." Third, equality was not a threat to the liberty of individuals armed with either natural or enumerated constitutional rights; it was instead the necessary condition of freedom, and thus the only enduring basis of a popular government that would be something more than majority rule. Abraham Lincoln put it best: "As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy."

To dismiss the founding as an insignificant moment in the history of the American Left is, then, to avoid everything that matters to the argument about what it means to be an American—it is to place the Left somewhere outside the history of the United States, as if it's an exotic import from another shore. And yet Zaretsky has done exactly that:

As figures like Thomas Paine suggest, the Revolution is important to the American left, which has as part of its birthright abiding concerns for national independence and individual liberty. Nonetheless, the American Revolution was not concerned to establish equality; on the contrary, most of the 'founding fathers' envisioned a relatively hierarchical society, and not simply because of slavery. The three crises I have in mind constitute a kind of counternarrative to the one that begins with Independence. . . . [Each] brought a crisis of authority, identity, and governing purpose that could not be resolved by reference to the political

thought of the Revolution, or to the American Constitution (with which in fact progressive forces were frequently at odds).

I don't see how Zaretsky (or anyone else) can make this argument in view of the available historical evidence, or in view of his own stated purpose, which is to demonstrate that the Left has been a central, vital element in the making of the American experience. The three great crises he cites were, in fact, resolved by constant, creative reference to the political thought of the Revolution, an event that most Americans, whatever their political affiliation, assumed was *completed*, not negated, by the Constitution. In every instance, all sides invoked "original intent" because they knew they wouldn't be taken seriously by their comrades or their enemies if they didn't. In this crucial sense, the history of the Left resides in the retelling of the story of the founding. Absent that purpose and that effort, it had, and has, no reason to exist.

The Myth of a Left that Stands Apart

Consider Zaretsky's cast of characters. Most abolitionists bonded over their deep hatred of slavery; some of them (William Lloyd Garrison and his followers) believed the Constitution was a pact with the Devil because it seemed to sanction enslavement; and a few of them (John Brown and his cohort) became terrorists who refused to distinguish between innocent inhabitants and outspoken supporters of slave society.

But all of them, save perhaps Brown, told a story of national redemption that turned on the meaning of "we, the people," and in doing so they specified a relation between the forthright commitment of the Declaration of Independence ("all men are created equal") and the guarded language of the Constitution. By 1840, movement activists like Theodore Weld, Angelina Grimké, and

Joshua Leavitt had taken the advice of John Quincy Adams—put off holiness and take on intelligence, he told his fellow abolitionists—and had settled in Washington, D.C., to develop an accessible lexicon and an electoral strategy that would rely on painstaking legal arguments and strict constitutional scruples.

They were still ideologically motivated, but they were tired of being an intensely cathected small group; they wanted to make a political difference, and so they were willing to risk the corruption of their souls. The end of slavery, they had realized, required not the repudiation but the amendment of the Constitution—the preservation by annulment, as it were, of the original Union. Most abolitionists followed their lead. So did the larger anti-slavery crowd that gathered around the Free Soil Party in 1848 and then the new Republican Party in 1854. And so did Abraham Lincoln, who, in his first and only term as a congressman, roomed at Abolition House, the hotel cum seminar run by Weld, Leavitt, and Adams in D.C.

When the war came, therefore, abolitionists supported the Confiscation Acts of 1861 and 1862, and the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, but they also worried, along with Lincoln and Republicans in Congress, that the invocation of military necessity in freeing slaves as “contraband of war” would probably fail a constitutional test at the Supreme Court when the South rejoined the Union (and, as a result, it would rekindle the Civil War as a scene of unofficial guerilla skirmishes). So they ardently supported Lincoln’s reelection in 1864 and the campaign for the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. And when the time came, they celebrated their success—they rejoiced that their ideas about equality at the law had become the mainstream of political discourse.

Abolitionists began, then, as saints standing apart from a society that took slavery for granted, but they didn’t make their contribution to the Second

American Revolution by abstaining from the mainstream and preserving their moral purity. They voted Republican.

But the Communists of the Popular Front were different, right? They never compromised with the reality of the liberal tradition in America. As Richard Wolff insists, and as hundreds of historians attest, they instead composed an “explicitly anti-capitalist social and political movement” that kept the Congress of Industrial Organizations militant and the New Deal on a social-democratic track. Well, maybe not, Zaretsky tells us: “the Communists gained popularity because they downplayed the idea of revolution in order to support the New Deal.”

Wait. You mean they did nothing but *validate* the transformation of liberalism underway since the Progressive Era, when the rugged individual—the self-made man—became the class clown, and Theodore Roosevelt, among other leading politicians, announced his support for environmental conservation, a progressive income and inheritance tax, workers’ compensation, workplace safety, regulation of child labor, funding and reform of public education, farm cooperatives, daycare centers, a minimum wage, and a statutory limitation on working hours? That was in 1910.

In what sense, then, were the Communists of the Popular Front a Left that stood apart from the liberal mainstream? Is it possible that Zaretsky is unconsciously reinstating Arthur Schlesinger Jr.’s argument about the Vital Center, claiming, in effect, that without the liberals, the Left has no purchase on the American imagination? Is he also suggesting that absent that center, anti-elitist radicalism becomes random political resentment, the raw material of terrorism?

It comes to this: Did the leading lights of the Popular Front ever speak in public (or in private) of a revolution that would repudiate the founding principles of liberty, equality, and the

sovereignty of the people as against the state? Did they ever try peddling a Soviet America? Or did they always assume that those founding principles were inviolable? You already know the answers, and so you might agree with me that Zaretsky’s book needs a new title: *Why the Left Needs America*.

But the New Left was surely the exception to the rule of an increasingly radical America. This “third Left” stood outside the liberal mainstream, didn’t it, no matter how rapidly and significantly that current of opinion was changing in the 1960s and ’70s? According to Zaretsky, at any rate, its notion of equality went deeper and reached farther than anything broached by the liberals, because it was rooted in the ancient, activist idea of participatory democracy. “Civil rights implied a social revolution, not simply a rights revolution” he argues, for its advocates understood the central issue as a “deepening of participation,” not just the designation of legitimate voters.

But who does Zaretsky quote to support this remarkable (and yet plausible) conclusion? Lyndon Baines Johnson, of all people, who explicitly repudiated liberal proceduralism when, in June of 1965, he described the next and “more profound” stage of civil rights as “not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.” Johnson had learned about substantive *social* equality, it seems, from the black student movement (from the sit-ins to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), which was “a critique of [Martin Luther] King from the New Left perspective.” By this strange accounting, MLK, who thought of the Declaration exactly as Lincoln did—as a “promissory note” written by the founders—was not himself on or of the Left. It was LBJ who crossed over.

The Founding Values of Liberty and Equality

Like every other writer in the new genre of left-wing jeremiad, Eli Zaretsky

claims that America needs a Left. But what for? To remind us of the republic's promise and purpose? All this can mean is that the promissory note remains unredeemed—that we, the people, must understand and continue to act on the original intent of the founders. If the Left wants to remain relevant to the future of America, it must then learn to retell the story of the founding. In that sense, it needs America more than America needs a Left. So it has to adopt the attitude toward American history recommended by Alfred Kazin, and thus learn how to be “both critical of ‘the system’ and crazy about the country.”

But how would that attitude challenge or change the new genre of left-wing jeremiad? Here's a provisional answer.

Of course the intentions of the founders were various, even conflicting, but on the issue of equality they were clear. Thomas Jefferson was a slaveholder, and apparently a brutal master, but he not only wrote the Declaration, he also sponsored the Ordinance of 1784 (outlawing slavery north of the Ohio River), which was ratified as the famous Northwest Ordinance by the first Congress convened under the Constitution and later reproduced in the very language of the Thirteenth Amendment (abolishing slavery as such).

James Madison, another slaveholder, composed a constitutional design that, until the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision of 2010, evenly balanced what he called the “two cardinal objects of Government, the rights of persons and the right of property.” His commitment to equality ran so deep that even though he believed that liberty was impossible in the absence of inviolable property rights, and that such rights would be endangered when the “Class without property” became the majority—probably sooner than later—he couldn't tolerate the idea of limiting the franchise to property holders. He knew that without the participation and/or consent of the majority,

no government was legitimate. But he also knew that majority rule couldn't be the only measure of what we designate as democracy, because the power of numbers is no more intrinsically *just* than the power of lawyers, guns, or money.

For these and the other founders, nation-building wasn't over in 1776 or in 1787 or in 1820 (this last is the year of the Missouri Compromise, which, by modifying the Northwest Ordinance, made the territorial expansion and moral content of slavery key issues in normal political discourse). They kept reinterpreting their own original intent. The Left, here as elsewhere, has a great deal to learn from that urge to reinterpretation, and from the varieties of nationalism that resulted—from the founders' commitments to a country they knew would always be a work in progress. Understood historically, these nationalisms appear as commitments regulated by a constitutional tradition that includes the ethical principle of equality enunciated in the Declaration and that honors the central principle of American politics: the sovereignty of we, the people, not the state or its agents.

Since the rise of the abolitionists in the 1820s and 30s, the social movements that matter in the United States have been animated by what the eminent anthropologist Arjun Appadurai associates exclusively with a “queer nation”—that is, with a “patriotism totally divorced from party, government, or state.” The Civil Rights Movement that came of age in the postwar period is probably the best example of this commitment to a nation that existed only as a dimension of the American dream, but the labor movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries could also demonstrate the claim. Insofar as we acknowledge that modern feminist movements appeal to constitutional principle and precedent in defending the rights of women, they, too, might serve the same purpose, for such appeals typically seek to protect

rights of privacy or individual autonomy against the powers of husbands, fathers, and governments, and in doing so they broaden both the meaning of individualism and the composition of the body politic.

These are the movements that Zaretzky and others correlate with the Left in American history. All of them began by imagining a community that lives up to the principles of liberty and equality on which the American nation was explicitly founded—by expanding the social boundaries of that nation, by dismantling its silent but effective exclusions, by complicating its internal articulation. And all of them have remained firmly committed to the supremacy of society over the state—that is, to the sovereignty of the people. They've remained committed to the inchoate, immanent, *extra-constitutional* “nation” to which Lincoln referred four times in the 271 words of the Gettysburg Address, the nation once conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that “all men are created equal,” the nation then, now, and always in need of a new birth of freedom.

As Lincoln understood, however, the original constitutional design sanctioned slavery, among other atrocities: the founding was anything but an immaculate conception. Why would the Left want to return to *this* origin?

Look again at Madison's design. As he saw it, his task was to construct a framework for popular government that didn't rest on the social foundation stipulated by the theorists of ancient and early modern republics, from Aristotle to Machiavelli and Montesquieu—the foundation of a homogenous or relatively undifferentiated population. Madison knew that a modern republic could not escape the social divisions and conflict brought by historical time (the time rendered intelligible by the metaphor of “commerce” or “commercial society”), so he tried to incorporate such division and conflict into the very structure of the body politic. To “extend

the sphere” of the American republic, as he famously proposed in “Federalist No. 10,” would be to multiply the interests, factions, and social classes contending for the allegiances of the electorate and the larger public. Thus the formation of majorities would become more difficult as the American population became more diverse, more divided.

Madison believed that to make majority formation more difficult in this manner was not to thwart but to preserve popular government—and he was right. For the exercise of state power in the name of the people can’t be justified by reference to the power of numbers any more than it can be justified by the power of money or weaponry. To put it in modern parlance, the cause of democracy can’t be served when a majority uses its power of greater numbers to oppress a minority. When white majorities disenfranchised and terrorized the black minority in the South long after the Civil War and Reconstruction, for example, the cause of democracy was betrayed. It was finally redeemed by that minority’s insistence on simple justice—on the consent of those governed by law—as the condition of legitimate state power.

Now consent is a principle of political obligation that doesn’t require equality. You can gladly consent to be ruled by people whom you acknowledge to be your betters, as many men and women have done over many centuries. But once you assume all humans are created equal, consent means—and justice requires—that *everyone* has the power to actually participate in the making of the rules, by legislating, by voting, or by effectively registering an opinion “out of doors” in the public sphere of ideological conflict and political compromise.

In other words, if all humans are created equal, then justice for all becomes the condition of the liberty of each. Your individual liberty requires that you yearn for, and work toward, social equality between you and me. That is the legacy of the American Revolution. When the Left can claim this

as its birthright, it can claim to have relinquished both its will to powerlessness and its residual Leninism. At that point, the Left might also understand just how much it needs America. ■

ZARETSKY (continued from page 34)

and individual freedoms. Throughout this period, there was no Dreyfus case in America, no widespread protest against persecution.

The politics of growth complemented the politics of fear. The core idea was that economic growth, as measured by GDP, would allow the country to bypass the divisiveness and conflict that had accompanied New Deal reforms, such as unionization. Economics, so the theory went, was “transpolitical.” Rejecting the very term “capitalism,” pluralists argued that business was simply one interest group among many. Works such as Arthur Schlesinger Jr.’s *The Vital Center* (1949) defined a new politics cleansed of “ideology” and “class struggle,” which were “too divisive.” Defining liberalism as a practical program requiring compromise and technocratic skills, they condemned a politics that served as “an outlet for private grievances and frustrations,” which is how Schlesinger characterized the Left.

The Cold War era strengthened U.S. civil rights efforts, as the Russians publicized lynching, Jim Crow statutes, and anti-Semitic discriminations. The popularity of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) (1966) demonstrated the new political power of women. Thus, liberals were poised to launch an overall set of structural reforms that would bring America into the postwar world: an activist foreign policy including immigration reform, a knowledge economy, the end of Jim Crow, and the end of the family wage.

In the 1960s, accordingly, the United States was poised on the cusp of a

profound structural transformation. Aimed at freeing the country from backward forms of authority, old-boy networks, short-sighted businessmen, and tradition-bound opponents of change, this transformation was analogous to the previous two moments of structural transformation: the Civil War and the New Deal. As in the preceding moments, however, the transformation was ambiguous in its implications. Would it lead to meritocracy or to equality, to a two-tier society or to social justice, to antinomian consumerism or egalitarian self-organization? The New Left arose to answer this question.

The Legacy of the New Left

The New Left of the sixties—known at the time as “the movement”—is one of the great success stories of American history, although this is little understood today. Its success lay in challenging long-established codes of protest, which had long diverted radical voices into harmless and counterproductive channels. Thus, the radical or left wing of the Civil Rights Movement (SNCC) confronted the vilest forms of racial segregation on an existential basis. The radical or left wing of the antiwar movement (originally SDS) forced the American people to confront their odious war, and the imperialist presuppositions that fostered it. The radical or left wing of the liberal women’s movement (“women’s liberation”) forced both men and women to confront the ties between heterosexuality and misogyny.

If the New Left was struggling to shape the meaning of the great structural reforms of the sixties, such as civil rights for African Americans and for women, and a shift toward a gentler, more humane foreign policy, it was also shaping the meaning of the cultural revolution. One did not need the Left to see that the sixties marked the first full-scale emergence of mass consumer culture. One *did* need the Left, however, to expose the alliance

between Democratic Party liberals and Mississippi segregationists; to grasp the corporate and military control of the universities; to acknowledge the almost incalculable extent to which the government lies to its people, especially concerning war; to grasp the continuity between racism, colonialism, and the war in Vietnam; to see that schools, prisons, and doctors' offices were sites of power; to develop critical subfields in every academic discipline; to see sexism as a deep structure of human history, not simply a form of discrimination; and to build ties of solidarity with the poorest people on the planet, and with homosexuals, women, and racial minorities. Like its predecessors, then, the New Left sought to bend a major economic and cultural transformation in the direction of equality.

The effects of the New Left on American society and culture have been almost incalculable. An entirely new consciousness of race, gender, and sexuality has transformed language, lifestyle, and institutions. Skepticism meets every proposed American intervention abroad. Academic life has been transformed, not only by the entry of minorities and women, but also by the creation of whole new subfields and by the transformation of canonical knowledge. The press owes whatever willingness it has to challenge authority to the New Left. A host of new political issues including abortion, gay marriage, and ecology occupy center stage. A moral revolution in the treatment of prisoners, the mentally ill, patients, and immigrants occurred. The churches, perhaps especially the Catholic Church, developed liberation theologies. The election of a black president in 2008, whatever his politics, testifies to the impact of the Civil Rights Movement. We are only at the beginning of understanding the full implications of the attack on patriarchy and on compulsory heterosexuality, and of the questions of identity that opened up in the early seventies.

The Marginalization of the New Left

Despite its many victories, however, the New Left is widely considered a failure today. Why? To answer that question we must first distinguish two different senses of "failure." In one sense the Left will always "fail" because it stands for quasi-utopian ideals that cannot be realized in the present. In another sense, however, the New Left failed in that it did not build a continuing, self-identified radical presence. In my view, neither this failure nor the rightward turn that followed the sixties was inevitable. Some have argued that if John F. Kennedy had not been assassinated he would have taken the country out of Vietnam. Other assassinations, including those of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Robert Kennedy, also played a role. In any event, the Left's goal of shaping the creation of a post-industrial world in an egalitarian direction became marginalized, even silenced.

The war in Vietnam was the turning point. By the late sixties, deficit spending to finance the war had weakened the American economy, and in the next decade industry was squeezed by the revival of Western Europe and Japan. In 1971 Nixon was forced to take the United States off the gold standard, which led to the creation of a vast international currency and capital market largely run by U.S. banks, insurance companies, and investors. As in Britain a century earlier, capitalists became rentiers, living off investments as opposed to production. Those who continued to invest in manufacturing were able to blame labor unions for inflation, and, with the threat of capital migrating, to enforce ever more capital-friendly contracts. New terms entered our language, including "deindustrialization," "rustbelt" and "downsizing." Although the country hovered between Left and Right throughout the seventies, by the end of the decade the idea of a permanent radical presence in

American life had been largely pushed aside.

When we examine the American liberal tradition against the background of this shift to the Right, its limitations become apparent. Since liberals had already signed on to the basic premises of the Right—the politics of growth as opposed to structural or redistributive reform, and the sanctity of anti-communism—they were unable to mount a full-throated alternative.

Observers of the seventies evoked an age of "limits," "diminished expectations," and "austerity." In fact, however, the Carter presidency opened into one of the great boom periods in American history for those with capital or "rents," i.e., monopoly claims on income, including licenses and degrees. Such individuals turned to wringing every cent possible out of wages and government, launching a tsunami of privatization, accomplishing enormous upward redistribution. With that came today's language of budgets and deficits, "efficiency," "competence," "waste," "accountability," and "affordability." At the same time, politicians of both parties won support through tax credits, easier mortgages, and other forms of "cheap," i.e., credit-financed, goods. The result was the now-familiar series of bubbles and financial crises, which began with the savings and loan debacle and the Latin American debt crises of the Reagan era, and which has culminated in the "Bernanke bubble," a huge transfer of credit to the banks, which inflated the stock market without restoring employment.

What my analysis adds to this story is how fundamental the marginalization of the Left has been to it. After all, the Left's job is to force the issue of injustice and mal-distribution of resources—"class struggle"—back into the public sphere. By the time of the Clinton presidency, when Thomas Frank moved to Washington D.C., he noted an "aversion, bordering on hatred, for the left, especially among Democrats," adding, "People who dominate discussions

in Democratic circles despise the left.” The Cultural Revolution was affirmed and the political Left degraded. Social equality was rejected, while diversity and meritocracy were applauded.

As Thomas Borstelmann explains in *The Seventies*, “Replacing the now clearly artificial hierarchies of race and sex . . . was a new hierarchy considered more natural: the sorting out of people in what were seen as their natural socioeconomic levels by the operation of the free market.” The result was the two-tier society we see today. Livingston describes this as the victory of the Left, because we hear much about racism, sexism, and gay liberation. But this is misleading because we hear about these problems in regard to meritocracy, and not equality.

What Does the Future Hold?

In recent years the realization that America is in a long-term crisis, requiring a new direction, has grown. Since 1989, the United States has missed three opportunities to reorient itself globally. After the fall of communism in 1989, the Clinton administration gave free rein to international banking, equating the new world order with

U.S. commerce. After September 11, 2001, when *Le Monde* wrote, “We are all Americans,” the United States launched the invasion of Iraq. In 2008 Obama was elected to correct for Bush’s disastrous missteps, but failed to change a worldview based on fear and actually worsened the disregard for civil liberties. How a nation responds to a trauma like September 11 is the best indication of its inner state. The United States responded by launching a mindless invasion and then swinging to the opposite extreme, rudderless passivity.

In spite of its marginalization, the Left has not disappeared. Two recent events indicate its present strength: the nomination of Barack Obama in 2008 and Occupy Wall Street in 2011. The left wing of the Democratic Party gave Barack Obama the nomination in 2008, not only because of the powerful symbolism involved in electing an African American president, but even more because of his insistence that the country needed a new mindset, not just new policies. Occupy Wall Street brought the language of class and social inequality back into American life, and gave the faltering 2012 Obama presidential campaign the language it needed for re-election. To be sure, both

of these events can be seen as failures, in that they created no lasting reforms, institutions, or directions, but that is precisely why we need not just inspired moments but also an ongoing Left. If we do not create such a Left, the present trends will continue, as they have under both parties, for decades. That may be Livingston’s idea of a happy solution, but it is not mine, nor that of a growing number of Americans.

Like Livingston, I revere the American tradition of individual rights and personal freedom, which has only a few counterparts elsewhere in the world. Unlike Livingston, however, I also revere the Left that grew out of that tradition. Three achievements of the American Left make it unusual on the stage of world history. The first is its robust *practice* of racial equality, extending into the intimate details of everyday life. The second is its vision of a form of social democracy that retains liberal values, including many aspects of the market. The third is its profound interrogation of gender and sexuality. If we try to build a politics on a liberal tradition bereft of these great moments, we build on sand. ■

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themselves. Activists first meet in affinity groups to clarify and define their groups’ position on particular issues facing the movement as a whole. After reaching a decision, the affinity group sends its spokesperson to the larger spokescouncil, which functions as a coordinating committee for the movement as a whole. In this way, decision-making swells from the bottom up. At the “non-top” of this non-hierarchy are recallable delegates who have no decision-making power at all. Through movement democracy, activists engage in face-to-face direct democracy, flexing and developing the democratic

muscles required for the radically new society to come.

Forms of movement democracy surfaced in the sixties but were further refined by anarchist wings of the U.S. anti-nuclear movement. The hub of the U.S. anti-nuclear movement was the Clamshell Alliance, a decentralized network of over eighty groups and organizations scattered throughout New England. The U.S. anti-nuclear movement was a particularly successful endeavor; it radically deterred the government’s grand plan to make the country 80 percent nuclear-reliant. Through organizing in opposition to nuclear arms and energy, activists created the country’s largest-ever network

of decentralized and horizontal decision-making bodies aimed at ridding the world of nuclear technology. The anti-nuclear movement popularized the idea that a movement could be built up out of many affinity groups that trained and worked together. The affinity groups of the 1970s and 1980s set the stage for Alter-Leftists committed to nonhierarchical and socially cohesive forms of movement democracy.

An Expressive New Protest Culture

The anti-nuclear movement was also marked by an expressive political sensibility. Its drum circles, public art

installations, and whimsical nonviolent direct actions captured the imagination of many throughout the world. In Seattle of 1999, a new set of leftist actors, agendas, non-structures, and post-hippy expressive sensibilities exploded like a confetti ball when the WTO came to town. Today, many associate Alter-Left demonstrations with the sky-high street puppets first pioneered in the 1970s by the Bread and Puppet Theater in Vermont. By 1999, David Solnit from Art and Revolution had begun working with Bread and Puppet artists, teaching young activists to craft the puppet-driven demonstrations so many have come to expect and enjoy.

For more than one rainy week, indigenous groups, peasants, workers unions, women's groups, anarchists, ecologists, anti-racism activists, and queers from around the world poured into Seattle to say "enough" to neoliberal non-democracy. Neoliberalism's grand meeting (real and metaphorical) was at least temporarily cancelled. As activists drummed on garbage cans and milk jugs, the Alter-Left chanted a collective "no" to the WTO.

After Seattle, a question arose: did the over-the-top aesthetic of the anti-WTO protest help or hinder the growing alter-globalization movement? Many in the country were alienated by these counter-cultural images, but on the other hand, the drumming, chanting, dancing, and puppetry helped capture journalists' attention. Undoubtedly, many journalists were determined to depict activists in violent terms, reinforcing notions of activists-as-criminals. Yet, the front pages of newspapers the world over were instead graced with images of activists in whimsical butterfly costumes (referencing studies on the toxic impacts of genetically modified foods on monarch butterflies). The expressive protest culture also helped assuage protesters' fears of the state's potentially violent response to activists' nonviolent actions, and participation in a common aesthetic helped forge a deep, if transient,

sense of political community. The celebratory protest culture of Seattle became a wellspring of inspiration for Alter-Leftists to come.

The Rise of Occupy Wall Street

A post-Seattle political culture propelled similar actions internationally, as people in Canada, Prague, Southern France, and Italy cultivated their own carnivalesque and nonviolent protest culture. Yet suddenly, out of nowhere, a plane zoomed into Manhattan. Then another. Death and more death ensued, now in the form of war with Iraq and Afghanistan.

When those planes destroyed the Twin Towers, they also shot through the blossoming center of the U.S. alter-globalization movement. The U.S. Alter-Left was hijacked by a McCarthy-like U.S. political culture that equated U.S. activism with terrorism. Although a fragmented anti-war movement did surface throughout the country, it tended to regress back into a top-down and colorless protest culture unable to capture the imagination and moral outrage of the U.S. populace.

And then, somehow, we found ourselves in the fall of 2011. The housing bubble burst as subprime mortgage loans went flying. Government bailed out Wall Street with our last cents. And there it was again: the U.S. Alter-Left, reborn in the form of Occupy Wall Street. That year, Occupy went national, then global. People from all corners of the Left enacted movement democracy, becoming the kind of democratic, self-governing, life-affirming revolutionaries the world needs now more than ever.

Sometimes, leftists must look at what we do—rather than at what we don't do—to understand the path we're on. What the more radical, far-flung Left has been up to is altering the Left, creating a newfangled version of something old, something new, something borrowed, and something that blew in all the way from Latin America.

For those who rightly note that the

Alter-Left is bereft of what the New Left was missing as well—a coherent revolutionary theory—we are justified in noting so. We have altered the U.S. Left's legacy of labor-centered theory. We have altered the old Left's lingering shadow that led activists to privilege the idea of "workers" as the key site of revolutionary action. Now altered, we move from a theory that privileged workers to a perspective attending to the many for whom the system simply isn't working (the 99 percent). While Occupy rightfully included union leaders and workers, it also welcomed the Alter-Left's cadre of homeless and unemployed people, youth, queers, students, climate justice activists, and racial justice activists, to name but a few.

We have indeed altered the methods of movement building and organizing, improvising decentralized, directly democratic networks of expressive activists who are willing to engage in civil disobedience and direct action. And we have tossed in all matters of ecology as we take stock of a dual disaster in the making—one humanitarian and one planetary. And we are indeed ready. All we need is a coherent revolutionary theory—a plan.

Those who brought us Seattle and Occupy Wall Street are young and old, ready to draw from the best of the old Left, the New Left, and the social movements that brought us the women's movement, black power, ecology, and the LGBTQ movements. We are ready to create an Alter-Left with revolutionary nerve.

The motto of the World Social Forum is "Another World Is Possible." The many who created the forum felt weighed down by a politics of refusal that could only say "no" to what it didn't want, entertaining only a vague sense of other possible worlds to come. The French expressed a similar desire to go beyond an "anti" politics captured in the term "anti-globalization." Creating instead a notion of *alter-mondialization* (alter-globalization), French activists captured the notion of alterity—or

an “otherness” built out of imaginative and humane possibility. This idea of alternate worlds—the notion that we can redeem humanity and the rest of the natural world through compassionate and intelligent human ingenuity—is breathtaking.

The Revolutionary Vision of Social Ecology

As we catch our breath together and conspire (which literally means to “breathe together”), we can draw insight and direction from the field of social ecology. For more than forty years, social ecologists from around the world have made a collective attempt to move the Alter-Left beyond our post-socialist impasse, toward a directly democratic, radically humane, and ecological society.

Social ecology offers four key principles upon which to ground political action: *horizontalism* (non-hierarchy), *direct democracy* (self-determination), *social justice*, and *ecology*. These principles are intentionally general, ready to be interpreted or adapted by diverse peoples around the world seeking to create a just and free society. Social ecology calls for unity in diversity; in this context, “unity” means shared commitment to these four principles, while “diversity” means each community is free to put its unique cultural stamp on the way each principle is translated into everyday life.

Putting this idea of unity in diversity into practice means incrementally transforming this existing (and failing) world of hierarchical states into a horizontal community of communities. This could assume the form of regional, continental, and even international confederations. In this way, each town, village, city, or neighborhood could enjoy a rich political life in which committed residents meet regularly in general assemblies to sculpt the political policies shaping their world. By engaging in face-to-face direct democracy, each community’s policy on education,

production, technology, or science, for instance, would be accountable to a common confederal constitution grounded in the four ethical principles stated above. What we today call “economy” would be determined by the general assembly as community residents (communalists) apply principles of horizontalism, direct democracy, social justice, and ecology to the way common goods are produced and distributed. In this way, this communalist project would seek to democratize the economy, shedding a capitalist economy that normalizes today’s dominant principles of individualism, exploitation, and hierarchy. By keeping ourselves accountable to these principles, social ecologists throughout the world seek to bring about a non-insurrectionary, socially just, democratic, and ecological revolution. Foundational theorist of social ecology Murray Bookchin did much to develop this vision of a “communalist project”—a vision for how to move away from our existing authoritarian and anti-ecological society and toward a just and harmonious one.

Social ecology provides a coherent revolutionary vision. Yet in its search for clarity, it provides neither a simplistic strategy reducible to a bumper sticker nor a rigid strategy reducible to a blueprint. Instead, it invites all of our communities to engage in conversations about how to apply its general principles to our particular cultures and places. Holistic movement building invites us to bring a logic of horizontalism, direct democracy, social justice, and ecology to a revolutionary process that will lead to a society that embodies those very values.

Worldwide, people are made miserable by capitalism, state tyranny, racism, sexism, heterosexism, ethnic hatred, and ecological destruction. The U.S. Alter-Left is well positioned to move our society away from this untenable position and toward a vision that allows humans and the rest of the natural world to flourish. It’s time to come together to create a broad-based popular

movement that valorizes and empowers local communities, while also working to create a global confederation of directly democratic communities linked together by a shared constitution. The way to build that movement is by starting a conversation in which we identify our shared principles, thinking through how to translate these principles into a political movement capable of transforming a society in much need of radical alteration.

The problem with the American Left is that it never cast its reach far left enough. It’s time to catch our breath, steady our nerves, and think ecologically as we dream our way to a world that is ours for the making. ■

VARON (continued from page 40)

this way, I reengage stubborn knots in the debate at hand and argue for a grand welcome as the best response to the question inspiring it.

One way to think of the Left is as a resolute and demanding liberalism, calling establishment liberals to honor their own stated convictions and policy agendas. As examples of such spine-stiffening gestures, one may think of grassroots advocates and MSNBC anchors pleading that Obama hold fast to the “public option” during health care debates, or climate change activists insisting that the Keystone XL pipeline is antithetical to a “green energy” policy. The Left is also a more or less reliable partner in what feels like a Popular Front every election cycle, mobilized to beat back a Republican Party increasingly dominated by plutocrats, nativists, and small government nihilists.

The Left, in addition, is commonly born from the doubt that adequate solutions to grave injustices are contained within existing liberalism. One may then struggle to expand liberalism’s portfolio, as LGBT people have done with respect to civil rights and Latinos are doing in regard to immigration and citizenship. Here the language of rights

and the presence of blocks of votes are especially resonant. Whether such ills as mass incarceration and the extended solitary confinement in U.S. prisons (about which there is scarcely a serious national dialogue) can become liberal causes remains to be seen, with all the potential for explosive social anger their neglect holds.

In a more intense register, the Left also emerges when liberal hypocrisy appears so profound that one doubts the integrity of liberal commitments altogether. Such doubt may be viscerally experienced as radical disenchantment, in which the rottenness of one's kingdom, extending even to the comparative good guys, becomes painfully apparent. Chastened several times over the years, I have felt this sting recently with respect to torture and the Obama administration's unwillingness to close Guantánamo and hold torturers to account. At stake has been nothing less than American fidelity to such bedrocks as the Magna Charta, due process, and human rights.

The Left as Prophetic Conscience

The consequence of such a damning verdict on one's country need not be cynicism or arrogance but instead passionate efforts to right a wrong. This space of prophetic conscience—with deep roots in the struggle against slavery that Zaretsky traces and a storied place in the modern Left—must be protected and not, as I fear Livingston might do, dismissed as mere moral vanguardism (were the saints the first Leninists?). Taking a cosmic view, whether by the dictates of a formal faith or appreciation for the long arc of the cause of secular freedom, may be the impetus for the kind of commitment that may change both lives and worlds.

Moreover, righting certain wrongs is hardly as simple, as Livingston suggests, as playing capture the flag and the U.S. Constitution. For years anti-torture activists have argued that

torture is illegal, immoral, and un-American, with a phalanx of retired generals agreeing. And yet, the crimes and sins persist. At such an impasse, at issue is not the integrity of the ideals themselves (due process and human rights) or the sincerity with which they are professed (though one sometimes wonders). Rather, the far more disturbing possibility is that the current exercise of American power, in the volume and qualities of violence necessary to maintain it, is incompatible with purportedly American values. This causes one to deeply consider the ethics of empire, with its economic predicates and sham justifications. In addition, the constitutional patriotism Livingston favors can work against itself. That is, protestations of the alleged greatness of the American idea, rather than spurring its deeper realization, can serve as a peculiar alibi for its sustained violation. Guantánamo is not “who we are,” Obama insists. Exonerated *in principle*, America is thus excused for doing little to align the reality with the ideal. Injustices other than torture may be similarly ignored by means of the very rhetorical operation Livingston presents as a panacea.

Interesting, then, has been the conspicuous activism of faith-based activists—most often coming out of a Catholic tradition of liberation theology and with a deep conviction in the innate divinity within human beings—in the campaign against torture. Indeed, within my experience, functional conversion to the political Left springs from a moral conviction about the need to bring about a world more consistent with one's most deeply held values. Personal experience transcending ideology, as disclosed by Michael S. Foley in his terrific study of activism in the 1970s and 1980s, is another great teacher, by which “accidental activists” responding to imminent threats to health, hearth, and home provide the core, local threads in a fabric of national resistance to the depredations of unchecked corporate and governmental power.

Uniting these two—a politics of abstract (if viscerally felt) morality, with a politics of circumstance—is likely our best future.

A Framework for Social Dreaming

Finally, I see the Left as a framework for what might be called “social dreaming”—both discursive and embodied articulations, often outside the traditional boundaries of political language and practice, that point toward utopian possibilities of a more radical freedom, equality, and justice. Each generation offers its own dreams for the future. Often appearing marginal or even crazy in their own day, they may be nurtured into widely shared values and desires at some tomorrow. In other words, today's radicals' exploration of direct democracy, mutual aid, and participatory economy may prove deeply prefigurative.

All the lefts specified above already exist, and America would be better off if each were stronger. And in my experience it is impossible to discern which is truest and best—most principled and effective in all contexts. Indeed, the impulses of diverse lefts commonly coexist within individual movements and within the heads and hearts of individual activists. Rather than being troubled or divided by this apparent inconsistency, I urge that we celebrate it as an enabling diversity. One may therefore praise Occupy as a kind of focus group in the streets that helped reelect Obama by persuading his campaign that “fairness” was a winning message, even before the gift of Romney's ludicrous “47 percent” remark. At the same time, one can cheer Occupy for reinvigorating militant direct action, opening a critical dialogue on capitalism as such and the implication of all sides in its ills, and experimenting with new conceptions of democracy. Countless other movements likewise combine pragmatic effect and idealist intent, or this-worldly and other-worldly politics.

It is, in sum, both prudent and right to invite all potential comers into the big tent of a dynamic and pluralistic liberal-Left political faith, where principled disagreements will doubtless persist. There, the revivalists can mingle freely among diverse ideologies, cultures, musics, sermons, strategies, and tactics. If the effect of the question “Does America need a Left?” is to argue for the exclusion of the wrong people with the wrong kind of politics, then it corrodes our cause. If, however, the question serves as beacon to join the party, then I’m glad someone thought to ask it. ■

EPSTEIN *(continued from page 43)*

good. Socialists, anarchists, and other radical tendencies would be welcome in such a coalition but on an equal plane with other participants. No tendency should expect to be accorded leadership.

The possibility of forming such a coalition is greater than it was a decade or so ago, because what remains of the Left is on the whole saner. In the late sixties and early seventies, in the context of a mass movement with radical overtones against the War in Vietnam, and in the context of Maoism and other revolutionary movements in the Third World, many on the Left thought that almost any kind of radical change was possible, even in the United States, virtually overnight. Some envisioned armed struggle and a seizure of the state; others believed that the culture and the alternative institutions of the Left would prove so attractive that mainstream society would lose its constituency and deflate like a punctured balloon. The experience of participation in the movements of the late sixties and early seventies was so intense that these and similar ideas remained as widely held conceptions of radical politics even after the war had ended, Maoism lost its appeal, and the influence of the Left in this country contracted.

In recent years in the United States,

many of the bad ideas once widely held on the Left have faded. No one talks about building vanguard parties or about armed seizure of the state. The variety of identity politics that focused on accusing one’s fellow leftists of racism and sexism has largely been replaced with an emphasis on building coalitions. Few on the Left think that anyone who is against the United States is therefore an ally. It has come to be widely recognized that the U.S. government is not responsible for everything bad that happens in the world. The view of unity as inherently oppressive has largely disappeared, along with the idea that fragmentation and division necessarily promote liberation and should be encouraged. The idea that a marginalized status is radical and desirable is still expressed, but there is nevertheless wide recognition that a movement of the Left that pursues marginality is not likely to have much influence. The disappearance of these and similar ideas helps to clear the ground for rebuilding the Left. ■

ARONOWITZ *(continued from page 48)*

and continuous demonstrations, rather than the usual one-day marches and low-wage worker strikes. Without a political formation it would be virtually impossible to build a global movement for social change that would address crucial issues such as immigration, war and hunger.

Leaving the Past Behind

We are still in the thrall of the experience of the 1960s. The Marxist-Leninist Left had suffered enormous losses at the hands of the federal government and its right-wing allies. The famous 1956 Khrushchev report of Stalin’s crimes had resulted in the disillusionment of a large fraction of the Communist Party—the leading organization of the Left since the late 1920s—and its considerable periphery. Therefore, the New Left embarked on organizing

a non-party series of social movements, especially the anti-Vietnam War movement. The reinvigorated Black Freedom Movement determined that its first task was to attain civil rights. In the process it laid aside the struggle for economic equality and settled for social integration and education access as the next best strategies. The second-wave feminist movement was born and its legacy was, in many ways, radical, but it too refused to undertake a basic critique of capitalism at a time when the opportunity structure seemed open. But the ’60s are history. Capital has refused further social reform; on the contrary, it now insists on a return to the 1920s as a condition of its own viability. If the Left refuses this relentless assault on popular needs, it urgently needs organization that does not rely on single issues. It requires a comprehensive vision.

One of the crucial barriers to the emergence of a vital Left is that many leftists have a fear of putting their money where their sentiments lie. As we should know but seem to have forgotten, you can’t publish books, pamphlets, newspapers, film, and videos or establish schools without money. And a movement needs organizers who must be paid. All manner of past radical movements placed primary emphasis for the costs of operations on their own members and sympathizers. This is an era when community organizations rely heavily on foundations and rich individuals who have their own priorities to which, at the risk of losing support, the community organizations must submit, at least in part. In this respect the Left needs to learn a lesson from the labor movement. From the start, the unions could not rely on capital to support them. They were self-financed. As a member of my union, I am required to pay 1 percent of my gross salary to support the employees and other functions of the union. In sum, the new political formation must be self-financed or it will be a supplicant of the ultra rich. Is this a tall order? Yes, but so is societal transformation. ■

a popular front alongside liberals, had wasted their efforts and played into their enemy's hands.

But what the corporate liberalism thesis gave in explanatory clarity, it took away in morale. What kind of political engagement could avoid the dreaded fate of co-option by the impressively—sometimes seemingly omnisciently—flexible “corporate liberals”? The answer that Sklar and his comrades initially came up with focused on the foundation of a new, explicitly socialist political party, a project whose fate can be guessed and need not detain us further here.

An Inversion of the Corporate Liberalism Thesis

Perhaps the best way to understand James Livingston's essay in this issue of *Tikkun* is as a mirror image of Sklar's “corporate liberalism.” This is not surprising, seeing as Livingston was part of a generation of radical scholars mentored by Sklar in the 1970s at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb.

The corporate liberalism theorists focused on the need for socialists to identify themselves explicitly in order to acquire distinction vis-à-vis their enemies, the liberals. Livingston, on the other hand, vehemently denies that “the development of socialism” requires a “resolute cadre of leftists dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism.” According to Livingston, there can be, and apparently is, socialism without (formally organized and self-identified) socialists.

Sklar, Weinstein, and other corporate liberalism theorists reinterpreted apparent Left victories—like the Progressive Era reforms and the New Deal—as Left defeats. Conversely, Livingston reinterprets apparent moments of Left defeat—especially the last thirty years—as moments of victory. To the corporate liberalism theorists, the Communist Party's Popular Front

strategy epitomized the Left's failure to distinguish itself from the American mainstream; to Livingston, it is a salutary example of how the Left can speak “American.” The pattern should be clear.

Neither Victory Nor Defeat Is Inevitable

In Livingston's framing, are liberal gains *de facto* seen as Left victories? If so, my sense is that among my friends and colleagues, Livingston's arguments will arouse suspicion as covertly quietist: not the usual quietism that derives from a sense of political defeat as *inevitable*, but a curious strain of quietism, the impotence of which follows from the sense that *defeat* is impossible.

Is my wording too strong? Read what Livingston writes right after he has acknowledged the power of the post-1960s Right: “But, historically speaking, this ‘conservative’ bid to derail the train to Jordan is a bad bet, a losing proposition.” Here, despite his strictures against orthodox Marxism, Livingston has apparently embraced the vernacular of the Second International (for example, Edouard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky, among others: the oft-scorned “inevitalists” who usually serve, in radical historiography, as placeholders marking time between the innovations of Karl Marx's First International and the political achievements of the Third International). Livingston invokes the Messianic teleology (“train to Jordan”) secularized into a vision of politics proceeding like the Trans-Siberian Express, en route from Vladivostok to Moscow, its inevitable progress guaranteed by a history against which bets can be scored in advance.

Even granting all that Livingston has to say about the American past, why is he so certain that the Right cannot win this time? The best answer I can come up with is that he's making a pragmatist effort to encourage positive thinking, the way a cognitive behavioral therapist

might encourage a patient consumed by negative thoughts to look for silver linings and hope for the best. There are no doubt studies showing that positive thinking and a healthy self-regard can be beneficial, even (or maybe especially) when those attitudes have no actual ground. Maybe there's something to this; it's certainly more interesting to read Livingston than a standard-issue Left pessimist. But I can't help but worry that in distancing himself from New Left “corporate liberal” theory, Livingston has traded abject defeatism for its opposite, offering a one-sided reversal rather than seeking the moment of partial truth that underwrote the young Sklar's pessimism.

Looking Ahead

The future fortunes of the Right and the Left are not guaranteed by history. Their determinants must be sought somewhere else. We need to theorize which social forces will be crucial to a Left victory and figure out how to support them. This may or may not involve organizing along explicitly socialist lines. But it will involve organizing, and it will involve risks. In *Dawn and Decline*, theorist Max Horkheimer wrote:

But if skepticism is bad, certainty is no better. The illusion that the advent of the socialist order is of the same order of necessity as natural events is hardly less of a danger to correct action than is skeptical disbelief. If Marx did not prove socialism, he did show that capitalism harbors developmental tendencies which make it possible. Those interested in it know at what points they must attack.

I do not share Horkheimer's confidence that we know where to attack, but I agree that if we want change we will need to mount attacks. For that, we need a different sense of what the Left has been, and what it continues to be, than that provided by Livingston. ■

Joe Louis's Fist

1.

After the sun rose into rust between gravel and horizon,
after the scent of you oxidized the steel of my car going
into the lidocaine of the morning air as the highway slid

into northeast Detroit past Chill & Mingle,
I did a double-take and took a wrong turn at Rim Repair.
(Long ago my father said I should see the fist).

No one spoke Swahili on 12th Street, still rubble
after the blind pigs folded up.
It was a cliché of the image of itself but it was, it was

like nothing, the vacant burned-out bungalows, car parts,
metal scraps
arson jobs, abandoned homes, barbed wire playgrounds,
shacks pummeled along Six Mile Road—derelict since '67.

2.

My father said when Louis won, the radio static was a wave
of sound that stayed all night like the riots blocks away in
Harlem,
as the scent of lilac and gin wafted down Broadway to his
window

across from the Columbia gates where the sounds of
Fletcher Henderson and Dizzy buzzed the air,
where the mock Nazi salutes were shadows over the

granite lions and snake-dancing, and car horns
banged the tar and busted windshields,
even coffee shops south of 116th were looted.

3.

It came back in fragments—through the gauze
of the summer of love, through Lucy in the Sky
and other amnesias; streets of burnt-out buildings,

paratroopers bivouacked in high schools with gas and
bayonets.

By 6 a.m. July 23 national guards were walking
in the rain of black cinder and pillars of smoke—

a black body hanging from a fence of an auto part yard,
whisky-faced boys shooting through the fire
as torn bags of loot trailed the streets.

Prostitutes used pool cues to defend themselves.
Booze and cartridge smoke ate their skin.
One trooper said it looked like Berlin in '45.

4.

Samson, David, and Elijah in one left hook
my father said, (6/22/38) upbraided Neville Chamberlain
liberated Austria and Sudetenland

knocked the lights out in Berlin—
sent Polish Jews into the boulevards
for one night of phantasmal liberation.

Because Hitler banned jazz, because Black Moses led
crowds and crowds to the marvelous, inscrutable,
overwhelming
balked dreams of revenge, millions seeped out of doorways,
alleys, tenements—

dreaming of the diamond pots, of Chrysler heaven,
the golden girls of Hollywood and Shirley Temple
who rubbed some salt into his hands for luck.

Untermensch from Alabama—
sucker for the right hand—the other side of Hailee Salisee
black men howled to him from their electric chairs.

5.

When I drove past Berry Gordy Jr. Boulevard
and the Hitsville USA sign on the studio-house,
the lights were out and I could only

imagine the snake pit where Smokey Robinson
spun into vinyl, where “Heat Wave”
came as sweet blackmail in the beach air of '64,

where the Funkbrothers and Martha Reeves
took the mini opera and dumped it on its head.

By the time I hit Jefferson and Woodward
the sun was glaring on the high windows.
and then it hit me—spinning the light—

horizontal two-foot arm smashing the blue
through the empty pyramid holding it up
in the glare of skyscraper glass: molten

bronze-hand, hypotenuse of history,
displaced knuckles—

the smooth-casting over the gouged-out wounds—
the naked, beloved, half-known forms.

—Peter Balakian

The Legend of How the *Tao Te Ching* Came Into Being on Laotse's Journey Into Exile

When he was seventy and fragile,
the Teacher felt compelled to seek repose,
for the Good within the land was on the wane,
and Evil gaining strength again.
So he drew on his shoe.

And he packed up things that he might need,
not much, but still there was this and that—
the pipe he smoked each evening,
the little book he always read,
and what he might need of bread.

Enjoyed for one last time the valley and then
forgot it as he took the mountain path.
And his ox enjoyed the fresh green grass,
munching, as he bore the Old Man on his back.
For slow was fast enough for him.

But on the fourth day out, in scree and stone,
the customs officer barred his way.
“Any valuables to declare?” “None.”
And the boy who led the ox spoke up: “He taught me.”
So that was then declared.

But the man, his eyes lighting up, went on to ask,
“So what exactly did you learn?”
And the boy replied: “That water, though it's soft,
in time wears down the hardest rock.
What's hard gives way, you see.”

In order not to lose the day's remaining light,
the boy now led the ox along.
And the three had disappeared
behind the firs when suddenly our man
ran after, shouting: “Hey, you there! Halt!”

“What's this about the water, Old Man?”
The Old Man halted: “That interests you?”
Said the man: “I'm just a customs officer,
but who conquers who, that interests me.
So if you know, then speak!”

“Write it down! Dictate it to this boy!
A thing like that can't be allowed to leave
the country. We have paper here, and ink,
and supper, too. I live yonder.
Could you ask for more?”

Looking over his shoulder, the Old One
took in the man: patched jacket, barefooted,
a single furrow for a forehead.
Ah, the man who came toward him was no winner.
And he murmured: “So, you too?”

To decline a courteous invitation
the Old Man was, it seems, too old.
For he said, aloud: “Those who ask deserve
an answer.” Said the boy: “It's getting cold.”
“Good. We'll rest awhile.”

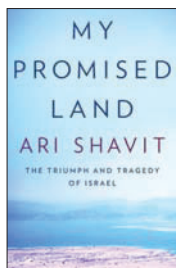
And the Wise One got down off his ox
and the two together wrote for seven days,
the customs officer bringing them their meals
(the whole time cursing smugglers beneath his breath).
And then the work was done.

And one morning the boy handed over to the officer
the sayings—eighty-one of them. And, having given
thanks for a little travel gift, the Old Man
and the boy descended through those pines and on.
Can one be more courteous than this?

But let us not sing the praise alone of him
whose book of sayings bears his name!
For one must first extract the wisdom from the Wise.
Therefore the customs officer should be thanked, as well.
He made him hand it over.

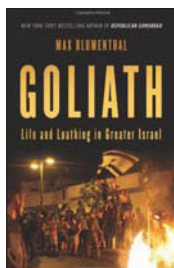
—Bertolt Brecht, translated by Jon Swan

Tikkun RECOMMENDS



My Promised Land

Ari Shavit
Spiegel & Grau,
2013



Goliath

Max Blumenthal
Nation Books,
2013



The Negotiator

Gershon Baskin
The Toby Press,
2013

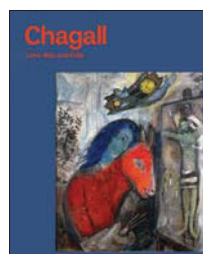
Read Ari Shavit and then Max Blumenthal and you get some idea of why it is so impossible to find a balanced account of Israel. Shavit is a journalist for the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, and he presents the perspective of the center-right in Israel, which is currently the mainstream perspective there. Shavit, a master storyteller, romanticizes Israeli history and presents a picture of Israel that thrills apologists by contextualizing all that is hurtful in ways that soften moral outrage. And yet, for those of us at *Tikkun* who love Israel, even while detesting its policies toward Palestinians, Bedouins, and other minorities, there is much in the story that rings true, because Shavit captures and highlights the remarkable story of a people crawling out of the death camps and managing to create a vibrant society capable of absorbing millions of Jewish refugees. Shavit acknowledges that most Israelis today do not see the suffering caused by the Occupation as urgent but are instead worried only about Iran. Shavit, however, also sees Iran as an “existential danger” to the survival of Israel and therefore lionizes Netanyahu’s militarist approach to the problem.

Max Blumenthal, on the other hand, highlights all of Israel’s darkest sides, and his book is at once depressing and likely to cause outrage. In his narrative, the oppression of Palestinians and the increasing intensity of Israeli racism (which has become widespread in recent years and is sometimes expressed as a desire to expel Palestinians) are discussed with an urgency that is sadly lacking in Israel, in the American Jewish community, and indeed in the mainstream of American politics (even among those who are otherwise liberal or progressive). He demonstrates how little change has been accomplished by “well-educated Ashkenazi teens inserting themselves into frontline combat units to civilize their less cultivated, lower-class peers from Mizrahi and Russian backgrounds.” And Blumenthal laments that “many members of the Zionist left still claim to revere the late Israeli writer Yeshayahu Leibowitz, but few are willing to heed his . . . call for Israeli youth to refuse army service, to organize mass revolt or risk becoming assassins.” Blumenthal does not account for what in Israeli society or Judaism has helped to inspire those young people who have indeed followed Leibowitz’s advice and put their lives at risk in order to challenge Israeli militarism and chauvinism from within. Nor does he give attention to the heroic work of Rabbi Arik Ascherman, Rabbis for Human Rights, B’Tselem, or the many groups concerned with dialogue, reconciliation, and empowerment of Israeli Palestinians that are supported by the New Israel Fund. Nowhere in Blumenthal’s account does one feel an inch of sympathy for the Jewish people or an awareness of the ways in which our collective post-traumatic stress disorder has led us down this destructive path. In this way it fails to engage with the powerful insight offered by Rabbi Michael Lerner in his 2012 book, *Embracing Israel/Palestine*: that PTSD has distorted the perceptions of many Israelis (just as it has distorted the perceptions of many Palestinians), leading each side to despair about the other.

If we keep the stories from both Shavit and Blumenthal in our minds at once, we can start to get a picture of the complexity of the current reality

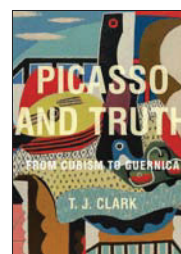
in Israel and Palestine—though little to provide us with a ground for hope. Yet Blumenthal’s piercing outrage, if felt by enough Americans, might help us break through the pious self-righteousness of the American Jewish community, which is deeply ensconced in self-satisfied denial of the realities of daily life in Israel. And Blumenthal’s narrative might also help energize a younger generation of activists who are pushing J Street to stop lobbying in favor of expanded budgets for the Israeli military, which it has presumably been doing to gain enough credibility within the Jewish community so as to be able to support the Obama administration’s weak-kneed efforts for a peace agreement.

After reading these two books, look at Gershon Baskin’s account of his role in freeing Gilad Shalit, the Israel Defense Forces soldier captured by Hamas and held for years in Gaza. Baskin’s courage and persistence demonstrate how an American who became an Israeli peace activist has actually had a profound impact. His story strengthens the argument that 100,000 American Jewish peace and social justice activists moving to Israel could have a great impact in challenging the psychology of fear that fosters the worldview of racism and domination that continues to distort daily life in Israel. But such an effort will only succeed if the activists bring with them a peace-oriented Jewish spiritual worldview, which none of these books is able to articulate.



Chagall: Love, War, and Exile

Susan Tumarkin
Goodman
Yale University Press
and the Jewish Museum
of New York, 2013



Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica

T.J. Clark
Princeton University
Press, 2013

Chagall and Picasso are two artists from the midst of what has been called Europe’s darkest age: the twentieth century, an age of violence unprecedented in human history. These two beautiful art books offer striking presentations of some of their works in rich color on oversized pages. Though Chagall and Picasso created art in response to the realities of their time, they both also held onto some of the sensibilities of the nineteenth century. Clark argues that “many of the artists who matter most in the twentieth century still lived instinctively within the limits of bourgeois society” and that “this was why their art took a retrogressive form.” Referencing both Picasso’s *Guernica* and *Nude in a Black Armchair*, Clark notes that the intertwining of “pain and abandon, panic and orgasm, or self-loss and self-absorption,” is basic to Picasso’s worldview.

Susan Tumarkin Goodman highlights the darkest period in Marc Chagall’s life, perhaps unintentionally challenging the view of Chagall as a romanticist selling cheap views of East European Jewry to a growing market for nostalgia. Moving to Paris in 1923, partly to escape the anti-Semitism of his Russian youth, Chagall was shocked by the return of virulent anti-Semitism in France and “began to create remarkable images of Jewish suffering and persecution.” What is most striking about this book is its exploration of how Chagall produced paintings of Jesus’s crucifixion as an expression of the Holocaust, even while understanding that one source of anti-Semitism was the belief that the Jews had caused the crucifixion.



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