I WANT YOU

President Trump makes a pitch to African American voters

p.40
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One of the things that appealed to me was the academic rigor of Union. I was looking for a Christian school that would push and challenge me. Union does that. Plus, coming from the personalized education of homeschooling was a really smooth transition. Union really does value each student.

LEAH BUSLER
public relations major
Chandler, Arizona

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HOW IS CORONAVIRUS AFFECTING LIFE IN CHINA?

“...Meanwhile, some schools are forging ahead with ‘online learning’ (a fancy name for simply assigning, receiving, and assessing work via e-mail), others are extending their end-of-the-year dates, and some are doing both. And while public buses continue to run, they’re all completely empty.”

—A source in eastern China whom WORLD has granted anonymity for safety reasons

HOW TO CONTACT US

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BUILDINGS WITH BAGGAGE

It’s nice to hear some good news about the abortion issue. Our enemies are Satan and his deceptions, not deceived and hurting human beings. Unless we fully acknowledge the pain others face and continue to help them, we will never stop abortion.

JAN. 18, P. 32—
LIZ JONES ON WNG.ORG

THE AERONAUTS

I was pretty disappointed with the lack of historical truth in a movie claiming to be “Based on a true story.” And once again, the woman comes out all tough and fabulous while the man lies useless in a corner.

JAN. 18, P. 21—REBECCA RABON ON FACEBOOK

BLESSINGS BY THE DOZEN

I loved your article on the Guess family. My parents, David and Laurie Guess, have 10 children and 15 grandkids so far. My dad also serves as a pastor, we too owned a station wagon before upgrading to a van, and one of my brothers served as an associate pastor under our father. The many similarities made my day!

JAN. 18, P. 59—ESTHER GUESS ON FACEBOOK

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION—OR ELSE

Affirmative action is “messed up” not only when government is the enforcer. As one who worked in human resources for many years, I saw how affirmative action is often reverse discrimination at its core.

JAN. 18, P. 4—DON WILKINSON ON WNG.ORG

CORRECTIONS

A group of eight Methodist bishops and eight church and lay leaders recommended dividing the United Methodist Church into two denominations (“Machen’s miracles, Methodists’ morality,” Feb. 15, p. 66).

Terrisa Bukovinac became involved with a friend’s online-based startup, Secular Pro-Life, in 2012. She participated with Consistent Life Network in a nonleadership role (“Unconventional ally,” Feb. 15, p. 68).

The author of Special God is Julie Melilli (“Picture perfect,” Feb. 1, p. 30).

SEEKING A FREE SOCIETY

Thank you for the interesting interview with libertarians Elise Daniel and Taylor Barkley. It is refreshing to see WORLD represent the variety of political viewpoints Christians hold.

JAN. 18, P. 26—JULIE LAWRENCE/NEW YORK, N.Y.

LOSE THE HISTORY WARS

Academia and the media have control of the message in America, and it is not pro-life. We need an army of pro-life writers to challenge every book and article that misrepresents our work. We need to hold the media accountable.

JAN. 18, P. 44—LOIS KERSCHEN/WAXAHACHIE, TEXAS

A LONG SLIDE

The Catholic Church’s “pedophile problem” turned out to be gay priests with young boys. Now in recent years the Boy Scouts have enrolled openly homosexual boys, allowed gay adult leaders, and enrolled transgender youths. Predictably, BSA has been sued for sexual abuse while thousands leave the organization. Satan has been working overtime here.

JAN. 18, P. 48—RICHARD FOGDALL/THE SEA RANCH, CALIF.

LESLIE HAHS ON FACEBOOK

We have three boys in Scouts and love what they learn in their troop and through their activities. It’s not perfect, but we are in rural America with no other scouting options. In our neck of the woods, Scouts are still respected for their service and patriotism.

JAN. 18, P. 32—LIZ JONES ON WNG.ORG

BOB CREMER ON WNG.ORG

We might be losing the history wars now, but the next generation is less enslaved to the lies of abortion backers. Advances in science show the reality of the baby, so abortion supporters are reduced to arguing about the competing rights of the mother and the pre-born baby. The real war is going in the right direction.

JAN. 18, P. 32—LIZ JONES ON WNG.ORG

SEEKING A FREE SOCIETY

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JAN. 18, P. 26—JULIE LAWRENCE/NEW YORK, N.Y.
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Enhances Retention with Hands-On Activities
Wholesome Classic Literature
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Notes from the CEO  KEVIN MARTIN

Calling on the prayers of tens of thousands

Please pray that God will give healing, peace, and encouragement to an ailing encourager

BEFORE YOU GO ON, would you please take a moment to pray for our friend and brother Joel Belz?

Joel’s battle with Parkinson’s disease is becoming increasingly difficult, as battles with Parkinson’s always do. He has fought the disease valiantly, and continues to fight. Up until recently, part of that fight was working in his office here in Asheville every day. For the past few weeks, he has had to eliminate that part of his routine as he devotes most of his energy and strength to physical therapy.

Joel’s continuing work in the office has been one part of his ongoing fight against the disease, but it’s far more than that. His presence here means so much to our staff. Even in his own health struggles, Joel is an encourager.

Joel’s work in the office also is encouraging to him. To see the vitality of the work he started, and to hear from WORLD’s readers and listeners who benefit from that work—those things strengthen Joel’s heart.

Which brings me back to my request: Please pray for Joel today, and for Carol Esther, Joel’s wife. We trust that our faithful Father will incline His ear toward the prayers of hundreds of thousands of believers, on behalf of Joel and Carol Esther, for the glory of God.

PRAY THAT GOD WILL GIVE JOEL THE ABILITY TO RETURN TO THE ACTIVITIES THAT DELIGHT HIM.

Please be bold to pray for Joel’s healing, his strength and energy, and his encouragement in Christ. Pray also for Carol Esther’s strength, as she bears Joel’s burdens for him. Pray for their peace, that God will give Joel the ability to return to the office and to the other activities that delight him, even if only for a while. Pray that they will draw near to God, as God draws near to them, and that God will move many to encourage the two of them, and their family, as they go through this trial. Pray what we read in the beginning of the book of James, that this testing will produce steadfastness in Joel and Carol Esther and all those who love them and that their steadfastness will “have its full effect,” that they “may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

I’ve never been more grateful that God has put me in a place that allows me to call on the prayers of tens of thousands of my own brothers and sisters. I’m calling on those prayers now, on behalf of Joel Belz, for God’s glory, and I’m thankful knowing that you will offer your prayers when you read this.

If you would like to send a note of encouragement to Joel, please send it to me at the email address below. I’ll make sure he gets it.

KEVIN MARTIN
EMAIL kevin@wng.org

KEVIN MARTIN
As a child, Maren Hamm was diagnosed with late-stage Lyme disease, a condition that confined her to a wheelchair for eight years. Today, Maren walks and functions normally. How? She discovered God’s healing grace through a God-ordained trip to Colorado and Charis Bible College. She has been miraculously healed of every symptom!

After her healing, Maren and her mother and sister enthusiastically moved to beautiful Woodland Park, Colorado, to attend Charis Bible College.

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Reforming Trump

Some random contacts offer ideas

O say that President Donald Trump marches to his own drummer is to cut off debate before it even begins. You may or may not like the way he’s gone about things—but either way, you’re pretty much forced to agree that his has been a unique approach.

But just suppose that one of his aides were to email you this week to say: “The president is seeking some thoughtful outside-the-box thinking. If you had the ability and power to change just one thing about his administration, what would it be?”

Fantasy? Perhaps. But I was intrigued. So I emailed several dozen folks, randomly drawn from my laptop’s address book, and asked that very question. And for each suggestion, I also asked: “Is this issue so important that, without such a change, you might well vote for Trump’s opponent next November? Or might you say that other benefits of Trump’s leadership will probably prompt you to vote for him with or without that change?”

I was impressed by the number and the immediacy of the responses. Here are some samples.

“I would prefer that the administration be more outspokenly sympathetic to the plight of illegal immigrants, particularly to women and children. Other than that, I have no problems with the administration as such. I do have problems with Trump personally: his childish tweets, arrogance, and self-centeredness. But his appointments have been spectacular, so I’ll vote for him again.”

“Mr. Trump doesn’t seem to possess either personal humility or national humility. He spent the State of the Union address basically bragging. At one point he gave some credit to Congress, but not much. He seems to see everything through a lens of money—the love of money.”

“I would direct him to act like a gentleman at all times, which would mean, among other things, that he would eschew boasting, treat all other people respectfully, and not demean them.”

“Trump has a big ego, and he fights like a junkyard dog. But he fights to win, and he could not care less what the rest of Washington thinks. I say more power to him, because I don’t see anyone else out there with the confidence and the backbone to shake the status quo like he has.”

“I would immediately find the resources—money and manpower—to prepare for the next immigration crisis at the Mexican border. I only saw chaos in the handling of the crisis, which was shameful. PR needs to show order and compassion in words and pictures. I am sure we can get ahead of the game, and avoid another disaster at the border.”

“Trump’s overall character. That includes his demeaning lawmakers, world leaders, reporters, and various minorities in his speeches, tweets, and live events. His character has made a mockery of the office, and made it into what I think he really wanted—a reality show. … I can take the partisan nature of our democracy. But I really feel his presidency has only contributed to its falling to new lows.”

“That he himself were capable of demonstrating integrity and honesty—and a commitment to heal partisan divides. (I did not vote for Trump last time. But I also did not vote for his opponent. This time, I may well vote for his opponent. It would be the first time I have voted for a Democrat in a presidential election.)”

Note well! There’s nothing scientific or statistically valid about this relatively tiny sample of the folks in my address book. But I’ve been around long enough to suggest that little pictures like these, taken cautiously, are better predictors of what lies down the road than you might first think. There are lots of nuances.

Only two of these seven respondents said they were still open to voting for Trump’s opponent. Check out that ratio over the next nine months! But while you’re doing those calculations, consider also how a nation’s loss of a consensus on important issues can be felt even in our personal address books.
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Teflon and toxicity
A momentous week in Washington brings acquittal for Trump, angst for Democrats, and acrimony for many

by Jamie Dean

As Patricia Schroeder cooked eggs for her children one morning in 1983, the Democratic congresswoman from Colorado contemplated her nonstick pan and created a moniker for President Ronald Reagan.

In a speech on the House floor, Schroeder called Reagan a “Teflon” president—nothing seemed to stick to him. Schroeder didn’t mean it as a compliment, but the nickname stuck. Admirers of Reagan later said he transcended criticism in part because of his calm demeanor.

Few would likely attribute President Donald Trump’s ability to survive
controversy to a calm demeanor, but as the Senate acquitted him of impeachment charges on Feb. 5, Trump's popularity rating hit 49 percent—the highest since he took office.

Democrats had a stickier week: Democratic Party officials in Iowa botched the state's first-in-the-nation contest for the Democratic presidential nomination. It took nearly a week for officials to declare Pete Buttigieg the winner of the most delegates in the contest. Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., finished a close second.

In New Hampshire, Sanders narrowly prevailed on Feb. 11, while Buttigieg came in second. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn, finished just behind Buttigieg, setting up a potential showdown for voters looking for an alternative to Sanders.

The candidates now face a southern swing that will test their ability to woo a critical voting bloc: African Americans. Despite a poor showing in early primaries, former Vice President Joe Biden has registered high support among black voters.

African Americans have overwhelmingly supported Democratic candidates for decades, but President Trump used his State of the Union address on Feb. 4 to serve up a direct pitch to black supporters (see p. 40).

He also welcomed Venezuelan President Juan Guaidó, amid Venezuela’s continued breakdown and Guaidó’s inability to oust dictator Nicolás Maduro. Hours after Guaidó’s appearance in Washington, D.C., Maduro’s intelligence service reportedly moved five Americans from house arrest to a Caracas prison.

The Maduro regime has detained the five U.S. citizens and one legal resident for more than two years. Officials charged the Citgo employees with corruption but haven’t given them a trial date.

In China, the deadly coronavirus continued to menace locked-down cities, and thousands of passengers on a cruise ship in Japan remained quarantined after the virus spread to 135 people aboard the vessel.

AS 2020 UNFOLDS, WHAT CAN CHRISTIANS DO IN AN OFTEN-NOXIOUS ENVIRONMENT?

Meanwhile, England unstuck itself from the European Union, as the first stages of Brexit officially began.

Back in the United States, politics promised to remain sticky as the 2020 presidential elections began in earnest. If Trump continues his streak as a kind of Teflon president, it’s worth remembering a notable trait of Teflon: It isn’t indestructible. At extremely high temperatures, Teflon can break down and release fumes. People inhaling the fumes can fall ill with symptoms that mimic the flu.

When Trump attended the National Prayer Breakfast the morning after his Senate acquittal, the high heat of impeachment and anger at his political foes boiled over.

Arthur Brooks, a Catholic and a former president of the conservative American Enterprise Institute, pleaded with the audience to pursue civility with each other and reminded them of Jesus’ words: “Love your enemies.”

When Trump took the stage, he quipped, “Arthur, I don’t know if I agree with you.” He used the first part of the prayer event to hail his vindication and lash out at his foes. (He also took an apparent swipe at Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, the only GOP senator to vote against acquittal.)

Democrats had displayed their own toxicity earlier in the week: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., dramatically ripped up her copy of Trump’s State of the Union address after he delivered the remarks to Congress.

As 2020 unfolds, what can Christians do in an often-noxious environment? One idea: We can pray we won’t release toxic fumes ourselves. Under the high heat of political disagreements, even with other believers, we can remember the Bible’s teaching about how God designs to use heat in a Christian’s life: to burn off dross and bring out gold.

It won’t be painless, but it can bring glory to God.
The number of games in which the Royals came from behind to win during the 2015 World Series. The Royals won the series 4 games to 1 against the New York Mets.

THE NUMBER OF GAMES the 2020 Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs won in the postseason after trailing by double digits, an NFL record. The 2007 New York Giants came from behind to win four games in the postseason but had not trailed by double digits in any of those games. Other Super Bowl champions have come from behind to win three postseason games, but none had come back from more than one double-digit deficit. The Chiefs, after 10 games this season, had a 6-4 record before winning nine straight games to claim the Super Bowl title.
Russians get a little too cozy out in space

LIKE A PAIR OF HIGH-TECH BOND VILLAINS, two Russian satellites appear to be following an American one. U.S. Space Force commander Gen. John “Jay” Raymond said the Russian spacecraft have several times in the past few months come within 100 miles of the U.S. orbiter, which is used to gather intelligence. “This is unusual and disturbing behavior and has the potential to create a dangerous situation in space,” he said in a statement to Business Insider. Raymond added that the United States has raised diplomatic concerns about the incident. Supporters of the new Space Force said the incident proves the need for the new agency. The White House requested $15 billion for the Space Force in its latest budget proposal.

FACEBOOK ANNOUNCED it will pay $550 million to settle a lawsuit over its use of facial recognition technology. Facebook users in Illinois brought the case, claiming that the company’s service, Tag Suggestions, violates the Illinois biometric privacy law. The law states that all companies must receive written permission to collect a person’s facial scan or other biological identifiers. Facebook’s Tag Suggestions uses face-matching software to identify the names of people in photos. The Illinois case claims this data was taken without users’ permission and without any information on how long Facebook would keep the data. Facebook denies the claims but agreed to settle the lawsuit.

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION will likely be loosening restrictions on the use of land mines in the near future. More than 160 countries have banned the weapons because of the danger to civilians. Previously, the U.S. military had banned all use of land mines, except on the Korean Peninsula. The president made the decision to change this policy after the completion of a Pentagon review. According to CNN, the review found that prohibiting land mines increased “risk to mission success.” The Pentagon’s new policy is expected to allow the use and production of land mines only if they have a self-destruction feature.

THE U.S. COAST GUARD on Feb. 10 unloaded about 20,000 pounds of cocaine it seized while pursuing drug runners in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. It took the drug haul—which has an estimated street value of nearly $340 million—to Naval Base San Diego. U.S. ships intercepted cartel boats in eight operations off the coasts of Mexico and Central and South America between November and mid-January.
“If the officials had disclosed information about the epidemic earlier, I think it would have been a lot better. There should be more openness and transparency.”

Dr. Li Wenliang, a doctor from Wuhan, China, who told his medical school classmates about the novel coronavirus in December, but police silenced him for spreading rumors. Li later died from the virus.

“He is persecuted even after death.”

A Christian villager in Gucheng, China, after the government forced her family to hold a secular funeral for her father. She said he had been a believer for decades.

“We are all marked men and women today.”

Catholic Bishop Matthew Kukah of Sokoto, Nigeria, at the funeral Mass of recently murdered seminarian Michael Nnadi. Kukah lashed out at President Muhammadu Buhari for failing to protect Christians from Islamist terror, saying the Muslim-majority north has become “one large graveyard, a valley of dry bones, the nastiest and the most brutish part of our dear country.”

“If I have to go to court, I have to go to court. I would go to jail for this.”

Muslim father Jabar Hussain on being told he faces up to a year in prison for removing his 9-year-old son from a U.K. public school due to an LGBT-inclusive curriculum.

“Large boulder the size of a small boulder.”

From a tweet posted by the San Miguel (Colo.) Sheriff’s Office announcing that a boulder was blocking a portion of Colorado’s Highway 145.
ANGRY CITIZENS OF AN IRISH VILLAGE are asking their town council to ban horses after several encounters with stray steeds around town. Councilor PJ Carey said he’s been saddled with complaints from the people of Kilmallock about stray horses wandering in and out of a city park. “Two duck races on the river have been affected,” Carey told the council. “I met a man who asked me why should he scoop poop of his dog when the park is covered in horse [manure].” Another councilor heard complaints of a horse wandering through the door of a gym. “It’s not nice when you’re running a business,” Councilor Mike Donegan said.

LONG LIVE THE LIBRARY People may like the movies, but according to a Gallup survey, Americans—incredibly, improbably—still love the library. According to survey data released by the polling firm on Jan. 24, Americans averaged 10.5 trips to the library in 2019, making it the most common cultural activity Americans engage in. Going to see a movie checked in at second place, with Americans claiming to have gone to see an average of 5.3 movies at the cinema last year. Women were nearly twice as likely as men to have gone to the library. The survey data showed Americans ages 30–49 were the most active in participating in cultural activities outside the home.

A GRAVE SITUATION Alan Hattel says his cell phone stopped ringing about four months ago. “I’ve been confused by it all, but now I know why nobody has been calling me,” the 75-year-old from Forfar, Scotland, told The Courier. “People think that I’m dead.” The retired welder said he discovered the problem in January as he toured a local cemetery. That’s where Hattel says he found a tombstone with his name on it. He claims the premature stone is the work of his estranged ex-wife who apparently
wishes to be buried next to him, bought the plot, and had the stone erected in anticipation of their side-by-side burials. Hattel reached out to his children and his ex-wife for help and said he plans to cover his name on the gravestone.

4 CARPOOL TOMFOOLERY Arizona transportation officials have a message for drivers using the state’s high-occupancy vehicle lanes: human passengers only. Officers in the Grand Canyon State cited a 62-year-old driver for violating HOV lane rules when they caught him with a model skeleton seated in his vehicle’s passenger seat. To enhance the disguise, the man draped a jacket over the skeleton’s bony shoulders and put a fishing cap on its head and a mini cooler in its lap. In July, Nevada state troopers ticketed a hearse driver who claimed the corpse he was carrying should qualify for HOV lane privileges.

5 BIRD BUFFET Officials with the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary in the United Kingdom have returned to nature a rehabilitated owl that was too fat to fly. A concerned citizen found the owl stranded in a ditch and brought it to the bird sanctuary in eastern England. The animal tipped the scales at just over 8.5 ounces—2 full ounces above the bird’s natural weight. With the extra heft, the owl could no longer fly. “[It is] extremely unusual for wild birds to get into this condition naturally,” sanctuary falconer Rufus Samkin said, noting the area where the citizen found the owl was teeming with prey. “We think she’s just done incredibly well for herself and overindulged.” After dieting for a few weeks, the obese owl could again lift off.

6 ANY TAKERS? One animal shelter has quite a deal for potential pet adopters. The Mitchell County, N.C., animal rescue outfit has advertised what it calls the “world’s worst cat” for adoption. “We thought she was sick,” the organization posted in its Jan. 22 ad for Perdita the cat. “Turns out she’s just a jerk.” The group added that Perdita was “not for the faint of heart.” Rescue officials noted that Perdita likes isolation, lurking in corners, jumping at people who pass her by, and “staring into your soul until you feel as if you may never be cheerful again.” The unappealing advertisement did the trick: After receiving 175 applications from people eager to adopt the jerk cat, the shelter agreed to give Perdita to a Tennessee couple, who renamed her Noel.

7 FAKE ID THEFT A Canadian teenager called police because he was worried his identity had been stolen—by the person from whom he’d purchased a fake ID. Ontario police say a Norfolk County teenager filed a complaint Jan. 21 that he sent money to a stranger for a fake ID card, but it never arrived. Worried that the purveyor of fakes might have taken the teen’s identifying information and stolen his identity, police opened an investigation of the supplier. Constable Ed Sanchuk also took the opportunity to warn Canadian teens that using a fake ID—to buy beer, for instance—is illegal in Canada.
How to ruin your life
Not every hardship is a disaster

Since joining Facebook about 10 years ago, I’ve collected a number of left-wing Facebook friends. Some I know personally, others only by casual friending sometime in the past. Though I seldom engage, they’re still on my feed because I want to know what they’re thinking.

Much of what they think is predictable, given the political perspective (and, of course, that’s true of me too). Abortion is a particular hot button because almost all of them are women. Let us grant this much: Childbearing is an intensely personal matter to women. A man can address the subject in philosophical or ethical terms, but not personal. Even fathers who feel a deep emotional connection to their children will not experience parenthood in the same way. Fathering and mothering are not the same, by God’s design.

But here’s an argument I will not grant. One of those Facebook cyberfriends put it this way: “I had an abortion at age 17. If I hadn’t, my life would have been ruined.” She followed up with outrage at one state’s latest attempt to limit a woman’s absolute right, because unless that right is securely guaranteed, countless lives will be ruined.

I could argue that abortion always ruins at least one life. But that concern may seem impossibly abstract when compared with a pregnant woman’s terror of the unknown. To her it looks like an entire future derailed because of a moment’s carelessness or weakness. But is that really the case?

In theory, “ruin” lurks within every hour. Carelessness can be failure to look both ways, set a parking brake, or lock the gate to the pool. Weakness can be co-signing a risky loan or agreeing to drive a getaway car. We’ve all felt like a pair of dice tossed into the air after a bad decision, hoping the damage will be minimal when we land. Still, ruin is a relative term and applies to no situation less than an unplanned pregnancy.

A developing human being in the womb is a disruption, as all humans are—we disrupt each other’s lives continually. In times of dissatisfaction I used to wonder what I could have accomplished by marrying someone else, or not marrying at all. But my husband’s material support—no small thing—allowed me to accomplish a lot. Even if he wasn’t “in the way,” something or someone else would have been. That’s how life is: continual traffic in and out of our plans, enhancing, supplying, suppressing, crushing, or redirecting them.

My Facebook friend is a successful author. Suppose she had not had that abortion. Might she still have become a successful author? With many paths to that goal, there’s no reason why not. Circumstances do matter in publishing, but determination, talent, and persistence matter more. (J.K. Rowling was a single mom working a minimum-wage job when she wrote Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone—an extreme example, but still.) Though the unexpected development is not always fun, it’s a powerful tool for shaping and teaching. Carefully constructed futures that work out as planned don’t teach anything but what we already know or shape anything but our prejudices.

That’s not to say an unplanned pregnancy, or any other life-altering event, will never be a severe hardship. Terrible things happen in life—ask Job. Children can be more heartache than joy—ask David. But to determine so ahead of time is to deny life itself, both figuratively and literally.

I would go further: To a Christian, as my author friend claims to be, life can’t be “ruined.” To see nothing but disaster ahead is no way for a disciple to read the future, even while suspended in uncertainty after a terrible mistake. Until we get there, the future is in flux. Disruptive, sure. But nothing could be more disruptive than Jesus Himself. Everything after Him is creative destruction of the old man, to build something entirely new.
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At the new documentary *Created Equal: Clarence Thomas in His Own Words* we see a bronze bust sitting high on a shelf in Thomas’ office. It’s of his greatest role model, his grandfather. And beneath the stern gaze are words Myers Anderson would often say: “Old Man Can’t is dead. I helped bury him.”

Thomas’ journey from Gullah Geechee-speaking poverty in rural Georgia to associate justice on the U.S. Supreme Court serves as a perfect model for the complexity, inconsistency, and idealism of the American experiment. Thomas and his wife, Virginia, spent more than 30 hours answering filmmaker Michael Pack’s questions: The film...
is more an in-depth, extended interview than a traditional documentary (the many mainstream outlets complaining it doesn’t include opposing views evidently failed to finish reading the title).

The Biblical principles that shaped Thomas’ life will be especially fascinating to Christian viewers. Though largely illiterate, Thomas’ grandfather drummed the Scripture he’d memorized into his grandsons’ brains, fostering a ferocious work ethic.

Yet those unfamiliar with Thomas’ story will find no cliché idolization of America’s virtues nor easy demonizing of its vices. On the one hand, the nuns who taught Thomas were very much on the side of oppressed blacks in the segregated South. He makes it clear he couldn’t have become the man he is without his parochial education. Yet it was the blithe bigotry of his white seminary classmates—that drove Thomas to abandon his plans for priesthood.

In the film, we learn how his rage against the inequity and prejudice he encounters as a young man drives him to a new religion: Marxism. But his grandfather’s simple wisdom is too deeply implanted for him to lose himself to campus radicalism completely. After a night of violent demonstrating, he finds himself in church, repenting of his hatred, begging God to remove his anger.

As a new father while at Yale Law School, the young Democrat begins to question more than just the methods of the far left. He sees black students bused into areas offering no better education but a lot more inconvenience and strife. He vows his own son will never be a pawn in social engineering, which Thomas defines as “have theory, add people.” Uninterested in a life of comfortable tokenism, he rejects corporate law and the “golden handcuffs” he believes it offers.

Once he makes the decision to accept a position with Missouri’s Republican attorney general, there’s no going back in Thomas’ ideological transformation. His deep affinity for the natural law the Founders advocated overcomes his distaste of their individual hypocrisy. Though he couldn’t know then, it would eventually bring him face to face with a racism as fierce and personal as anything he experienced in Georgia: During his Supreme Court confirmation hearing, cartoons depicted him wearing the Ku Klux Klan’s white robes and polishing other justices’ shoes.

Thomas’ life would be a riveting novel. That said, Pack’s approach has some drawbacks. When he asks Thomas about his first marriage, we see the face of the famously recalcitrant judge close tight as the oyster shells his mother once shucked in a seafood cannery. If Pack pushes for any further insight, we never see it.

Still, given that Thomas was only 43 when appointed to the Supreme Court, it’s possible he’ll live to become the longest-serving justice in history. His is a uniquely American journey, and a glimpse into the mind and making of such a towering figure shouldn’t be missed.
IT’S A PROBLEM OVER HERE, TOO

Film examines sex trafficking in the USA

by Bob Brown

SEX TRAFFICKING isn’t just happening “over there” in Asia and Africa. Pimps, gangs, and relatives keep women and children in bondage in Atlanta, Las Vegas, and other cities and towns across America. Through interviews of ministry leaders and former victims (with no graphic imagery), the new unrated Christian documentary Blind Eyes Opened identifies risk factors, reveals suffering, and asks what more can be done to stop it.

The average age of a trafficked girl is 13. Fifteen percent of child victims are boys. Sex-trade victims, child or adult, can be “sold” a dozen times a night. Thousands fall prey because sex trafficking is “more innovative than snatch and grab.” One ploy is for an older “Romeo” to befriend a lonely girl at the mall or online and eventually coerce her into prostitution.

Pornography creates demand, and abortion covers up evidence of the crime. Abby Johnson says when she was a Planned Parenthood director, she “ignored cries for help” and the significance of a girl having multiple abortions. Now a pro-life activist, Johnson says the abortion industry won’t admit it’s “part of the problem.”

The solution? It’s the Church’s job, one interviewee says, to go into chaotic situations and restore peace: intervention, education, forgiveness, healing.

Says Michele Coomer, founder of Chosen4Freedom Ministry, who was trafficked by her father: “I am God’s precious creation, and that’s where my identity lies.”

IN THIS YEAR of the international Oscar, few feature-length award winners can boast the scope packed into Free Burma Rangers: The 97-minute documentary spans two decades in war zones 3,000 miles apart. At the center is a missionary family whose American ordinariness draws viewers in to the extraordinary story of their life’s work.

Dave and Karen Eubank made a mission trip to Burma for their honeymoon and never left the front lines. The two started Free Burma Rangers in the mid-1990s and over 20 years trained 70-odd teams to treat the wounded and spread love amid an unending civil war. Work that expanded into Iraq and Syria sticks to Dave’s unorthodox original vision: “Go to the sound of the guns, go to the sound of need, and trust God to show you how you can be useful.”

The film splices actual footage, from sunrise drills to close-up battles, with commentary—from the Eubanks, their three teenage children, and the ethnic fighters who join their cause. Discipleship based on the sacrificing love of Jesus is the steady undercurrent to a fast-paced and suspenseful chronicle of war and evil. Weeks into the battle to free Mosul from the Islamic State, Iraqi army Gen. Mustafa al-Azzawi tells Dave, “You’re just like us, you know you’re not God.”

The eponymous movie showcases the Eubanks’ work but defies any attempts at gloss, pitted against backdrops out of their control. In Mosul Dave faces inner demons too, and in a street strewn with dead bodies, he must decide whether to risk everything to save one Iraqi girl.

High stakes set apart Free Burma Rangers from most Christian docudramas. The graphic images of blood and death are real, and elementary-age viewers probably should stay home. Producers planned to show the film in theaters nationwide for two days only, Feb. 24 and 25.

CANDID CLARENCE THOMAS

While speaking to college students in 2014, Clarence Thomas said: “The worst things that have been done to me, the worst things that have been said about me, are by Northern liberal elites, not by the people of Savannah, Ga.”

VIEWERSHIP OF ACADEMY AWARDS HITS HISTORIC LOW

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FREE BURMA RANGERS: DEIDOX FILMS; BLIND EYES OPENED: SHIPS OF TARSHISH
**REAL UNREALITY**

Some critics may be looking too closely at *The Man in the High Castle*

by Shayla Ashmore, Mark Closson, and Marvin Olasky

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In 2010, the BBC originally had rights to produce *The Man in the High Castle* as a four-part miniseries. But production stalled, and the Syfy Channel acquired rights in 2013. After more problems, Amazon took the show over and began production in 2014.

*The Man in the High Castle*’s opening show in 2015 was Amazon’s most-watched ever. Viewers and critics relished the premise—an alternative reality where Germany and Japan won World War II—but after 10 episodes of Season 4, it’s now over. All 40 episodes are available for streaming via Amazon Prime.

Streaming services have expanded exponentially since *High Castle* first debuted, back when Amazon’s biggest (and nearly only serious) rival was Netflix. With Apple TV, Disney Plus, CBS All Access, and many other newcomers arriving on the scene, *High Castle* is far from the only resistance fiction game in town. As it aged, it struggled to hold on to viewers, leading Amazon finally to cancel it for fresher fare.

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Still, it maintained a core audience. And it proved viewers had an appetite for other serious sci-fi/alternate history mashups, setting the stage for series like Starz’s *Counterpart*, Netflix’s *Travelers*, and HBO’s *Watchmen*.

At a time of debate about fake news and fake history, *High Castle*’s perplexing plots offered a provocative set of “what ifs.” In Season 4, patriots and “Black Communist Resistance” heroes fought Nazis east of the Rockies and Japanese occupiers in California. This season built on earlier ones in which American rebels somehow obtained films of Allied victories in other worlds. In this world, Nazis dropped bombs, characters on all sides dropped F-bombs, and viewers could watch assassinations and decapitations.

As the series developed, its multiverse angle intensified: Multiple simultaneous realities purportedly exist, and human beings have no essential character, so environment determines all. In one world a major character, John Smith—the name signaled his representative Everyman role—is an insurance agent and a compassionate guy. In another world he’s a Nazi fiend.

Some critics connected the show’s anti-Nazi forces to Antifa forces today and applauded a “Black Communist” who disparages the U.S. flag and says, “All those white Americans are Nazis now.” *The Hollywood Reporter* proclaimed that with “Trump-era relevancy, Amazon’s most popular original series is now must-see TV. ... In every frame, it’s impossible not to feel the connections to the state of the world. ... The show is so good now because it’s so real now.”

Real? In Season 4, Nazi agents, using quantum mechanics, travel through a portal of bright light to kill scientists in the reality where the Allies won. They also steal technology and military secrets. Fear permeates each world. A mad scientist with a German accent states the goal: to “defeat all worlds of the multiverse.” Ethereal travelers from some alternate world walk through a tunnel into ours.

So real, or surreal?

—Shayla Ashmore and Mark Closson are graduates of the World Journalism Institute mid-career course
**PROBLEM OF EVIL**

Well-written, well-acted series may do too good of a job

by Jim Hill and Jeff Judson

DOES EVIL EXIST? Can science explain everything? Does prayer make a difference? In a siloed society, people with different worldviews rarely discuss these questions. CBS’ *Evil* (Season 1), a fresh science-versus-supernatural series, could provide thoughtful opportunities for both the faithful and the skeptical. But so far it’s a little too evil.

*Evil* takes seriously the existence of “cosmic powers over this present darkness,” but the portrayal of its sinister subject matter focuses too much on the “dark” without providing enough “light” to overcome it. In one episode, parents kill their son because he poses a deadly threat to his siblings. In another, a young tortured girl asks Kristen’s daughters to play a game that forces them to answer how they would “kill their mother.” So *Evil* more than earns its TV-14 (comparable to a PG-13) rating for sexual situations, occasional crude language, and, well, just plain creepiness.

*Evil*’s excessively dark tone is too bad: Husband and wife duo Robert (a practicing Catholic) and Michelle King (a secular Jew) have penned a well-written and well-acted show. Each episode finds David and Kristen investigating mysterious occurrences that may be demonic, miraculous, or natural. The semi-solution leaves viewers pondering which side of science/faith the writers favor.

The series also contains complex characters: Lead priest David is a believer fighting his own “demons.” Skeptic Kristen appears open to going beyond materialism, but David does not offer sound theological answers.

*Evil* is not a show with neatly wrapped answers to mysterious questions, so where it goes from here will be interesting. It is a cleverly crafted show that could inspire conversations between Christians and skeptics, if it didn’t live up to its name.

—Jim Hill and Jeff Judson are graduates of the World Journalism Institute mid-career course
Executive branch insight

Walking Washington’s political tightrope

by Marvin Olasky

Former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley walks a political tightrope inWith All Due Respect (St. Martin’s, 2019). She writes of her relationship with Trump, “We didn’t always see eye-to-eye. Sometimes I called to privately express my disagreement with a policy. But he always took the call and he always listened. Usually, as in the case of the Iran deal, we agreed.”

Haley describes her battles with former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson: “I was scandalous, but of what, we are not sure. In part, the President's views were better off learning a skilled trade—but David Kirp’s The College Dropout Scandal (Oxford, 2019) concentrates on another part of the story, the institutional reasons for failure.

Haley shows a better way: “Socratic teaching, small classes, academic advising, and emotional backstopping.”

A.K. Sandoval-Strausz’sBarrio America (Basic, 2019) shows how Latino immigrants have revitalized many U.S. cities, small towns, and old courthouse squares. They have stemmed or reversed population losses in more than 600 rural counties. Eric Weitz’s A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation-States (Princeton, 2019) is a chapter-by-chapter look at human rights abuses over the years in many countries, including Namibia, Korea, the Soviet Union, and Rwanda.
Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life by John Calvin: John Calvin first published The Institutes of the Christian Religion in Latin in 1536. Within these five chapters translated by Henry J. Van Andel, Calvin says the goal of the Christian life is to achieve “a harmony between God’s righteousness and our obedience.” Intended to fortify Christians against life’s trials, Calvin skips flowery language and long paragraphs in favor of bullet points. He includes chapter headings like “Self-denial” and “Patience in Cross-bearing.” He also encourages readers to go beyond lip service and live out the gospel. “Doctrine,” he writes, “is not an affair of the tongue but of the life.” While Calvin wrote much of his Institutes for seminary students and pastors, this booklet informs everyday readers how to run the race of life well.

Gilead by Marilynn Robinson: When 76-year-old John Ames learns he is dying of heart disease, he begins a memoir for his young son to read in years to come. Vignettes of his boyhood center on the conflict between his pacifist father and gun-toting grandfather, an abolitionist friend of John Brown. Ames reflects on his later life as a husband, father, and minister using rich Biblical imagery and quotes from theological heavyweights like Calvin and Augustine. Through Ames’ poetic voice, the book offers a rare, riveting—although fictional—glimpse at the life of an early 20th-century pastor. Themes of racial compassion related to Ames’ godson add to the book’s positive moral center. Robinson’s own religious universalism does play a role, but the human insights of this 2005 Pulitzer Prize winner outweigh that negative for discerning readers.

A Diary of Private Prayer by John Baillie: First published in 1936, A Diary of Private Prayer became Scottish minister and theologian John Baillie’s most popular book, selling more than 1 million copies. The book offers a month’s worth of morning and evening prayers to help readers confess sin, remember God’s character, and call on Him for provision. Baillie’s poetic lists, occasionally including short Scripture verses, draw readers more deeply into daily prayer topics. In this 2014 revision, editor Susanna Wright recasts many of Baillie’s ideas in more modern language, dropping archaic words like thee and thou. For the most part, she adds readability without sacrificing the book’s rhythm and theological richness. Readers who enjoy classic writers like Spurgeon or Bunyan may still prefer the original language (available used or in digital book form).

The Life of Josiah Henson by Josiah Henson: The Life of Josiah Henson relates the true story of a Kentucky slave who escaped to Canada. Sold away from his Christian mother as a boy, Henson eventually saved enough money to buy his freedom. Sadly, corrupt masters accepted his payment without setting him free. Readers familiar with Harriet Beecher Stowe’s anti-slavery novel, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, will recognize a number of elements here. For instance, both share a character who braves a perilous journey to lead his family out of slavery. Henson’s tale ends happily, with a new community for himself, his family, and (later) hundreds of slaves he helped find freedom. While Henson never learned to write well, his oratory skills as a lay preacher can be seen in his dictation of this manuscript. A concise, eye-opening tale of redemption.

JOSIAH HENSON WAS STILL A SLAVE WHEN HE FIRST HEARD THE GOSPEL. “[M]y heart burned within me, and I was in a state of the greatest excitement at the thought that such a being as Jesus Christ had been described should have died for me.”
DON’T ROCK THE BOAT...
JUST YET

Strategy and timing are key ingredients for winning pro-life victories

CAROL TOBIAS IS PRESIDENT of the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC). Here are edited excerpts of our conversation shortly before last month’s March for Life in Washington, D.C.

What’s your earliest memory of any pro-life activity?
My mom was the Political Action Committee Director for North Dakota Right to Life. She sent questionnaires to state legislative candidates. I remember having all those questionnaires spread out on the table as she was trying to organize them. And in 1972 North Dakota had a
statewide referendum on abortion: 78 percent of the voters opposed the pro-abortion measure.

You were 12 then. Had you learned that people are killing babies?
It was about that time. Mom talked about conversations she had with local ministers. I asked questions, and she told me what was happening.

Did that startle you?
I was shocked, and questioning: How could anyone even consider killing an unborn baby?

At what age do you think kids should learn about this?
At a young age they can learn about the beauty of life: Let them see pictures of babies in the womb, beautiful photography. I wouldn’t put an age on learning about abortion, because children differ in how they can handle the information—but let them gradually know what’s happening to these babies.

At age 19 you were working 9 to 5 as a bookkeeper and volunteering at the local Right to Life chapter?
I got to know people active at the state level. They asked if I’d move to Bismarck to run the state organization. I jumped at the chance, at the opportunity to spend my time in a very worthwhile movement.

In 1981 you went to Washington as the NRLC’s political director? Was that a decade of optimism?
The pro-life movement was instrumental in helping Ronald Reagan win the White House. Republicans elected many pro-life senators.

At the end of the decade Operation Rescue (OR) became the highly publicized face of the movement. Was that helpful or harmful?
It gave an outlet for people who weren’t happy making phone calls and lobbying legislators. I’d tend to say it was probably more harmful because the country at that time maybe wasn’t really open to those kinds of activities, sit-ins, whatever.

Did OR lead to killing more babies rather than fewer?
I know some OR people. Their hearts were so sincere that I am very reluctant to put that kind of connotation on it. But if those efforts helped us lose some elections, and then we got in one or two more bad justices who have been on the court now for 20 years, that might’ve extended the battle. Until we get more people in agreement with us, we need to be really careful that we’re not pushing them away into thinking we’re the crazy ones.

How extensive within the movement was the debate between the all-or-nothing folks (never support any proposal that leaves some babies unprotected) and the all-or-something folks?
There was a lot of frustration and anger. Some thought people were compromising too much. Others thought: If you do an all-or-nothing, you’re going to get nothing, and how does that help the babies?

What are the major similarities and differences between the pro-life movements of 1990 and 2020?
We definitely have more young people. They are seeing the unborn baby. And the social media aspect: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. The pro-life message is getting out to people in so many different ways.

How important is the development of ultrasound in leading more people to call themselves pro-life?
That is a very large part of it. Women are seeing their babies. You can’t pass them off as just a blob of cells. Legislation has been a very good educational tool. People are learning with the partial-birth abortion ban that babies later in the pregnancy were being delivered, then stabbed in the back of the head with scissors. A substantial part of the country still believed abortion was legal for three months: They were shocked to find out it could be done on babies later in pregnancy. We started talking about unborn babies having their arms and legs torn off.

Three out of 4 Americans in one recent poll said abortion should be legal in cases of rape or incest. Those cases are unusual, so while we want all babies to have life, should we ignore those cases now and work in areas that have majority support?
I would love to be at the point where all babies are protected and we are arguing over rape and incest, the 1 or 2 percent. I’m not going to give up, but I’m willing to narrow down when abortions are allowed and keep pushing the boundary until we get to that point.

Pro-life are introducing bills about personhood, heartbeat, fetal pain, and so on. Which should we emphasize?
Until we get a Supreme Court that is going to dismantle Roe v. Wade, a lot of these arguments are—I don’t want to say not helpful, but we need to get a majority of people in this country electing a good president who puts good judges on the court, and electing senators who confirm those judges. If that doesn’t happen, if we get a pro-abortion president and a pro-abortion majority in the Senate, it doesn’t matter what our disagreements are. Our hands will be tied. Until we are confident that we’ve got those votes on the court, I would encourage people to focus on the things that will bring in pro-life voters or at least not alienate the “ mushy middle” who are uncomfortable with making abortion totally illegal.
What do you say to people who are pro-life but believe President Trump is unfit to be president?
He’s doing everything we need him to do. He’s cutting off our tax dollars that would go to organizations like International Planned Parenthood to kill babies in other countries. He’s cutting off funding to them here in this country. He is allowing medical personnel to object to involvement in an abortion procedure or assisted suicide because their conscience or their religious and moral values tell them that’s wrong. He is putting justices on the federal bench who will look at the Constitution and not legislate. There might be some things you don’t like about this president, but he is doing what we need him to do to save babies.

So NRL’s greatest goal this year is to reelect President Trump?
We need one or two more judges on the Supreme Court. That’s not going to solve all problems, but if we can get the court to dismantle Roe and give us a 50-state battleground, we’ll save many more lives than we can now.

Pro-lifers in many states are disagreeing on the right strategy: personhood bill, heartbeat bill, 20-week bill. Does NRL have a dog in that hunt?
I really truly believe it comes down to the Supreme Court. Until we can get rid of a national law that has tied our hands, a lot of what we’re trying to do could actually be counterproductive. I understand pro-life people getting impatient: 47 years, how many more babies have to die? Let’s do something. But more people are agreeing that abortion is wrong. When New York and Virginia allow abortion through all nine months, people are flabbergasted and move to pro-life. We don’t want to lose our chance to change the Supreme Court and change Roe. So the battles we’re having are fine, but I would like them to wait a little bit.

So you oppose personhood bills?
We’ve never been in support because they don’t have any legal impact.

I hear you saying that every time people see how radical the pro-abort agenda is, more move in the pro-life direction. Would you then say we should not rock the boat politically?
I think that I would. Lots of people are open to hearing our arguments, but they still think there are times when a woman should have that option. When they think we will ban all abortions right now, we’re pushing them to the other side. I’m hopeful that President Trump is reelected and we can settle this in a year or two. Maybe I’m being too optimistic, but I think right now our position is: Don’t rock the boat.

Do you think John Roberts and Brett Kavanaugh will push for a Roe reversal?
I don’t expect it. They’ve got a case coming up this spring out of Louisiana. I would not be surprised if they uphold the Louisiana law. I will be very surprised if they use that to dismantle Roe. I don’t think we’ll see that on a 5-4 vote. The country is so divided that I think the Supreme Court will want to have a 6-3 or 7-2 decision.

How can that happen, given the current makeup of the court?
My goal is to have four more years of Donald Trump as president, so at least two judges who usually vote pro-abortion are replaced.
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From high school to graduate school

VISIT MBU.EDU/FIRSTCHOICE
Bill Fay’s new album works when the lyrics are solid but not when muddled

by Arsenio Orteza

The reason that the English singer-songwriter Bill Fay descended into obscurity circa 1971 is that on neither of the two Deram albums that he had released up to that point (Bill Fay and Time of the Last Persecution) had he found a way to bring his gently apocalyptic, elliptically Christian folk-rock to life.

By the time that he began recording the much-improved Tomorrow, Tomorrow and Tomorrow with Gary Smith, Rauf Galip, and Bill Stratton as the Bill Fay Group in 1978 (think Harry Nilsson and Paul McCartney sharing a piano stool while brainstorming chipper demos), the music industry had moved on to disco, punk, and new wave—styles as far removed from Fay’s as styles could be.

When the producer Joshua Henry coaxed Fay out of retirement and back into the studio in 2012, the proliferating niches resulting from the music-appreciating public’s unprecedented atomization all but guaranteed that the resulting album, Life Is People, would gain at least some traction. And it did, turning Fay into a critics’ favorite and smuggling the prayer “Thank You Lord” into the musical diets of the kinds of listeners who take their cues from NPR—which among other more-secular-than-thou tastemakers celebrated Life Is People as a major achievement.

It wasn’t quite that, but Henry’s chamber-folk settings did suit the softness of Fay’s 68-year-old voice better than the straight-ahead rock settings accompanying his youthfully earnest delivery. Three years later, the similar, if somewhat less consistent, Who Is the Sender? followed to comparable acclaim.

The newest fruit of the Fay-Henry collaboration, available in both standard and deluxe editions naturally, is Countless Branches (Dead Oceans), Fay’s most intimate album to date. But while increased intimacy is a welcome factor where many artists are concerned, it leaves Fay, who has never been anything but intimate, sounding extra naked—assuming such a condition were possible.

On the standard edition’s 11 tracks, Henry has scaled back the accompaniment to such an extent that almost all of the responsibility for putting the tunes across falls to Fay’s piano and his increasingly frail voice, leaving the lyrics, essentially, to stand on their own. When they’re solid (“Love Will Remain,” a deft condensing of 1 Corinthians 13, or the title track, an equally deft meditation on God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12), their unadorned simplicity makes them feel like peeks into deep mysteries.

Sometimes, however, they’re too muddled (“Time’s Going Somewhere”) or too sentimental and verbally clunky (“Your Little Face,” “Salt of the Earth,” “I Will Remain Here”) either to compensate for their meager melodies and their draggy, mostly drumless tempos or to support the weightiness of their themes.

The fuller-sounding “band versions” of “Love Will Remain,” “How Long, How Long,” and “Filled With Wonder Once Again” on the deluxe edition’s eight-cut bonus disc reveal glimpses of the stronger album that Countless Branches might’ve been had Henryforgone the bare-bones approach—and of the stronger album that might result if Fay and Henry decide to give their partnership yet another go.

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—Bill Fay in a 2012 interview

“DELETED” NO MORE

“Until 1998, when some people reissued my albums, as far as I was concerned, I was gone, deleted. No one was listening. But then I got the shock that people remembered my music. I was doing some gardening, and listening to some of my songs on cassette, and a part of me thought they were quite good.”

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 musical diets of the kinds of listeners who take their cues from NPR—which among other more-secular-than-thou tastemakers celebrated Life Is People as a major achievement.

It wasn’t quite that, but Henry’s chamber-folk settings did suit the softness of Fay’s 68-year-old voice better than the straight-ahead rock settings accompanying his youthfully earnest delivery. Three years later, the similar, if somewhat less consistent, Who Is the Sender? followed to comparable acclaim.

The newest fruit of the Fay-Henry collaboration, available in both standard and deluxe editions naturally, is Countless Branches (Dead Oceans), Fay’s most intimate album to date. But while increased intimacy is a welcome factor where many artists are concerned, it leaves Fay, who has never been anything but intimate, sounding extra naked—assuming such a condition were possible.

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Back in time

**Today Belongs to Me:** *Complete Recordings 1977-1980* by The Flys

The rewards of diving into complete-output excavations by long-defunct bands that never broke through seldom outweigh the effort. For this two-disc compilation, they do. Blurring the lines separating pub-rock from punk and power-pop from new wave, the clever and energetic tunes that poured forth from these too-eclectic-for-their-own-commercial-good British rockers never stood a chance in the overground. But had they held on a little longer, the college-radio explosion that they had no way of knowing was just around the corner would’ve embraced them with open arms. Their drummer, Pete King, went on to power After the Fire, but otherwise the band was lost to history. That is, until now.

**Seems Like Tears Ago** by Jason James

In case you haven’t heard, Jason James sounds almost exactly like George Jones, right down to his fondness for inserting an “I” into “ev” words such as “heaven” and “ever” and singing them as “helven” and “elver.” At times (“We’re Gonna Honky Tonk Tonight,” “Ole Used to Be,” “Achin’ Takin’ Place”), the similarity is enough to make even listeners familiar with Hebrews 9:27 wonder whether there might be something to reincarnation after all. What puts an end to such ruminating is the up-tempo cuts. Neither “Move a Little Closer” nor the Hank Williams-ish “Cry on the Bayou” sounds anything like Jones at all, raising the question of whether James is “just acting.” But if so, he deserves an Oscar.

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**Encore**

“Gustave Moreau was nobody’s pupil,” wrote Joris-Karl Huysmans of the 19th-century painter in his novel *A rebours*. “With no real ancestors and no possible descendants, he remained a unique figure in contemporary art.” Adjusting for scale, genre, and civilizational impact, the same might be said of the Helsinki-based multi-instrumentalist John Ringhofer, aka Half-handed Cloud.

That Ringhofer is “nobody’s pupil” is, of course, an exaggeration. One doesn’t reach the artifact-crafting stage without picking up at least a few tricks along the way. Still, it’s hard to identify precursors to Ringhofer’s modus operandi: setting explicitly Biblical subject matter, including verses taken almost verbatim from New Testament epistles, to merry melodies with kaleidoscopic (collide-oscopic?) time signatures and instrumentation more suitable to cartoons than to “rock” or “pop.” Even “indie” and “alternative” fell short.

On his latest release, *Gathered Out of Thin Air: A Second Decade Collection of Non-LP Tracks: 2010-2019* (Asthmatic Kitty), Ringhofer compiles 60 previously scattered ditties (average length: a little over a minute) featuring the accompaniment of 21 other joyful noisemakers and sequences them into an insanely catchy, 77-minute medley that hits on everything from Acts 22, Romans 8, 2 Corinthians 4-6, Galatians 6, Philippians 2, Colossians 1 and 2, 1 Timothy, and 2 Peter to Palm Sunday, the Damascus and Emmaus roads, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” Handel’s Messiah, and Christmas. If ever music had to be (and deserved to be) heard to be believed, Ringhofer’s is it.
While Washington fiddles
Ukraine’s Donbass region faces life-and-death fallout over impeachment

A column of Russian trucks rolled to the border with Ukraine on Feb. 5 as U.S. senators in Washington prepared to vote on whether to remove from office President Donald Trump. The Russian convoy carried ammunition, weapons, and military equipment—all to reinforce Russian-backed rebels and Russian units that in 2014 took control of eastern Ukraine.

Ukrainian Defense Ministry officials report the trucks crossed into the Eastern European nation, which gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, near the village of Diakove in Luhansk. Much of Luhansk and Donetsk, a region known as Donbass, essentially has become Russian territory, with Ukraine’s military forced to hold a 280-mile front line for six years.

Moscow has tested some of its latest weaponry in Donbass, while Ukraine’s army relies on Soviet-era aircraft and outdated weapons. A January video clip showed one Ukrainian unit using the M1910 Maxim machine gun, a once-revolutionary weapon used in Imperial Russia before World War I.

That disparity is the forgotten centerpiece of Trump’s controversial decision last year to withhold $400 million in military aid from Ukraine. Trump’s willingness to condition aid to Ukraine investigating his domestic political opponents threatened Ukraine’s security. Democrats, by leaping to open an unbounded campaign to remove Trump, also showed their willingness to risk Ukraine’s future.

No one looking seriously at the Russian threat can cheer the Democrats’ hapless conduct of impeachment proceedings. Nor can anyone applaud Trump’s victory lap once the Senate acquitted him on Feb. 5—within hours of fresh Russian armaments rolling into Ukraine.

Ukraine lost much during the five-month Washington debacle. The Russian convoy signals that momentum toward a bilateral pullout from Donbass—spearheaded by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky—has ended. Republicans and Democrats’ bipartisan effort to maintain sanctions and diplomatic pressure on Russia may also be finished. Zelensky emerges from the impeachment melodrama a weaker leader, even though he was elected in a landslide last year. Trump and his lawyers have seen to that, touting Ukraine as a bad actor who let the United States down.

This emboldens Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose expansionist aims extend into other former Soviet states. Putin is likely to redouble efforts to control Ukraine and extend the Kremlin’s reach into Europe.

Ukrainians already have paid a high price for Russian occupation in Donbass. More than 14,000 have died in the conflict. The region’s economy has never recovered. To cash a monthly check, elderly pensioners take buses to cities outside the zone, as no banks have reopened since 2014. Authorities have outlawed non-Orthodox religious groups, forcibly closing churches, seizing property, and making many religious activities illegal. “You cannot serve a soup kitchen. You cannot spread or receive humanitarian aid. There is no place to complain. There is no one to stand for them,” said Mission Eurasia President Sergey Rakhuba.

Ukraine as political theater isn’t going away. Despite the vote against Trump’s removal, at least 17 Republican senators say the president committed “an improper—but-not-impeachable offense,” according to a morning-after survey by The Dispatch. Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., who made a decided move against impeachment, was clear in his statement to call Trump’s actions “inappropriate.” Those views are important because they stand at odds with what Trump and his legal defense team claim. A conclusive impeachment vote hasn’t resolved those differences.

Further revelations are likely, including from former national security adviser John Bolton, whose book covering Trump foreign policy is due out mid-March. Bolton, while controversial, has a reputation as a straight shooter. Critics won’t easily be able to dismiss his account. Alexander and Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, who voted for one count of impeachment, are former governors with long records in public life. Voters weary of Democrats’ grandstanding also tire of Trump treating serious critics with public contempt. Demeaning the office one holds becomes self-defeating.

Playing with foreign policy, too, can cost lives. Ask the Ukrainians in Donbass.
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MINORITY OPINION

CAN DONALD TRUMP GAIN ENOUGH BLACK VOTERS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN 2020?

by Jamie Dean in Greensboro, N.C.

IN A 90-YEAR-OLD BUILDING in downtown Greensboro, the Woolworth’s lunch counter still looks just as it did when Clarence Henderson quietly defied a racist store policy and helped change the course of American history. The building now houses the International Civil Rights Center & Museum, and the once-bustling diner sits preserved in its original spot. That’s where Henderson joined three other black college students on Feb. 2, 1960, to sit at the sprawling lunch counter designated for white customers only. The sit-ins at the popular department store helped spark a series of similar protests and counterprotests in Greensboro and across the South. By the end of the summer, the Greensboro diner was desegregated. Successes followed in other cities. This February marks the 60th anniversary of the sit-ins. Henderson remembers the insults he heard on that day and others. He says it was worth it to “put Jim Crow on trial.”
Today Henderson faces a different kind of trial: “I still get called names by people who think I’m on the wrong side of history now.” In 2016, Henderson wrote an op-ed for The Charlotte Observer criticizing those who equated debates over transgender restroom policies with the civil rights battles he and thousands of others fought over racial prejudice.

Later that year, he publicly supported Donald Trump for president. He’s voted for GOP candidates for years because he opposes abortion and likes the party’s economic policies.

That makes Henderson a minority within a minority. Black voters have overwhelmingly supported Democrats since Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Nearly 98 percent backed President Barack Obama in 2008.

Henderson says critics have called him “an Uncle Tom” and “a sellout.” He still believes voters should think for themselves: “When someone tells you how to vote, they’re trying to tell you what to think instead of how to think.”

Voters like Henderson raise an intriguing question: Could Trump get enough support from black voters to make a difference in a tight 2020 election? Could a voting bloc that some pollsters consider unwinnable for Republicans help Trump win a second term?

Past voting patterns and current polls suggest a surge in African American support isn’t likely, but a surge might not be necessary. Moving the needle a few percentage points in key swing states could tip a close contest.

Even that seems unlikely to many pundits, considering some of Trump’s rhetoric. Still, the Trump campaign is working hard to reach black voters and may find unexpected allies in an under-the-radar policy fight.

Outside the Tyler Perry Studios near downtown Atlanta, some 300 demonstrators gathered a few hours before Democratic presidential candidates took the stage for their fifth televised debate in mid-November.

In a notable twist, at least some of the protesters were Democrats. They hoisted homemade signs supporting school choice. One sign declared, “Black Democrats want charters!”

Inside the television studios, Democratic presidential candidates sparred over climate change and healthcare, but school choice didn’t rank high in debate topics—even though hours earlier
the crowd outside chanted to the beat of a marching band from a charter school: “Our children, our choice.”

That’s not a talking point among Democratic presidential candidates.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., has called for a moratorium on federal funds for new charter schools. Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., has called for a similar freeze, despite charter schools’ popularity among many families—including a majority of African American voters.

A poll commissioned by Democrats for Education Reform—a nonprofit group that supports expanding charter schools—reported that 58 percent of black Democratic voters view charter schools favorably. Only 26 percent of white Democratic voters expressed a favorable view.

Warren and Sanders have said charter schools divert resources from traditional public schools. But charter schools are public schools privately managed by boards of directors, and usually require substantial parental involvement. Some 3 million children attend charter schools nationwide, with thousands of students reportedly on waiting lists.

Still, bolstering charter schools often isn’t palatable for Democratic candidates courting the support of powerful teachers unions. The Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan research group that tracks political giving, says the political contributions of teachers unions grew from $4.3 million in 2004 to $32 million in 2016. The unions contribute more than 94 percent of those funds to Democratic candidates.

The National Education Association (NEA), the largest labor union in the United States, emphasized in 2017 its “forceful support of state and local efforts to limit charter school growth and increase charter school accountability.”

Some charter schools are ineffective, and some states—including Warren’s home state, Massachusetts—have curbed their expansion. But many parents have praised the schools’ successes, particularly among lower-income students seeking better educational options.

Outside the television studio in Atlanta, Richard Buery, head of public policy for KIPP, the largest charter school network in the country, told The New York Times he views the Democrats’ move away from charter schools as “a reflection more broadly of the lack of respect for black voters in the party.” Buery is African American and a Democrat.

The next morning, black and Latino parents interrupted Elizabeth Warren’s remarks about race at a campaign rally in Atlanta: They chanted, “Our voice, our choice!” The charter school activists wore black T-shirts reading: “Powerful parent network.” The back of the shirts read, “#stateofemergency.”

In December, 100 protesters gathered outside a forum in Pittsburgh, where Democratic presidential candidates gathered to discuss public education. Candidates reportedly said little about charter schools, but demonstrators outside repeated their calls for school choice.

Pennsylvania is a hotly contested swing state: Trump narrowly flipped the state in 2016, marking the first time a Republican presidential candidate had won in Pennsylvania since 1988. Lots of issues and voting blocs will factor into the presidential contest in Pennsylvania—and every other battleground state—in 2020, but school choice remains an ongoing debate in Pennsylvania politics.

Do enough black voters worry enough about school choice to break from Democrats in an election?

A recent election in at least one swing state suggests it’s already happened. In 2018, Republican Ron DeSantis narrowly defeated Democrat Andrew Gillum in Florida’s gubernatorial race.

DeSantis had closely tied his campaign to Trump. (A campaign ad showed DeSantis helping his young daughter build a pretend border wall with toy blocks.) Trump campaigned for DeSantis in Florida in the final days of the election. Gillum, who was the mayor of Tallahassee, would have become the state’s first African American governor. But exit polls reported some 100,000 black women voted for DeSantis over Gillum.

A likely reason: school choice. Gillum expressed opposition to charter schools and other school choice programs.

More than 100,000 low-income students in Florida participate in a program that offers tax-funded scholarships to attend private schools. Shortly after the election, William Mattox of the Marshall Center for Educational Options described most of the students in the Florida scholarship program as “minorities whose mothers are registered Democrats.”

That dynamic is difficult to ignore in a state famous for deciding presidential elections in nail-biting contests.
Poll numbers vary, but his support among black voters appears to remain low. In August, polling from Rasmussen showed Trump’s approval among black voters at about 30 percent. In November, Gallup reported a 10 percent approval. In January, a *Washington Post*-Ipsos poll reported 8 out of 10 black Americans believe Trump is racist.

If the truth about Trump’s support among African Americans is somewhere between the differing poll numbers, his black supporters will likely continue to face questions about charges that Trump is racist.

Some opponents point to Trump’s rhetoric, including his 2019 comments that a predominantly African American district in Baltimore was “a disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess.”

Dean Nelson, now an adviser to the Black Voices for Trump coalition, says he was part of a gathering of African American leaders who met with Trump shortly after his Twitter comments about the Baltimore district represented by Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md. (Cummings died in late 2019).

Nelson says four black pastors at the meeting spoke to the president about taking care in remarks directed toward African American communities. He believes accusations of racism “fall flat,” considering some of Trump’s actions aimed at helping black communities.

Given recent polls, the president may have a steep hill to climb to convince other black voters. But he’s not shying away.
Vernon Robinson, a leader of Black Americans to Re-Elect the President, says Republican candidates have to work to gain the trust of African American voters like himself: “No one has ever made a sale without asking for the order. [Republicans] haven’t asked for the business for 60 years.” Robinson says GOP politicians should also talk more about how abortion disproportionately affects African American communities.

Winsome Earle Sears was the first black Republican woman elected to the Virginia Statehouse, nearly 20 years ago. She became a Republican in the 1980s, partly because of her pro-life views and support for the GOP’s economic platform. She says she faced name-calling and insults when she ran as a black Republican in 2001.

Sears says Democrats have taken African American voters for granted, and Republicans often don’t ask for their votes because they think they can’t win them. As a black voter, she says, “Nobody knocks on my door and asks me what I think.” She says both parties assume they already know how she’ll vote.

When Georgia Republican Brian Kemp won his gubernatorial race against Democrat Stacey Abrams in 2018, a particular exit poll startled some pundits: Eleven percent of black men backed Kemp over Abrams. An editorial in The Washington Post tried to shame them: “What’s up with all those black men who voted for the Republican in the Georgia governor’s race?” A Boston Globe editorial chastised the black male voters, saying the GOP is “unabashedly the party of white supremacy, migrant family separations, racist fearmongering, and Brett Kavanaugh.”

Sears supports Trump, but says she’s not trying to convince everyone to become a Republican. She wants voters to think for themselves and consider the merits of each candidate and policy. She doesn’t give Republicans immunity: In 2018, she mounted a write-in campaign to challenge a Republican candidate for Senate she thought was embracing racist ideas.

“After everything I’ve been through as a black Republican,” she says, “how could I not?”

Tim Murtaugh, a spokesman for the Trump campaign, told the Associated Press in January that the campaign had already spent more than $1 million on black outreach, including radio, print, and online advertising. The Republican National Committee has launched a grassroots effort to send staffers and volunteers into black communities to talk about GOP candidates ahead of the 2020 elections.
1990 AND 2020

Examining how public opinion on abortion has changed in the last 30 years

by Marvin Olasky

1990: A PRO-LIFE DEMONSTRATOR CONFRONTS A PLANNED PARENTHOOD BACKER OUTSIDE AN ABORTION FACILITY IN HOUSTON WHERE PRO-LIFERS SOUGHT TO PREVENT POTENTIAL CLIENTS FROM ENTERING THE BUILDING.

(BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES)
Examining how public opinion on abortion has changed in the last 30 years

by Marvin Olasky

2020: PRO-LIFE ADVOCATES HOLD SIGNS WHILE STANDING OUTSIDE THE U.S. SUPREME COURT WHILE PARTICIPATING IN THE 47TH ANNUAL MARCH FOR LIFE IN WASHINGTON, D.C., ON JAN. 24. (JOSE LUIS MAGANA/AP)

changed in the last 30 years by Marvin Olasky
The printed signs they carried:
“Life is Winning.” “Pro-life is Pro-Woman.”
“We are the Pro-Life Generation.” “Pro-freedom, Pro-life.” “Babies Lives Matter.” “I Regret My Abortion.”
¶ The handwritten signs they waved:
“She can have her baby and her dreams too.”
“I am a lifeguard: I believe in guarding all life.”
“Pregnancy is not a health problem.” “Human rights begin in the womb.” “I was 16 scared and pregnant, but her life mattered too.”

The crowd at the 47th annual March for Life on Jan. 24 was huge—100,000 was a reasonable estimate—and young. Thousands of students from Christian schools came wearing coats and beanies of many colors: blue, orange, black, and checkerboard. The march I attended in 1990 was smaller and older.

That year President George H.W. Bush phoned the march and offered abstract niceties. This year Donald Trump became the first president to speak in person at a march. He gave a passionate speech emphasizing his administration’s pro-life successes, including the confirmation of “187 federal judges who apply the Constitution as written, including two phenomenal Supreme Court justices.”

Trump concluded with an “I love you all,” and many in the crowd yelled, “We love you back” or “We love you, Donald.” It was a long way from his 1999 statement, “I am pro-choice in every respect.” For the pro-life movement, 2020 is a long way from 1990, when abortions in the United States peaked at 1.6 million per year, and from 1995, when 56 percent of Americans called themselves “pro-choice” (and only 33 percent said they were pro-life).

The number of abortions has fallen by almost half during the past three decades. The viewpoint split now, according to Gallup polling, is 46 percent “pro-choice” and 49 percent pro-life. A May 2019 poll showed 38 percent of Americans favoring legal abortion in all or most circumstances, and 60 percent wanting it illegal in all or almost all circumstances.

Changed attitudes and a changed Supreme Court have led to great optimism among today’s pro-lifers. The crowd cheered as Vice President Mike Pence and his wife Karen said by video, “Life is winning.” A March for Life marshal greeted early arrivers, “Good morning. You’re almost there.”

But “almost” in abortion history is a long way from “there.” Optimism in the pro-life movement is nothing new. In 1990 at the National Right to Life annual convention, workshop leaders said, “We’ll do this after Roe is overturned, we’ll do that after Roe is overturned.”

On the other side, Justice Harry Blackmun feared an overturn of his most notorious opinion: “The signs are evident and very ominous.”

We’ll understand more about current opportunities if we see what went wrong in the early 1990s and what’s gone right since then. We’ll concentrate on public opinion, starting with what Abraham Lincoln said in 1856: “In this country, public sentiment is everything.
With it, nothing can fail; against it, nothing can succeed. Whoever molds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes, or pronounces judicial decisions.”

Throughout the 1980s pro-abortion propagandists aimed their attacks against a fast-growing pro-life development: crisis pregnancy centers that helped pregnant women materially and spiritually. The pro-abort slur “right to life, right to lie” never gained major traction: It was hard to make the majority of Americans in the middle believe that volunteer counselors—who helped troubled women and sometimes gave them lodging—were evil.

At the end of the decade NARAL Pro-Choice America President Kate Michelman warned her troops of a swing “sharply to the right, and as I speak to you now, the fate of millions of American women quite literally hangs in the balance.” The polls reflected pro-abortion forces’ failure to move public opinion in their direction. In 1980 only 1 in 4 Americans wanted abortion to be always legal. Despite major media support for abortion, support for the always-legal position dropped slightly during the next eight years.

From 1988 to 1992, though, support for always-legal abortion increased by 40 percent. A big development during those four years: Operation Rescue (OR) became the face of the pro-life movement. The intent was noble: save lives by blockading abortion businesses. The 1960s civil rights movement had gained huge media support: Couldn’t the same happen with attempts to save the most helpless among us?

Big media, though, presented rescuers as oppressors of women. The Los Angeles Times headline on April 15, 1990, was typical: “Huge Protest at Abortion Clinic Turns Violent.” The story told how “militant abortion protesters descended on a Los Angeles women’s clinic during a violence-marred, seven-hour siege.”

As journalist/historian Cynthia Gorney pointed out, “In the newspaper stories about OR, no one ever ‘held’ a Bible or a rosary: these items were always ‘clutched,’ as though everyone present had fallen into amusing spasms of holy-roller frenzy.”

Pro-abortion journalists would have seen OR spokesman Randall Terry as a godsend, if they had believed in God. Gorney’s reporting is accurate: “How
readily Terry lent himself to caricature, how precisely his carriage and language suited every secular cliché of the heavy-breathing right-to-lifer. He had worked as a used car salesman, a detail reporters repeated frequently and with obvious delight.

Correlation is not causation, so I can’t say that OR caused that big jump in ardent pro-abortion sentiment, but in 1990 I chaired meetings of pro-life leaders who saw Terry’s media presence as disastrous, particularly when television producers paired “the angry white man” with demure Planned Parenthood President Faye Wattleton, an African American. Three leaders I spoke with just before the 2020 March for Life, with a combined century of experience in the pro-life movement, said the same.

The Supreme Court’s Webster decision in 1989 was extraordinarily muddled, but abortion advocates used it to fundraise: The court was a haven of reason, the pro-life movement (purportedly typified by OR) a center of radical frenzy. The Boston Globe stated one result: “The abortion-rights movement has gained extraordinary political momentum.” The Washington Post opined, “The ground has shifted toward pro-choice”—and the newspaper never admitted that it was using huge earthmovers to accomplish that feat.

Major networks and newspapers pressured moderately pro-life politicians to change their positions. When they did, the Chicago Tribune and other publications ridiculed them: “Candidate’s Copout” and “Wimp Wriggle.” Newsweek harrumphed about “abortion contortions.” Pro-abortion forces mobilized star power: Jane Fonda, Marlo Thomas, and Susan Sarandon gave speeches. Alice Walker read a poem at one abortion event.

Humorist Finley Peter Dunne in 1901 said, “The Supreme Court follows the election returns,” but this was no laughing matter near the end of the century. Republican operatives had assured pro-life leaders that Reagan nominee Anthony Kennedy (1988) and Bush nominee David Souter (1990) would vote to overturn Roe v. Wade. In 1992’s Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey case, though, they instead followed the Gallup polls and smashed pro-life hopes by keeping Roe alive.

It got worse. Ruth Bader Ginsburg joined the court in August 1993, replacing pro-life Byron White. Stephen Breyer in 1994 replaced retiring Harry Blackmun, a wash—but suddenly abortion had a 6-3 majority with two new justices likely to stick around for at least 25 years. A pro-abortion tide also rolled in at local levels: In Portland and Houston, juries and judges decreed millions of dollars in fines against those who blocked the doors of abortion centers.

As justice slipped away, a few honed their frustration into murder. In 1993, one pro-lifer murdered abortionist David Gunn outside his Pensacola abortion business. In 1994, others murdered abortionist John Britton and his bodyguard, James Barrett, and two receptionists at Massachusetts abortion centers. While pro-life leaders condemned the killings, big media placed a scarlet “M” for murder on the pro-life movement.

The lowest moment for the pro-life movement, four deliverances—two from law and politics, two from technology—turned the tide.

Blockades of abortion centers peaked in 1992 with 83 and were already down to 25 in 1994, but that year President Bill Clinton signed the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act. Protesters who blocked entrances, trespassed on facility property, or stopped cars from entering parking lots now faced up to $10,000 fine and six months’ jail time for a first offense. A second conviction would bring up to 18 years in prison and fines of up to $25,000. In 1995 the number of blockades decreased to five,
Bush could sign the ban into law, with 60 percent to 75 percent of the American public approving and the Supreme Court upholding it 5–4.

Meanwhile, a technological breakthrough aided the pro-life movement. The cost of ultrasound technology decreased and the quality increased. Troubled parents could now see not just a flat, black-and-white image that needed interpretation by doctors and nurses, but a multidimensional portrait of their unborn baby in motion. Crisis pregnancy centers found a sharp upswing in decisions to keep babies alive.

John Piper had offered a prophetic word in 1989: Ultrasound and intruterine photography would open “a window on the womb that will be Exhibit A at the judgment seat of God. There is no more excuse.” Abortion advocates recognized this in 2016 when they criticized a 2016 Super Bowl commercial for Doritos in which an unborn baby moves yearningly toward a bag of chips. “Nobody shares a Facebook picture of their ‘fetus,’” The Daily Beast commented: “We call it a baby. And once we do, the argument is over.”

Not quite. Last spring’s Gallup polling showed 3 in 5 Americans wanting abortion to be illegal in all or almost all circumstances, but big media misinformation has been effective: One-third of that majority opposes overturning Roe v. Wade, even though Roe must go if abortion is to be most often illegal. The miseducation doesn’t end there: While more Americans self-identify as pro-life rather than pro-choice, only 35 percent believe they are in the majority.

Nevertheless, the reality of abortion combined with pro-life perseverance has produced much better results than evident in the other social issue that’s been central to our cultural battles, homosexuality. From 1996 to 2019, the number of abortion centers in the United States has fallen to 800, while just one evangelical network, CareNet, has 1,100 affiliates. Another major pro-life organization, Heartbeat International, has 2,700 centers worldwide.

More than 800 churches participated last year in 40 Days for Life, a movement devoted not to blocking abortion businesses but witnessing near them. The organization says its vigils have contributed to saving nearly 17,000 lives since 2007, without creating a backlash that pushes public opinion in the direction of abortionists.

Matthew Arnold in the mid-19th century wrote of the Sea of Faith’s “melancholy, long, withdrawing roar.” Many pro-lifers have felt that way during the past three decades, but the tide is rolling in again. Ten years ago WORLD depicted this in a memorable cover illustration. Since then the babies have floated in closer.

Meanwhile, many ardent abortion advocates are no longer chasing the middle ground with the “safe, legal, and rare” mantra of the 1990s. With increasing shamelessness they are ordering women to “shout your abortion!”

And last month President Trump didn’t stay in the Oval Office, at a safe mile away from the March for Life. He not only said all the right words and listed his baby-saving executive orders, but recognized the compassion that characterizes most of the pro-life movement: “You stand for life each and every day. You provide housing, education, jobs, and medical care to the women you serve. You find loving families for children in need of a forever home. You host baby showers for expecting moms. You make—you just make it your life’s mission to help spread God’s grace.”
A TIME FOR VIGILANCE: Children need their parents not only to guard against objectionable books but to promote good ones. The titles in the following pages are books to consider.

BY JANIE B. CHEANEY
Illustration by Krieg Barrie
State Rep. Ben Baker, of Missouri House District 160, is concerned about the kind of books kids may encounter at the local library. “I want to be able to take my kids to a library and make sure they’re in a safe environment,” where objectionable material can’t slip by a parent’s notice. To that end, his House Bill 2044 attaches the “Parental Oversight of Public Libraries Act” to a routine funding measure. Under its requirements, “any description or representation, in any form, of nudity, sexuality, sexual conduct, sexual excitement, or sadomasochistic abuse,” as determined by a locally elected citizens’ board, will be restricted from access by minors. Not removed from the library: Parents who have no qualms about their children viewing such material are free to check it out.

The Missouri Library Association strenuously objects, and there’s a legitimate case that wholesale restriction of material deemed objectionable will sweep up the worthwhile with the trash. But Christian parents who are looking sideways at some of the books their kids bring home share Rep. Baker’s alarm. Though overt sexuality is rare in juvenile fiction (the publishing category known as Middle Grade), subtle messages about LGBTQ issues are getting less subtle.

To Night Owl from Dogfish, featuring two girls who try to get their dating dads back together after a breakup, is an engaging, funny, and sympathetic read. The upcoming The List of Things That Will Not Change, by Newbery Medalist Rebecca Stead, is a genuinely touching—to judge by the blurbs—novel of divorce and same-sex remarriage. These books are not propaganda but mainstream novels of high literary merit.

The teen market is more explicit. A contributor to BookRiot.com lists “50+ YA Books Starring Queer Girls Hitting Shelves in 2020”—“a very gay year!” “Queer,” in all its manifestations, was slow to gather momentum in children’s publishing but is now mainstream.

With or without legal restrictions, parental vigilance must go mainstream too—not only to guard against the objectionable but to promote the good. Our selection committees found a lot of good this year, even for teens. Christian authors are winning awards, and secular authors illuminate God’s truth by common grace. New Kid by Jerry Craft, one of our fiction runners-up, won the American Library Association’s Newbery Medal, meaning that thousands of kids will take in its uplifting theme. Our Novel of the Year also gathered a bushel of rave reviews in secular journals.

Children’s publishing may be growing more thorns, but we can still smell the roses. This 2020 special children’s section is our bouquet.
PICTURE BOOKS

TURNING A SHACK INTO A HOME:
Brightening colors help tell a story of hope amid tragedy

BY SUSAN OLASKY

WORLD’S PICTURE BOOK OF THE YEAR is *Home in the Woods* by Eliza Wheeler (Nancy Paulsen Books, ages 5-8), a hope-filled, true story of a family that survives and prospers despite tragedy. Adults will appreciate the enormity of the challenges the mother faces. Children will appreciate the simple story and luminous illustrations that show a family facing difficult circumstances with resourcefulness, tenacity, love—and fun.

The book begins with a monochromatic spread featuring Mum, 34, surrounded by cameo portraits of her eight children, including Eva, only 3 months old. The next page reads, “Dad lives with the angels now, and we need to find a new home.”

The home they find is a dilapidated shack in the woods. It has an old bedspring, a rusty stove, and dirty canning jars in the cellar. The narrator, Marvel, 6, says the shack “looks cold and empty, like I feel inside.” But Mum says, “You never know what treasures we’ll find.”

The story unfolds through the seasons. Some of those treasures become apparent: a pump that brings forth clear, cold water, and rich dark soil under a layer of rotting leaves. They plant seeds. “Some treasures take a little time,” says Mum.

They discover more treasures in the woods: an abundance of berries and wildlife. “Our laughter echoes through the trees.”

When Mum goes to work in town, the children divvy up the chores at the shack. When they finish with chores, they invent games like General Store—again their laughter “echoes through the trees.”

By the time spring rolls around, Marvel the narrator sees the shack with new eyes: “The shack all wrapped in tar paper looks different now—warm and bright and filled up with love … like I feel inside.”

The illustrations begin with muted colors—grays, greens, and browns that reflect the family’s sadness. As the story progresses, as the family’s hard work yields its fruit, the palette brightens. By harvest time, the table is laden with orange pumpkins, yellow corn, purple eggplants, and red beets. Canning jars of jewel-toned fruits and vegetables line the shelves. By springtime, color bursts forth on every page.

While the brightening colors reflect the book’s hopeful story arc (beauty from ashes), Wheeler does not minimize the family’s hardships: You can hear Marvel’s disappointment after a trip to the store where they have just enough money to buy necessities: “We say nothing at all on the long walk home.” And you hear resignation when she describes the results of her brothers’ typical hunting trip: They usually “return with nothing at all.” One page shows the children asleep side-by-side in the bed, while Mum, holding the nursing baby, stares wistfully out the window.

In an author’s note, Wheeler explains that she based the story on her grandmother Marvel’s childhood.

RUNNERS-UP

*Frog’s Rainy-Day Story and Other Fables* by Michael James Dowling
Eight humorous fables offer proverbial wisdom in an inviting way. In one, bored barnyard animals decide to put on the play *Little Red Riding Hood*, but when each animal insists on going off script, the idea dies. As in Aesop, each fable ends with a moral—but here the morals are Biblically based. For the fable above: “Rules are sometimes hard to obey, But they keep us from going astray.” Each fable also concludes with a page contrasting “Wisdom of the World” with “Wisdom of the Word.” Expressive animal illustrations fit the text. (Ages 4-8)

*Grandpa’s Top Threes* by Wendy Meddour
Redheaded Henry and his grandpa are close, but for some reason Grandpa won’t talk. He just keeps gardening. Henry complains to his mom, and she says, “Give him time. ... So Henry gave him six and a half minutes.” Eventually Henry’s “top three” game brings Grandpa out of his shell. They compare top three sandwiches, top three jellyfish, and top three animals at the zoo. When they get to “top three Grannies” the story lands an emotional punch. Bright, chaotic illustrations let us see the world through Henry’s eyes. The book shows the power of love and relationship to heal a grieving heart. (Ages 3-6)

*When Grandma Gives You a Lemon Tree* by Jamie L.B. Deenihan
A young girl has six gadgets on her birthday wish list. Then Grandma gives her a lemon tree, which was not on the list. The girl knows how she should react to this unwanted gift, and a series of funny illustrations shows how not to act. When the lemon tree bears fruit,
she and Grandma make lemonade and set up a lemonade stand. What will she buy with the profits? Bright, airy illustrations match the tone and tempo of the story. They show the girl’s transformed desires and portray a larger transformation extending to the whole neighborhood. (Ages 3 and up)

**It Began With a Page**
*by Kyo Maclear*

This picture book biography tells the story of the Japanese American illustrator who convinced her publisher in the 1960s to print her “international set of babies”—babies of all colors—despite the typical all-white representations of the time. The book follows Gyo’s journey from lonely childhood in Southern California, to Japan, where she pursued her passion for art, to New York. Maclear, keeping children in mind, writes deftly about racial prejudice, World War II, and the internment of Japanese Americans. Delicate and expressive illustrations help tell the story of this unassuming hero who recognizes the power of a children’s book to change the world. (Ages 4-8)

**The Crayon Man**
*by Natascha Biebow*

This picture book biography tells the story of Edwin Binney, the inventor of Crayola crayons. When his children beg him to invent better, brighter crayons, he goes to work. The story and pictures show him testing various formulas to come up with the perfect nontoxic crayon. When he succeeds, his wife dubs them Crayolas (from the French words for waxy and chalk). Steven Salerno’s exuberant illustrations celebrate color and depict Binney’s turn-of-the-20th-century world. Binney’s creativity, determination, and ability to persist through failure led to the invention of something almost every child owns. (Ages 4-8)

—Megan Saben, Mary Jackson, Pamela Palmer, Courtney Holder, Sandy Barwick, and Kristin Chapman contributed to these reviews

**NOVELS**

BECOMING A GENTLEMAN:
How tragedy can produce an honorable young man

*by Janie B. Cheaney*

“THIS BOOK STARTED WITH AN IMAGE: a very formal butler standing on a stoop of a normal suburban house, on the first day of the oldest kid’s sixth-grade year, in the rain,” explained Gary D. Schmidt, author of *Pay Attention, Carter Jones* (Clarion Books, ages 10-12). “That whole image was there before anything else, and obviously, the question is: Why is he there?”

At the Jones household, there’s a lot more going on than the first day of school. The family is falling apart. Capt. Jackson Jones, aka Dad, is on deployment in Germany, and a recent tragedy makes his absence doubly stressful. Mr. Bowles-Fitzpatrick has arrived to bring word of the passing of Capt. Jones’ father, a grandfather the children never met, but who left them, as it were, a butler.
By Chapter 2, Mr. Bowles-Fitzpatrick is firmly bringing order to the house. Any fan of British children’s literature might be thinking of Mary Poppins (even though, as 12-year-old Carter and his sisters often remind their new mentor, “We’re in America”). But the butler is stolidly unmagical.

The butler prefers the title of “gentleman’s gentleman,” and true gentlemen can be found even in America. But they are made, not born, and Carter’s gentlemanly training begins with thoughtfulness toward his sisters and respect for his mom (all of which comes with the privilege of driving his late grandfather’s eggplant-colored Bentley). Capt. Jones has neglected these traits and abandoned his family to deal with a devastating loss in their own ways. The butler has another way, adapted to each family member.

For Carter, it’s the elegant game of cricket: The boy begins as a typically cheeky (at least on the surface) adolescent who doesn’t know what to do with the weightier matters of life. But Mr. Bowles-Fitzpatrick provides some grounding: “In the midst of great anxiety and great sadness, it takes an honorable man to nourish the goodness around him, small and fragile as it may seem.” Family, art, dance, and sports are all good things, but it takes effort to nourish them properly. Eighth grader Carson Krebs, who has also experienced loss, backs up the butler: “Cricket is serious. Pay attention.” Cricket is also incomprehensible to most Americans and will remain so to readers who don’t pay attention to the chapter headings and game sequences.

But that doesn’t matter because (of course) it’s a metaphor. Life is serious and requires attention to the rules, both explicit and implicit. But it’s also thrilling, fun, and totally worth the effort. Gary Schmidt (who while writing children’s fiction still loves engaging with students and literature at Calvin College) gently reminds young readers that a life lived well is well worth living.

**RUNNERS-UP**

**Time Sight** by Lynne Jonell
Will’s mother, on a medical mission to some disaster-prone, Third World country, has run into serious trouble involving soldiers and guns. Dad has flown to the rescue while Will and his brother Jamie take an impromptu, and unwilling, vacation to relatives in the Scottish Highlands. Little does Will suspect a weird talent buried deep in his genetic heritage: the ability to open windows in time while on any spot of land significant to the family. Layers of ancestral history unfold, each with its own troubles and ethical dilemmas, but God remains: a rock of stability and hope in all stories. *(Ages 9-13)*

**We’re Not From Here** by Geoff Rodkey
For the humans who planet-hopped after Earth collapsed, Mars isn’t as supportive of life as they hoped. The distant Planet Choom, originally settled by an insectlike species called the Zhuri, has offered refuge. But in the 20 years it takes for the Earthlings to get there, the Choomians have reconsidered: Humans are emotional and violent, and therefore too risky. Only after intense negotiation are Lan Persaud and his family allowed a provisional stay to prove their worth. More than a rollicking space adventure, the story touches on issues of fake news, racism, censorship, creativity, and more—often hilariously. *(Ages 9-13)*

**Super Jake & the King of Chaos** by Naomi Milliner
Ethan performs magic at children’s birthday parties and dreams of sharing a stage with his hero, Magnus the Magnificent. His Jewish family supports him enthusiastically: parents, grandparents, annoying little brother—and Jake. At 2 years old, Jake can’t walk, talk, sit up, or swallow. But he can smile; that’s how he shows his love for the family that loves him. Ethan always dreads the moment when he has to explain his brother to strangers, but life is good until a crisis makes him question everything he’s believed. Though realistic about the strains of caring for a special-needs child, the story is engaging, upbeat, and hopeful. *(Ages 9-13)*

**A Wolf Called Wander**, by Roseanne Parry, is the fictionalized account of the adventures of an actual wolf. Lindsay Lackey’s debut novel, *All the Impossible Things*, follows a troubled foster child from an “impossible” family situation to new hope, with hints of a guiding providence. *The Bootlace Magician*, Cassie Beasley’s follow-up to *Circus Mirandus* (WORLD’s 2016 Children’s Novel of the Year), explores profound spiritual themes in a magical setting.
The fifth child in her large family, Rebeka Uwitonze was born with a neurological disorder that made her feet curve entirely backward, bent her thumbs into her palms, and limited the use of her arms. Superstitious villagers suggested someone quietly suffocate her, but her parents knew God had a plan for her. Rebeka grew up with this assurance and a will strong enough to propel her to get up and walk—that is, hobble on the backs of her feet. Such determination would soon carry her through greater challenges.

God doesn’t always reveal His plans, but when Rebeka was 9 years old a series of providential events brought Clay Davis, a Texas businessman, to her village. One of his friends was sponsoring a little girl through a Christian charity called Africa New Life Ministries. The little girl happened to be Rebeka’s younger sister. Rebeka herself had a sponsor through the same ministry: Dr. Robert Denhe, who lived in Austin and happened to know the Davises. When Clay returned to Texas and showed Dr. Denhe pictures of his sponsored child, the man was stunned. He’d had no idea of Rebeka’s disability. Might she come to America for surgery?

Thus an improbable chain of circumstances brought an obscure Rwandan girl to the chance of a lifetime, but that was only the beginning. The surgery that began to correct Rebeka’s twisted feet called for months of treatments, therapy, casts, and hospital visits. Every step caused intense pain and required a level of fortitude challenging even for a grown-up. Throughout Rebeka’s year in America, the faith and love of her natural family and the dedication of her host family provided the inner strength to keep going.

But there’s more. Rebeka’s American mother, Meredith Davis, also happened to be an aspiring children’s nonfiction writer who had already made important publishing connections. Even here, God’s providence was working to get the story into print.

“I was born the way God created me,” Rebeka says in a personal note to the reader. “I endured hard things. If I can do it, you can do it.” With God’s help.

Nonfiction

Against the Odds: How God Planned the Steps of a Girl with Deformed Feet

By Janie B. Cheaney

“Rebeka traced the shape of her curled feet through the blanket that covered her and her little sister, Medatrece. Everybody was asleep and she needed to go to the bathroom. She wanted to go by herself, without bothering anybody, but she was also afraid. Wild dogs roamed the Rwandan countryside after dark and could easily get into her yard.”

The introduction of Her Own Two Feet: A Rwandan Girl’s Brave Fight to Walk by Meredith Davis and Rebeka Uwitonze (Scholastic Focus, ages 10-15) instantly plunges readers into the plight of a 5-year-old with severely deformed feet. To take care of the most basic need, she has to crawl across a dirt yard in the dark, dodging animal waste and praying the wild dogs don’t get her. But that’s only the beginning of her challenges.

Runners-Up

All in a Drop: How Antony van Leeuwenhoek Discovered an Invisible World by Lori Alexander

The curious son of a cloth merchant, young Antony was destined to follow in his father’s trade but with an interesting sideline: lens grinding. Gentlemen of the age that we’ve come to call the Scientific Revolution had been using lenses to explore small things. But Antony had some ideas that would improve the simple magnifying glass and give human eyes the capacity of seeing into a tiny world of living creatures previously unknown. The engaging biography with colorful and winsome illustrations communicates the excitement of those days, when a draper with a middle-class education could blaze new trails into the frontiers of science. (Ages 7-10)

Crossing on Time: Steam Engines, Fast Ships, and a Journey to the New World by David Macaulay

Before David Macaulay (The Way Things Work) developed a fascination with engineering and architecture, he was a boy growing up in England. In 1957 his father accepted a job in New Jersey, which meant David and his mother and siblings would be crossing the Atlantic on an ocean liner to join him in the United States. To tell the story of this adventure, Macaulay goes back to the early days of mechanized water travel. The detailed drawings (with whimsical touches) and the clear, readable prose make this a treat for budding engineers. The rest of us can marvel at the creative genius God gives to man. (Ages 8-14)

The Promise of Change: One Girl’s Story in the Fight for School Equality by Jo Ann Allen Boyce and Debbie Levy

In Clinton, Tenn., whites and blacks were friendly as long as the latter obeyed cer-
tain unwritten rules: no going into the library or pool; balcony only at the movies. Then came Brown v. Board of Education. Jo Ann Boyce, barely 15, was one of the “Clinton 12” who enrolled in the local high school and became national icons. She tells her own story in a variety of verse forms that give her recollections immediacy, poignancy, and emotional grip. During four tense months at Clinton High, we see faith in her fellow man wavering while faith in God holds firm, to be rewarded in time. (Ages 10-16)

**Rocket to the Moon! (Big Ideas That Changed the World)** by Don Brown

The idea of rocket propulsion goes back hundreds of years, but traveling by rocket is only about a century old. One of the first to try it was Rodman Law of New Jersey. He becomes our narrator for this history of the Apollo Project to put a man on the moon, a dream that was accomplished less than 10 years after its proposal. The graphic-novel format dives into the basic rocket technology and its development by Goddard, von Braun, and others. The dramatic presentation and straightforward narrative make this a story even non-science nerds will find engrossing. (Ages 8-12; note: There is one quoted profanity)

**HONORABLE MENTIONS**

**O Captain! My Captain: Walt Whitman, Abraham Lincoln, and the Civil War** shows young readers a side of our nation’s greatest conflict that’s seldom seen. **Epic Athletes: Stephen Curry** introduces young sports fans to a tough competitor on the court who is also a God-fearing family man. The latest in the Reformation Heritage Christian Biographies for Young Readers series details the life of Julia Gonzaga, a little-known Reformation hero.

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**GRACE AND POETRY**

Painful memories, but also hope and faith, inform the work of poet Nikki Grimes

BY JANIE B. CHEANEY

**LIFE FOR ME AIN’T BEEN NO CRYSTAL STAIR.**

In his poem “Mother to Son,” Langston Hughes set one of his most vivid images. It might also describe the early life of another poet whose climb out of childhood was similarly studded with tacks, splinters, and “boards torn up.” In her teens a friend asked Nikki Grimes how she could still believe in God. “What kind of question is that? How could I not? If it weren’t for him, I wouldn’t even be here. I’d either be in prison, or the grave” (Ordinary Hazards).

With over 65 children’s novels, picture books, and poetry collections to her name, plus articles, accolades, and honors (The Watcher was WORLD’s Picture Book of the Year in 2017), success seems crystal-clear. From her home in Corona, Calif., Grimes keeps a demanding speaking and writing schedule, taking time for church, art projects, and connecting with readers through her website, where she invites prayer requests.

But splinters can lodge deep, and her latest published book, a memoir called Ordinary Hazards (WordSong, 2019), prods painful memories. “I’ve cracked the past / like a door.” The door opens to a little girl born in 1950s Harlem to a protective big sister, a musically gifted father, and a paranoid schizophrenic mother. Within a few pages rats are nibbling the leftover bread, and Daddy, unable to take his wife’s instability, moves out for good. While at work, Mother relies on unsuitable babysitters, one of whom locks Nikki and her sister in a closet all day.
When their mother’s alcoholism leads to rehab, the girls go to separate foster homes. That’s how Nikki, age 7, comes to the only haven of stability she would know as a child: the Buchanans of Ossining, N.Y. “Search my life for luck, / and bad is all you’ll find. / Keep an eye out / for grace, though. / Hard evidence appears / round every corner.” In Ossining she receives a notebook and begins to record her thoughts.

After returning to her mother at age 9, grace often seemed elusive; indifference, abuse, and gang violence were closer at hand. By her teens her father had become her best friend, introducing her to art and artists, planting seeds of beauty and purpose—which made his death in an auto accident all the more bitter.

*Ordinary Hazards* is a book for older teens, not children. It’s often raw and angry as the author digs up neglect, loss, and harm. The blessings that sprouted in the cracks sometimes took years to bloom. But she kept climbing, and eventually settled on her calling as a writer.

Her wide-ranging body of work includes humorous novels for middle graders, chapter books for early readers, serious fiction for teens, Biblical narratives for Easter and Advent, and picture books for reading aloud. Many include hints of her early sorrow, but all end in hope. Sometimes even a hope beyond this world.

All authors write their experience into their work, but few, in today’s secular culture, include their faith so explicitly. In *Ordinary Hazards*, you sense God’s presence from an early age. Have you always been a believer?

Absolutely, though it would be some time before I entered into a personal relationship with the Lord. But I always believed.

Has memory been more a blessing or a burden to you?

I don’t think it’s that simple. There are painful memories that I’d just as soon erase. At the same time, I grieve the memories that are lost. The most agonizing thing about writing my memoir was having to grieve those lost memories, and having to figure out how to navigate those blank spots. In general, though, as we are all made up of our memories, I would have to say each one is a blessing, in some sense—not the painful events, perhaps, but the fact that we can remember them.

Why a verse memoir?

Why not? Poetry is my second language. It is the genre I reach for when I need to express the deepest things of the heart, or share those experiences that were the most difficult. I didn’t choose the form of this memoir. The choice was unconscious, organic, natural. I don’t know that I could have written *Ordinary Hazards* any other way.

What would you hope a young reader takes away from *Ordinary Hazards*—even, or perhaps especially, a reader who has not experienced similar trauma?

Ah! My least favorite question! There is no single answer, here. Every reader, no matter the age, takes away something different from each book. So much depends on what that reader brings to the story, in terms of experience, mindset, emotional circumstance. In a general sense, I hope readers are inspired, are empowered to own their own stories, are encouraged to know that, no matter their circumstance in life, there is always light at the end of the tunnel, if you are stubborn enough to hold on to hope. How’s that?
Lovely War by Julie Berry

The gods of Olympus, ensconced in a classy Manhattan hotel, debate the nature of love as World War II rages. Aphrodite has a story to share from an earlier war: of two couples who meet in extreme circumstances and prove that love is not about self-fulfillment, soulmates, or safety. It’s about grace and, very often, suffering. The bickering-gods device sometimes intrudes on the narrative, but their inclusion, along with the wartime setting, adds a Homeric dimension that’s not accidental. In spite of a small amount of vulgarity, profanity, and violence (all understandable in the context), Lovely War is an elevating read.

Butterfly Yellow by Thanhha Lai

Six years after she was separated from her little brother at the Saigon airport, 18-year-old Hàng is finally relocated in Dallas with her uncle, and determined to track her brother to his adopted family in Amarillo. At the same time, another teen is driving up from Austin: LeeRoy, a would-be cowboy determined to meet his rodeo hero Bruce Ford. When their paths collide, LeeRoy reluctantly finds himself honor-bound to escort Hàng to her destination. A classic rom-com scenario gains emotional weight with themes of living beyond tragedy and finding joy in unexpected places. (There’s some self-conscious profanity from LeeRoy.)

What the Night Sings by Vesper Stamper

“When all is stripped away, what am I?” Gerta Rausch was living up to her parents’ musical ambitions, with no inkling of her Jewish heritage, when the Nazis ripped up her script, transported her to Bergen-Belsen, pushed a viola into her hands, and forced her to play for new arrivals headed to the ovens. The narrative begins when her camp is liberated, with Gerta, now 16, near death and so weak she must be carried. Though the horrors of the Holocaust loom large, her story is about renewal, with her house of torment transformed into a place of flowers, bakeries, love—and of course, music.

Forward Me Back to You by Mitali Perkins

After a rough semester at school, Katina King’s single mom sends her to an elderly friend in Boston for a month of R&R. It’s anything but relaxing, as Mrs. Vee expects Kat to attend church with her—even maneuvers her into a mission trip to India to serve at a shelter for victims of sex trafficking. Robin, another disgruntled teen at church, has his own reasons for going back to the place where he was born. The plot includes danger, adventure, suspense, humor, and a dash of romance. Though not a “Christian novel,” Christian faith shines a light on difficult subjects.

WORTHY YA
Four outstanding novels for teens

BY JANIE B. CHEANEY
NO MORE SMALL TALK

Your friends can get two free months of sound journalism, grounded in facts and biblical truth, and have some real current events to discuss.

Refer your friends, family, colleagues, and fellow church members at getworldnow.org.
TWELVE DOGS AND A SLED

Colleen Sweeney Wallin became an unlikely lover of a unique winter sport

by Sharon Dierberger in Two Harbors, Minn.
A dozen tense sled dogs strain at their harnesses, impatiently waiting with 13 other sled teams from the United States and Canada. Behind these 12 dogs, a musher wearing bib number 15 grins and steadies her crew. Sunglasses, purple cap, and a thick, fox-fur-ruffed red snowsuit mostly hide her dark eyes, fair Irish skin, and auburn hair. Her mittened fingers grip the wooden handles of a titanium sled, heavy boots planted firmly on its footboards.

At two-minute intervals, handlers lead each team to the starting line. There, after a 10-second countdown, dogs and musher erupt onto a 300-mile, snow-packed trail one team at a time. So begins the 36th John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon, lasting two days in January in Minnesota along Lake Superior’s north shore.

Colleen Sweeney Wallin, 57, from Two Harbors, Minn., is not the stereotypical musher from a Jack London novel—no burly body or grizzled countenance. No wilderness experience, either, until she embraced mushing. Growing up in a Twin Cities suburb with six sisters and only small dogs for pets, she never expected to own, feed, and train 37 huskies, much less compete in the longest premier sled dog race in the Lower 48, a qualifier for the famed Alaskan Iditarod.

Wallin first became interested in sled dogs in 1993, after watching the finish-line filming in downtown Two Harbors of the classic movie Iron Will. Her avid hunter-fisherman husband of 32 years, Ward, gifted her with a paid recreational sled dog trip to the Boundary Waters wilderness area, and that trip’s emotional experience persuaded her next to research and purchase dogs to train on the 40 acres surrounding their log cabin.

Her love for dog sledding grew, and she entered her first competition, the shorter Beargrease 100-mile race, in 1995 with no racing know-how. When her lead runner injured its ankle and other dog issues ensued, the whole team refused to continue, stopping 8 miles from the finish line.
The trail crew eventually found Wallin in the dark with her minimal survival gear and tired dogs and said she’d have to quit. After begging for one more chance, she rallied her canines and crossed the finish line last, long after everyone but family members had gone.

“It was a cool sense of accomplishment,” says Wallin, and it motivated her to keep training. Prior to January’s competition, she had completed 18 Beargrease races, finishing as the top female in 13 races and as third overall in 2014.

Mishaps occur during training, too. Once, careening around a turn, her sled tipped, dumping Wallin over a bridge into icy, waist-deep water, and her dogs took off. She hiked 3 miles in wet (soon frozen) snow pants before finding her team lying down calmly waiting for her. Another time, she grew dehydrated and hallucinated that turtles were clogging the trail.

Even occasional race temperatures of minus 50 degrees haven’t daunted Wallin, though twice she didn’t compete because of the births of her two sons and twice organizers canceled for lack of snow.

Rather than isolating her from family members, dog sledding unites them. Everyone participates in what’s also become a family side business, Silver Creek Sled Dogs. Ward helps train and run the dogs and splits daily feeding and poop-scooping with Wallin. (Their 37 huskies consume 4 tons of food every nine months.) Sons Ian, 21, and Ero, 17, help care for the dogs between school and hockey events. This year marks Ero’s second Beargrease shorter competition.

“It makes me feel good to know Ero’s on the same trail as I am, seeing what I’m seeing,” says Wallin.

During today’s race, the trail is the best Wallin’s ever seen. A deep snow-pack of 40 inches on the northern portion makes sledding fast but controllable and keeps Wallin in the pack of lead mushers.

The marathon commemorates John Beargrease, son of an Anishinabe chief. He and his brothers delivered mail weekly along the rugged Superior shoreline between Two Harbors and Grand Marais from 1879 to 1899. Mail communication connected and helped develop this northern frontier.

At six marathon checkpoints, handlers help unharness, feed, rest, and then reharness teams. Veterinarians check dogs. Mushers briefly recuperate, change clothes, and resupply sleds with frozen herring and beaver fat for their animals. At the midtrail checkpoint, mushers care for teams unassisted.

After 25 years raising and racing sled dogs, Wallin has developed not only physical and mental stamina but an ability to read her dogs’ emotions and recognize their barks. They respond quickly to her gestures and commands: They trust Wallin, and she has to trust them with her life.

She sounds almost poetic reflecting on dog sledding with her team: “The amount of prayer time I have out there ... I feel cloaked in wonderment when I look around at the beauty God’s created.” She sees moose, wolves, foxes, and snowshoe hares and has time to pray for her family and ruminate on what she’ll plant in her spring garden.

During two days of racing, Wallin snatches four to five hours of sleep, downs as much peanut butter and cream cheese as she wants, ends up with cold-swollen face and fingers, and is exhausted but elated.

This year, after more than 32 hours on the trail, Wallin crosses the finish line as the first female finisher, and fifth overall.

“Never in a million years did I ever think growing up I’d be doing this,” marvels Wallin. Now she can’t imagine otherwise.
NUMEROUS CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS sent buses full of students to the March for Life in Washington, D.C., last month. Which museum on or adjacent to the National Mall had about 700 students lined up to enter it at 10 a.m. the day before the March? Which had no line and would be a good one for school groups to visit next January, when many will be back for the 48th annual march? Which should schools avoid unless they want a massive dose of ever-changing but always trendy pseudoscience?

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, where the student groups were lining up, is well worth a visit. The permanent exhibits show how the Nazis multiplied hatred step-by-step: Nuremberg Race Laws, Kristallnacht, ghettoization, killing fields, and gas chambers. The museum plays to eyes and ears: photos of Jewish deportation, oral testimonies from Auschwitz. And a few survived: The museum displays resistance and rescues, liberation of the camps, and video testimonies from those who lived.

School groups next year should also visit the National Museum of African American History and Culture, a quarter-mile from the Holocaust Museum. The history section notes not only the familiar uprisings like Nat Turner’s, but little-known ones like the Natchez Revolt of 1729 and the New York Conspiracy of 1741. It shows how slavery in the 17th and 18th centuries was a tragedy in the North as well as the South: “By 1664 New York City had more enslaved residents than any other city in North America. Forty-three percent of the city’s households depended upon enslaved domestic servants and laborers.”

One exhibit, “Thomas Jefferson and the Limits of Freedom,” shows the contradictions in the man who wrote in the Declaration of Independence of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” but removed two-thirds of those basics from the 600-plus slaves he owned. Jefferson’s attitude was like that of the person lampooned by hymn-writer William Cowper: “I admit I am sickened at the purchase of slaves ... but I must be mum, for how could we do without sugar or rum?”
Overall, the museum’s three floors of history steer clear of the propagandistic approach of The New York Times’ “1619 Project” (see p. 72) and recognize the importance of Christianity. Harriet Tubman’s hymnal has with it this explanation: “A fiercely religious woman, Tubman spoke of visions and dreams that helped provide a moral compass throughout her life. The wear and tear on this hymnal suggests that she must have loved it and used it quite frequently.”

Other references to Christianity show how slave owners sometimes used parts of the Bible to intimidate their “property,” but slaves perceived the ennobling and comforting essence. Ex-slave Elizabeth Rose Hite recalled, “We had our own church in the brick yard way out in the field. We hid behind the bricks and had church every night.” Olaudah Equiano gained his freedom in 1766 and later offered this challenge: “O ye nominal Christians! Might not an African ask you—Learned you this from your God, who says unto you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you?”

Sadly, because it contains always-in-style dinosaur bones, the museum to skip is the National Museum of Natural History, two-fifths of a mile east of the African American museum. That’s because the NMNH is too fashionable, always trying to drum into impressionable heads both the basic evolutionary message and the crisis du jour.

I wrote five years ago about the museum’s hyper-Darwinism. “Welcome to the Mammal Family Reunion,” one exhibit banners. “Come meet your relatives,” including “One of Your Oldest Relatives: Morganucodon oehleri.” But the museum cheats by propagandizing for macroevolution from Morgan (who was 4 inches long) to humans while largely providing microevolution examples: “As Habitats Changed, So Did Giraffes.”

Of course over time giraffes with longer necks would have an advantage over short-necked ones. That’s not where the dispute lies: The argument is about who made giraffes.

But while the evolutionary sleight-of-hand continues, the particular crisis has changed. Five years ago the emphasis was on pollution. Now it’s on—no surprise—climate change. We’re told, “Climate Change Impacts Daily Lives. Imagine your whole country disappearing under the ocean because of rising sea levels.” NMNH goes beyond the evidence to assert that “current climate change is primarily caused by humans ... by driving our cars, heating and cooling buildings, powering industrial plants, and even making concrete.”

We can now blame epidemics on climate change: “Ecological and climate changes caused by humans increase our exposure to infected animals. ... When people change an environment, they interact with animals and their viruses in new ways. ... It’s not too late to avoid disaster, but we are running out of time. ... Never in the entire 200,000-year history of our species have we faced the prospect of such rapid climate change.”

And yet, an irony lurks here. In an exhibit on “Climate, Evolution, and Survival,” NMNH tells us: “During the period of human evolution, Earth’s climate fluctuated between moist and dry, warm and cool. The challenge of surviving during these times of change shaped the course of human evolution. ... The characteristics that make us human evolved over 6 million years as our ancestors struggled to survive during times of dramatic climate change.” So could climate change, by forcing humans to become superhuman, be a good thing?
OFF TO A BAD RESTART

The Grove United Methodist Church has not abandoned its elderly members, but it has abandoned Biblical doctrine

by Russell St. John

The story was sensational. A small, struggling congregation of some 30 elderly attendees is scheduled to close this summer, only to relaunch in the fall with a new, young pastor, new décor, and a new worship style, but without its aging members. Pioneer Press reported that church leaders at the Grove United Methodist Church (UMC) had asked elderly members not to participate in the relaunch and to worship elsewhere for two years before “reapplying” for membership. Accusations of age discrimination followed. Major media picked up the story, painting it as a case of youth-obsessed culture run amok.

The truth is more complicated, but also more sobering. The Grove boasts two suburban St. Paul, Minn., campuses: the small Cottage Grove congregation, and a large, prosperous Woodbury congregation 15 minutes to the north. The two congregations merged in 2008, but for the past seven years the Cottage Grove campus has been unable to support its own minister. Members of the congregation plan services, provide music, and take turns preaching sermons. Despite past revitalization efforts, the Cottage Grove campus has remained stagnant.

The planned relaunch is designed to attract younger families and to forge an intergenerational ministry. Leaders have asked Cottage Grove members to worship at the Woodbury campus for 15-18 months so the relaunch can “take.” The leaders clarified no current member will be excluded from the relaunch. They are being asked—not commanded—to give it a chance to succeed.

But it won’t.

In June 2019 the Minnesota Conference of the UMC voted to reject a Biblical view of human sexuality, marriage, and Christian ministry in order to support “the full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people in the life of the church.” In a Jan. 5, 2020, sermon, Grove Associate Pastor Kelly Lamon stated that the leaders of the Grove “stand in solidarity” with the decision of the Minnesota Conference.

Theologically liberal Methodists already repudiate substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection of the dead, and the plain Biblical witness to the necessity of repentance and the certainty of eternal punishment apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Their current repudiation of Biblical morality further untethers the Grove from historic Christianity.

In a brief survey of 12 weeks of sermons, including messages from pastors of the Grove and the bishop of the Dakotas-Minnesota area, I found not a single reference to repentance, conviction, guilt, law, commandment, the holiness of God, judgment, atonement, or God’s wrath against sin.

One sermon mentioned sin, but did so while suggesting that Christians too often use light and darkness as metaphors for good and evil, and that by doing so we promote racism against dark-skinned persons. No sermons mentioned eternal life, reconciliation with God, the necessity of forgiveness, obedience, or the cost of discipleship.

The leaders of the Grove might succeed in relaunching the Cottage Grove campus. They might fill the sanctuary with young people. But ultimately they will fail, for they appear committed to withholding the words of eternal life from those who attend.
GOD MAKING UP FOR US

They fought one another in marriage—until God brought a change of perspective

by Charissa Koh

11TH IN A SERIES ON LONG MARRIAGES

STEPHEN AND SHERRY COLLINS had been married five years when, in 1980, difficult circumstances led them to Christian faith. On bed rest while pregnant with the couple’s second baby, Sherry, a Jew, watched the film Jesus of Nazareth on TV. After giving birth, she read the Bible during her hospital recovery and became convinced Jesus was the Messiah.

Meanwhile, Stephen, at home with the newborn, woke one morning to find his son cold and rigid in the crib—dead in his sleep. “It was the most shocking thing that’s ever happened to me,” said Stephen. “I felt helpless. I was shaking.” Like his wife, he turned to the Bible: Reading in 2 Samuel, he realized King David’s response to his baby’s death was “the exact opposite reaction that I had.”

Stephen and Sherry both found hope in Christ, but they nevertheless had a rocky marriage in the years afterward. The couple’s different personalities clashed and, with six children, so did their parenting styles. They fell into a repeated cycle of hurt feelings.

A psychologist who evaluated Stephen and Sherry in the early 1990s pronounced them “incompatible.” They separated in 1992 but came back together after a year. Still, they couldn’t stop fighting. They separated again in 1999: Stephen moved in with some single men from church, hoping the distance would help him and his wife sort things out.

But this time their problems intimidated fellow church members. Sherry said she prayed frequently as she cared for their kids and attended Bible studies and counseling. Stephen tried everything he knew: self-help books, Christian conferences, and counseling. After a year without progress, he gave up. He began looking for a new place to move to. It seemed his 26-year-old marriage was over.

One night, Stephen went to bed in despair, but when he woke up, he felt God telling him to go home and love his wife selflessly. His only explanation for the change that came over him: “The ‘me’ part of me died that day, sometime during the night while I was sleeping. The next day it no longer mattered to me whether there was any hope or not: I had to do what God told me to do: Go home, love your wife and your kids.”

Stephen called Sherry and said he was coming home. Sherry remembers feeling “happy,” because she really did love him. When he returned home, he found new ways to serve her, like cooking and doing the laundry.

Nearly 20 years later, they still fight, but now fight differently: Instead of emotional, selfish fights, their conflicts now often end in prayer. Stephen said they are learning to give grace and accept one another, instead of just fixing every problem.

Sherry said, “The Lord taught us that we have to forgive each other and think of each other [as] more important than ourselves.”

Stephen is now 67, and Sherry is 64. They agree the last few years of their marriage have been the sweetest: “The way it feels to hold her hand after 45 years of marriage, there’s no words for it,” said Stephen. “Most of the last 45 years has been God making up for what we do.”
Not-so-great moments in history

New Jersey schools turn to LGBTQ promotion instead of teaching important lessons about the past

Starting in September, New Jersey public schools will be teaching children in grades five, six, eight, 10, and 12 about the great historical contributions of LGBTQ people to United States history.

What are these great historical contributions, you ask? Well, for example, that Barbra “Babs” Siperstein was the first transgender person to serve on the Democratic National Committee. Yes, it’s true! You may have lived your whole life in deplorable ignorance, but your children will never again be deprived of this knowledge.

Nor that Siperstein’s name is on legislation allowing trans people to change their birth certificates. (Which, come to think of it, sounds a lot like changing the past, a thing we once took a dim view of when Stalin airbrushed Leon Trotsky and Lev Kamenev from photos of Lenin’s speech at Sverdlov Square.)

Don’t look for much detail about Lenin or Stalin in the new New Jersey school curricula—or perhaps even about Washington crossing the Delaware. I mean, something will have to be sacrificed from the syllabus to make room for “Babs.” Children’s textbooks can only be so big.

The Garden State joins Illinois, California, and Colorado in mandating that our pedagogical institutions henceforth teach the social, political, and economic contributions of men who like to have sex with men, women who like to have sex with women, folks who like to swing both ways, and those who have breasts and penises surgically removed or installed.

For myself, I struggle to see the relevance of what individuals do in their bedrooms to their accomplishments in the fields of management, finance, real estate, marketing, and civil engineering. Is the invention of a lightbulb any more to be celebrated because it is made by someone who checks “gender-queer” on government forms?

Well, if that’s how it is, then I say we go all the way and pass laws ensuring that left-handed people get their due acknowledgment. Also, what are the great achievements of Freemasons? Or freckled citizens? Or redheads? Or tobacconists? Or aficionados of fly fishing? Or makers of reflective orange street cones?

And when the pendulum has swung its furthest from priggish morality toward sexual “liberation,” let us update New Jersey’s educational materials to include the category of pedophile, that last of all civil rights victims. We’ll rehabilitate tarnished British author Oscar Wilde, who pleaded heroically at his 1895 trial on charges of “gross indecency”:

“The love that dare not speak its name’ in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art. … It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as ‘the love that dare not speak its name,’ and on account of it I am placed where I am now.”

Beautiful sentiments, eh? So your children will be made to think, especially if they hear it in the fifth grade, then are told again in sixth grade, and are reinforced in the opinion in the eighth grade, 10th, and 12th. In vain you console yourself that only “History” class will be infected: Teachers of math, music, and science will be tutored by curriculum coaches to make their own disciplines more “inclusive.”

Oscar Wilde is wrong about David and Jonathan, of course. And Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias says that before his untimely death, Wilde asked a friend and fellow pederast, “In loving one of those boys, did you ever love any one of them for themselves?” The friend replied, “No, I never did.” Wilde said, “Neither did I.”

I dare say you won’t find that in a textbook in a high school in New Jersey.
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Misplaced blame
Using 1619 for propaganda in 2020

As Black History Month concludes, let’s not forget the biggest historical gambit of the past year, the “1619 Project” of The New York Times. Princeton historian Allen Guelzo says it “is not history; it is conspiracy theory. The 1619 Project is not history; it is ignorance”—and you can see by Guelzo’s use of semicolons that he’s an academic who normally doesn’t scream.

Guelzo and many other scholars are complaining about the 1619 Project, named after the tragic year slaves from Africa first arrived in Virginia. The project teaches that America’s 18th-century founders fought a revolution “to ensure that slavery would continue.” The project, in its own words, shows slavery was part of “the brutality of American capitalism … low-road capitalism … winner-take-all capitalism … racist capitalism.”

As if there’s not only enough hate-America teaching in public schools, some educators are jumping on this crooked-wheel bandwagon. Chicago Public Schools announced that each of its high schools will receive 200-400 copies of the Times’ glossy 1619 Project publication, whereby students will learn that America relishes not only modernity and democracy but also “barbarism … cruelty … totalitarianism.”

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Some backstory on the use of such loaded terms in a newspaper that once used understated prose: The Times has figured out a way to have both the appearance of moral principle and the accretion of financial principal. While its editors and writers rage, rage against the Trump machine, the newspaper’s decisive move further to the political left has won it many new readers and millions of dollars. The Times had already lost most of its conservative subscribers, so it alienated few as it picked up numerous Trump-haters.

Last month prominent historians James McPherson, Gordon Wood, Sean Wilentz, Victoria Bynum, and James Oakes charged that the 1619 Project reflects “a displacement of historical understanding by ideology.” The NYT turned down their request for corrections. These and other liberal or moderate historians recognize the evil of slavery but stand against attempts to minimize not only its horror but its continuing effects.

Allen Guelzo’s 2012 book Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War & Reconstruction is a thoughtful account of the war and its aftermath, so I value his judgment: “The 1619 Project is not history: it is polemic, born in the imaginations of those whose primary target is capitalism itself and who hope to tarnish capitalism by associating it with slavery.”

Guelzo said the NYT effort views “slavery not as a blemish that the Founders grudgingly tolerated with the understanding that it must soon evaporate, but as the prize that the Constitution went out of its way to secure and protect. The Times presents slavery not as a regrettable chapter in the distant past, but as the living, breathing pattern upon which all American social life is based, world without end.”

That’s no exaggeration. The 1619 Project is a case study in how, to a hammer, everything looks like a nail: “Why doesn’t the United States have universal health care? The answer begins with policies enacted after the Civil War. … Slavery gave America a fear of black people and a taste for violent punishment. Both still define our prison system. … The sugar that saturates the American diet has a barbaric history as the ‘white gold’ that fueled slavery. … What does a traffic jam in Atlanta have to do with segregation? Quite a lot.”

So, given the many reasons we are disunited concerning health insurance, is the biggest one white fear that “free and healthy African-Americans would upend the racial hierarchy”? Yes, we need criminal justice reform, but is the main problem that “a presumption of danger and criminality still follows black people everywhere”? Since my own Ph.D. is in American studies and I’ve written half a dozen American history books, I feel able to weigh in on this. Seems to me we’re seeing an NYT attempt to squeegee not only the present but the past as well, and drip what remains down the captive throats of teenagers forced to study a bigoted high-school curriculum.
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