
PLAYBOY
STATE OF AMERICA
featuring
Ta-Nehisi Coates • Chelsea Handler • Patton Oswalt • Killer Mike • Wiz Khalifa • Krist Novoselic
★
THE JOKES THAT SET US FREE
starring
Lewis Black • Louis C.K. • Joan Rivers • Chris Rock • Whitney Cummings
THE FREEDOM ISSUE
THE CONSERVATIVE SEX MOVEMENT
By Hugh M. Hefner

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Chelsea Handler

Whether on TV (now redefining the talk-show landscape on Netflix) or in her memoirs, Handler has risen to media dominance by refusing to compromise—she's uncensored and unapologetic in both her politics and her comedy. Read *My Choice,* her reflections on the abortion debate, and admire a woman with the courage of her convictions.

Norm Stamper

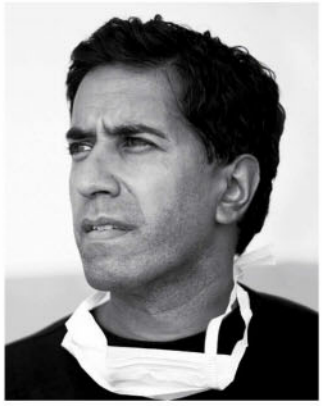
The troubled state of American law enforcement requires voices with equal parts passion, experience and reason. Stamper, author of *To Protect and Serve,* spent 34 years as a cop and served as chief of the Seattle Police Department. In his essay *Fix the Police* he offers solutions that may be exactly what our country needs now.

Dr. Drew Pinsky

Pinsky is such a pervasive media presence—from *Dr. Drew on Call* to *Loveline* to *Celebrity Rehab*—it's easy to forget he's a practicing physician. *The Long Leash of Sexual Liberty,* his insightful essay on the origins and implications of the sexual revolution, lays bare the unseen forces that shape our intimate behavior.

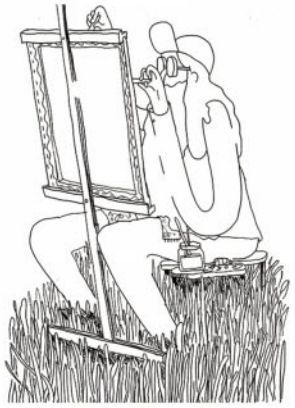
Dr. Sanjay Gupta

As CNN's chief medical correspondent, Gupta is uniquely positioned to analyze the state of our health care. In *Ending the American Pill Epidemic,* the neurosurgeon addresses the widespread abuse of opioid painkillers, including quick-fix overprescribing and the "pill for every ill" mentality that has swept the medical profession.



Patton Oswalt

The comedian, actor, voice artist and author may need to add another title: social philosopher. Oswalt's essay *You Gotta Fight for Your Right to F%@k Up* tackles our peculiar inability to distinguish between the individual and the crowd, raising the question: Why do we discriminate against entire groups based on the actions of a few?



Mike Perry

Perry's handiwork probably looks familiar if you've seen the psychedelic opening credits of *Broad City* or his books full of nudes and hallucinatory, trippy scenes. His illustration for Rachel Rabbit White's *Advisor* column on the protocol for receiving a massage-parlor "happy ending" is a new favorite.

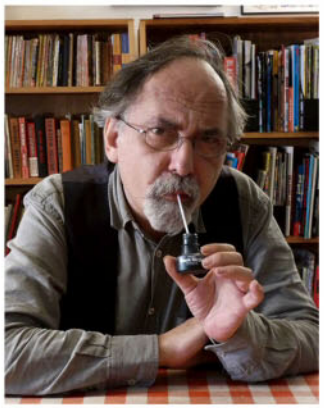
Killer Mike

Known equally for his involvement in the Bernie Sanders campaign and for his music with the hip-hop duo Run the Jewels, Killer Mike blurs the line between rapper and activist. In *Black Votes Matter* he advances an issue close to his heart: getting out the vote, a weapon he calls as powerful as his knife or his gun in fighting tyranny.

Mary Mapes

Is the American press truly free? Mapes, who was fired from CBS in 2005 after airing a story that questioned George W. Bush's military record, is here to tell us it isn't. Question your sources, become your own editor and be aware that corporate interests reign supreme in today's news media, she warns in *Free the Press.*

CREDITS: Cover and pp. 116–129 model Valerie van der Graaf at Photogenics LA, photography by David Bellemere, styling by Tara Williams, hair and makeup by Jakob Sherwood for the Wall Group, set design by Cydney Griggs, set design by Enoch Choi. Photography by: p. 4 courtesy CNN/Jeff Hutchens, courtesy Killer Mike, courtesy Mary Mapes, courtesy Patton Oswalt, courtesy Mike Perry, Brad Barket/Getty Images, Adam Franzino, benningtonphotography.com; p. 5 courtesy Molly Crabapple, courtesy Robert Mazur, courtesy Jeff Moss, courtesy Krist Novoselic, Devin Christopher, Brad Jamieson, Brian Bowen Smith, Nadja Spiegelman; p. 10 Aaron Feaver; p. 24 Ryan David Brown for *The New York Times*/Redux; p. 25 courtesy the Pig and the Lady, Jody Horton/courtesy Hotel Emma, Rob Larson/courtesy Ace Hotel Pittsburgh, Getty Images; p. 31 Matt Cowan/Getty Images for Coachella, ©United Archives GmbH/Alamy Stock Photo, courtesy Ben & Jerry's; p. 36 Jay L. Clendenin/*Los Angeles Times*/Contour by Getty Images; p. 38 courtesy Sony Pictures Entertainment; p. 40 courtesy Daniel Clowes; p. 44 Jeff Hutchens/Getty Images; p. 46 Molly Cranna; p. 88 Allen Berezovsky/Getty Images, Jason Merritt/Getty Images, Michael Schwartz/WireImage/Getty Images, Kevin Winter/Getty Images for BET; p. 89 Fotos International/Getty Images, Charley Gallay/NBCU Photo Bank via Getty Images, Michael Schwartz/WireImage/Getty Images; p. 90 Brian Ach/WireImage/Getty Images, Bobby Bank/WireImage/Getty Images, Neilson Barnard/Getty Images, ©Bettmann/Corbis, Mike Windle/WireImage/



Art Spiegelman

A stamp of approval from Spiegelman, one of the best-known voices in comics, is invaluable. So when the Pulitzer Prize–winning author of *Maus* champions the work of Artist in Residence Molly Crabapple, much less pens an ode to her "simultaneously earnest and smart-assed, serious and playful" creations, it's best to listen.

Krist Novoselic

The Nirvana bassist's crucial role in music history is undeniable, but his burgeoning political career as chair of the electoral-reform group FairVote may be his great second act. In *Take Back the Political Map,* Novoselic reimagines our broken voting system to put democracy back into the hands of those to whom it matters most.

Molly Crabapple

As an "artist-reporter engagé"—in Art Spiegelman's words—this month's Artist in Residence is steadily redrawing the future of political and journalistic illustration. Crabapple's dispatches from the front lines in Syria, Gaza and elsewhere are as immediate as they are ingenious, haunting and colorful—and impossible to ignore.

Matt Gallagher

A former U.S. Army captain and an Iraq vet, Gallagher received much critical acclaim for his debut novel, *Youngblood,* out this February. In *Babylon,* his PLAYBOY-exclusive short fiction, a marine who trades the conflict of war for the controlled chaos of a Brooklyn kickball field finds that she misses the sound of an authentic *yut.*

Liz McClean

Stylist McClean knew her calling at an early age, from her first shoot on set with the legendary Richard Avedon. Her signature style, mixing high fashion with casual vintage clothing and lingerie, can be seen on our April cover with Camille Rowe, as well as in this issue's Playmate pictorial with Miss July Ali Michael.

Bomani Jones

Jones was an admittedly biased choice to conduct the *Playboy Interview* with Ta-Nehisi Coates—he refers to Coates as "the GAWD" online. The ESPN correspondent and co-host of *Highly Questionable* is no stranger to sensitive racial topics, and his explosive presence on social media may soon rival his idol's. Theirs is a dialogue that will stick with you.

Robert Mazur

Going undercover and befriending Colombian cartel bosses, as Mazur did for five years, requires an iron will not many people in this world possess. But going further and dismantling the globalized drug trade will require a coordinated international effort. Mazur outlines how we can beat the cartels in *The New Drug War.*

Jeff Moss

Starting out as a bedroom hacker, Moss went on to found two of the world's largest computer-security conferences. The greatest threat to our cyberprivacy, he argues in *Living in Your Own Not-So-Private Bubble,* lies not in unsecured networks but in the personal data we give up every day, freely and often unwittingly, to marketers.

Getty Images; p. 91 Josh Brasted/Getty Images, Fred Hayes/Getty Images for Sundance, Tibrina Hobson/FilmMagic/Getty Images, David Livingston/Getty Images; p. 92 Michael Bezjian/WireImage/Getty Images, Tim Mosenfelder/Getty Images, Kevin Winter/Getty Images; p. 93 Maarten de Boer/Getty Images, Jason Kempin/Getty Images; p. 133 courtesy Sony Pictures Entertainment; p. 134 NBC/courtesy Everett Collection; p. 144 courtesy Molly Crabapple; p. 148 courtesy Playboy Archives. P. 13 styling by Kyle Kagamida; pp. 14–15 prop styling by Janine Iversen; pp. 32–35 styling by Lauren Matos, grooming by Tracy Love; pp. 80–85 model Madison Headrick at the Society Management, styling by Amarsana Gendunova for Wilhelmina, hair by Moiz Alladina using R+Co for Art Department, hair by Noah Hatton using EVOLVh products/Cutler Salon for Judy Casey, makeup by Jamie Dorman for Art Department; pp. 94–107 model Ali Michael at IMG, styling by Liz McClean for Brydges Mackinney, styling assistance by Olivia Khoury, hair and makeup by Karina Moore, manicure by Emi Kudo for Opus Beauty, prop styling by Cydney Griggs, prop styling by Enoch Choi, vintage jean shorts by Levi's, suspenders, American flag vest and helmet from What Goes Around Comes Around; pp. 116–129 military shirt by Playboy, bracelet by Gorjana, star sweater by Banjo and Matilda, blue briefs by Calvin Klein, cut striped T-shirt by Truly Madly Deeply, white briefs by Playboy, black knit top by Trois the Label; p. 130 grooming by Christina Guerra for Celestine Agency; pp. 136–143 model Lise Olsen at IMG.

The Freedom Issue

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ON THE COVER Valerie van der Graaf, photographed by David Bellemere. A midsummer midriff is the perfect place for our Rabbit to soak up some sun.

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Brook Power lights up the room.

#TRANSPARENCY

The U.S. government's social media is in some ways insidious, but at least it's usually well labeled (*Big Brother Wants to Be Your Friend,* May). If you follow @CIA, complete with its Twitter-verified seal of approval, you know you're interacting with an intelligence agency. In other countries that's not always the case. China pays massive teams of censors and commenters. Israel employs counter-narrative teams to edit Wikipedia and correct "misconceptions" about the country. The list goes on.

The United States has toyed with these options. A Central Command program announced in 2011 would have created "sock puppet" accounts to "combat extremism." It's almost a given that the U.S. will join China and Israel at some point in employing paid commenters or, worse, bots to do the job. At that point, I suspect we'll look back fondly on the irreverent—and yes, a little creepy—@CIA.

Jillian York
Berlin, Germany

York is the Electronic Frontier Foundation's director for international freedom of expression.

BETTER THAN EVER

I'm a longtime PLAYBOY reader and just renewed my subscription. One thing I love about the redesign: I don't have to jump pages ahead to finish an article, the *Playboy Interview* or your great fiction. I look forward to a long relationship with one of my favorite magazines.

Robert Campbell
Kansas City, Missouri

I love the new print magazine; it's great. Can't wait for future issues. You did a fantastic job.

Frank Lazzerini
Barberton, Ohio

When I first heard about the format changes to PLAYBOY, the conservative in me took a wait-and-see approach. I'm glad I did. I appreciate all your efforts.

Bob Losse Jr.
Eastampton, New Jersey

FASTER, IT'S ALL RIGHT

I enjoyed Wes Siler's bike pages (*Motorcycles,* May). As an avid rider, I love ogling the sweet retro bikes. But maybe you shouldn't let Siler near them—he mentions his leathers have saved him in "half a dozen crashes."

Paul Jameson
Salt Lake City, Utah

LIP SERVICE

Rachel Rabbit White's advice is sound (*Advisor,* May), but the only woman a man should be asking how he can improve his oral performance is the one he's trying to please.

Mike Strzelczyk
Twin Lakes, Wisconsin

POWER FOR THE PEOPLE

Thank you for giving us the splendid Miss May Brook Power. Where did Aaron Feaver take the photos? It looks like a slice of heaven—but that may just be Brook's presence.

Bill Steffens
Phoenix, Arizona

The photo shoot took place in a private home in Topanga Canyon, California.

The May pictorial mentions that Brook Power works as an artist. What type of artist is she?

Dree Franklin
Miami, Florida

Brook says, "Thanks for asking. I work as a graphic artist for magazines, musicians, record labels and clothing companies." See more of her at Playboy.com/brook-power.

Hef has a practiced eye for finding special faces. Miss May is gorgeous—and a doppelgänger for my favorite actress, the brilliant and beautiful Rashida Jones.

Sam Brown
Chicago, Illinois

A SHOT TO THE HEART

Matt Farwell gets it right about PTSD (*The God Shot,* April). As a marine Vietnam vet, I know what it feels like to kill, come home twisted inside, then rupture with brutal behavior.

What saved me was my wife's love. She created sweat lodges and meditation retreats for veterans, and we traveled back to Vietnam to help heal my pain. She kept me writing and talking about it and held me when the dreams were too real. She's my "God shot."

Jack Estes
Lake Oswego, Oregon

Estes is author of the Vietnam memoir A Field of Innocence and of the forthcoming novel A Soldier's Son.

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"It's rare to see an Asian female take on the role of a badass."

"As a first-generation Japanese American, I've always wanted to play a samurai warrior like my *Suicide Squad* character, Katana. Samurai are almost always male, so growing up in America I had a hard time figuring out role models. Katana and I may not have the same personality, but coming from the same cultural upbringing, we share core values.

In Japanese culture there's this idea of putting others before yourself, but I've also never wanted to let myself down. Someone recently told me how refreshing it is to see an Asian woman as a superhero. That stuck with me. Stand up for yourself and what you love."

Karen Fukuhara
stars in Suicide Squad, opening August 5.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEN MILLER

HOW TO GRILL WITHOUT A GRILL

Liquid propane and charcoal briquettes be damned. The new thing in food is as old as fire

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRANT CORNETT

BY **HUGH GARVEY**

You don't need to buy a grill. Those rows of gleaming stainless steel outside the big-box store represent the kindergarten version of cooking with fire: all training wheels and safety valves and the avoidance of soot. Let other men debate clay-insulated *kamado* versus metal kettle versus *bincho* charcoal versus mesquite chips. Men who claim culinary dominance because of their lump-charcoal mastery live in a prebagged state of ignorance.

Look at the coolest restaurants and you'll see they have one thing in common: wood. As in splintery. As in recognizably from a tree. From the new Shepard in Boston to pioneering Camino in Oakland, chefs follow the flame, preparing food kissed with the flavorful smoke produced by wood as it shifts from lumber to ember. Lump charcoal will never do that.

And shamefully, it will never require that you start a fire from scratch, building it from kindling you've scavenged from your backyard or a walk in the park. There's kindling everywhere. You have to focus your attention to find it, but it's there. Cardboard from a shoebox will also do. Or just a lot of newspaper balled up.

Start a fire like in the movies: Place little bits of very dry stuff on the bottom; above those bits, some dry, pencil-size sticks or thick pieces of cardboard; above those, some wood as thick as the handle of a pool cue, arranged in a teepee shape; and on top at least three pieces of oak, again in a teepee shape.

Light the little bits and get ready for some very active 90 minutes of cooking. If you've planned ahead, your fire will be on a spot of ground you won't mind scorching. Around it will be a ring of bricks or cinder blocks, on top of which you'll place a big metal grate (20 bucks at Home Depot) to replace the grill you're not going to buy. As the conflagration blazes, you'll have high heat to cook with. A big cast iron pan over that fire will sear a steak without letting the flames scorch it. The smoke will envelop and flavor the meat. The coals will turn to embers and provide a less intense spot for charring onions, peppers or fennel you've salted and tossed with olive oil. Follow the flames and embers as they shift from high heat to low. It's dinner, and you're a better man for your efforts.

For more detailed techniques and recipes, *Around the Fire* from the chefs at Ox in Portland and *This Is Camino* (both from Ten Speed Press) are profoundly inspiring restaurant cookbooks that will further raise your game. ■


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Building a Better Beer

Gluten-free brews have invaded the booze aisle. A guide to the latest offerings

In the past few years, gluten-free has gone from food fad to a bona fide beer category. Set aside the scientific debate about whether non-celiac gluten intolerance is a real thing; it's an indisputable fact that a good third of Americans report they're eating less of the grain protein. And when Anheuser-Busch gets into the rapidly growing $1 billion gluten-free-food game, it's safe to say that suds without wheat are here to stay.

Sadly, many gluten-free beers downright suck. Barley and wheat (both of which contain gluten protein) are the principal grains used in traditional brewing; they provide the structure and flavor that are missing in many gluten-free beers. Part of the problem is that mass-produced gluten-free beers tend to depend primarily on sorghum, a cereal grass, as their base ingredient. And beer that is too reliant on sorghum often has an overabundance of sweetness and fruit flavors. Despite this, a number of gluten-free beers stand out as worth drinking for the taste alone, their brewers having dialed in flavor profiles that boast a beerlike balance of bitter, sweet and sharp.

People who suffer from celiac disease should never experiment with anything that contains gluten, but we do have a beer drinker's hack for limiting intake of the ingredient: Stick with Corona, which, it turns out, is made from rice and corn as well as malted barley, bringing the gluten content below the 20 parts per million threshold that Sweden uses as its gauge of gluten-free. For a more artisanal experience, try the four brews at right—the best gluten-free alternatives to your favorite style of beer.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTTIE CAMERON

ALTERNATIVE ARTISANAL GLUTEN-FREE BEERS

FOR THE LAGER-LOVING LAD: ESTRELLA DAMM DAURA
If you prefer classic Euro-style lagers (think Stella, Heineken, Peroni), try Spain's Estrella Damm Daura, a malty, easy-drinking, medium-bodied alternative to the standard stuff. It has a tinge of sweetness true to the category.

FOR THE STOUT SIPPER: STEADFAST BEER CO. OATMEAL CREAM STOUT
The first and only gluten-free stout in America, this offering from Albany-based Steadfast Beer Co. is rich, nearly jet-black and full of the delicious toffee, coffee, chocolate and slightly sweet flavors that stout lovers expect.

FOR THE EXPERIMENTALIST: DOGFISH HEAD TWEASON'ALE
Many gluten-free beers mimic other styles, but craft-beer pioneer Dogfish Head developed this one-of-a-kind fruit-forward brew made from strawberries, sorghum and honey. Think of it as a beerlike twist on rosé wine.

FOR THE HOP HEAD: GLUTENBERG INDIA PALE ALE
Fans of super-bitter IPAs will rejoice over the high hop content of this Canadian brand's award-winning beer, which has a score of 76 IBUs (international bitterness units). It also has an IPA's trademark citrusy, lip-smacking refreshment factor.

TORTOISE TAKES THE LEAD

Summer's sickest sunglasses go beyond basic black

Tortoiseshell-framed shades offer an enduring look that combines brainy sex appeal with low-key cool. This season's updates on the masculine mainstay feature a gutsier take on the shell's mottled motif, with oversize frames and colored lenses for a sharp contrast.—*Vincent Boucher*

GET A ROUND
New York optical institution Moscot jacks up a traditional round frame in rakishly oversize style with the Governor (top), adding sea-green fashion lenses. *$260, moscot.com*

EYEING THE TIGER
A surfer classic gets a gloss of cinematic appeal with Saturdays NYC's boldly scaled Errol (middle) in tortoiseshell with polarized lenses. *$295, saturdaysnyc.com*

MILE DRIVER
Handmade in Italy, these square-frame Nairobi shades from L.G.R. (bottom) have specially engineered blue polarized lenses to reduce glare while driving. *$335, mrporter.com*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEIRNAN MONAGHAN AND THEO VAMVOUNAKIS

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IS THE SEDAN AN ENDANGERED SPECIES?

When Infiniti targets millennials, it ditches the trunk. What gives?

A decade ago, the major selling points of a compact car were fuel economy and suitability for city driving. The thought being, if it's convenient to park and costs less at the pump, what's left to consider?

These days, there's a lot more, with a larger variety of compact cars—from economy to sporty to luxury—available than ever before. That makes the 2017 Infiniti QX30, which combines the aforementioned features with the additional practical benefit of a hatchback instead of a trunk, such an interesting vehicle. And at a time when sedan sales are rapidly declining, it further fuels the question: Is the death of the traditional sedan all but inevitable?

The QX30 doesn't necessarily put that issue to rest. But our time spent testing one in Portugal—where driving is discouraged in certain towns due to the narrowness of the streets—certainly sold us on the idea of a luxury hatchback over a typical four-door sedan. And that's the point of the new Infiniti QX30: It doesn't compromise on any of the amenities of a luxury sedan while providing a ride and size more fitting for the city. The new Infiniti is essentially a smaller take on the brand's crossovers, packaged in a cool compact designed to appeal to millennials, who presumably need more cargo space to haul the gear required for their active lifestyles. Think of it as a middleweight boxer who has gone through rigorous training to run in the New York City Marathon: a much smaller fighter now but one far better suited to the challenge at hand. Plus he's a pretty sharp dresser when he's not in the ring.

The well-appointed compact is powered by a two-liter turbocharged four-cylinder that puts out 208 horsepower: That won't satisfy your urge to do a burnout in the parking lot, but it's more engaging than you'd expect.

Our test model was a QX30S prototype, which, along with the entry model (expected to start at $30,000), comes equipped with a front-wheel-drive system. If given the option, though, we'd probably take the QX30 AWD for more enhanced control at the wheel.

All in all, the new Infiniti is a nice balance of everything. Except a trunk.—*Marcus Amick*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHANTAL ANDERSON

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These unexpected destinations are going from a steady simmer to a rolling boil

THE MARIJUANA MECCA: DIALED-UP DENVER

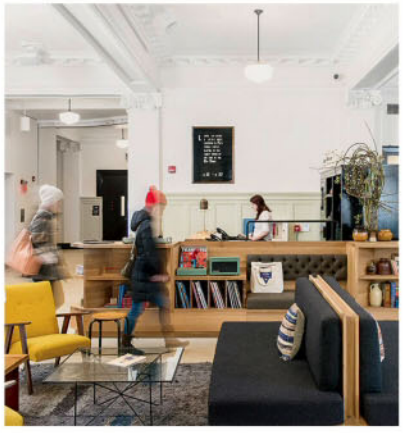
Of the 24 cannabis-supportive states in the country, Colorado is the top destination, and Denver is ahead of the game in offering an elevated experience to cannatourists. The Mile High City's Nativ Hotel is the best pro-pot place to stay, thanks to its draft-beer garden, champagne café and Stereo Lounge, a basement club where Snoop Dogg has made an appearance, naturally. For a verdant twist on a classic B&B, stay at the Adagio, a six-suite Victorian "bud and breakfast" known as one of the city's most cannabis-friendly accommodations. The best one-stop shop in this cannacapital is My 420 Tours, which offers a cannabis cooking class (pictured) and a four-hour "Grow and Dispensary" tour, buzz-preserving tinted windows included. The cannabis concierges at My 420 can also book a massage in your hotel room using THC-infused lotion, because isn't this trip ultimately about doing nothing?—*Anna del Gaizo*

TEXAS, HOLD THE BBQ: SAN ANTONIO'S PEARL DISTRICT

Although the Granary restaurant in the historic Pearl Brewery complex is devoted to cue, it's not your average meat-and-three joint. Chef Tim Rattray serves his brisket in a bowl of shoyu ramen instead of plated next to coleslaw and potato salad. And that's just the first of the Texas clichés to fall away: Situated on the northern reach of the San Antonio River, the former brewery is home to many other worthy establishments, including upscale Il Sogno Osteria, known for its antipasti; Lick Honest Ice Creams, whose confections are made with Texas ingredients; Green, which serves 100 percent kosher vegetarian dishes; and La Gloria, which offers street food inspired by inland Mexico. Locals flock to the twice-weekly farmers' market, and around 150 students perfect their cooking skills at the Culinary Institute of America. We have reclusive billionaire Christopher "Kit" Goldsbury, who made his money selling Pace Foods to Campbell Soup Company in 1994, to thank for all this. He's the man behind the brewery's redevelopment, including Hotel Emma, where welcome margaritas are served in the wood-paneled library. Kit's orders.—*Julia Bainbridge*

HIPSTER HAWAII: HONOLULU

Ask any local creative and they'll tell you the art and music scene in Honolulu was stuck in 1990s overdrive until 2011, when artists Jasper Wong and Kamea Hadar discovered Kaka'ako, a forgotten industrial district between the city's downtown and Waikiki neighborhoods, and set to work building a Hawaii outpost for Wong's Pow! Wow! art festival. As the brand has grown (there have been Pow! Wow! festivals in half a dozen cities around the world), so too has Kaka'ako. The once desolate hood now bustles with small businesses, and the cadre of artists and musicians who transformed it is making Honolulu a destination for more than just the standard sun seekers. The Modern Honolulu and Surfjack, two luxury boutique hotels in Waikiki, feature works by Pow! Wow! artists. Makers & Tasters events attract happy foodies almost every night of the week, as does the Pig & the Lady (pictured), a Vietnamese fusion kitchen and cocktail bar. Honolulu still has its fair share of latter-day kitsch, and that 1990s sensibility isn't entirely gone, but thanks to locally grown creative minds, it's evolving from the inside out.—*Adam Skolnick*



THE RUST-BELT PORTLAND: PITTSBURGH

The unfortunate thing about hip locales is that once they know they're hip they kind of become dicks about it. See: San Francisco, Williamsburg, Portland. But not Pittsburgh. Yes, it has a new Ace Hotel (pictured), housed in a century-old YMCA building that now hosts live music and a beanbag toss, and several world-class contemporary art museums (the Mattress Factory, the Warhol), but the folks here are anything but cynical hipsters. Instead Pittsburghers offer a warm welcome and a word of advice on where to get a good steak (Gaucho in the Strip) or a stiff drink (Kelly's in East Liberty). With hot new restaurants popping up regularly, the food scene here is home to the kind of energy that hasn't been seen in New York or San Francisco in decades. Morcilla, an exemplary tapas joint, serves some of the best *pintxos* this side of Barcelona, while Smallman Galley offers up-and-coming chefs their own pop-up restaurant, free rein over the menu and a place to build a following. Naturally, an array of excellent local craft brews are on tap. Go soon, before Pittsburgh realizes how cool it is. And for God's sake, leave the Bengals jersey at home.—*Jeremy Freed*

518, NOT 718: HUDSON, NEW YORK

This town two hours north of New York City has a storied history and plenty of postindustrial rusticity, but it's no "upstate Brooklyn," thank you very much. Sure, it's bespoke and expertly curated in areas (it's home to an Etsy office), but Hudson has its own funky yet sophisticated homegrown vibe. Notable restaurants include Bonfiglio & Bread (café and bakery), Hudson Food Studio (contemporary Vietnamese), Fish & Game (chef Zak Pelaccio's acclaimed eatery) and Wm. Farmer & Sons (Southern-inflected restaurant and barroom with 11 handsome guest rooms above). Drinks flow freely in Hudson, the alleged birthplace of the American cocktail. Back Bar (a boozy cousin to Fish & Game) serves vittles and spirits, as does the Nordic ÖR Gallery and Tavern. If you find yourself needing a bit of loud music too, order a sazerac and a hot dog at the Half Moon. The town is rich with art galleries, and its cultural hub may be Basilica Hudson, a converted factory that plays host to everything from an upscale flea market to the annual Basilica SoundScape (co-produced by Pitchfork Media), an international music festival of genre-pushing artists.—*Eric Steinman*

How Do You Ask for a HAPPY ENDING?

BY **RACHEL RABBIT WHITE**

Q: *When I've had a stressful week, I like to get a massage. Recently I've been fantasizing about getting a "happy ending." I realize it's inappropriate to ask a licensed massage therapist at a day spa for a handy, but after combing the classifieds I found several venues that offer "erotic massages." What's the etiquette for receiving a happy ending?*

A: In the name of hard-hitting sex journalism, I decided to find out firsthand. So one cool gray Monday I find myself buzzing an apartment in midtown Manhattan. "Hi, welcome to the hand-job palace," says Nikki, an art student whose official job title is, I think, "hand-job princess."

Nikki agrees to give us a peek into how happy endings are made. On any given day, Nikki and several other women from the same agency work out of different residential apartments. I note the ambiance of this one—amateur paintings, a bed with colorful sheets, a massage table with its accoutrements: oils, hand sanitizer, paper towels, Febreze, a bowl of peppermints.

While the protocol for receiving a rub-and-tug would seem easy enough to google, the internet proves to be full of questionable advice from listicle blogs. (No matter what AskMen.com advises, never, under any circumstances, point at your erection and say, "Well?")

If you plan to purchase any form of erotic entertainment, there are a few rules you should always follow. When booking an appointment, it's customary to give your real name, number and other information; screening customers is how sex workers stay safe. Make your payment at the beginning of the session, and when dealing with employees like Nikki who work for someone else, it's good practice to tip—the agency takes half her rate. Be respectful and take a shower, cleaning thoroughly before your session. And don't be cheap: Book the proper amount of time for the experience you want. Lots of guys new to erotic services spring for the shortest block, which may not allow much time to get comfortable. (A word of caution: In most states, any act that involves genital touch in exchange for money is illegal. Proceed at your discretion.)

Nikki changes into a pink satin slip. "Courtesy and cleanliness are so important," she says. "Some men think they don't need to wipe their asses. I would bet money that Donald Trump doesn't feel a need to properly wipe his ass."

We sit side-by-side on the bed, and Nikki clicks through ads for massage girls, professional dominatrices and escorts in New York. Her Monday schedule is slow. It's tax season. "Do you want me to give you a massage?" she asks. Since I've put myself in your shoes, I don't see why not.

"What kind of stuff do you usually say to your clients?" I ask, feeling relaxed after she finishes my back. She tells me to turn over and slides her breasts over mine. "I talk dirty, like, 'Yeah, you've got this nice young princess stroking your cock. Does that feel good? Does that feel nice?' " We laugh, but the line works. "Marry me," I murmur after I orgasm. "Okay," she says. Which is what I want for all of us anyway: to live happily ever after in the hand-job palace.

Questions? E-mail advisor@playboy.com.

MIKE PERRY


www.moodsofnorway.com
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JAMEL HERRING

The Olympian and Marine Corps Hall of Fame boxer on how war and loss have kept him fighting

AS TOLD TO **IAN FRISCH**

I was 19 years old when the military deployed me to Iraq for the first time. Fallujah was under heavy fire—this was 2005, the height of Operation Iraqi Freedom—and I spent seven months there as a field electrician in the Second Marine Logistics Group before they sent me back to North Carolina. I had never been so happy to see grass.

When I returned to the States, I decided to try out for the All-Marine Boxing Team. I'd started boxing when I was 15 years old, and by the time I joined the Marines I had already achieved a record of 10–1. I couldn't wait to get back into the ring. I made the team and began cutting my teeth. For the first time, I had access to top-notch training facilities, and I spent more hours in the gym than ever before. But it was short-lived. In January 2007, President George W. Bush announced a surge of 20,000 U.S. troops in Iraq; they shipped me back over there a month later. My wife was two months pregnant with our first son.

During my second deployment, my unit was in charge of tracking IEDs—improvised explosive devices—which is vastly different from being an electrician. A sergeant trained me to spot environments rigged with bombs—potholes, roadside digging. During our training, I learned that the sergeant was also a new father; his first son had been born two weeks earlier. Later that year, he lost his life to an IED explosion. He never made it home to meet his son.

His death hit me hard. I vowed to take life more seriously when I came home. I didn't want to face the horrors of war a third time, especially as a father, so I decided to commit to boxing. My focus became competing in the 2012 Olympics in London.

In 2009, however, life threw me another hard hook. I lost my daughter to sudden infant death syndrome two months after she was born. I had spent so much time running from death in Iraq, only to have it follow me home. But I chose to use my daughter's memory as motivation. I kept throwing the punches toward my dream, in her honor.

After stacking an amateur record of 81–15 and winning three qualifying bouts in Rio de Janeiro, I secured a spot on Team USA. I was the only marine to compete that year. It was a huge honor, but even more meaningful was the fact that the opening ceremony—July 27, 2012—took place on the third anniversary of my daughter's death.

I lost my first match, by decision, against Kazakhstan's Daniyar Yeleussinov. I had won the first round, but Yeleussinov, a Youth World Boxing champion, adjusted to me during the fight. It was a tough day.

After the Olympics, I turned to the professional circuit, signing with Floyd Mayweather's manager Al Haymon and moving to Cincinnati to train with Mike Stafford, who has also coached three-time Olympian Rau'shee Warren. My first pro fight, against Jose Valderrama, was less than six months after my Olympic defeat. I won the match and kept on winning. This February I beat Luis Eduardo Flores, whose number of knockouts outnumbered the sum of my professional fights. I now stand with a 15–0 record and eight knockouts, and in April I was inducted into the 2016 class of the All-Marine Boxing Hall of Fame.

Unfortunately, going pro currently disqualifies me from competing in the Olympics. With the 2016 Summer Games under way, it's rare that a day goes by when I don't think about what could have happened if I hadn't turned pro. But I can still play a part in U.S. boxing: I train, speak and spar with athletes, including my friends Claressa Shields and Shakur Stevenson, who will represent the United States in Rio. What's next for me? To be the next marine to win a world championship, of course.

Boxing has helped me release frustration, stay disciplined and focus on what matters. You have to be smart. You have to adjust to and cope with tough challenges inside the ring, and those principles extend to surviving everyday life. When you compare my career, Olympic defeat included, with everything else I've been through, stepping into the ring is the easy part. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN LOWRY


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ON MUSIC FESTIVALS

BY **BEN SCHOTT**

RADIUS & OVERLAP

Ever wonder why bands don't play locally for months before or after a festival? Thank the **RADIUS CLAUSE,** a contractual noncompetition proviso that defines the exclusivity distance (e.g., 250 miles) and period (e.g., 60 days) around a festival. It's designed to keep band appearances special and lucrative. That said, as an analysis on Quartz shows, "All music festivals are starting to look the same." Below are 11 major festivals and the number of acts they featured in 2016 that **OVERLAPPED** with other fests on the list:

No. overlapping acts	
Lollapalooza	89
Coachella	82
Firefly	56
Bonnaroo	52
Hangout Fest	50
Outside Lands	50
Governors Ball	46
Sasquatch	46
Panorama	36
BottleRock	23
Boston Calling	15

SOUND & VISION

In 1969, Woodstock defined our **IMAGE** of the modern music festival. The "Aquarian exposition" promised "three days of peace and music" and also delivered mud, love, chaos and intoxication. However, the modern festival's **SOUND** had been defined four years earlier at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. There, on July 25, Bob Dylan plugged in his 1964 Sunburst Fender Stratocaster and sang an electric version of "Maggie's Farm." This "electrocution" of tradition divided the folk community, and the wounds had not healed a year later when, at Manchester's Free Trade Hall, a fan denounced Dylan as Judas.

"There's always a little bit of heaven in a disaster area."

—WAVY GRAVY, WOODSTOCK, 1969

FESTICELLANY

Music festivals date back at least to the **PYTHIAN GAMES** of ancient Greece, where singers competed in performing a hymn to the **ORACLE OF DELPHI,** accompanied by a kithara (similar to a lyre). ¥ More recently, festivals have exploded in popularity, wielding an economic and social impact that extends far beyond music and merchandise into food, fashion, politics, technology, media and activism. ¥ According to Nielsen, some **32 MILLION** people attended at least one American music festival in 2014; 46 percent were **MILLENNIALS** (ages 18 to 34). ¥ Below are the **HIGHEST-GROSSING FESTIVALS** worldwide in 2015, according to Statista:

Festival	*Million*
Coachella	$84.3
Outside Lands	$24.3
Stagecoach	$21.9
Pinkpop	$15.3
Rock am Ring	$15.2
Rock im Park	$12.9
Electric Daisy	$11.2
Bluesfest	$9.8
Osheaga	$9.7
Southside	$8.9
Hurricane	$8.4

¥ **BONNAROO** takes its name from Dr. John's 1974 album *Desitively Bonnaroo,* which is apparently Creole for "absolutely" the "best on the street" (*bon* + *rue*). ¥ **LOLLAPALOOZA** is something outstandingly good and, according to H.L. Mencken, may derive (via Irish usage) from the French *"Allez-fusil,"* which translates as "Forward, muskets!" ¥ Below are the comforts missed most by British festival-goers (festivalawards.com):

Clean toilet	23%
Bed	18%
Shower	10%
Cell reception	6%
Phone charger	5%
Nothing	33%

COACHELLA @'S & #'S

Festival organizers and sponsors are increasingly analyzing digital media to get a fan's-eye view of an event. Research by Cision from the 2016 Coachella festival's first weekend reveals:

Artists with most media mentions
(1) Zedd (2) Guns N' Roses
(3) LCD Soundsystem (4) Grimes

Most buzzed-about celebrities
(1) Kesha (2) Kardashians (3) Taylor Swift

Brand partners with most media coverage
(1) H&M (2) Perverse Sunglasses
(3) T-Mobile (4) Absolut

Top Twitter handles, by followers
@mtv @eonline @tip @voguemagazine

NAUGHTY & NICE

These are the "substance terms" most often used in relation to major U.S. music festivals, according to DrugAbuse.com's March 2015 analysis of 3.6 million Instagram posts:

Term	*Mentions*
MOLLY	22,752
BEER	17,197
DRUNK	9,865
DRUG	6,507
BLOW	4,948
WEED	3,070
ALCOHOL	2,960
VODKA	2,959
MDMA	2,394

Speaking of munchies, hippie ice-cream hawkers **BEN & JERRY'S** have created two festival flavors: Bonnaroo Buzz (coffee and malt ice cream with whiskey caramel and toffee) and Glastonberry (vanilla ice cream with fudge brownie and raspberry swirls).

WOODSTOCK, 1969: ***August 15–16*** · Richie Havens · Swami Satchidananda · Sweetwater · Bert Sommer · Tim Hardin · Ravi Shankar · Melanie Safka · Arlo Guthrie · Joan Baez · ***August 16–17*** · Quill · Country Joe McDonald · Santana · John B. Sebastian · Keef Hartley Band · The Incredible String Band · Canned Heat · Mountain · Grateful Dead · Creedence Clearwater Revival · Janis Joplin · Sly and the Family Stone · The Who · Jefferson Airplane · ***August 17–18*** · Joe Cocker · Country Joe and the Fish · Ten Years After · The Band · Johnny Winter · Blood, Sweat and Tears · Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young · Paul Butterfield Blues Band · Sha Na Na · Jimi Hendrix

WIZ KHALIFA

The Pittsburgh-raised rapper and weed entrepreneur smoked a mere two joints before this interview. Clarity ensues as he takes on everything from cops to Kanye

BY **JEFF WEISS** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **TODD COLE**

Q1: *You will have released two albums by the end of this year. Khalifa came out in February, and Rolling Papers 2: The Weed Album will drop later this summer. What phase are you in right now as an artist?*

KHALIFA: I'm in the reinvention stage, like when Justin Bieber was a child and then transformed himself into a different person but one who was still successful. I was a streetwear brand, and now I'm a high-end designer. People are going to accept me as a grown man. A lot of people don't even know I'm only 28 because I'm kind of ageless.

Q2: *Your song "Black and Yellow" reached number one on Billboard and was nominated for two Grammys. Did you know it would be a huge hit?*

KHALIFA: I actually did. It was crazy. As soon as they played the beat, I thought of the hook in two seconds. After [2010 mixtape] *Kush & Orange Juice,* I knew I had to switch up my style and do something different, but how could I do that and make the label and myself happy? So I wrote a bunch of songs about the first thing I thought of—whether it was corny or stupid, I was going to record it. But once we recorded "Black and Yellow," the label went back and forth on it. I was like, "Man, that's the song. That song is the shit." They waited all summer for me to try to record other shit, and still I was like, "That's the song!" I took it back to Pittsburgh, played it for a roomful of people and was like, "This is my new single." They were so excited to hear it. Then when I played it, they were like, "Damn, he about to lose again."

Q3: *What kind of artists did you gravitate to when you were growing up?*

KHALIFA: The people who had a crew, who had their own slang. Of course Wu-Tang, because they had the whole mathematics and the science and all. That's why I was into Bone Thugs-N-Harmony. It's the unity of it all: being able to know what to look forward to and disconnect from everybody else and be like, "This is my shit." And then the older I got, I started liking Cam'ron more because of his personality. That's how I see myself as a rapper: this cocky, fly...you know what I mean, jewelry. I thought, When I become a rapper, that's how I'm gonna act.

Q4: *Your parents were in the Air Force. You were born in North Dakota, but you grew up in England, Japan, Germany, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Georgia and Pennsylvania. Did constantly moving prepare you for the rigors of fame?*

KHALIFA: I'm pretty sure it's just my intuition. That's how my parents raised me: to see through bullshit and always tell the truth. It's hard to fool me. I've always been super chill—fun-loving, trying to get along with everybody.

Q5: *What was Pittsburgh like when you were growing up there?*

KHALIFA: It was fucked-up and really dark. A lot of shootings and gang violence. I saw people get killed. You'd

get off the bus and somebody would be dead and they'd be cleaning it up. A lot of waking up in the morning and seeing people you knew dead on the news.

Q6: *Did you personally encounter police brutality?*

KHALIFA: Hell, yeah. Cops there are crazy. I've never been pulled over without them having a gun to my head. Even with traffic stops, they'll put a gun to your head and say, "Get the fuck out the car. What you got?" Searching you, breaking shit, twisting your arm. They're cool about weed, though. I got jammed up a lot in Pittsburgh, but I never did real time.

Q7: *What are your thoughts on the Black Lives Matter movement?*

KHALIFA: It's about knowledge. A lot of people are surprised that this still exists, and when the media puts it out there, people get upset. But it's about education and figuring out how to defend yourself and how to fight back and not be a victim. They victimize us because we don't know. Body cameras? That shit is just to make people think we're safe. We ain't safe. It's not about fighting the cops physically. You have to know how to outsmart them, and what they can and can't do to you. That won't make things all good, but it will help level the playing field.

Q8: *There was a lot of controversy about race surrounding this year's Academy Awards. What did you think about it?*

KHALIFA: I didn't pay attention to that too much, because I feel like black people are always being shit on. They stand up and shit on us publicly at the Oscars, and when you put gas on it, then it becomes a thing. Black people should boss up and say "We don't give a fuck," and then really not give a fuck. If you nominate me and I get an award, cool. But if you don't, I don't give a fuck.

Q9: *Have there been moments in your life when you think making a different decision would have completely altered your trajectory?*

KHALIFA: Probably just my relationship with Amber Rose. I feel like not being in that relationship helped me out a lot. I learned how to be present where I need to be present. I'd been present in the relationship, but at that age and with what was going on, it just wasn't right for me. It helps to walk away sometimes, even though it was super hard.

Q10: *Did the public nature of your divorce make things more difficult?*

KHALIFA: Definitely. Dealing with a breakup or a divorce is hard enough, let alone for it to be public and on TV and radio. Suddenly everyone has advice. I'm a private dude, so I only talk to my family and the people next to me. I don't trust anybody with information, so I would never tell a rapper how I really felt.

Q11: *Do you think you'll ever get married again?*

KHALIFA: I think I will, but it will be later. It was cool; it was fun. I learned a lot. Things that would've taken me much longer to learn, I learned in a short period of time. I feel like I'll probably get married again when I'm in my 50s. I was sad after it ended, but I wasn't depressed; I've never really been depressed in my life. I was sad because we were going through a lot and my son was involved, and that hurt me because my main goal is to raise my son how I want. I'm a control freak, and not being able to control that was weird. I didn't know how to deal with it and didn't understand that feeling. A year later, I'm way smarter and better equipped to deal with it.

Q12: *You tweeted about a Pam Grier movie a while back. Now that you're single, who are your top five ideal women?*

KHALIFA: Pam Grier, Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman, 1990s-era Madonna, Apollonia Kotero from *Purple Rain* and Pocahontas. I like classic chicks, not these new girls who aren't really stunning. All those women are stunning, classic beauties. If they came in here now, they would be awesome and beautiful—cool people on top of being sexy as fuck.

Q13: *You also had a very public Twitter beef with Kanye West earlier this year. What happened?*

KHALIFA: That was a weird situation, because it was something I would do in real life. All I did was speak my mind. I'm a Max B fan, and if me and Kanye were in a room and he said, "Yo, I'mma name my album *Waves,*" I'd be like, "Don't do that. You're not allowed to do that." Nobody really does that these days. Nobody checks niggas like, "Nah, nigga." No one is above being spoken to, and if you've got real friends, they'll tell you how they feel. That's how I handle all my situations in real life. Even if I have a problem with somebody, I'm not gonna advertise it. We can go around the corner and we can really do it. But all in front of people? That's not me. Niggas talk shit every day, and niggas say shit about my ex, niggas say shit about my kid. It's all good. There's competition in rap, and Kanye obviously sees me as that.

Q14: *You split with Warner Bros. Records when you were 21. Did you worry that was the end for you?*

KHALIFA: It was crazy, but I never saw that as the end for me. I always hustled on my own, and I knew there was something wrong with them; it wasn't me. They thought I was this pop kid. They thought I was going take a bunch of samples and flip them into club songs because "Say Yeah" was one of the first times that had been done on a rap level. The beat was so hard, there was so much bass in it, so they thought that's what they do in Pittsburgh—they take dance songs and flip them. They were trying to do that shit, and it wasn't working. And I was giving them other songs, and they weren't taking them. They didn't know what to do with me. When I asked to be released it was like, "All right, what's next?" They didn't really give me that much fucking money, but I was making money. I was good. I had a big-ass chain. I was 21. I just thought, I'll smoke weed and come up with another plan.

Q15: *Did you like weed the first time you smoked it?*

KHALIFA: Nah, I didn't really like it at

BLACK PEOPLE SHOULD BOSS UP AND SAY "WE DON'T GIVE A FUCK," AND THEN REALLY NOT GIVE A FUCK.

first. My mom used to smoke weed a lot, and I thought it was bad, because that's how I was programmed to think as a kid. So for a while I was like, I don't need that shit. I ain't trying to smoke. And then shit got fucked-up when I was in high school; my mom was at a point where she wasn't making a lot of money, and it was like, "Yo, we struggling." I started hanging out with my friends, and they were selling weed. I started selling weed, and then one night at the studio I was like, "Fuck it, I'mma smoke." And then I was like, "Damn, I love this shit!"

Q16: *You've been vocal about marijuana legalization. How involved are you politically with that issue?*

KHALIFA: I'm active, and it's gonna get bigger and bigger. I just bought a grow house, and I'm in business with one of the largest growers in America, but people don't know that because they're legal and legit. It's crazy. We're gonna be manufacturing and selling, so that's why I'm gonna be trying to help get bills passed—to talk to the people and explain, "Hey, this is why you gotta do it."

Q17: *What have your experiences with other drugs been like?*

KHALIFA: I've done mushrooms. I shroomed in Las Vegas for a weekend on my birthday. I did mushrooms in Switzerland and at Coachella. It was pretty awesome. But I don't do party drugs. I've never popped any pills. I've never done coke. Painkillers make me sick; I think I'm allergic to them. I tried Xanax one time, but it made me throw up, so I was like, "Nah, I don't like this shit." I did lean, but it just made me sleepy. It's just cough medicine. I don't know what it is with rappers on lean, because that shit don't help. It don't help you be creative, it don't help you hear anything differently. I think they do it and they get addicted.

Q18: *It seems that weed is becoming legal everywhere and is less subversive now. Has that changed how much you want to publicly embrace it?*

KHALIFA: The whole world doesn't have to know you're getting stoned. I feel like the rebel part of it is what made me think, Yo, I gotta smoke everywhere; I gotta do this because fuck that! But now I wanna be high on the low. I still smoke a lot, but I definitely smoke less. Today I probably only smoked two joints, but back in the day I'd be tripping if I only smoked two joints. To other people, it's like, "What? Wiz only smoked *two joints?*" But guess what—I'm fucking high. I feel great.

Q19: *Who do you make music for?*

KHALIFA: Anybody who thinks, who likes Bob Marley, who likes Willie Nelson, who likes Prince, who loves music and poetry. It could be a young person who doesn't know why they love the music or an old person who wonders, Why isn't music like this anymore? I don't give a fuck about an awards show. I love my cars, but that's just me as a person. I go crazy trying to come up with new ways to do shit, and that energy gets transferred through my music.

Q20: *You're touring this summer with Snoop Dogg, who is 44. Where do you see yourself in 10, 20 and 50 years?*

KHALIFA: In 10 years I'll be a billionaire. I'm going to hit a lick, the biggest one ever, and people are going to be like, "What the fuck?" In 20 years I'm not even going to give a fuck about money. In 50 years I'll probably be back to caring about money, on the road, chilling, doing young shit, because I'm going to be bored. I've already done it all, so I'm just going to get back out here and do this again. ■

Winona Now

A new series reminds us that Winona Ryder is more than a Hollywood survivor and GIF-able internet goddess

"You have to believe that the craziest thing is going to happen," says Matt Duffer, who with his twin brother, Ross, created the Netflix series *Stranger Things,* premiering this month. He's referring to their first choice for one of the show's lead roles—a single mom in 1980s suburbia whose son goes missing in connection with a secret government experiment. Matt goes on: "Sometimes it doesn't, but sometimes it does. And then you're on set with Winona Ryder and you have to pinch yourself."

It's tempting to cite *Stranger Things* as the latest evidence of a Winona renaissance (Winonaissance?) following her exquisite performance in David Simon's 2015 HBO miniseries *Show Me a Hero* and ahead of the unconfirmed yet rapturously awaited *Beetlejuice* sequel. But the truth is that Ryder, now 44, has been working for the past decade—after that one scandal and an ensuing four-year hiatus.

The projects have ranged from family dramas to shoot-'em-ups, and most of them, with the exception of *Star Trek,* have been flops. But this seemingly random string of roles isn't random at all. It's a remarkably brave response to what happened one December afternoon at Saks Fifth Avenue in Beverly Hills.

In hindsight, Ryder's 2001 arrest for shoplifting marked a crucial shift in American culture—a dividing line between people becoming famous for their talent and people becoming famous for, well, trying to become famous. Just months afterward, Harvey Levin debuted the TV show *Celebrity Justice,* which covered the shoplifting trial exhaustively and led to Levin's creation of TMZ a few years later. In 2002, Gawker Media launched, and one of its earliest scoops was the Paris Hilton sex tape. Of course, the scandal that followed *created* Hilton's career instead of preventing it. Next came *The Real Housewives,* the Kardashians, the YouTube stars, the Instagram influencers, the Republican candidate for president. These days, there's no such thing as bad press, only bad engagement.

Ryder could have leveraged her newfound infamy: a posttrial reality show, a sit-down with Oprah. But other than appearing in a 2003 Marc Jacobs ad campaign that slyly sent up her felonious past, she took a long break. And when she returned, she did so quietly, determined to take risks and play against type—an especially bold move given Hollywood's ageism when it comes to substantial female roles. She did slapstick with David Arquette (the admittedly terrible *Darwin Awards*) and a *Vogue* cover. She did a CBS TV movie and modeled for Rag & Bone. She stole scenes in *Black Swan* and played a mannequin in a Killers video. In her constant mingling of high and low she practically out-Franco'd James Franco.

To Matt and Ross Duffer, though, Ryder has always been a leading lady of the highest order. "It's that movie star thing," says Ross. "I don't know how to articulate it, but you either have it or you don't. And she obviously does. Winona goes all-in."—*Sean Manning*

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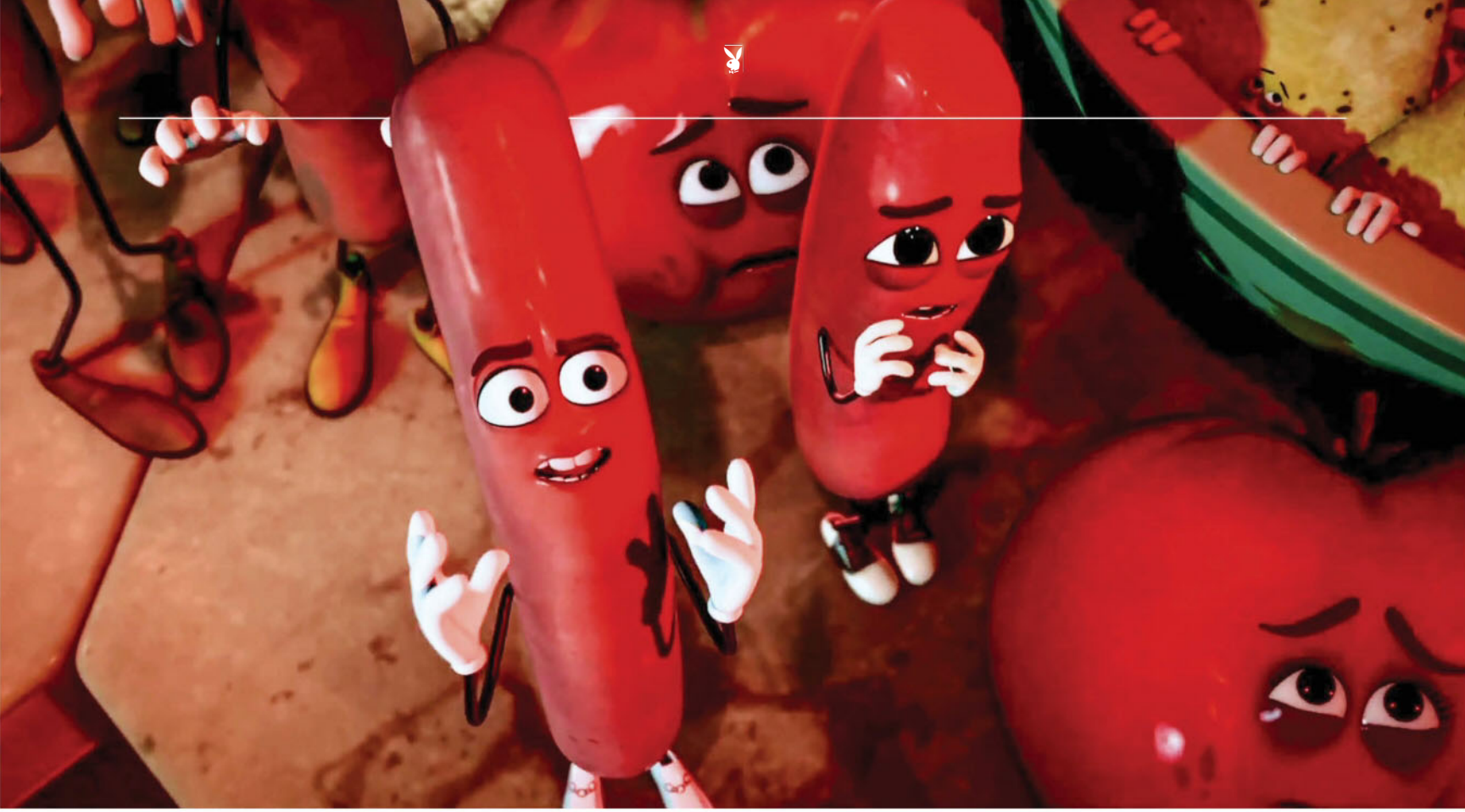

FILM

The Filthy Pixel Revolution

Seth Rogen's Sausage Party may just launch a new era of R-rated animation

A horny anthropomorphic hot dog in love with a doe-eyed bun. A used condom with a face, loitering in a seedy park. A booze bottle named Firewater intoning pseudo–Native American mysticisms while puffing sativa. It may look like one, but *Sausage Party* is no Pixar family feels fest.

Those who have belly-laughed their way through Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg's stony, filthy films—*Pineapple Express, This Is the End* and *The Interview,* to name a few—may be surprised to learn that the duo is staking out a spot in cinematic history with their latest effort: *Sausage Party* is the first-ever CGI-animated movie to be given an R rating. Writers Rogen, Goldberg, Kyle Hunter and Ariel Shaffir, along with directors Greg Tiernan and Conrad Vernon, are on a mission to loosen up mainstream animation—much like *Sausage Party*'s racy small-screen predecessors *South Park, Family Guy* and *Archer.*

They've got their work cut out for them. "Outside the United States, audiences are accustomed to animated movies for grown-ups, like *Chico and Rita* and *Persepolis,*" says a source from another studio that has dabbled in animation. "But here, where production costs can run higher than $200 million and animated films are 'family fare,' it takes nerves of steel to gamble on something that's rated R. That's one reason Warner Bros. made its R-rated *Batman: The Killing Joke* strictly for home-video release."

Rogen, who, until Sony stepped up, had been trying since 2008 to mount the $30 million project, says, "We've made this insane movie, packed with every joke you'd expect from something called *Sausage Party,* but what you don't assume is that we also have an unpredictable, sweet story about people from different cultures—people who don't understand each other learning to relate and get along. So there's a good theological analogy to be had too. We set the bar high: On a level of story, character and emotion, we had to make it as great as those Pixar movies. Visually, it had to be on a *Toy Story 3* level. And we agreed that we couldn't make fun of it."

They don't. Still, *Sausage Party* has more in common with such raucous curiosities as *Fritz the Cat* or the more recent *Anomalisa* than with *Frozen* or *Minions.* Says Rogen, laughing, "Look, I play the hot dog hero Frank, and for added authenticity Frank is molded off my dick. I'm actually playing my own dick, and it's one of my best performances. Greg Tiernan has worked with DreamWorks for 20 years, and like he says, today that studio wouldn't even do the edgy dialogue they did in *Shrek*—dialogue like 'Dead broad *off* the table!' and 'Eat me!' Pixar would never do that. Hopefully, we'll set a precedent the way *Deadpool* did for superhero movies."

"We showed Sacha Baron Cohen the movie," adds Goldberg, who launched his career with Rogen, writing episodes of *Da Ali G Show,* "and he was traumatized and personally appalled. It was nice to shock even him." If the actor who once pretended to masturbate on a crowded Manhattan street was shocked, trust us: He won't be the only one.—*Stephen Rebello*

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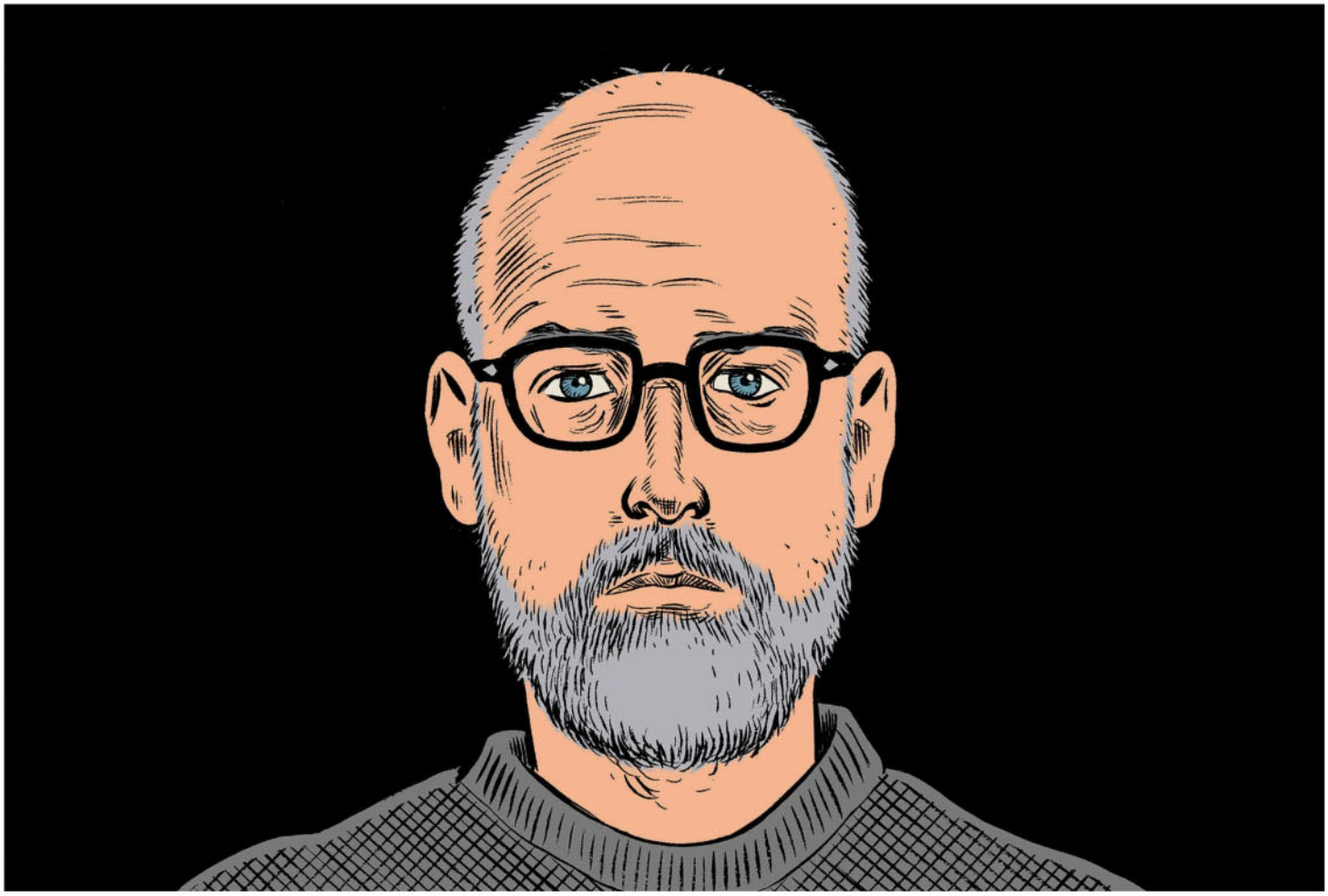

CLOWES COMES ALIVE

A best-seller, a Hollywood adaptation and the tragedy that made cartoonist Daniel Clowes question it all

BY **ADAM POPESCU**

"You want to see my studio?"

On the second floor of a green craftsman house in the East Bay city of Piedmont, Daniel Clowes's work space is a study in organized chaos. Pencils, erasers, pens, T squares, tape, scissors, ink, virgin paper. The blinds are closed. A desk supporting an old Apple sits on one side of the room, a drafting table on the other. Clowes kicks up his feet. A flyswatter hangs an arm's length away.

"There's nothing worse than trying to draw and having bugs flying around," he explains, his voice cracking an octave, a raspy cough erupting. "Sorry, I'm just getting over a cold. Jesus, I sound like a chain-smoker."

He's taller than I expected. Thinner too. At 55, the cartoonist has a gray beard that's thicker than the hair on his head (as depicted in the self-portrait above). His hawkish blue eyes shift behind black frames; you can see the gears in his mind turning. He's more eager to talk about the Golden State Warriors than himself. Despite years of media attention, Daniel Gillespie Clowes isn't quite mainstream—he writes and pens beautiful, cerebral comic books in an age when the spandex set has conquered Hollywood—but he's far more than a fringe demigod.

He's banked a PEN award, a 2001 Oscar nomination for his *Ghost World* adaptation (which stars a then unknown Scarlett Johansson), covers for *The New Yorker* and a serial in *The New York Times Magazine. Patience,* his most recent graphic novel, took five years to create and became a best-seller within five days of its release. This fall, Woody Harrelson will play a bitter schlub attempting to make peace with his dying father in *Wilson,* the cartoonist's third feature-length page-to-screen translation.

As he settles into the conversation, it's clear that Clowes is not the Howard Beale–like angry man often portrayed in the press. Years of solitude and professional struggles branded him, but a health scare and, just last February,

the death of a close friend and colleague seem to have changed everything.

In 2003, his doctor detected a heart murmur. Three years later, when they realized his heart was growing so quickly it would soon kill him, Clowes underwent open-heart surgery that lasted seven hours. "I had that feeling: This is it, I'm done. I was programmed to die at 46."

The man's heart was just too big. It was genetics, not stress, but it didn't help that while he was recovering, *Art School Confidential,* his second book turned into a film, failed to match the success of *Ghost World.*

Seated in his studio, Clowes runs a finger down his chest where the scalpel cut him open.

• • •

With his Lynchian take on modern Rockwell Americana, Clowes fathered the movement of visual-literary comics. Gaston Dominguez-Letelier, owner of Meltdown Comics, calls him "our greatest living graphic novelist." Adrian Tomine says he's "one of the greatest living artists in any medium." And Chris Ware, author of the Joycean graphic novel *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth,* says, "He's one of the funniest people I've ever met. Dan is well aware that an awkward drawing is more likely to stay in the memory than a virtuosic one."

An avid comics reader growing up, Clowes was skeptical of certain mainstream titles. "Superman doesn't make any rational sense. Even as a kid I thought, If this guy has superpowers, why would he beat up small-time criminals? That's basically the work of a beat cop."

His parents divorced when he was two. Three years later, his stock-car-racing stepfather died in a wreck. Bouncing between relatives, Clowes devoured comics passed down by his older brother. "*Mad* magazine, *Betty and Veronica,* all the early Marvel. I still have *Fantastic Four* number one. I read everything."

At 18, Clowes enrolled in New York's Pratt Institute. After graduating in 1984, he built a portfolio that his professors praised but that failed to get magazine editors' attention. "I put in little ripped-up pieces of paper that would have moved if they'd opened it," he says.

He spent a depressing time in Chicago and then in small-town Michigan. For fun, he made his own comics. "I didn't actually think I'd ever make a living doing comics. I thought *maybe* it would lead to something."

It did. Clowes unleashed years of bottled frustration in his 1986 parody *Lloyd Llewellyn* and 1989's sublimely kitschy *Eightball* series. Back then, if you couldn't pop claws or web-swing, you weren't breaking registers in the comics game. But Seattle's Fantagraphics saw what no one else did, publishing both.

Never charting a straight path, Clowes had a Dennis Rodman–short first marriage. But then *Eightball* started to develop a following, and Clowes drew dozens of album covers for Sub Pop Records—without listening to the music, which he hated.

In 1993, Coca-Cola tapped rising artists Clowes and Charles Burns to design the look of OK Soda. The drink was a flop, but it marked the cartoonist's first major payday. And he got it because *Eightball*'s *Ghost World* arc, spanning 1993 to 1997, was becoming a crossover smash. When *Ghost World* was collected in a stand-alone edition in late 1997, the tale of angsty teen alienation attracted a large audience. "It remains the best-selling book in Fantagraphics history," says cartoonist turned publisher Eric Reynolds, who estimates the title has sold about 1 million books and comics.

"I HAD THAT FEELING: THIS IS IT, I'M DONE. I WAS PROGRAMMED TO DIE AT 46."

Clowes found a fresh start in California, meeting a Berkeley lit student named Erika Katz at a 1992 signing. They fell in love and married three years later, and this time it stuck. These days, they have a great kid, great house, great life. And it seems that after years on the periphery, Clowes is poised to break through in Hollywood. Maybe. If *Wilson* isn't a success, it could signal the end of Clowes's flirtation with the mainstream. But if the movie is another win, then what?

When I pose this question, it becomes obvious that recent events have made it irrelevant.

• • •

After confining himself to his studio for years, leaving only to pick up his son from school, Clowes was faced with a tragedy that shook him to his core. As *Patience* went to press in February, his friend and manager, Alvin Buenaventura, who had meticulously overseen production on the book, died suddenly at the age of 39.

The two met when fifth-grader Buenaventura approached Clowes at the San Diego Comic-Con in the 1980s. There were no lines at Clowes's booth—he wasn't a star then—but Buenaventura idolized him. The two would later work closely together, and Buenaventura became Clowes's manager–confidant–production savant.

His death "puts things into perspective, that's for sure," Clowes says. "To still be involved with the book, to be out promoting and all that—it still feels like I'm connected to him. As that kind of drifts away, I'm becoming more and more aware of having to process that he's really gone. You find very few people in your life you can really trust like that."

Does it matter that *Patience* is a best-seller?

"Well, on that level, certainly not," he replies. "But it feels like he lives on in the book. By pure accident, on the opening spread with all the credits, I drew his credit on a rock floating off into oblivion. It feels incredibly tragic but also somewhat comforting. When I see that rock floating off, I imagine there's something about him still floating around."

Buenaventura was the buffer between Clowes and the outside world, handling everything from travel to e-mails. He left with all Clowes's online passwords, forcing the artist out from behind the page. But for this very private man to mourn now? The timing seems a cruel cosmic joke.

• • •

Why does Clowes's work resonate? Why did *Ghost World* strike such a deep chord? And why is *Wilson,* 77 pages of vignettes centering on a fractured family, so powerful? Maybe because, unlike the Marvel and DC hordes, Clowes's characters are powerless to stem the tide of change. They're all flawed, relatable. No wonder his fan base includes literary types, confused kids and film execs.

And what of his reputation as an angry recluse? It turns out the one most responsible for that label is Clowes himself.

"People have an impression of me that I'm either an ivory-tower elitist, an intellectualist looking down on everyone or cynical and depressed. I *was* pretty angry; I still am. As a young man, I held an optimism about the world. When so many things that should not happen do, you see the frustrations of humanity beat you down, and it makes you angry."

It's clear, however, that among the sly humor, the visible affection for his family and, perhaps most important, the vivid panels of *Patience,* that primal optimism is still alive.

"In my case," Clowes says, "I came out on the other side." ■

FRANCOFILE

*A conversation with **Danny McBride** about Eastbound & Down, substitute teaching, Your Highness and his new show, Vice Principals*

BY
JAMES FRANCO

JAMES FRANCO: Did you always want to make movies?

DANNY MCBRIDE: I started making movies when I was in fifth grade. I made movies all through middle school and high school. We had a series of shorts called *Fools TV.* We made *Fools TV 1* and then *Fools TV 3: The Search for Part 2*. We did something called *Stand By Me: Part 2,* where the dead kid comes alive, follows those boys back home and murders them. Everything was about drugs and killing people.

FRANCO: You actually went to film school at University of North Carolina School of the Arts with David Gordon Green, who directed *Pineapple Express, Your Highness* and *Eastbound & Down*, and Jody Hill, who wrote and directed *Eastbound & Down* and your new HBO show, *Vice Principals.*

MCBRIDE: We all wrote and worked on stuff together at school. When we got to L.A., we tried to maintain that. We would go to our day jobs and at night work on scripts together. After being out there for a few months, David got his second film, *All the Real Girls.* We were all planning to work on it, and then the financing fell apart. That was startling, because we felt like there was this momentum. Like, fuck, even a guy like David, who got written about in *Time* magazine, can lose funding for a movie? That was the wake-up call. Everyone was sort of realigning. I was couch surfing. Me and my girlfriend broke up, and I was depressed and didn't know whether I wanted to stay in L.A. or go back to Virginia. I ended up going to Virginia for a little bit and substitute teaching and writing. I thought, I don't need to live in L.A. to write a script. Maybe I just need to get my arsenal filled up and then I'll go back, you know?

FRANCO: Holy shit, you were a substitute teacher? Your character on *Eastbound & Down* is a substitute teacher, and *Vice Principals* is set in a high school.

MCBRIDE: I was coming up with ideas for that stuff when I was subbing. A lot of times I felt really embarrassed about being a substitute teacher. I felt like I was still the same age as those kids. I was only a few years older than they were, but I always felt like I had to let them know I was on the level, like I wasn't a regular teacher and shit. [*laughs*]

FRANCO: Then you and Jody made *The Foot Fist Way.* I can see the roots of *Eastbound & Down*'s Kenny Powers and your character in *Your Highness* in Fred Simmons, your *Foot Fist* character.

MCBRIDE: We were sort of writing a love letter and also mocking these Southern men who'd tried to shape our minds when we were kids. But as we got into it, we realized it's funny to tell a story about somebody who sees the world differently and to figure out a way to make people sort of see it his way by the end. Me and Jody wanted to do something in that tone again but where we could have more time. We knew we were just scratching the surface.

FRANCO: Why do you think that approach works in *Eastbound & Down* but not in *Your Highness*? It's similar but maybe doesn't work the same way.

MCBRIDE: You don't think so, James? [*laughs*] In *Eastbound,* Kenny was so dark it was shocking to people, but I think it was also intriguing. And really, it's the character April. The fact that something in Kenny is good enough to want her keeps you invested in him to see if he figures it out. I feel like we got a bad shake on *Your Highness.* We got you and Natalie Portman in this silly movie that was made for, like, 13-year-olds, and I think it just had a target on it.

FRANCO: I wonder if my and Natalie's involvement distorted what it was originally intended to be, because in the early version my character was pretty minor.

MCBRIDE: He had his arms chopped off; that's why my character had to go on the quest. Then we thought the movie was really about these two brothers, so we changed it. We were still going to chop your arms off, but the studio was like, "There's no way you're putting James Franco in this movie and have him have no arms." [*laughs*]

FRANCO: We're in Australia now working on *Alien: Covenant.* Is doing drama different from comedy? You told me you felt like you were doing an awards-show spoof.

MCBRIDE: I feel like I'm hosting the *MTV Movie Awards* and I've done a reel of all the cool movies and put myself in them. [*laughs*] Honestly, I feel dramatic stuff is easier. I just have to say what's on this fuckin' script and make it believable. I don't have to have 30 other jokes under my belt. I remember being nervous to do *As I Lay Dying.* All the actors were murmuring to themselves, going through lines. It looks like you're tripping with people and everyone's in their own world on bad mushrooms. I feel self-conscious about striking up a conversation. I don't know what everyone's process is—do they want to talk, or should we be talking as our characters? I don't know. How do I talk to everybody? [*laughs*] ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE MA

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Private Parts

The evolution of the American locker room

Last year I spent almost all my nonworking hours in a sweaty subterranean boxing gym in lower Manhattan, training for a fight. And almost every night, after a few hours of hitting the bags, I would limp to the sorry excuse for a locker room

and strip before a dozen guys fighting for space on the single long bench separating three moldy, barely curtained showerheads from a toilet.

Some of my best memories of those months emerged from that locker room, where I talked shop with a rotating cast of boxers, taking in the startling diversity of their bodies: the heavyweights with their drooping breasts moving aside for the 120-pound featherweights who picked their way, pantherlike, among us. Men of every size and color—freckled, scarred or tattooed like me—navigated a space smaller than my studio apartment with the assurance of a group accustomed to nimble footwork and tuning out the sight of another guy's flopping member.

After the fight, I joined the high-end gym across from my Union Square office. Its tiled, wood-paneled locker room with glass-door shower stalls and clinical atmosphere immediately made me feel strange, nearly feral. Here men changed in hushed and concentrated silence. Aside from a few peacocky muscle bros who strutted with practiced nonchalance, we undressed in the showers or corners, exposing ourselves for no more than a second. After a few weeks I found myself missing the stinking, toilet-paper-strewn locker room at the boxing gym. I started to feel that in our privacy we were tacitly agreeing we had something shameful to hide.

It wasn't always this way. S3 Design co-founder Bryan Dunkelberger, who has done design work for Equinox and other gyms, says gang showers were the standard as late as the 1990s. He's quick to add that today's gym user would "revolt" at the idea. "People are more modest now versus the 1960s," he says. Rising demand for amenities that he helped pioneer is partly to blame. "You can't think of too many times in life when you're going to stand naked in public," he says. "If you ask somebody if they'd like to shower in front of 10 men or in a stall, most would take the stall."

He's right. But what if our need for isolation isn't rooted in modesty but in something darker—something more like shame?

Brené Brown, a University of Houston research professor, defines shame as "the fear of disconnection," whose roots lie in "excruciating vulnerability." In a 2010 TED Talk she said, "In order for connection to happen, we have to allow ourselves to be seen, really seen."

As a trans man, my instinct is to hide my nudity. It's worth noting that I can pass, which means my gender is rarely questioned. (For those in a less privileged position, fighting for the right to safely use a locker room often means arguing for single-stall changing areas.) But I was surprised at both how easy it was to be exposed at the boxing gym and how meaningful it could be. When a brusque guy from the Bronx asked me about the scars crisscrossing my chest and I mumbled something about a car accident, a man who overheard chastised the questioner for being rude. After a few weeks of towel-and-shorts acrobatics, I realized no one would admit to looking at my dick in the first place. Although the implications were troubling, the result was a feeling of freedom I'd never known in this body.

Something in me had shifted in that cramped gym downtown. When I glimpsed myself in the filthy mirror, surrounded by men of all shapes and sizes, I saw my body clearly, liberated from shame: functional, muscled and with a story all its own. My new gym took that freedom away.

By the 2000s, the gang shower had died, coinciding with the rise of metrosexuals—those Gen X and older millennials suddenly the target of marketing campaigns touting the urbanity of caring about the shape of your abs and the fit of your shirt.

BY **THOMAS PAGE MCBEE**

The "metrosexual effect," as R. Tyson Smith, sociologist and author of *Fighting for Recognition: Identity, Masculinity and the Act of Violence in Professional Wrestling,* calls it, challenged norms of masculinity, but Smith sees the result as a net negative. "The policing of bodies we've traditionally reserved for women has extended to mean that those anxieties are felt more by men," he says. "That's not a gain for feminism."

Dunkelberger traces the move toward modesty in locker-room design to the 1980s, when fitness culture graduated from YMCAs and high school gyms to a spin-crazed, Richard Simmons–style middle-class commodity. Baby boomers were raised on spartan facilities that prized functionality; Gen Xers and millennials grew up expecting something very different. "Millennials hit college, where locker rooms still had gang showers, and said, 'What is this?' " Dunkelberger says.

In Smith's view, the move toward gym modesty has more complicated origins than consumer preference. He cites another trend of the 1970s and 1980s as a major culprit: the rise of a visible post-Stonewall gay movement. "With gay liberation came the idea that anyone can be gay," he says, and that gave the gang shower a very different meaning. "I have to believe that in a post-closet society there's also a secondary response, a heightened concern around privacy in more intimate spaces."

Dunkelberger's locker-room designs, which balance the demand for privacy with open space, seem to highlight that concern. "The more privacy you provide, the more opportunity for mischief," he says. His team now situates saunas in high-traffic areas, "so you feel less like you can go back there and hide."

The irony is that the modern locker room provides only the illusion of privacy: Every body within is under constant watch. "We want to lay it out so staff members can walk from the front to the back and see everything," Dunkelberger says. "It's a funny balance. The last thing you want is someone to walk into a locker room and not feel comfortable and safe."

For Dunkelberger, gyms give customers what they want: more space, more privacy, more walls. I for one am glad my gym doesn't have a gang shower, but not because I'm ashamed. It's because my body is in danger—because most men haven't seen a body that looks like mine. The way things are going, very few ever will.

Even after I began injecting testosterone, I would blur parts of myself when facing a mirror. Some nights when my coach and I closed the boxing gym and I was the only guy left, I would turn toward the mirror above the sinks, nude, and stay there for a few seconds, practicing making myself visible. I highly recommend it.

Tonight after work, I'll go to the gym across the street and change in the shower. I'll be grateful for the amenity, but I'll wrestle with the implication. Stripping down, I'll imagine a world where guys like me can relax, exposed as the men we are. And picturing such a world—positioning my towel just so, walking back to face my locker—I'll think, as I always do, that this isn't it. ■

GOD SAVE THE GOP

Paul Ryan is trying to rescue a Republican party that doesn't want to be saved

BY **JOHN MERONEY**

Speaker of the House Paul D. Ryan lost this summer, and he wasn't even in a race. Ryan may not have been on primary and caucus ballots, but the anger that voters conveyed was intended for him and his agenda just as much as it was aimed at the establishment candidates who went down along the way. By voting to give the GOP presidential nomination to a certain *Apprentice* host, voters soundly rejected Bush Republicanism—or what Ryan calls "the principles of our party."

That party has defined nearly all of Ryan's life. Ryan, 46, grew up Catholic in Janesville, Wisconsin, where he flipped hamburgers at McDonald's during summer breaks. After college, he took his aw-shucks persona to Capitol Hill, where he worked as a staffer for Republican politicians and immersed himself in GOP economic dogma.

But Ryan's origin story really begins with his part-time job waiting tables at Tortilla Coast, a Tex-Mex cantina across the street from the Republican National Committee. One night, he served former GOP congressman Jack Kemp of New York; it was love at first sight. Once a star quarterback for the Buffalo Bills, Kemp parlayed his gridiron success into a seat in Congress, where he made a name for himself in the 1970s by championing tax cuts, promoting hawkish internationalism and reaching out to minorities. In the 1980s and 1990s, he tried and failed to become president and then vice president.

Ryan found a mentor in Kemp, who encouraged his protégé to follow his footsteps into Congress—even if Kemp was an unusual model for an ambitious politician. "Jack was always a day late and a dollar short," says Bruce Bartlett, who worked for Kemp as staff economist. "But he had an enormous amount of intellectual influence."

In 1998, Ryan was elected and became the second-youngest member of the House. The neoconservative *Weekly Standard* magazine branded him as one of the "young guns" of Capitol Hill who would lead the GOP into the future. He went on to chair the House Committee on the Budget, and in 2012 Mitt Romney selected Ryan to be his vice presidential running mate—"an intellectual leader of the Republican Party," as Romney called him. Yet their ticket couldn't even carry Ryan's home district and generated just one percent more votes nationwide in 2012 than John McCain and Sarah Palin did in 2008.

Still, Ryan managed to land on his feet back in Congress, and last fall when House Republicans were desperate for a new leader, they chose him as Speaker. Once again, Ryan was hailed as the savior of conservative "ideas and principles."

Then 2016 happened. After hearing Trump, conservative voters asked themselves what was "conservative" about GOP-backed trade policies that have closed more than 50,000 factories in the U.S. since 2000. Why should they continue to support the globalist agenda, advocated by Ryan and other Republicans, that moves jobs once held by Americans offshore? In state after state, they voted to stop it.

"Republicans lose personality contests, but we win ideas contests." That was how Ryan rationalized the defeat of the Romney-Ryan ticket, a line he repeated even as Trump racked up victories. Instead, voters looked at Ryan's ideas, as repackaged by Jeb Bush and other Trump opponents, and said no thanks.

"Those were policies that were right in 1980," says Bartlett, who helped draft Kemp's tax-cut bill that Ronald Reagan signed into law as president in 1981. "Circumstances have changed, and Ryan and other Republicans are still echoing the same old tired philosophy."

That hasn't stopped Ryan from pledging to ride these ideas into the Republican National Convention and the fall campaign. A preview came in March, during the heat of the primaries, when Ryan's office announced he would deliver a big, bold speech about the "state of American politics." Instead, he rebuked Trump's rhetoric without naming him and employed such generic bromides as "My dad used to say, 'If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem,'" and "Personalities come and go, but principles endure." The audience of interns sat expressionless, some playing with their iPhones. "The big speech landed with a big thud," concluded *The Washington Post*'s Daily 202 newsletter.

Ryan's office tried again in April, this time promoting a "millennial town hall" with him at Georgetown, arranged by CNN's conservative commentator S.E. Cupp. The appearance generated barely 7,000 views on YouTube.

But Ryan loyalists are a determined bunch, praying that the Donald will be defeated so they can launch a "Paul Ryan for President 2020" campaign. Before Ryan lets them get too far, he may want to take Reagan's test for success in national politics and ask himself if he can answer yes to these two questions: Are you saying something different from what everyone else is saying? And is anyone listening? ■

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TA-NEHISI COATES

Making the case that the United States government owes black people for what it has done to them is an unlikely way to become a household name, but that's what Ta-Nehisi Coates did two years ago. "The Case for Reparations" was the cover story of the June 2014 issue of The Atlantic, and the publication says the piece brought more unique visitors to its site in a single day than any other magazine story it had ever run. Coates's thorough defense of a revolutionary idea became a star turn. ¶ Then came Between the World and Me, a 176-page essay that doubles as a letter to his now 15-year-old son. In it, Coates covers police brutality, spirituality and coming-of-age in ways that capture how much has and hasn't changed since his adolescence.

Focusing on all the things that threaten black bodies and the fear produced by that condition, he soberly reports on the struggles inextricably linked to blackness, trading the traditional tale of freedom and redemption for one supported by history instead of hope. The book was instantly hailed as a masterpiece, yielding its author a National Book Award and a MacArthur Fellowship and ending up as a Pulitzer Prize finalist. Coates went from simply being critically acclaimed to being compared to James Baldwin by no less an authority than Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison.

He's as shocked by all this as anyone else. A Kanye-esque college dropout sharing stages with some of the world's preeminent scholars just six years after losing three jobs in seven years? That would be enough to drive the average intellectual past the point of hubris. But not Coates, who seems unable to process his current success without keeping an intimate acquaintance with tougher times.

Ta-Nehisi Coates was born on September 30, 1975 in Baltimore and grew up on the west side of the city, the part of town made famous by HBO's *The Wire*. His first book, *The Beautiful Struggle,* tells the story of his upbringing, the product of a pan-African resistance to the toxicity of the 1980s—both the political rhetoric and the poison flooding the streets. After struggling through high school, Coates went to Howard University in Washington, D.C., where his father worked as a librarian. Although bright and well-read, the teacher's son wasn't a good student, and he left to pursue a career in journalism.

He bounced from job to job—fired from *Philadelphia Weekly,* "basically forced out" of *The Village Voice,* laid off from *Time* (nine years later he would appear on the *Time* 100 list)—before landing at *The Atlantic* in 2008, initially as a blogger. His posts were pointed, precise and parsimonious. The only side he consistently took was the one born of logic. He called out Barack Obama for his sweeping critiques of black America the same way he responded to similar sentiments from the right. He matter-of-factly confronted questions of race, rejecting optimistic narratives and basing his conclusions on centuries of irrefutable American history. That work helped build trust and a following that made "The Case for Reparations" possible, which led to Ta-Nehisi Coates becoming more prominent than he thinks he should be.

He's thirsty for challenges. That's why he agreed to write a series of *Black Panther* comics for Marvel and why he currently lives in Paris. His approach is self-assured but short on delusion, qualities reflected in his demeanor as well as his work.

ESPN's **Bomani Jones** met Coates at a café in Paris's third arrondissement, across the street from the apartment he shares with his wife and son. They talked over dinner and resumed the conversation the next morning at a Latin Quarter hotel. "He's uncommonly warm and gracious when he's comfortable, with a big laugh and frequent smile," Jones says. "Some of that faded when he talked about harder

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JORK WEISMANN**

times, but discomfort never stopped him from saying what he felt. He's similar in person to how he comes across on the page: honest, measured and emotive—and as brilliant as most of us think he is, which is more than he thinks of himself."

PLAYBOY: When did you realize you had become *somebody*?

COATES: When I came to *The Atlantic* I'd been writing for 12 years. *The Atlantic* is seen as this arbiter of sophisticated ideas, well ensconced in the mainstream consensus, and then they bring in this dude. I wasn't making the case for reparations back then, but I was saying that sort of shit. I could see the reaction, and it built a little bit, and then when "The Case for Reparations" came out—holy shit. But even then it was like, "This is one story, and I'll go back to my life." I thought *Between the World and Me* would hit people who read shit. When we did BookExpo America, the book-trade joint, there was a line of people to get the galleys. I was like, "What the fuck?" And I knew it was some shit when somebody said to me on Twitter, "Oh, you've got to be a celebrity to get this book?" [*laughs*] Who the fuck wants a galley? And then when you've gotten love from Toni Morrison—it still didn't hit me. When I started seeing the reaction to it I thought, Oh, this is different.

PLAYBOY: Having Toni Morrison compare you to James Baldwin sounds like a big deal.

COATES: Yeah, but when she said that, I feel like people misconstrued it. I felt her point was "It's a space I felt I was looking for, a certain kind of analysis that I'm not getting, and I got it from this book—not from everything he'll write after it, not from anything he wrote before. It's just this book." I mean, Baldwin is not just *The Fire Next Time*.

PLAYBOY: I took it as her saying "This dude might be the next Baldwin." Do you often downplay your work?

COATES: The Baldwin thing, for me, was intentional. I love *The Fire Next Time*. You've got this essay in book form; dude is using journalism, using first person, the history, the literary criticism, all just kind of mashed together. He's talking about the most essential conflict of his day. Now here we are in this era, and motherfuckers are uploading videos of people getting choked to death, beaten on the street, black president. This seems like the moment for that form. Where's that book? My editor said to me, "The road is littered with motherfuckers who tried to do that." My agent knew Baldwin. She said, "You just don't come across as a Jimmy." [*laughs*] But she said, "I think you can do it." I tried the first time; it did not work. Second time, did not work. Third time—we've got something there.

PLAYBOY: What happened between the second and third drafts?

COATES: Between the second and third time, I literally printed out every page, went sentence by sentence and came up with a completely different structure. I assigned each paragraph to each heading where I thought it should belong, then I sat down and typed the whole thing out just to run it through the machine again. So it's not that I'm downplaying it. It's hard to step back and think about it as a finished thing. The fact of the matter is I've got to go do that again, and then again, and then again, and each time different. I've got to do some other shit now, and it's got to be of that caliber. It might fail, and there's no dishonor in failure.

People start shouting out your name and they ain't even talking about you.

PLAYBOY: Since the book has come out, what's the biggest change you've noticed?

COATES: The book has given me and my family a level of financial security I never thought we would have and thus the freedom to go out and think, Okay, how are we really going to go out here and do this now? At the same time, I didn't realize how much heat there was.

PLAYBOY: Some of that heat came from Cornel West, who basically said you were a neoliberal darling who wouldn't criticize Obama. Others, including author bell hooks, suggested the book was written more for white people than for your son.

COATES: The book couldn't have been out more than three days, and I saw this note. "Look, Cornel West is going after him." It was on a Facebook post, and it was clear it had almost nothing to do with the book. Then bell hooks and Kevin Powell got together and went after the book with some bullshit. It was like all the people I was reading in the 1990s were attacking the book. I was like, Damn, what the fuck is this?

PLAYBOY: You had become a figure.

COATES: Right. And so you lose yourself. They really are not talking about you. Glenn Loury was talking like, "Yeah, I only flipped through the first few pages, but this dude was bragging to his son about how he can find a gun." I wrote to him and was like, "Dude, you need to read the book. I didn't say none of that shit." My elders got their knives out. I don't want to say everybody, but people I'd really studied and learned from. It's like, That's what it is now?

PLAYBOY: Did any of the criticism hurt?

COATES: All of it hurt. I had criticized Cornel for going after Obama, but not in that sort of personal way. The bell hooks shit hurt because she was talking about my son. The Loury shit, that hurt. Eventually I figured out that they were aiming at the gaze of white folks. I didn't account for how much that shit controls everything. I can't tell you how many times I've gone somewhere and the question has been "What's up with white people reading your book?" It alters everything. You're talking about money right there. But I think on top of that it's the prestige part. "Oh, you're a MacArthur genius now?" Now people have to look at you a certain way and talk to you a certain way, and that has nothing to do with what you're actually saying. People start shouting out your name and they ain't even talking about you.

PLAYBOY: White people are not just reading it but have also gotten behind it. Is that hard to comprehend?

COATES: It's easy. The number of white people who read books is really small. I mean, what are we, a country of 300 million? Two hundred million white folks? They haven't read *Between the World and Me.* Another thing: A lot of the shit people think is crazy is not crazy at all in academia. If you talk to historians or sociologists and ask, "Is racism one of the most consistent themes in American history, without which you would have trouble conceiving of the country at all?" they say, "Hell, yeah. I would go further than that." Is this country reading its own historians? It was really radical in my folks' home, and I thought some of that shit was crazy. Then I started reading these historians. A lot of it wasn't crazy, and a lot of it was true. There are enough "elite" people in academia who can provide the evidence for it. You might not like how it sounds, but the consensus in academia is pretty clear. When I saw that? I ain't got to fight you with what's on 125th. I can fight you with your own people. That's Harvard and Yale. I've got your history department. Like that great Chuck D line, "You check out the books they own."

PLAYBOY: Did you get any pushback from people who'd worked on reparations for years about you becoming the face of that movement?

COATES: By and large people were extremely excited to see this taken seriously. This is what my pops and that generation fought for. This is what was supposed to happen. This is the fruit. The 1960s and 1970s, a lot of the shit they were saying, it's like a scientist who intuitively feels himself to be correct but doesn't have the science. "Everything I know about this tells me it's that way. I ain't got the scholarship, but I know what direction it's supposed to go." For the next generation, folks like us, we went off to school, read some things. I was able to bring to bear tools they didn't necessarily have. And it was like, "Everything you thought was intuitively correct? I got it now. You used to say this whole thing was built on slavery—got it. Footnoting and everything, we got it." How many black folks wanted to do something like this but just couldn't?

PLAYBOY: How was it growing up as a pan-African in the 1980s and 1990s?

COATES: I've always felt black, but I always felt a little outside that real black shit. "Come on, man, we don't celebrate Christmas, we don't celebrate Thanksgiving, we don't go to church." Really? That's what we're doing now? It became cool when I was 13, when Public Enemy came out.

PLAYBOY: And you had to carry that name.

COATES: Oh my God, that was the worst. I'm like, "Can I just get a normal name?" And then I went out in the world and realized this *was* a normal name. [*laughs*] I had a crush on a girl whose name was Mwaneisha. I knew plenty of girls with names like that. What was I supposed to say about that, you know?

PLAYBOY: Does the class difference between how you grew up and how your son is growing up ever worry you?

COATES: No. I feel like I learned certain stuff the way I grew up, and those things helped me later. But the amount of violence in black communities is just off the hook, so I think it's a net negative. You've got to put it on balance. I think everybody who goes through that says, "Well, I'm gonna toughen him up." See, these white folks ain't got to be tough. Tough is for people without money.

PLAYBOY: Is there anything related to race that you once believed and now look back on and say, "What was I thinking?"

COATES: Yeah, there are crazy things that I believed. That whole iceman thing was total bullshit.

PLAYBOY: I take it you're talking about Michael Bradley's book *The Iceman Inheritance,* which attributes white racism to, among other things, sexual maladaptation in Caucasians.

COATES: See, these motherfuckers believe shit now and argue on it. I've had these fights with Andrew Sullivan about IQ. That's his iceman. There's no science behind this shit. But see, you've got institutions and guns behind it, right? You've got a whole power structure behind it that allows them to stand on the crazy shit I could not go out on. When I went to Howard they were like, "Ain't no way you're going to leave here talking that shit." These motherfuckers get to go to Harvard and come out talking that shit. Charles Murray did this bubble study. Did you see that shit?

PLAYBOY: I did not.

COATES: How to determine whether you live in a bubble or not. It's totally based on white people. No black person would take that study and have it tell them anything about their life. This motherfucker got the backing of Washington. These motherfuckers just get to spout crazy. This cat Marty Peretz, who used to run *The New Republic,* was an active racist and bigot spouting the worst poison in the world. This guy is in high reaches of society, getting degrees from Harvard. My pops said this shit to me one time: "The African's right to be wrong is sacred." When we're wrong, it's craziness, but when they're wrong, it's...Harvard.

PLAYBOY: In your back-and-forths with Sullivan and Jonathan Chait, they seemed to be wondering what was wrong with you. What was your thought when people said you seemed down, when you believed you were dealing in facts?

COATES: That's what they say when they can't fight you. They abandon the whole thought of any sort of empirical, historical, evidence-based argument, and they say, "Well, I don't like where you're coming from." It's like if I tell

you I have empirical evidence that the world is going to end in five days and you're like, "I don't like how that sounds. Why are you burning me out?" That's something people apply to the dialogue around racism but they don't apply to other shit. Kathryn Schulz won a Pulitzer Prize for this incredible piece that basically says the Pacific Northwest is going to get hit by a huge tsunami that will kill a lot of people. It's the most pessimistic, dire shit you'd ever want to read. What if they said to Schulz, "You could sing us a song"? When people can't fight you, they say, "Why are you so pessimistic?" It's a different question than "Are you correct?"

PLAYBOY: You also wrote in the book about being an atheist. Did you have any reservations about sharing that?

COATES: No. I don't know why either.

PLAYBOY: I mean, you could say you worship a different god in America.

COATES: Right, you can be spiritual. It's difficult to explain my perspective in that book without talking about atheism. So much of the black perspective is built on this notion of transcendent spiritual victory, and I had to explain why I was estranged from that. You know what I mean? How I'm going to get around that. I've got to tell them; otherwise, it's not going to be true. There's another question: Why are all these black church people reading *Between the World and Me*? I mean, people are teaching the book in church. That I did not expect.

PLAYBOY: Do you worry about going further than your audience is ready to go?

COATES: No, because I wrote for 12 years and had no audience. I'm prepared for it to go. I loved writing before this and I will love writing after this. I loved it when it made no money. I love it now that it makes more money. I will love it when it goes back to making no money again. It's not for that. And the minute you let them take it from you, the minute it becomes for them, you are lost.

PLAYBOY: How good do you think you are at writing?

COATES: I'm a good writer. I think there are very few people who can do journalism, do history, form an argument, an argument with a brain, and then write in such a way that it gets at your heart also. I'm thinking about Isabel Wilkerson. I think of Nikole Hannah-Jones. I think Elizabeth Kolbert at *The New Yorker* is really good at that. I'm talking about making an argument that's simple, with all this evidence, and writing about it in a beautiful way. There are very few people who can do all of it at the same time, and that's because very few people actually try.

Coming up on hip-hop really taught me the beauty of poetry. Reading comic books taught me the beauty of poetry. Studying poetry after that, I had this obsession with how language sounded. Coming out of my household and being a history major at Howard gave me a deep appreciation for history. Working under David Carr as a journalist gave me a deep appreciation for actually going out and talking to people. So I had a variety of experiences, but it's not mystical. It's not in the genes or in the bones.

I want the notion of "the voice" for black folks completely obliterated.

PLAYBOY: You've said that when you look at yourself in the mirror you see a guy who got fired three times. Do you think there will ever be a point when you'll look in the mirror and see the dude who changed the game with *Between the World and Me*?

COATES: No, because that remains to be seen. And the game could get changed back. Listen, I went and started this damn comic book, *Black Panther,* and it's like, Oh yeah, this is hard. Things don't just flow out of your brain. It's not like, Hey, I'm brilliant. Show up, paper right here, *bam,* another banger. No—you sit and you struggle with yourself and you stop cutting your hair. I'm not cutting my hair right now. You stop shaving, like I'm not shaving right now. You remember that you can fail. I've failed several times. The fact that everybody else don't see that don't give me the right to *not* see it.

PLAYBOY: Did you think when you said you were voting for Bernie Sanders that it would turn into a de facto endorsement?

COATES: No, I didn't see that coming at all. [*laughs*] I've got to be more self-aware. But after that, it became really hard to write about the election. I damn near can't write anything without people being like, "Oh, this dude is weighing in." I don't know why people say, "You're voting for Bernie Sanders; that enforces my vote for him." You need to think for yourself.

PLAYBOY: Has being in France changed the way you view yourself as an American?

COATES: France was the first place where that was the first thing people saw when I talked. It reminds me that the first thing they think in America is, Oh, you're black. Here, the first thing they think is, You're American, maybe black American. They're racist as hell, but the sociology that comes out of slavery is a little different from the sociology that comes out of colonialism. France colonized all sorts of people—Asian people, black people, whoever. So the relationship is a little different. It's not a good relationship. But America has a very specific thing with black people. Here, the people who get it the worst are actually the Muslims, so it's not like they're cured. But slavery did something to America; it did some shit.

PLAYBOY: Are you looking forward to going back to the States?

COATES: Yeah. And then coming back here. [*laughs*]

PLAYBOY: What do you miss?

COATES: My friends, mostly. My friends and my family.

PLAYBOY: Nothing particular to the country?

COATES: The country is the people to me, and I miss the people. There are things I don't have here that are very different but that I don't miss. I don't know if you'll see this over the next few days or whether you've seen it already, but America is a much freer place. France is actually maybe a culturally more conservative place. "We ain't open on Sunday. Deal with it. Period." In America, somebody's trying to make some money; somebody's always saying, "I'm open over here. What's up?" You know, my butcher ain't open on Monday. And during the week he shuts down from 12 to three. He works, like, 20 hours the whole week.

PLAYBOY: What role does hip-hop play in your work?

COATES: I always considered myself a failed MC. That was what I really wanted to do. I was listening to that old Quincy Jones album *Back on the Block.* Big Daddy Kane says, "Back up and give the brother room to let poetry bloom to whom it might concern or consume." I heard that and thought, Good God, there's so much in that. It's the kind of faux majesty of it, "to whom." It's actually really regal. I heard something like that as a kid, and it was like these cats were taking the language from its inventors and retrofitting it to explain their reality. Nas didn't need to go to Harvard, or even Howard, to become masterful in the use of language. I think great rappers, because of how stuff is structured, really understand on an intuitive level how to get across as much information as possible in the smallest amount of space.

In terms of literary inspirations, hip-hop's got to be number one, and I'm talking above actual literature. Aesthetically, it defines how I try to write. You really have to think hard about every single word. Probably a hundred years from now people will look back on something like *Illmatic,* some of that Wu-Tang stuff, some of the Kendrick stuff, some of the other stuff, and they're just going to be like, "Holy hell." You're talking some of the greatest wordsmiths of our age.

PLAYBOY: Have you been able to impart some of that to your son?

COATES: My son is doing it for me now. I did when he was younger, but music requires the time to actually dig, you know what I'm saying? He has always been open to stuff I play, but now he's the one who tells me, "Yo, you should check this out." He got me on the new Rihanna album. He's like, "Man, you really would like this."

PLAYBOY: So you trust his taste in music.

COATES: He has great taste in music. I don't know if it's because I was relatively young when he was born—I was 24—but I don't have that whole "Cut that off! I'm going to show you how we used to do it back in the day!" I took him to this foreign-language camp about a summer ago, and one of my great memories is just listening to his music all the way up there. It was good stuff too.

PLAYBOY: How is learning French going?

COATES: It's always hard. I'm in my fourth year of studying, and I think I speak like a four-year-old child, which is progress. My first summer here I actually took classes, and at the end I was like, I think I have some sort of brain injury. Coming back, it was a lot easier. I've had to go out and talk about the book. I can generally understand the questions from the person who's giving them to me, but I usually have the answers translated. And sometimes I actually give the answer in French.

PLAYBOY: That has to be humbling.

COATES: I think I seek out difficulty. At this point, when people are handing you things and giving you all these accolades, and you go somewhere and they're basically, "Who are you? You can't even talk to us." You know what I mean? Like, "You really ain't shit." It takes it back. I need that in my life.

PLAYBOY: With these recurring themes in history, how do you avoid writing about the same thing over and over?

COATES: You just don't write. I've been trying for the past two weeks to write about the 1994 Violent Crime Control Act without rewriting. I wrote "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration" back in October, and then when Bill Clinton went crazy—–

PLAYBOY: When he was trying to defend his crime bill to Black Lives Matter protesters in Philadelphia earlier this year?

COATES: Yeah. I was sitting there trying to write, and I got about three paragraphs in and was like, This is deceptive. It's just saying the same shit. You said it, and either they heard you or they didn't. It's not up to you.

PLAYBOY: Does the fact that these things keep happening make you question the utility of your work?

COATES: No, because you have no control over that. Ida B. Wells went all through the South, reporting on lynchings and everything. Nothing changed, not in her lifetime. If nothing ever changes, that does not relieve me of the responsibility to tell the truth as I see it.

PLAYBOY: Some would make the argument that you have become the voice on these issues. How does that make you feel?

COATES: It makes me sad that people don't read more black writers. I want the notion of there having to be "the voice" for black folks completely obliterated. There is no one voice on climate change. There's no one person on sports. I think that allows for a kind of laziness among nonblack people who don't want to read other people's shit. It saves them from having to compare me with other writers who are not black. It allows them to say, "You're king of the blacks over here." The journalism I'm making stands up with any of these white folks you want to put up. If you want to have a conversation about where I stand in my field, we can talk about that. I'm black, very proud to be black, standing within the tradition of other black writers. That's my culture, that's my ethnicity, that's my struggle, that's my tradition, that's my literature, but don't use that as an excuse not to explore that tradition.

PLAYBOY: Are you comfortable with being thought of as perhaps the best voice on these issues?

COATES: No, because when people say that, they are often unqualified. Very few black people say that to me. Why do we think about black folks like this? I'm practicing a craft,

and if you want to talk about best, compare me to other craftsmen. I'm interested in a particular question, but why would you compare me only to other people who are interested only in that question?

PLAYBOY: When was the last time somebody important to you fundamentally disagreed with something you'd written or done?

COATES: I wrote a column defending the use of the word *nigger,* and my buddy Ben and his wife, Janai—they're mentioned in the book—were like, "It's total bullshit."

PLAYBOY: Why is that the thing that gets people so charged up?

COATES: The nigger thing? I understand if you're black and you say, "Man, I had white people call me this shit all my life. They called me this shit when they hit me upside the head, and I don't want to hear it." I understand that. But that ain't everybody's experience. I've never had a white person call me a nigger. I had somebody call me *le négre* here in France, but I was 38 years old and I couldn't have cared less. It didn't mean anything. So not all of us come out of that experience.

PLAYBOY: How would you describe the eight years of Obama's presidency?

COATES: I think he did a tremendous job, and I say that with all my criticism of how he talks about black folks and how he talks *to* black folks. I say that with all my criticism of the morality or the lack of morality in terms of drone warfare. You're not voting for a civil rights leader; you're voting for a president of the United States within the boundaries of what presidents do. And within the boundaries of what presidents do, he's easily the greatest president in my lifetime. I don't think people understand what he had to navigate. It's a hard job already. You've got people on TV—and this is just the small end of it—on the internet, everywhere, sending out pictures of you and your wife looking like apes. You've got officials in the opposing party e-mailing pictures of watermelon patches in front of the White House. You have an opposition party where somewhere on the order of 50 or 60 percent don't think you are legally president. You're giving the State of the Union address and some white dude from South Carolina stands up and yells, "You lie." Just open, blatant disrespect. You say the most sensible things in the world and people lose their mind, almost scuttling your top agenda in terms of legislation. You've got to be a certain motherfucker to be able to manage all that in your head. Their leading presidential candidate right now is the person who claimed our president was born somewhere else and asked to see his grades. You're dealing with a party where racism is a significant undercurrent. I mean, whew.

PLAYBOY: Were you surprised by the level of obstruction?

COATES: I was surprised by how much his very presence drew out the racism in the country. I didn't know these folks were basically going to double down. There's stuff we don't even remember. In the 2012 Republican primary, Newt Gingrich just comes out and calls this dude a food-stamp president. I mean, just says it. This is a respectable figure in American politics right now. Five years from now, people will be looking back on this presidency and talking about how great the times were. Ten years from now, Republicans will be talking about how whoever is the Democratic nominee at that point is not like Obama and how magisterial Obama was. Twenty-five, 30 years from now, they're going to put his face on the money, if we still have money. And 50 years from now—it might not even take that long—he will be considered one of the greatest presidents in American history.

They tell me I'm wrong, and that's cool. I look for that. I still feel like a student.

PLAYBOY: Did you have to reconcile what you wanted Obama to be with what he turned out to be?

COATES: No. I think my politics are significantly more radical than that of most people in the black community. That the first black president would not have my politics or my way of addressing folks is not particularly surprising to me. That does not relieve me of my responsibility to say, "This is wrong and here's why." But I understand where he's coming from. I think Obama loves black people. I think he likes being black. Is it a mistake that he's attracted to Chicago—for my money, the capital of black America—and participates within the institutions there? That he married a woman who is from there and lives there? I don't think you do any of that without having a sincere affection for black folks. You can feel somebody has a sincere appreciation for black folks and just think they're dead wrong.

PLAYBOY: What's the importance to you of having a black family in the White House?

COATES: That shit replaced *The Cosby Show,* didn't it? I think it's important, because culture is important. If having no black family there was important, then having one there is important. When you're the most famous black folks in the country—I mean, I don't want to fall too much into the romance of it, but imagery matters. That's the most public picture of us for eight years. That has to have some impact on white people, and I'm talking about white children. Part of the way racism works is through imagery, through reinforcing certain ideas. It's not policy, but symbols matter.

PLAYBOY: The women in your life don't get mentioned much in your books. Is there a reason for that?

COATES: Well, the woman in my life is in the second book. She has her own life, and she deserves that. The book is dedicated to her. I would not be here without her. But she deserves her space. I don't particularly enjoy all the attention, and I know just from talking to her that she would not enjoy it. To some extent, it's the type of book that both those were. To another extent, I just don't want to drag her into this.

PLAYBOY: So it's protection as much as it is respect?

COATES: Or more respect than protection.

I don't know if she needs protection, but respect, yeah.

PLAYBOY: Were you surprised by the discussion about the lack of women in *Between the World and Me?*

COATES: Not surprised. I wouldn't change that about that book, though. That book is 176 pages. It is what it is. My view on art, though, is a little different from most people's. When *Girls* first came out, there was this whole thing: "Why is *Girls* so white?" I want Lena Dunham to make the show she wants to make; I just want other people to have the chance to make shows too. The problem is not that Lena Dunham's world is totally white. That's her world. She's an artist. She's not a policy maker. But there are other worlds too, and other people should have the opportunity to put those worlds on display. It's the same for *Between the World and Me,* and this takes it back to the whole thing of being the best or the most representative. A book can't carry the entire weight of all the nuance and texture of the black community. It's just one dude who not too long ago was on unemployment. What people need to do is read other folks. This is not the only African American memoir. There's other stuff out there that should be explored.

PLAYBOY: What was unemployment like?

COATES: I was scared. I was scared for my son and, at that time, my girlfriend. I didn't have anything else to offer the world, so this was going to be it. Either it was going to hit or it wasn't, but this was what I was going to do. I had dropped out of school. I had no proof that I was capable of doing much else. I had been laid off from *Time* magazine. That was the third job I'd lost, and I was like, Maybe I don't have it, but I have to do it; I don't have anything else. So it was incredibly scary.

PLAYBOY: Dealing with your partner then, was it "You can do it!" or more like "So you know you've got to get a job, right?"

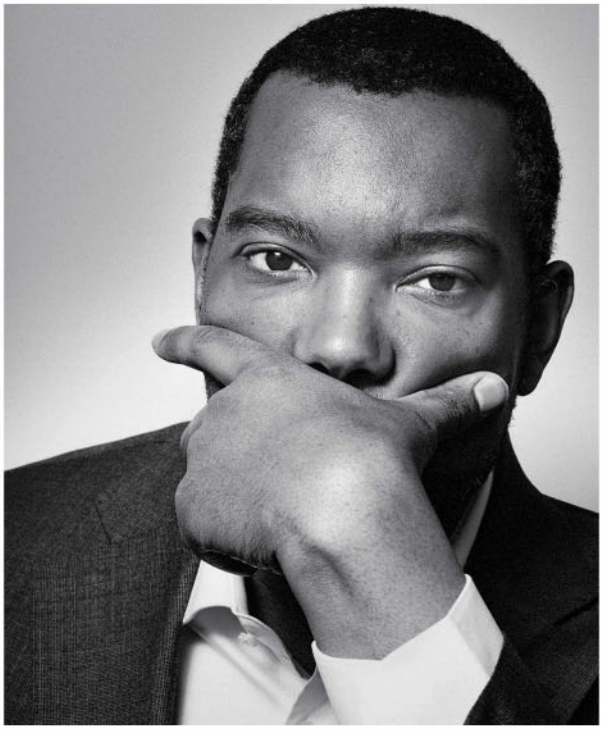
COATES: I wanted to drive a taxicab, but she was like, "I think you need to spend more time writing." She'd say that over and over again. It was never "Go get a job." I'm happy she was right. She had faith. "You're going to go out and break the world. You just need to keep doing it." She was right. That's insane. I couldn't see it.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever feel insecure when you're around academics?

COATES: No, I just want to listen more. I wish they would stop asking me what I think. [*laughs*] No, I don't feel insecure. They tell me I'm wrong and here's why I'm wrong. I've had that before, and that's cool. I look for that. I still feel like a student. If I'm wrong, I'm wrong.

PLAYBOY: In 25 years, how do you think we'll remember the Black Lives Matter movement?

COATES: I think that depends on what happens. I think it has been pretty effective. This whole conversation about body cameras, retraining the New York Police Department, the way Ferguson went down and the report that came out, I think they've been tremendously effective. One of the reasons movements like that get criticized is they say, "Well, what are you about? What specific thing?" But you've seen specifics come out of this.



PLAYBOY: Why do you think this has happened at this time?

COATES: It's totally the technology and the ability to get people assembled relatively quickly. It's not original in the sense that, in large part, the civil rights movement was very much a product of TV cameras and photography. So it's not totally surprising or unprecedented.

PLAYBOY: How do you feel about the way the presidential candidates have dealt with that movement?

COATES: They know it about as well as they can. I had high expectations for Bernie. I thought he would have known certain things. I don't know how you're a candidate on the left in the Democratic Party but not really competing for the black vote. You ain't got to come out for reparations, but you've got to speak to these people who've lived their lives not just as colorless victims of Wall Street, because they're black—not as some sort of accident but because of who they are. You've got to have some sort of facility with that, and I don't think he does. I don't think Bernie's a bad person or doesn't care about black people. I think you need staff around you to say, "Yo, when you go to South Carolina, you've got to do this, you've got to do that." He just didn't have that.

PLAYBOY: What do you think about Hillary Clinton?

COATES: I don't know what's going to happen under Hillary Clinton. Obviously she's preferable to Donald Trump, and I don't blame black folks who vote for her or support her. I get it. But I just don't know. When I see her husband defending her use of the "superpredator," come on. Talking about how the crime bill actually cut crime, come on. Stand back. Defending welfare reform at this hour? Here's the thing that's most damning for me: How do you take $600,000 from Goldman Sachs for speeches, knowing you're going to run for president? Somebody says, "What were you doing?" and you say, "Well, that's what they offered." It's a disturbing lack of personal judgment. So it scares me.

PLAYBOY: Is there anyone whose style you'd like to emulate?

COATES: Toni Morrison, because she doesn't really talk. She does interviews, but she's not, like, out there. People forget how viciously she was attacked in the 1980s, but at the end of the day, the work just stands for itself. Also, she has this kind of regalness.

I'd like to be quieter. I think I'd like to be quieter and let the work speak for itself. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY JASON LEE PARRY

WE CAN ALL BE MORE FREE

In this, our Freedom Issue, we look at what it means to be an American today. Across 11 essays, we consider the state of freedom in the U.S.—from our sexual liberties and civil rights to our ability to screw it all up

One year ago, after the Supreme Court announced its decision to effectively legalize gay marriage, President Barack Obama addressed the ruling from the White House Rose Garden, telling the crowd, "When all Americans are treated as equal, we are all more free." ¶ "More free" is accurate, because in America, freedom often comes in degrees. Freedom to vote doesn't mean the political system won't suppress your ballot based on your political beliefs or skin color. Our freedom to use technology comes at a hefty cost to our privacy as we allow government and corporations to monitor what we do and where we go. The sexual liberties, personal freedoms and constitutional rights we enjoy as Americans are constantly being calibrated, recalibrated and occasionally outright threatened. ¶ In honor of the anniversary of that Supreme Court opinion and this tumultuous election year, we asked a range of contributors to look at the state of our freedoms and, wherever possible, to suggest ways to increase their expression. Because Americans, as we've learned, can always be more free.

BY **JASON BUHRMESTER**
Editorial Director, PLAYBOY magazine


BUZELLI

THE CONSERVATIVE SEX MOVEMENT

Fifty years later, Republicans face their own sexual revolution

BY **HUGH M. HEFNER**

Every four years, a new crop of conservative presidential candidates barges into American bedrooms, looking to police what you do and with whom you do it. These politicians, eager to cater to religious voters, campaign on promises to eliminate access to birth control, ban abortion, pass discriminatory laws against gays, and regulate or outright ban any lifestyle or preference that doesn't fit into their Christian crusade to eliminate all sexual activity that doesn't lead to procreation. In the 50 years since the triumph of the sexual revolution, I have personally watched this fight over and over again: conservative candidates stepping on our sexual freedoms to reach the White House.

This year, no candidate beat the drum of sexual repression longer and louder than Ted Cruz. The Texas senator has spent his entire political career attempting to force his puritanical agenda into our sex lives. During his time in the Senate, Cruz has proposed bans on IUDs and other forms of birth control he refers to as "abortion-inducing drugs," arguing that women don't need access to such methods because "we don't have a rubber shortage in America." He has attacked laws that protect women from being fired by their employers for using birth control, opposed abortion even in cases of rape or incest, proposed an amendment banning same-sex marriage and promoted anti-LGBT legislation. Last year, Cruz attempted to orchestrate a government shutdown unless Planned Parenthood was defunded and promised that, if elected president, he would have the health care organization investigated by the Department of Justice as a "criminal enterprise."

And yet despite Cruz's fanatical fixation on our sex lives, he failed to win the Republican nomination. Polls show that voters found Cruz too conservative and failed to embrace his views on sex, women's rights and gays. Instead, voters nominated Donald Trump, a thrice-married New York entrepreneur who once owned the Miss USA pageant, over Cruz, the son of a pastor. It's a sign of the massive changes in the "family values party" and proof of what I've watched building over the past several months: a sexual revolution in the Republican Party.

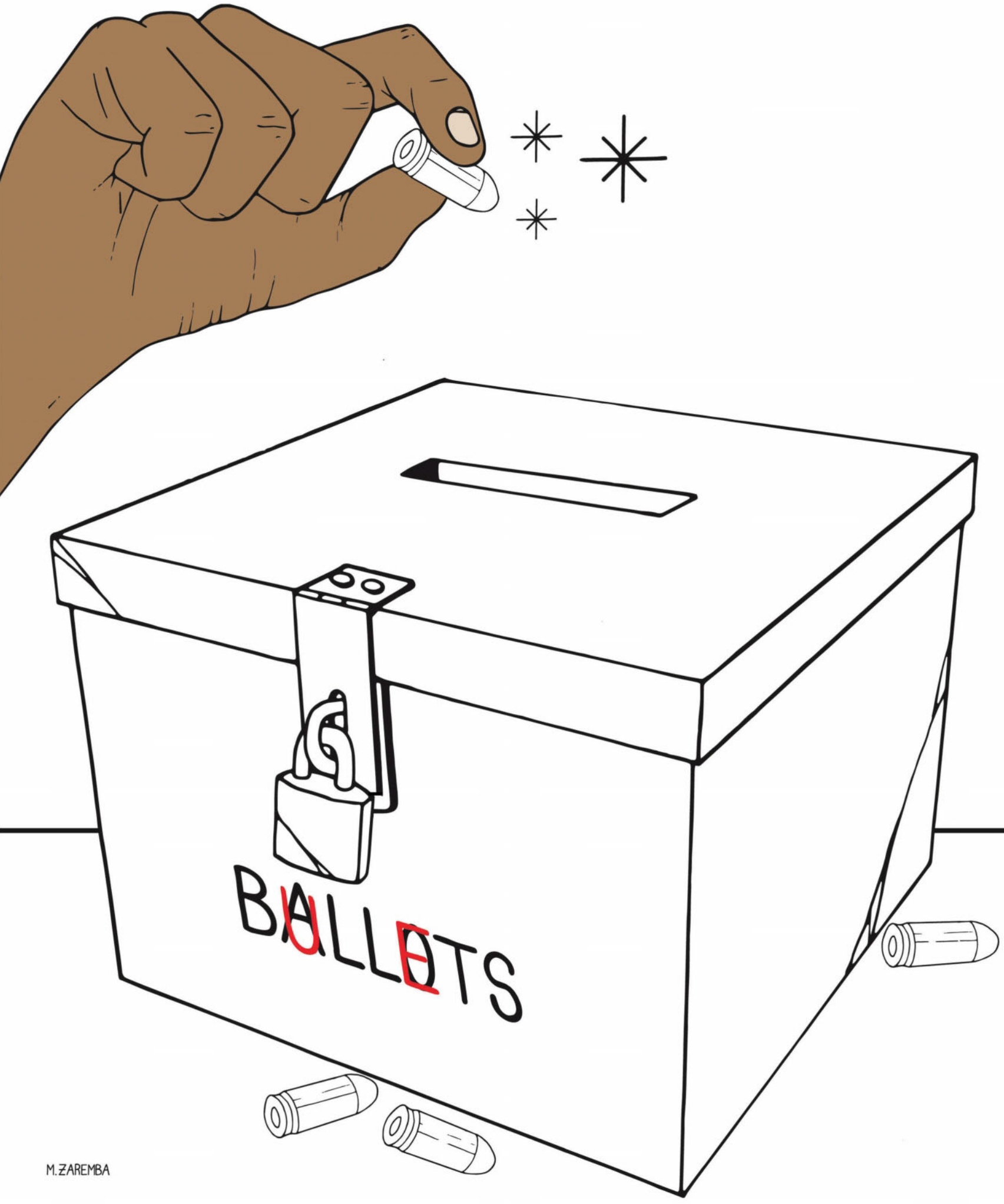
This growing conservative sex movement certainly has implications. After losing two presidential elections, core conservatives realize the time has come for the party to stop pandering to America's fanatical religious minority and give up a losing war to suppress our sexual rights. Polls show that the majority of "moderate" Republicans are pro-choice, accept gay marriage and favor politicians who acknowledge that "women and men feel free to have sex without any interest in getting married." Political writer Michael Lind recently urged conservatives to dump "utopian projects," including "the reversal of the sexual revolution." Lind correctly points out the reality that "few if any elected Republicans or conservative pundits actually believe that there will be a...return to the sexual norms of 1950s America in their lifetimes, if ever." And at this year's Republican National Convention, a powerful and organized group of some of the party's biggest financiers, calling themselves the American Unity Fund, plans to push the party to embrace same-sex marriage in the official Republican platform—a far cry from the previous platform, which described gay marriage as "an assault on the foundations of our society." The organization's Jerri Ann Henry claimed that the move away from the religious zealotry that has defined the GOP for decades is "necessary if the party is to remain viable in the years to come."

Fifty years of progress passed that party by while its politicians pandered to a small, vocal minority of religious fanatics. When I wrote *The Playboy Philosophy* in the early 1960s, I warned, "Nowhere is this unholy alliance between church and state more obvious than in matters of sex." Although that alliance shows signs of fracture, we must remain vigilant. Not all conservatives are willing to recognize that they have lost the war over our sexual rights. Utah governor Gary R. Herbert recently signed a bill declaring pornography a "public health hazard." Conservative governors in Mississippi and North Carolina have signed laws promoting discrimination against the LGBT community. And across the country, attacks continue on Planned Parenthood and reproductive choice as evangelical politicians attempt to circumvent *Roe v. Wade* with legislation designed to regulate abortion access into oblivion.

We have already won those battles, and we will win them again. These are the final skirmishes of a retreating army of self-appointed moral authorities who have been defeated again and again for the past five decades. Americans have rejected these religious fanatics and fought to protect women's rights, reproductive rights and our right to privacy rather than submit to their Christian view that sex exists for the sole purpose of procreation. Recent polls show that more than 60 percent of Americans view gay and lesbian relationships, sex between two unmarried people and having a baby outside of marriage as "morally acceptable." Nearly 90 percent feel the same about birth control. This is no surprise. We won the sexual revolution; it has just taken Republicans 50 years to admit defeat. Now it's time for them to exit our bedrooms and close the door behind them forever.

Hugh M. Hefner is founder and Editor-in-Chief of PLAYBOY.

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS BUZELLI


BALLOTS
M. ZAREMBA

ESSAY

BLACK VOTES MATTER

The power of the minority vote—and the powers that want to stop it

BY **KILLER MIKE**

Young black men everywhere ask me, Why vote? Considering that black male unemployment is nearly double the national average, that black males are unfairly targeted in a bullshit drug war and that politicians rarely keep their word to the black community, it's a fair question.

My response to them is: I don't care if you vote; I care that you register. If you're not registered, you're less likely to be chosen to serve on a jury. And if you're not on a jury, how can I be judged by a jury of my peers? This always makes the men I speak with listen. Our rights in this country—free speech, gun ownership, protection from self-incrimination, trial by jury and many more—are weapons against tyranny from our own republic. Once you realize that a vote is a weapon, the ballot suddenly matters as much as freedom of speech and the right to own a gun. And a vote is a powerful weapon.

I vote because my vote, like my knife and my gun (which I carry daily), is a tool for fighting against tyrants and for the betterment of my community. I know it's effective because after the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in 2013, restrictive voter laws popped up across the South. Southern white conservative men push for such laws—from requiring IDs to discourage minorities from voting, to redistricting attempts in places like Texas in order to cripple the minority vote—to help them regain or retain power. If the minority vote didn't matter, those white men wouldn't work so hard to stop it.

For the black community, it's important to point out that voting alone doesn't help. "Just" voting is like taking blood-pressure medicine and still eating fried chicken. To see an improvement, you also have to change your diet. Just as we have to eat more greens, we also have to focus on getting some green. Why? Because money is the biggest vote changer. We must remain loyal not to parties but rather to the people who will help us. I agree with black author Claud Anderson, who said in a speech, "We must pull out of both parties and vote as an indie bloc that only votes for people that will deliver what we expect to our community." What we expect are fair goods and services and a say in politics. To make this happen we must patronize our own businesses and use our athletes and entertainers as the investor class. Put simply, if you're going to order hot wings, buy them from Rick Ross and his Wingstop restaurant so he can put that money behind local politicians and state representatives who push policies that benefit us.

The most important elections in your life are local. Your city council, mayor, school board, county officials and police policies are all voted on locally. In my city, Atlanta, nearly half of all airport-vendor contracts go to black-owned businesses. This is a direct result of actions taken by Maynard Jackson, Atlanta's first black mayor, who declared that 25 percent of all city contracts must have minority ownership or involvement. This policy came into existence because decades ago Jackson's grandfather John Wesley Dobbs empowered black voters and then used those votes to influence Atlanta elections. Because of that, I have never known a nonblack mayor in Atlanta, a city with the third-highest number of Fortune 500 companies and a true black middle class. Even with gentrification, black-owned businesses and job hires are up in this chocolate city.

After my community masters the money and after black men get into the voting game, we can affect the courtroom culture that preys on us. No city, town or county with a large black population should be without equal representation on the police force, in the district attorney's office or on the judge's bench. Marching won't change that. Money and votes change that.

Relationships also help fuel change. I don't care who delivers what the Constitution promises. Frederick Douglass was a Republican; Maynard Jackson was a Democrat. Both are heroes in my household, as are Barack Obama and Ben Carson. (I don't normally like overly religious politicians, but I do like Ben.) It matters to me that when I approached Senator Bernie Sanders and suggested that I interview him on my barbershop tour, he accepted (as did Republican National Committee press secretary Raffi Williams). When I asked Senator Rand Paul to sit with me, he flaked.

Sanders talked with me—and advanced much further in the election than Paul. That's not to say I'm a kingmaker, but the young people, especially black men, who saw me interview Sanders got a chance to meet an ally. And in matters of politics, my community needs more allies.

My vote is a weapon for my good and against tyranny, from getting a chance to sit on a jury to making sure Atlanta's public schools return to greatness. My vote is a tool I will use to positively affect my community. Others like me must realize the power of this weapon—or have it used against them by a political class bought and sold by corporations and the men who own them.

My name is Michael Render, and I vote. Try to stop me.

Killer Mike, a member of the hip-hop duo Run the Jewels, is also a solo artist and an activist.

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW ZAREMBA


#BLACK LIVES MATTER
#BLACK LIVES MATTER
TRUMP RACISM
UNITE HERE!
#BLACK LIVES MATTER
TRUMP

YOU GOTTA FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT TO F%@K UP

It's time to stop using the mistakes of individuals as an excuse to judge entire groups

BY **PATTON OSWALT**

The most important—and nebulous—freedom that's up for grabs in 2016 and beyond is this: the freedom not to be the exemplar of your race, gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation, hair color, height, gluten sensitivity, etc.

In other words, the freedom to fuck up and not have it cost the rest of your peer group.

The Jackie Robinson Story is being replayed, in a hundred huge and a thousand tiny ways, every single day in this country. A black person or a woman or a gay person or a transgender person or a poor person or a Muslim—if one of them stumbles in any attempt? If they misspeak or act impulsively or otherwise royally screw up? That error is applied to the entirety of their population. If they fail? That failure sets their entire group back a dozen steps.

"See how that one woman got emotional? It's how they all are."

"See how that one Muslim guy went on a rampage? They're all ready to pounce, just like that."

"Check out this one redneck and his backward, homophobic views. They're all that way down South."

The examples are endless, and they don't belong to any single point on the political spectrum. Hillary Clinton isn't 100 percent perfect in the decisions she's made in her long political career, so no woman should be president. A mentally unstable individual finds justification for his bloodlust in the Koran, so all of Islam is a religion of death. The elected representatives of North Carolina—to the surprise of a majority of their constituency—pass laws discriminating against LGBT people, and the entire South is a fundamentalist, homophobic and transphobic wasteland.

This is nothing new. Two millennia ago a minority of conservative religious elites (and the mediocre politicians trying to score points with them) decide to execute a voice for the non-elite, and from that point on it's "the Jews killed Jesus."

And on and on and on, further into the past and, sadly, probably into the future.

The day that a gay fuckup or a black fuckup or a Muslim fuckup or a female fuckup becomes known as a fuckup first, and then whatever group they belong to is noted as an afterthought, if at all? That's the day we take a big lurch forward.

I bet I don't get to see it. Not in my lifetime. I'm doubtful my daughter will see it in her lifetime either, or her children in theirs.

But if we give people the same number of times at bat as, say, a George W. Bush or a Kim Kardashian? The wiggle room to be 100 percent incompetent, without it being applied to everyone else like them?

That's when we head to the stars.

Patton Oswalt is a Los Angeles–based stand-up comedian, writer and actor.

ILLUSTRATION BY SIMON SPILSBURY

ESSAY

ENDING THE AMERICAN PILL EPIDEMIC

Drug overdoses—more than 60 percent of which involve opioids—are the number one cause of accidental death in America. How did we get here, and how do we kick the habit?

BY **DR. SANJAY GUPTA**

Right around the time I was finishing my neurosurgery residency in 2000, the consumption of prescription pain pills, known as opioid analgesics, was growing at a staggering rate. Over the next decade, sales of these medications would quadruple and the United States would earn the dubious honor of becoming the most pain-medicated country in the world.

With less than five percent of the planet's population, we were consuming 80 percent of its opioids and 99 percent of its hydrocodone by the year 2010. In the wake of these pain-pill prescriptions came lethal overdoses—one every 19 minutes on average. By 2014, overdoses—61 percent of which involved opioids—were overtaking traffic fatalities as the number one cause of accidental death in the U.S. It was an American epidemic, and it was fully man-made.

We got here on a winding road paved with good intentions, as well as downright greedy ones. One thing is certain: There's plenty of blame to go around.

Our culture has become frighteningly accustomed to "a pill for every ill." Nearly 40 percent of all Americans over the age of 65 take five or more medications, and every American fills 12 prescriptions a year on average. Far too many of them are for pain pills.

Of course, many patients suffering chronic pain will read this and wince, worried that it represents another attempt to rob them of relief. That's not my intent. But pain pills weren't expected to be effective long-term, with most scientific studies lasting only three to four months. Additionally, most of my patients understand the concept of hyperalgesia: Sustained use of pain pills can make certain patients *more* sensitive to pain. As one escalates the doses, the hyperalgesia intensifies, as does the risk of overdose. The pain pills don't just become less effective; they can actually make things worse.

If that's the case, you may wonder, why do doctors prescribe so many of these pills? The charitable answer is that most doctors don't like saying no to their patients. The vast majority of my colleagues derive tremendous satisfaction from helping people, and doling out pills is sometimes part of that. The more typical reason, though, is likely that it's easier to write a prescription than to spend the time finding effective alternatives.

And then there's the tremendous cultural shift that took place in medicine during my surgical training, between 1993 and 2000. At first, I was taught to reserve opioid analgesics for three very specific indications: postoperative pain, cancer-related pain and pain at the end of life. Even in the field of neurosurgery, where we treat many pain-related disorders, we were taught to prescribe much more physical therapy and far fewer opioid analgesics. Over the years, I saw an increasing number of pharmaceutical advertisements in medical journals and guidelines from the American Pain Society—which is funded by pharmaceutical companies—making the case that long-term use of narcotics was safe for an ever-growing range of conditions.

Pain even came to be known as the fifth vital sign, a measurement to be taken along with blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate and temperature. The message was: Always ask about pain, typically using a smiley-face pain scale. If the patient pointed to a frowny or crying face, treat the pain, even with opioids.

All this helps explain why, by the time I graduated, the pain-pill epidemic was running near full throttle.

Since then there has been a concerted, if complicated, effort to better monitor who is prescribing these drugs and what drugs they're prescribing. States and federal agencies have started to clamp down on "pill mills." While that has made access to prescription drugs more difficult, it has pushed many addicts to the streets in search of cheaper alternatives. For many, that alternative has been heroin or fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that can be up to 50 times more powerful than heroin. From 2002 to 2013, the number of heroin-related deaths increased by 400 percent by even conservative estimates. Between 2013 and 2014, overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids increased by around 80 percent.

There is some hope. Earlier this year, President Obama pledged $1.1 billion of next year's budget to fighting the opioid epidemic, much of it geared toward treatment—expanding access to medication-assisted therapies such as methadone and buprenorphine. The administration is also making efforts to expand the use of naloxone, an opioid antidote that can reverse overdoses, and to ensure parity in addiction-treatment coverage. When I sat down with President Obama at this year's National Rx Drug Abuse & Heroin Summit, he said we need to think of addiction as a disease and treat it that way.

There are many diseases in the world, physical and cultural, with no cure in sight. But right now we have an opportunity to solve the opioid problem—to put an end to this monster we created.

Dr. Sanjay Gupta, a practicing neurosurgeon, is CNN's chief medical correspondent.

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OUR FIGHTING FORCES
DC
Our FIGHTING FORCES
FEATURING
PATRIOT
20c
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
POLICE
MAKE WAR NO MORE

ESSAY

FIX THE POLICE

From Ferguson to Freddie Gray—what the hell happened to America's cops?

BY **NORM STAMPER**

In the minds of the Missouri police officers who, a year after Michael Brown's death, sought to celebrate the cop who killed him, policing does not need fixing. To the rest of America, the institution is badly broken and in desperate need of repair.

This is nothing new. From the time the first one was founded in the mid-19th century, police departments have been tainted by recurring spasms of corruption, brutality and racism—accompanied by escalating militarism.

Stories of police beneficence and courage—the cop who springs for new boots and warm socks for a homeless man on a bitterly cold night in Times Square; the officers who buy diapers or baby formula for impoverished shoplifters in Roswell, New Mexico (or in Kansas, Florida, Kentucky and many other places); the street cops who risk their lives to stop a shooter or to pull a suicidal woman from a freeway overpass—are important and deserve wide recognition.

But until we confront and change a system that allows the cold-blooded murders of Freddie Gray in Baltimore and Laquan McDonald in Chicago—and the attempted cover-ups in both cities—we will find ourselves returning again and again to the question of how to assure ethical, compassionate and lawful policing.

The biggest barrier to this kind of police work is the paramilitary-bureaucratic structure and mentality of every law enforcement agency in the nation. It's a mentality that gets conveyed to the public as "We are the police, and you are not."

It's time America's police officers recognize they belong to the people, not the other way around. How do we accomplish this? Put simply, your local government must invite community participation in all aspects of police operations: recruitment and training, policy making, program development, crisis management and effective, credible citizen oversight of police performance and behavior. If that invitation doesn't arrive, the people—critics, grassroots activists, civic-minded supporters of public safety and neighborhood health—must demand a place at the table as full partners in local police operations.

A city or county that forges an honest community-police partnership will soon realize the benefits of mutual trust and respect, enhanced crime fighting and neighborhood problem solving, fewer unarmed citizens dying at the hands of their police and, critically, improved officer safety and morale. With the exception of exigent circumstances that demand an armed response, officers will no longer make unilateral or arbitrary decisions. Partners don't have to agree all the time, but they do have to communicate, cooperate and support one another.

Two additional steps can tremendously benefit community-based policing. The first is to end the obscenely expensive, immoral and utterly ineffective war on drugs, a war that has made many citizens—including a disproportionate number of young, poor black and Latino Americans—the enemy of their local police. This pointless war has destroyed individual lives, fractured families, brought about mass incarceration and strained community-police relations beyond the breaking point.

The second step is to use the tens of billions of dollars saved by ending the war on drugs to support education and treatment for those in need and to establish a much-needed federal accountability presence in local law enforcement.

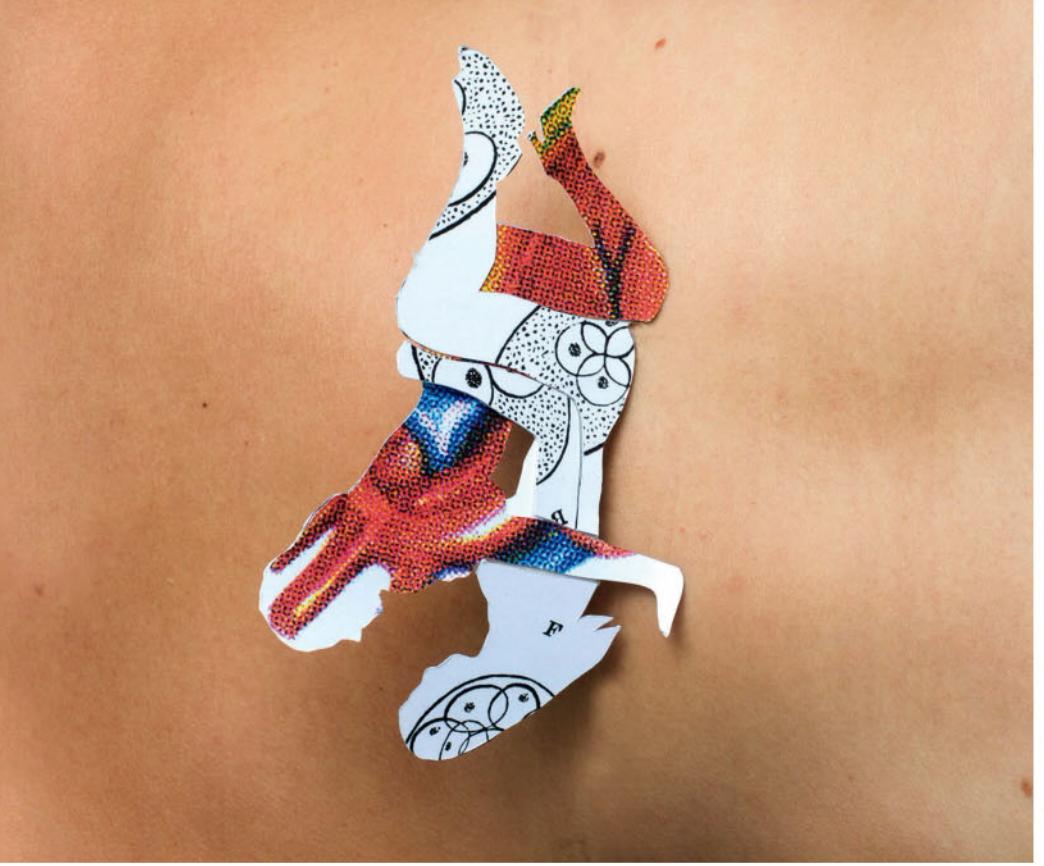
There are about 18,000 police agencies in the U.S. and only one Constitution. Each of the country's more than 1 million law enforcement workers is legally obligated both to enforce and to abide by all provisions of this "secular Bible" of the land. Like it or not, when it comes to policing—from Ferguson to the NYPD—America is in need of more big government.

In order to ensure that local law enforcement abides by laws governing search and seizure, stop-and-frisk, use of force and free-assembly protections, the Department of Justice must be given the authority and the resources to do three things. First, it needs to set reasonable, defensible standards of police performance and conduct. Second, it needs to certify every law enforcement officer and agency in the country. And third, it must be given the power to decertify, for just cause, any individual or department that refuses to play by the rules.

Imagine America's cops as defenders, not violators, of their fellow citizens' civil liberties, and work toward that. It's as doable as it is necessary.

Norm Stamper was a cop for 34 years and served as chief of the Seattle Police Department. He is the author of *To Protect and Serve: How to Fix America's Police,* out this June from Nation Books.

ILLUSTRATION BY BEN TURNBULL



THE LONG LEASH OF SEXUAL LIBERTY

We enjoy unprecedented—if incomplete—freedom in our sex lives. A doctor examines the hidden biological boundaries that surround our most intimate choices

BY **DR. DREW PINSKY**

Over the past 50 years, Western culture has seen unprecedented progress in our sense of ourselves as sexual beings. The so-called sexual revolution, with its rejection of puritanical values and embrace of "free love," enriched our ability to be open about our sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual practices with vastly reduced shame and judgment. But the unintended consequences of this revolution continue to unfold in a dazzling array of manifestations—among them teen pregnancy, internet pornography, Tinder, sexual addiction, epidemics of sexually transmitted diseases and a frequently impoverished interpersonal landscape.

As a physician, I'm always alert to the biological contexts of cultural change. At least some of the attitudes about sexuality that we've transmitted across generations have a basis in biological reality. A good deal of ink has been spilled suggesting it was the advent of hormonal contraceptives (a.k.a. the pill) that allowed women to have mastery over their reproductive potential. And one must remember that throughout human history, a significant percentage of women died in childbirth. When obstetric and medical advances decreased this threat, sex was uncoupled from reproduction for the first time. This certainly contributed to the freedom we've enjoyed since.

But other rarely addressed phenomena have also influenced our freedom of sexual expression. Foremost, I suggest, is the invention of antibiotics. Throughout human history the medical consequences of sexual contact were protean and dire. Prior to antibiotic treatment, even something as simple as a urinary tract infection came with the hazard of serious medical complications, even death. Gonorrhea, chlamydia and syphilis were virtually untreatable. Knowing well the intensity of libidinous desires, you can imagine that if you were the parent of young adults in a pre-antibiotic era, you would be sure to instill in your children a healthy fear of sexual contact. Their lives would be at stake.

We now largely enjoy freedom from the complications of these infections when properly treated, and our sexual mores have evolved in a new biological context. I'm not suggesting that cultural attitudes don't also restrain us; I am suggesting that those attitudes may have had biological roots that modern medical science has upended, allowing for a new range of freedom of expression.

Another important consideration is the very nature of freedom itself. Increasingly, neurobiological insights are calling into question precisely what we mean by free will. Freedom, as our founding fathers conceived it, was freedom from external oppression, freedom from tyranny, freedom to pursue our life's work unencumbered by arbitrary restraint. Gradually, we have expanded our sense of freedom to include the freedom implied by equality and choice. These are complex topics, and I don't mean to reduce them to empty shibboleths. But I do wish to mention that our free will is at a minimum influenced, if not completely constrained, by neurobiological forces well outside of consciousness. Functional MRI data show that our brain makes choices and drives behavior long before consulting consciousness. Still, though we are undoubtedly under the influence of many biological forces, we have moments of relative choice; in other words, we can make choices somewhat freely, but the desires behind these choices are *not* under our control. You can choose to eat pizza every day, but you cannot will yourself to love pizza.

From my decades of clinical experience, I know that many processes can shape or adulterate our sexuality and thus our genuine freedom of expression. Childhood trauma has a profound effect on our adult sexual desires and behaviors. We are loath to admit it, but it is simply a feature of the human experience that traumatic experiences in childhood often lead to traumatic reenactments in our adult lives. We end up becoming attracted to individuals and circumstances that recapitulate our childhood experiences. This is deeply entrenched in our biology. Reducing the dangers of pregnancy and removing many of the complications of bacterial STIs have made it easier to detect this compulsion to repeat. When you see people making the same "mistakes" over and over again, look for trauma.

As with most realities of the human experience, the law of unintended consequences always lurks near at hand when there is change. Our sexual freedoms have undoubtedly enhanced many aspects of intimacy. I do not mean to diminish the benefits of being able to more easily assert one's sexual preferences. And I am not Pollyannaish about work yet to be done to help further free those who feel the sting of sexual repression. I do, however, believe we should take an honest inventory of the forces that brought us here and continue to examine the phenomena that come to bear on our freedoms of sexuality and desire. The human experience is rich with revelations—many of them hiding behind the veil of the unexamined life.

Dr. Drew Pinsky is a practicing physician and addiction specialist whose call-in show *Loveline* was on the air for more than 30 years.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TREY WRIGHT

LIVING IN YOUR OWN NOT-SO-PRIVATE BUBBLE

Corporations are using vast stores of your personal data to reshape your every moment. And you're letting it happen

BY **JEFF MOSS**

It's said that information wants to be free—that, like life, it will find a way to replicate itself and show up where you least expect or want it. Your information now has more ways than ever before to spread, from online backups to the private messages your ex-girlfriend archived. But I can tell you this: My information absolutely does *not* want to be free. It wants to stay home and go out and play only when I give it permission.

Storage space costs next to nothing, and everything you do is recorded forever. That porn site you visited is not just in your browser history; it's also in the logs of your internet service provider, the DNS server, the content-distribution network, the ad network the site uses, Google Analytics and finally on the actual site you visited. Clearing your browser history only hides it from whoever else uses your devices. If I want to browse the internet, my information has to go out and play, whether I like it or not.

It's also said that we live in the "golden age of surveillance." Simply put, surveillance is when an intelligence or law enforcement agency listens in and records traffic, be it voice, data, telemetry, radio, whatever. This is what Edward Snowden revealed.

If we're talking freedom, though, I worry most about the collection that companies do on us. Have a mobile phone? Your location data is shared with "partners." Same with your medical records, home-loan finances, social media pictures. Use any apps that have access to your address book? They just backed it up "for reference purposes."

This is society's cost of entry today. Companies must monetize everything about you to help fund their services—services we see as essential to participating in modern society. I can't pay Facebook $100 a year not to collect info about me; its platform doesn't work that way. In a Möbius strip of data, we're both the product and the consumer. Think you have a right to privacy? To paraphrase President Obama, "You don't own that." You just gave it away in the terms of service you didn't read.

The amount of data that companies have about you individually may not be much, but when data brokers aggregate hundreds of companies' collections, it ends up being way more detailed than what the NSA knows about you. These giant pools are used by advertisers, insurance companies, market researchers... basically anyone who can pay.

Going shopping? Malls, supermarkets and outdoor advertisers collect the MAC (media access control) addresses that your phone broadcasts and use them to track where you go and how long you stand in front of the cookies. It helps businesses optimize their inventory if they know where people linger. Don't like this? Don't use a Bluetooth headset, and turn off wi-fi.

It gets worse. Way worse. When the internet of things arrives, add to this list all the data your IOT devices will have on you: the shows, games and songs you enjoy, when you're home or away, how much energy you use compared with your neighbors, the food you prepare, where and when you drive, your health stats. Talk about your quantified self!

Marketers work hard to put you in a bubble. With their ever-increasing understanding of your behavior and preferences, one of their end goals is to influence you at just the right moment with just the right offer. The more they can influence what you read or watch, the better they can do this.

Your bubble will be personalized to your tastes, like a constant mash-up of Amazon, Netflix and Facebook recommendations. It will steer you toward news stories and articles you're likely to agree with and enjoy (while viewing all the ads along the way). Your bubble will give you just the right amount of new discovery excitement along with your daily favorites while sharing only that which is in-network. Your bubble will be different from those of your friends, neighbors and bosses. In other words, your bubble will be an all-encompassing field of personalized content enabled by compulsory mass corporate surveillance.

Government didn't do this to us. The free market did. It costs nothing for an app developer or a company to add a terms-of-service clause giving it permission to collect your information. And all that data is such an attractive nuisance! The perverse thing is that spy agencies and prosecutors don't need to collect anymore; what they can't subpoena, they just buy.

What does freedom even mean in this context? The current debate about NSA bulk collection is important, but it's a sideshow to what's really happening to our privacy and freedoms in a connected world. That will become clear when a whistle-blower of Snowden's caliber emerges from Facebook, Google or some other company that makes it their business to collect on all of us.

Cybersecurity expert Jeff Moss, a.k.a. the Dark Tangent, is founder of the event series Black Hat and the global hacker conference DEF CON.

ILLUSTRATION BY GRAHAM ROUMIEU

ESSAY

THE NEW DRUG WAR

Dirty banks still enable the global drug trade. The battle must move from the streets to the boardroom

BY **ROBERT MAZUR**

A lot has changed in the drug trade since the 1980s, when I went undercover for the Drug Enforcement Administration, infiltrating the top echelons of Colombia's drug cartels and helping bring down money-laundering bankers. Back then, the Medellín cartel had a network of operatives that distributed cocaine shipments to wholesale buyers in the United States. Mexico was simply a transshipment point where commercial jets laden with huge cargoes of cocaine were safely off-loaded. The Colombians gave Mexican cartel operatives and corrupt military personnel as much as 20 percent of the shipments in exchange for the use of military bases and other airstrips for secure landing and storage. The remaining 80 percent was moved into the U.S. and sold through a network of Colombian distributors operating there.

These days, Colombian cartels sell much of their cocaine directly to Mexican cartels, which then take the bulk of the risk, distributing the drug in the U.S. with the help of gangs entrenched in our cities. Meanwhile, terrorist groups including Hezbollah and Hamas have been clearly shown to work with the cartels in global cocaine trafficking and money laundering.

A lot has stayed the same too. We still face the inconvenient truth that portions of the international banking and business communities service the underworld by transforming mountains of ill-gotten cash into legitimate-appearing assets. These bankers and businessmen rob people around the world of their freedom by enabling criminal organizations to create a veil of legitimacy around dirty fortunes that are used to corrupt everything from families to governments. In order to influence politicians, prosecutors, judges, cops and even armies, the cartels rely on their ability to enrich people in clandestine ways. They can't walk into a politician's office and plop a duffel bag full of cash onto the desk, but if that cash is moved into a bank that extends a "legitimate" loan to a company the politician controls, no one is the wiser. In the past seven years, more than a dozen banks, some based in the U.S., have admitted to criminal offenses in connection with the movement of dirty money, including laundering drug proceeds.

Segments of the banking and business communities market underworld money because there is little likelihood they'll get caught and the profits are very high. U.S. law enforcement authorities identify and seize less than one percent of the annual $400 billion in illegal drug proceeds earned globally; professional money launderers can make as much as 20 percent of a criminal's fortune. The only thing that will turn this around is a real fear in the hearts and minds of launderers that their conduct will land them behind bars for the better part of the rest of their lives. As it stands now, the law enforcement world does not invest the resources or brainpower needed to identify and prosecute money launderers. Most criminal prosecutions for money laundering are developed secondarily when cops prove someone committed some other crime and conducted a transaction with tainted funds.

So what can we do to make the world safer and more free? For starters, we have to find a formula that will reduce demand—our insatiable appetite for illegal drugs is the fuel that keeps the cartel engines running—and make education and economic opportunity available to the less fortunate so they have a real path of hope that's resistant to the lure of drugs.

On a global level, we need an aggressive plan to identify and prosecute those who service the underworld—a plan to change the failed corporate culture that has produced money launderers within the international banking and business communities. We need a multiagency, multinational task force with the sole responsibility of identifying the world's top money-laundering threats. This task force would become the entity with primary jurisdiction for prosecuting money-laundering cases, just as the DEA is now the primary agency recognized for prosecuting drug cases and the U.S. Secret Service is known for handling currency-counterfeiting cases.

Finally, we must accept that drug cartels do far more than simply make illegal drugs available worldwide. Their most dangerous product is corruption. They buy significant influence within governments through payoffs, they ruthlessly murder, and they steal freedom from virtually anyone in their path. People in Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Venezuela, nations in sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the world experience this death and destruction every day. Even our own country is no stranger to cartel-bred violence: The bloodshed within our borders caused by illegal drugs is at epidemic proportions.

Clearly, the way we're fighting this war is not working.

Robert Mazur, author of *The Infiltrator* and subject of the movie of the same name, was a federal agent for 27 years, many of them spent investigating international money-laundering cases.

ILLUSTRATION BY CLEON PETERSON


it's an
abortion!

MY CHOICE

Roe v. Wade has helped women determine their own destinies for more than 40 years. So stop fighting it; it's not going anywhere

BY **CHELSEA HANDLER**

When I got pregnant at the age of 16, getting an abortion wasn't the first idea that popped into my unripened brain.

I was going through a very bad stage in my life. I hated my parents and I was having unprotected sex with my boyfriend, who was not someone I should've been having sex with in the first place, never mind unprotected sex. I wasn't really playing with a full deck of cards, and when I got pregnant I just thought, Why not? I can have a baby. Maybe I'll have twins and give them rhyming names! Of course, the idea that I would have a child and raise it by myself at that age, when I couldn't even find my way home at night, was ridiculous. My parents recognized that, so they acted like parents for one of the very first times in my life and took me to Planned Parenthood. I felt parented, ironically, while I was getting an abortion. And when it was over, I was relieved in every possible way.

And I didn't have just one abortion; I had two in the same year, impregnated by the same guy. I didn't have the money the second time. I had to scrape together the $230 to pay Planned Parenthood, but it was a safe abortion. Getting unintentionally pregnant more than once is irresponsible, but it's still necessary to make a thoughtful decision. We all make mistakes all the time. I happened to fuck up twice at the age of 16. I'm grateful that I came to my senses and was able to get an abortion legally without risking my health or bankrupting myself or my family. I'm 41 now. I don't ever look back and think, God, I wish I'd had that baby.

Like millions of women, I can live my life without an unplanned child born out of an unhealthy relationship because of *Roe v. Wade*. It's infuriating to hear politicians make bogus promises about overturning this ruling that has protected us for more than 40 years. It's infuriating to hear them pander to the Christian right with promises they have no chance of keeping. (By the way: Even if there is a God, I highly doubt he wants everybody to go through with their pregnancies.) And it's even more infuriating to watch politicians find ways to subvert *Roe v. Wade,* passing lesser laws that close clinics or restrict abortion access for women. At least five states—Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming—currently have only one clinic left within their borders.

But despite all that, I don't buy that *Roe v. Wade* is in danger. We're too far ahead of the game. Once you go forward in history, you don't go backward. That would be like the government saying, "Okay, we're taking away your right to vote too." You can't introduce a black person and be like, "Oh, I just got a slave!" That era is over. It's similar to what's happening in Mississippi and some other states with gay-marriage discrimination—marriage equality is *going* to take. You can't stop that. We've already made the decision, and now we're moving on to transgender rights. And it's a wrap on men deciding what women can do with their bodies.

I doubt this is something America will ever agree on. Again, it's like racism and sexism: People will be racist if they're innately built that way, but whether they can act on their racism or not is a separate issue. There are people who think women shouldn't hold high-powered positions, or who think Obama is Muslim, and it's okay for them to have those thoughts; they just can't act on them in a civilized society. It's okay if you think it's not right for women to have abortions—but it's not your problem, because we decide.

We have 7.3 billion people on this planet. Anybody who carefully decides not to become a parent—let alone a *bad* parent, which is what I would have become—should be applauded for making a smart and sustainable decision.

I'd love for somebody to try to tell me what to do with my body. I dare them.

Comedian and writer Chelsea Handler hosted *Chelsea Lately* on E! from 2007 to 2014. Her current series, *Chelsea,* is the first original talk show to run on Netflix.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARVIDA BYSTRÖM

TAKE BACK THE POLITICAL MAP

Rewriting the rules of our broken electoral process will require more than rallies and hashtags

BY **KRIST NOVOSELIC**

Every election season, we're urged to participate by voting. This works when candidates pull people in, but it's less than inspiring when people vote out of the fear that someone they don't like will be elected. We've all heard variations of the line "Vote because it's your duty," and while I agree, the real problem is the sucky choices we get on the ballot. The good news is that things don't have to be this way—at least not when it comes to Congress. We can pass election laws, without changing our Constitution, in a way that truly engages voters.

There's an uneasy silence when it comes to races for the House. I find that most people don't even know who represents them in the Capitol. If we stood in front of a supermarket with a picture of Justin Bieber and a picture of the local congressperson, I bet 19 out of 20 people wouldn't recognize the latter. This is not our fault. It's the result of the wall the House has built around itself.

I became involved in politics in the mid-1990s, working with others to fight music censorship on the local and state levels. Along the way I noticed how many elections were effectively uncontested, and I wanted to know why. The culprit is gerrymandering: political insiders drawing district lines that benefit them and the mainstream parties they work for. Nine out of 10 House races are in the "safe seat" column, in districts where the outcome is a foregone conclusion. This is why most people can't name their U.S. representative: The lack of competition is repellent.

We can fix that with a federal law that empowers independent commissions to redraw district lines so political elites can no longer manipulate elections. California voters passed such a law. The awesome power of redistricting was handed over to a citizens' commission, and the old district lines, custom made for politicians, were wiped off the map. What if we took it one step further so you and I could share in this power? What if voters could pick a candidate who inspired them and who had a chance at winning in a fair election?

There is a way.

The idea that a district should be represented by only one person has no constitutional basis and is flat-out wrong. The system stems from the Uniform Congressional District Act, a 1967 federal statute that resulted in a gerrymandered wall around the House. Prior to that law, many states allowed districts to elect multiple representatives. Unfortunately, political insiders manipulated the rules to disenfranchise racial minorities, making sure the white majority swept all the seats—hence the law.

But the problem is not multi-seat districts. We need voting rules that use these kinds of districts to give more people a real voice in elections. Here's how we get to a potent vote and fair representation.

Imagine a three-seat district where each citizen gets one vote to elect three people. This wouldn't necessarily mean an increase in the number of House seats; the redistricting process would entail consolidating multiple districts in each state, so the country's grand total could stay at 435. (That number, by the way, is a political decision and not a constitutional requirement.)

So how would this work? It's as simple as electing the top three vote winners. We would see districts electing both Republicans *and* Democrats. And of course there would be space for third parties and independents. No more voters getting stuck in a district that favors one party or another.

This system is constitutionally protected, and many examples can be found in local governments—especially in places that needed to remedy racial-disenfranchisement issues under the Voting Rights Act.

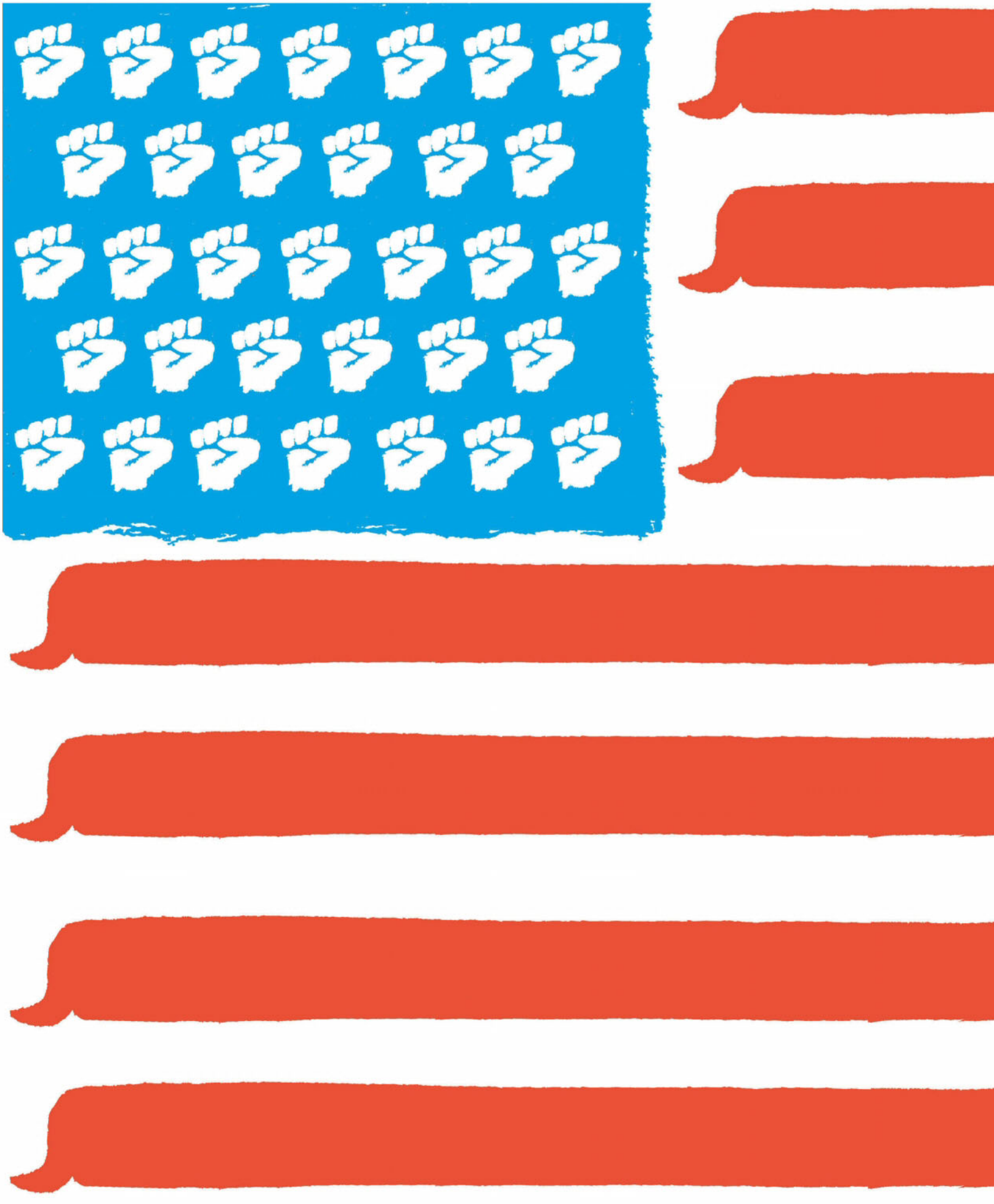
Things get more potent when we use ranked-choice voting, following the example of cities in California's Bay Area, as well as Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, and Portland, Maine. With this system, you rank your candidates first, second and third. The three candidates with the most votes win.

We need to take the power out of the hands of insiders and put it where it belongs—in the hands of voters. While issues such as money in presidential campaigns and gender identity in public bathrooms dominate politics, our broken congressional elections pass under the radar. We ignore them at our peril. In essence we are giving away this cornerstone of our constitutional system to the interests that control the Washington, D.C. political culture. It's time to make Congress the "People's House" it was designed to be.

This November, many people will hold their nose as they vote in the presidential election. Regardless of whom you choose for the highest office in the land, imagine casting a strong and meaningful ballot for the U.S. House under a system of fair representation. This is the inspiration that will tear down the wall Congress has built around itself.

Best known as the bassist of Nirvana, Krist Novoselic chairs the electoral-reform group FairVote and is a longtime advocate for freedom of expression and association. He lives in Washington state.

ILLUSTRATION BY BENJAMIN CONSTANTINE



ESSAY

FREE THE PRESS

The American news media is driven by the pursuit of money and power—not the truth. It has to be fixed

BY **MARY MAPES**

Imagine if the press in America were truly free—if journalism cost absolutely nothing to produce. What would reporting be like if it were unencumbered by the need to make profits, if a news operation's survival didn't depend on generating clicks, ginning up subscriptions or depositing asses in front of TVs?

What if our media were also free of the greed for power—free of a corporate owner's desire to please a politician whose actions could affect the company's bottom line, of reporters who ask only friendly questions in order to retain access to the highest levels of power, of newsroom workers who have fixed their compasses on moving up at the expense of making a difference?

Would our stories be more aggressive and our questioning of politicians, of all stripes, more adversarial? Would more whistle-blowers be willing to step forward? Would newsrooms be more inclined to launch risky investigations, tackle difficult subjects and take on projects that require more time, manpower and money than they're able to commit now?

We all know the answers.

When I became a journalist, I didn't do it because I wanted to get rich quick, or even slowly. I did it because I believed I was joining a kind of church, a cult that worshipped curiosity and the First Amendment, whose members believed we were performing a public service integral to our way of life. We were there to represent all Americans, to be their eyes and ears, and to bring back to them the gritty details of how government really worked, how our leaders behaved behind closed doors and how our tax dollars were used.

That is what I believed profoundly when I took my job at CBS News in 1989. I lost that job almost 16 years later in a political firestorm triggered by corporate fear and partisan political attacks after Dan Rather and I broadcast a challenging *60 Minutes II* story about the sketchy military record of then president George W. Bush.

What I didn't realize when we aired that story was that in the years between my first day at CBS and the day I was asked to leave the building and never come back, our media models had devolved into something much less than a fully free press. They'd become profit-first businesses built on the belief that freedom of the press simply wasn't worth the cost. That thinking has been behind the decades-long drive of corporate owners to cut corners in news coverage, lay off a generation of reporters and shutter news outlets that weren't meeting unrealistically high profit margins. At some point, profitability and the First Amendment became mutually exclusive.

Once upon a time, we had very few outlets for news and information. Now, though we seem to have more choices, it's a digital delusion. In 1983, 50 companies controlled 90 percent of our media. Over the next three decades, the Federal Communications Commission relaxed or eliminated multiple rules limiting media ownership. Today, thanks to consolidation, mega-mergers, hostile takeovers and financial hard times, the number of controlling companies is down to six. And those six companies—Comcast, Walt Disney, News Corp., Time Warner, Viacom and CBS—have made callow choices about what Americans should be able to see and learn about the world around us.

If our media universe were a restaurant, American news consumers would be undernourished. We exist on a steady diet of intellectual junk food—cotton candy, Cheez Whiz and chicken wings—with an occasional hunk of raw red meat thrown into the mix. Like children whose every meal is delivered through a car window, we're getting exactly what media executives think we want, not what they know we need—and not what we deserve.

That's why a blustering reality-TV star has seemed to so many Americans a viable candidate to lead the country. And the media has facilitated Donald Trump, the Honey Boo Boo of Campaign 2016, by giving him free, unfiltered access to American audiences—not because he's brilliant but because he's ratings gold.

It's not as easy as it used to be to stay informed, but it's more important than ever before. That leaves the onus on American citizens to curate our own coverage, to serve as our own editors in compiling a go-to list of news sites, newspapers and television programs. We have to read international news and consider analysis from people with whom we fundamentally disagree. We have to try new things, such as journalistic start-ups that operate as nonprofits. We have to protect whistle-blowers, support websites and editors that rail against the status quo and champion reporters who regularly earn the wrath of the rich and powerful.

We all know the future of our news media is digital, but we aren't there yet—not by a long shot. We're still chimps in command of a jumbo-jet cockpit, thrilled to be along for the ride but not quite sure where we're going or how to get there.

We can use our desktops as windows into the universe, our laptops to learn about the world and our smartphones to access the wisdom of the ages—or we can use them to take pictures of our genitals and text them to one another.

Maybe it's time we stopped dicking around.

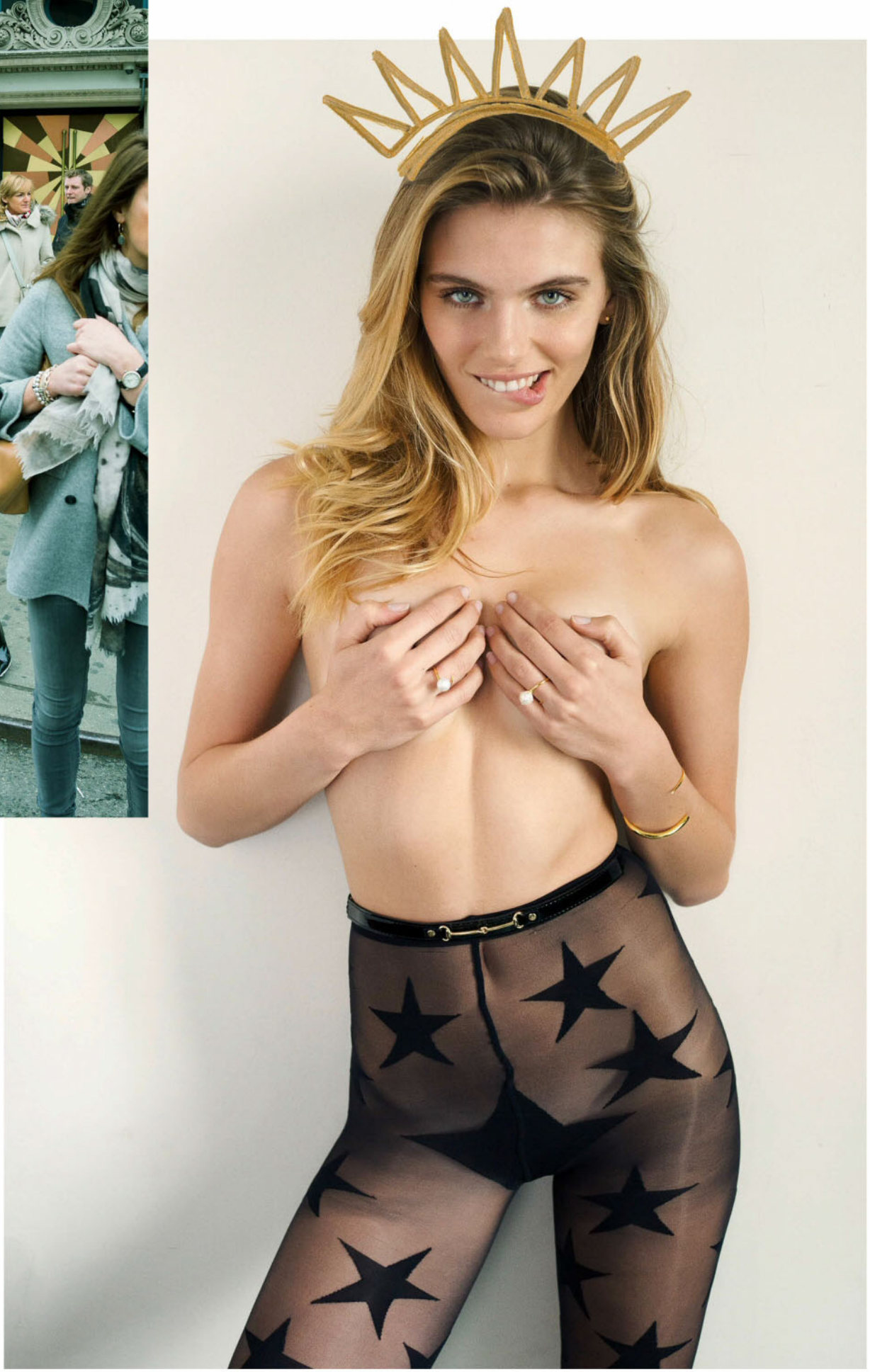
Mary Mapes is a journalist, author and Peabody Award–winning television news producer.

ILLUSTRATION BY JEAN JULLIEN

LAND OF THE FREE

*In the city that never sleeps, model **Madison Headrick** captures the essence of our greatest American liberty—the freedom to dream*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CHRIS HEADS**

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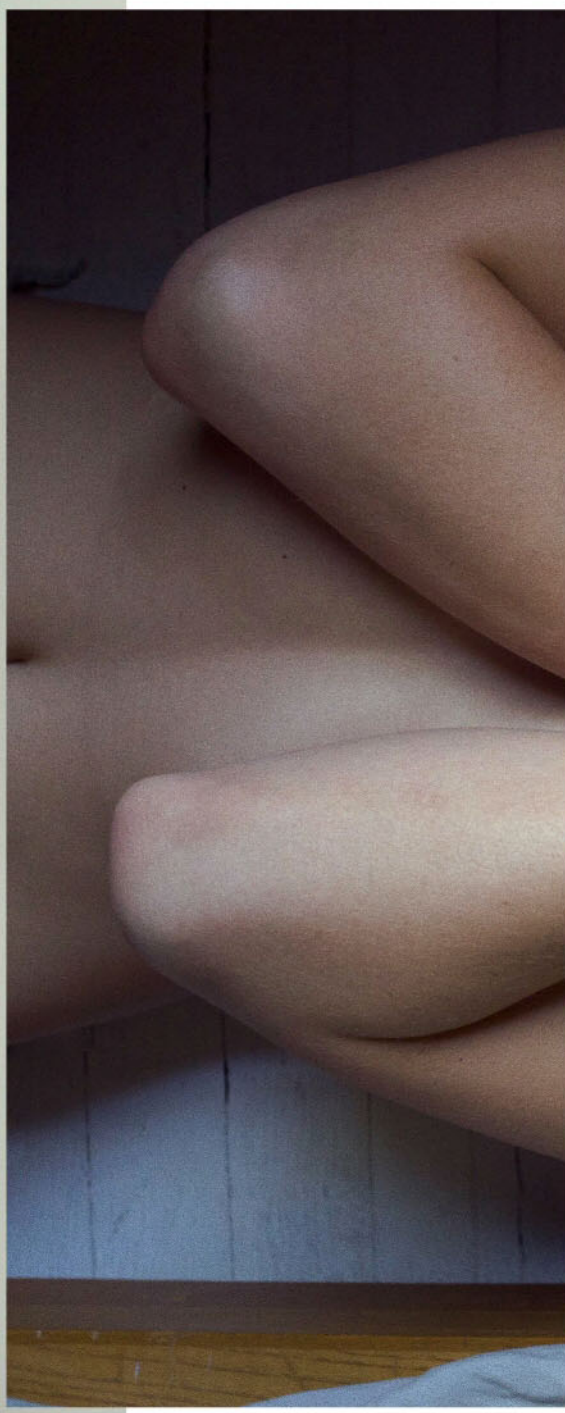


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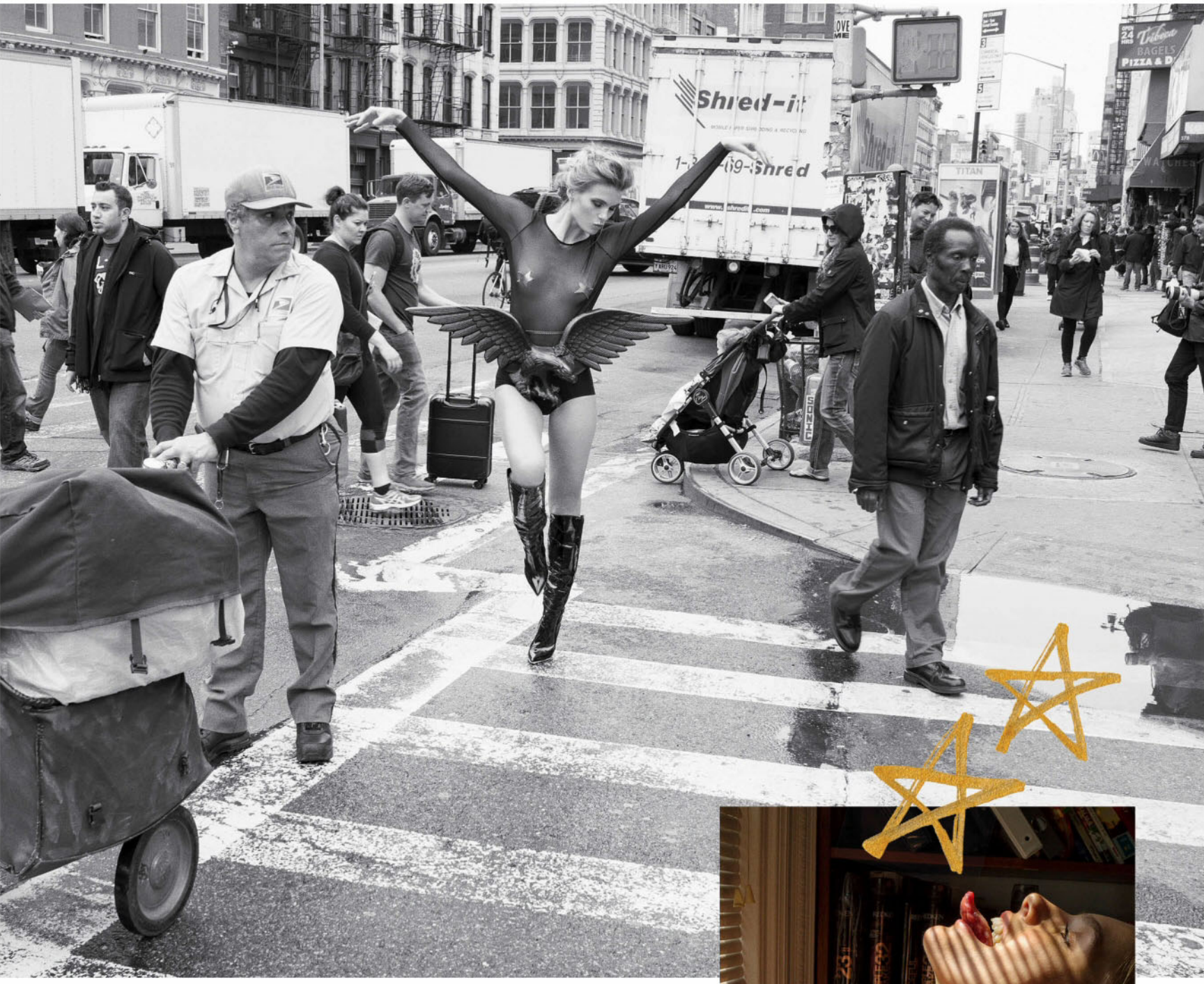
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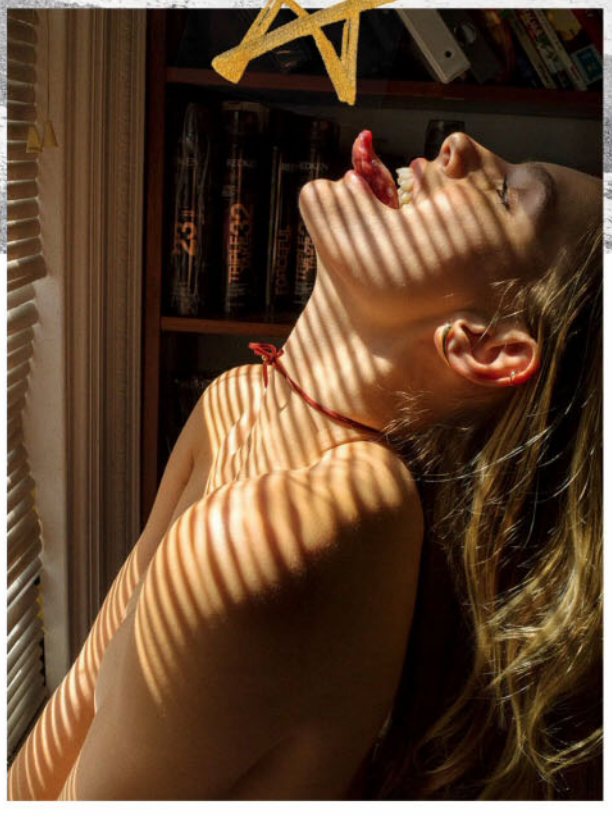

THE WI
CRAZIES
OFFEN
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JOKES EV

Today's comedians talk about the jokes that took on taboos, broke barriers and left us cringing—and laughing

Risky comedy is edging closer to extinction. Unfortunately, this shift isn't happening because our culture has become so progressive that the proverbial line is nearly impossible to cross. Quite the opposite: The level of tolerance for daring humor has retreated. Collective cries of the offended are amplified by retweets, online petitions and college op-eds from the vice chairperson of the Students for Nondiscriminatory Language Committee. ¶ How the hell did this happen? There's no clear perpetrator, no outspoken right-wing

ILDEST ST MOST SIVE & D-UP VER TOLD

BY
JEREMY ELIAS

televangelist, no Tipper Gore, no McCarthy-like politician foaming at the mouth over every tits, ass and dick joke. No, in this age of pervasive political correctness and cries of "microaggressions," we're doing this to ourselves. ¶ PLAYBOY *sought out some of today's funniest comedians and asked them to tell us about the most fearless jokes they've heard and the comics who crafted them. What we found are jokes that take on the most salient topics of our time—terrorism, abortion and race, to name a few—and are absolutely hilarious.*

IT WAS BEYOND MY IMAGINATION'S IMAGINATION THAT YOU COULD EVEN DO THAT. BACK THEN, "GOING TOO FAR" WAS A REAL THING.

LEWIS BLACK: Paul Krassner on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy

In 1967, William Manchester published The Death of a President, a historical account of the JFK assassination. But Jackie Kennedy and Robert Kennedy had insisted that parts of the manuscript be removed. Amid that censorship controversy, satirist Paul Krassner provided the "missing pieces" in The Realist, his underground paper.

I would get *The Realist* in the mail. I don't know how my parents let me do this, but it would show up, black and white, 20 pages, and one issue had a supposed excerpt from Manchester's book.

I'm of that generation for whom Kennedy's assassination was massive. The game board changed. We were playing Monopoly, and now we're playing Psychosis.

Up to that point, the big thing in terms of over-the-top comedy was Lenny Bruce saying Jackie Kennedy was scrambling to get out of the car. But Krassner wrote in *The Realist* that Jackie was on *Air Force One* with her family and Lyndon Johnson, flying back with the casket with President Kennedy's body in it. And she goes to the back and notices that Johnson is hovering over the casket. As she approaches, she slowly realizes—this is a summary—that Johnson is fucking the bullet hole in Kennedy's neck.

It was like somebody gave me a drug. It literally made my head explode. I yelped, and then I laughed, and then it was...disorienting. It was beyond my imagination. It was beyond my imagination's imagination that you could even do that. Or say that. And back then there were still taboos. Back then, "going too far" was a real thing. It wasn't just a question of "too soon."

That joke changed the way I looked at the world. You have to realize, they were pulling the rug out from under Kennedy. It was the first shot across the bow of all of this stuff that would come out later: "Our leaders are not who they seem to be."

Jay Mohr on Chris Rock (pictured): "He explains to hundreds of black people what he hates about them. It's astoundingly ballsy."

KELLY CARLIN: George Carlin on Abortion

When I was a kid, I didn't really understand what my father was doing in a larger context. It didn't dawn on me. He was my dad. But in my 30s I started to appreciate the power and the true boldness of his comedy. In his 1996 HBO special, he comes out and says something like "Why is it that people who are against abortion are the people you wouldn't want to fuck in the first place?"

On the surface, it can seem like an anti-feminist statement, because he's objectifying these women who are against abortion. But he's making this really subtle point about abortion at the same time. And it's really funny. You can't help—if you have a certain political proclivity—but laugh from the shock of it and from the truth of it.

When you put something like that out into the world, the risk is that it's no longer yours. You can't control how it lands on everybody; everyone has a prism they're going to receive it through. That's what's interesting about my dad's audience. Not only did he have everyone from nine- to 90-year-olds, but he also had radical lefties and libertarians—and conservatives. Telling that kind of joke—it's a huge risk.

JAY MOHR: Chris Rock on Race

Chris Rock. Checkmate, Chris Rock. Chris Rock stood in front of a black audience while filming a special. He said, "I love black people; I hate niggers." Like I said, this was in front of a black audience. They're all laughing, but you know he's a comedian, so there's an explanation to come. So you're just sitting there thinking, Um, what is happening?

Look, everybody wants to say Lenny Bruce was this pioneer. Lenny Bruce was whacked out on speed, reading his own court transcripts onstage until people left. I could do that if I did speed—because I wouldn't care about anything but more speed.

But to stand in front of a black audience and tell them what's wrong with your entire race, citing specifics—*checkmate.* No matter who else says what in this article, no matter what

you think after finishing this piece, just circle back to Chris Rock and see if it's ballsier than what he did.

It wasn't like he did the bit at a nightclub. It was a filmed special! There are signs outside saying, "If you enter the premises, you are agreeing to be filmed for HBO." And he just explains to hundreds of black people what he hates about them. It's astoundingly ballsy. It's other level. George Carlin probably went, "Wow!"

If you're a comedian and you're not doing something ballsy, go do something else, man. Nobody buys a comedy ticket to hear about how wacky the airlines are.

JB SMOOVE: Richard Pryor on Freebasing

In 1980, after freebasing cocaine, Richard Pryor doused himself in 151-proof rum, set himself on fire and ran through the streets ablaze. He was rushed to the hospital with burns covering half his body and later revealed it was a suicide attempt—something he describes in his 1982 special, Richard Pryor: Live on the Sunset Strip.

Comics are the only ones who can take pain and make it into something interesting to hear. Richard Pryor, to me, was the one who would go into that barrel and express himself so vividly onstage, especially after his tragic incident. Who knows how that changed his life? I was a huge fan, and to watch him do that bit onstage—*wow!*

To me it shows the level of commitment Pryor had. His level of honesty—I don't think anyone has come along after that to top what he does onstage. What he does is daring. There's a sacrifice he makes.

You have to be willing to give part of your life away. Comics don't worry about people in the audience. They worry about people they have to be around after they leave that stage—the people trying to help them, the people in a relationship with them. The audience doesn't know the extent of Pryor's drug use; maybe they think he's making it up. They don't know his personal life. They haven't been in bed with him. They haven't raised him. They haven't done anything with him other than watch him on TV and on stage. But someone in his life didn't know all those details yet, so that's a whole different thing to give up.

And you have to realize, he almost died. He almost left this earth. Yet he put a take on it that was funny while still acknowledging the extent of what he'd gone through. I'm not just laughing at the bit, I'm thinking, Damn, this is crazy! It's intriguing, it's funny as hell, and it's honest. It's a powerful moment in comedy.

JB Smoove on Richard Pryor (pictured) in *Live on the Sunset Strip*: "I'm not just laughing at the bit, I'm thinking, Damn, this is crazy! It's intriguing, it's funny as hell, and it's honest. It's a powerful moment in comedy."

ANDY KINDLER: Bill Hicks on Killing President Ronald Reagan

Bill Hicks had a bit about John Hinckley Jr.—the guy who tried to kill Reagan—and how Hinckley's whole thing was that he wanted to kill the president because of Jodie Foster. Hicks says something like "I can't understand why it was because of Jodie Foster. I could understand if it was Phoebe Cates." Then Hicks does a whole thing where he's running around the White House, killing everybody in the name of Phoebe Cates.

I wouldn't do that joke. There are certain things I have a Jewish fear of, like you're never supposed to joke about killing the president. But what's so perfect is that Hicks would do things I would never do, which means it was probably even more important that he did it. The joke ends with him in the electric chair, sniffing his finger, kind of as a Phoebe Cates memory.

It would never occur to me to go, "Jodie Foster? That's a horrible choice...but I could see Phoebe Cates!" Remember that scene where Phoebe Cates comes out of the water in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*? To me, Hicks picks the exact person you would choose in that scenario.

Hicks obviously hates everything the Reagans represent. Within the context of this fantasy, I'm sure he took pleasure acting it out. I think he says something like "Get back here, Nancy Reagan! Get your skinny ass back here!" while he pretend-runs through the White House, spraying bullets.

I met Hicks in the winter of 1988 on a tour in Michigan. It was right after he got sober. I had started comedy in 1984, and I was actually frightened at how amazing his act was. He was the first comic I saw really be angry. I think he was outraged by the politics of the country. Outraged. He had such strong opinions about how fucked-up things were. So his joke is basically saying, "These people are in many ways criminals, so don't walk around canonizing them or making them larger than life." But he's also making a solid point that if you're a crazed psychopath, you should have higher standards.

Natasha Leggero on Joan Rivers (pictured): "Joan's own manager took her aside and said she shouldn't tell those types of jokes. Back then, being a woman who talked about things like abortion and sex was just not done."

NATASHA LEGGERO: Joan Rivers on Abortion

Comedy is all about perspective and time period. You watch Lenny Bruce's act now, and you don't understand how it got him arrested. Things have changed so much. But when you look at context, it's Joan Rivers talking about abortion on television. She couldn't even call it abortion! She had to call it an appendectomy. She had a joke about a woman who had 14 appendectomies, and Joan's own manager took her aside and said she shouldn't tell those types of jokes. In her documentary she remembers how Jack Lemmon left her show and was like, "That's disgusting. Women shouldn't talk like that."

Today, if something's not politically correct, or if it's bad, it doesn't matter if it comes from a man or a woman. But back then, being a woman who talked about things like abortion and sex was just not done. Joan Rivers is definitely the first person I know of who did.

The best comics have always gone against the norm. Men at that time were probably afraid of women talking like that. But abortion is something a lot of women can relate to. They have the potential to have, they have had or they're scared they're going to have an abortion. It's part of being a woman. Of course females will joke about that.

Comedians go through life saying the things other people are afraid to say, so obviously they're going to go into the territory of taboo subjects. Sure, you can go around being PC, making sure you don't offend anyone. But the kind of comics I like, and the kind of comedic minds I'm drawn to, are the people who say what everyone is thinking. And they're able to frame ideas in a way that's not only enlightening and intelligent but also hilarious.

JIM NORTON: Wanda Sykes on Rush Limbaugh and Terrorism

The most unafraid joke I can think of was told by Wanda Sykes when she hosted the 2009 White House Correspondents' Dinner.

She did a bit about Rush Limbaugh being the 20th hijacker: "He just wants the country to fail. To me, that's treason. He's not saying anything different than what Osama bin Laden is saying. You know, you might want to look into this. I think maybe Rush Limbaugh was the 20th hijacker, but he was just so strung out on OxyContin he missed his flight."

I thought that was so stunning because she did a 9/11 joke in front of the president and the entire U.S. government. She risked absolutely losing everyone by doing that.

I don't care what side of the fence you're on politically, who she voted for, whatever. The fact that she did a 20th-hijacker joke—I would never have the balls to do that as a comic. And it was a funny joke.

Now again, it was a White House Correspondents' Dinner. You really can't do a higher-profile gig than that or a more prestigious one as a comedian. She was risking a tremendous amount. In this day and age, that kind of risk could hurt your career. I'm always amazed when people are willing to do jokes like that. I've heard meaner jokes. I've heard dirtier jokes. But as far as overall risk, that's the one I admire the most.

ARTIE LANGE: Mitch Hedberg on Heroin

Mitch Hedberg had a joke that could have led to some very serious personal consequences.

Mitch died of a heroin and cocaine overdose 11 years ago. Really a tragic end. But he had some of the most amazing, edgiest jokes ever. He told this joke on the radio—and I felt like he sort of looked at me, because he knew I had the same issue—and I could see him in his head going, Should I say this? Because it was clearly true. The joke was "You know what I love the most about my Federal Express deliveryman? He's a drug dealer and he doesn't even know it."

Think about that. Mitch was known for having drug issues. He'd been busted before, and he'd clearly gotten his fix delivered by his FedEx guy. If that joke spawned an investigation of any sort, he'd go to jail.

But you know, that's who comedians are. That's an insight into the psyche of a comic. "You know what, it's a great joke. It's going to get a laugh. I want to be known for doing great jokes. Even if I'm going to prison, I'm going to say the joke." That's what a lot of us have.

DAVE ATTELL: Sam Kinison on Jesus

As a comic, Sam Kinison is totally underrated and one of the guys you wished you were when you watched him onstage. He was that good. Pure energy, rage—it all syncs together so well.

SHE DID A 9/11 JOKE IN FRONT OF THE PRESIDENT AND THE ENTIRE U.S. GOVERNMENT. SHE RISKED LOSING EVERYONE BY DOING THAT.

Take his whole Jesus bit: "Jesus is the only guy who came back from the dead and didn't scare the fuck out of everybody." If you look at the full-tilt run, it's great joke after great joke. I've heard so many versions of it, but the pure, true first one on Jesus was Sam.

I know he did a bit of it on *Saturday Night Live* and on his first HBO special. It was basically, "No one knew what Jesus's last words were, but I think it was something like this"—and he begins hammering his hands into the floor. He's doing this on television. And he did the whole thing of Jesus saying, "When am I coming back? Tell 'em I'll be there as soon as I can play the *pianoooo again!*" He has all these great jokes. It was something of Sam's that was his brand, unique to him. And the fact that he was a preacher makes it valid.

Today everyone is so PC about religion. You're allowed to talk about certain things but not others. Sam Kinison was definitely the guy who took it as far as you can go, and every little piece of the Jesus bit is hilarious. He runs with it. You can't not laugh. It's great. It's irreverent.

KEVIN POLLAK: Zach Galifianakis on Racism

The most fearless joke I've ever heard is the famous Zach Galifianakis bit. It's about how much he hates the word *nigger*. He hates every part of it, any use of it, any context it can be used in. He sets it up by saying he's very, very sensitive to it. He says, "Like, the other day, I heard someone say the word *sandnigger*. And it really, really disturbed me. It got me in my heart. It hurt to hear it. And it wasn't even in the correct context. It wasn't like the guy said, 'Hey! Get off the sand, nigger. Don't you know volleyball is a white man's sport?' "

Doing that joke in front of a mixed audience, that's the most fearless I've ever seen. It was so beautifully designed that it's pure comedy. And it completely and utterly defends, and gives an example of, why there's no place for censorship or political correctness for a standup comedian. I mean, you might be offensive to people, but you're not being racist, because it's a beautifully crafted and designed joke, and it's making no comment about a people in any way, shape or form.

I saw him do it live at Radio City Music Hall. He did it in front of so many people—and just leveled the place. When it's funny, all bets are off. No rules apply.

TODD GLASS: Louis C.K. on Gay Marriage

Comedy is a powerful way to get people to change. When people already like you and you say something they don't agree with, if you do it comedically, you can change their beliefs. That's why comedy is so powerful. When you hear "It's just comedy," it's usually said by a shitty comic. It's not just comedy.

In his bit on gay marriage, Louis C.K. goes, "People say, 'How am I supposed to explain to my child that two men are getting married?' I don't know. It's your shitty kid, you fucking tell him.... Two guys are in love, but they can't get married because you don't want to talk to your ugly child for fucking five minutes?"

I call it vulgar poetry. In one clean sweep, it's like, Really? Is this why we're preventing people, two consenting adults, from doing a natural thing? Please don't tell me that's why we're preventing two people from showing their love for one another, because you're afraid you can't explain it to your children. Louis's joke calls them on that. It says, "You're not being honest with why you don't support gay marriage. You're just looking and searching for something."

You know, you can't get caught in the truth. And the truth is that most people don't like anything about the world of being gay because it grosses them out. And if they just said that, you'd be like, "Thank you for being honest. Now we can discuss."

But when you try to hide behind "I don't know what to tell my children...." Of course you don't know what to tell your children! You don't even know what to tell yourself. And Louis's joke says it in one clean swoop.

WHITNEY CUMMINGS: Greg Giraldo and Crossing Boundaries

What's gutsy in Texas might not be in New York. I worked

Todd Glass on Louis C.K. (pictured): "Louis's joke calls them on that. It says, 'You're not being honest with why you don't support gay marriage.'"

THAT GOT THE CROWD BOOING AND HISSING AND GASPING—EVERY BAD REACTION YOU COULD POSSIBLY GET.

for a long time on the *Comedy Central Roasts*, where there are no boundaries. So if someone is able to find a line there and cross it, it's like, wow.

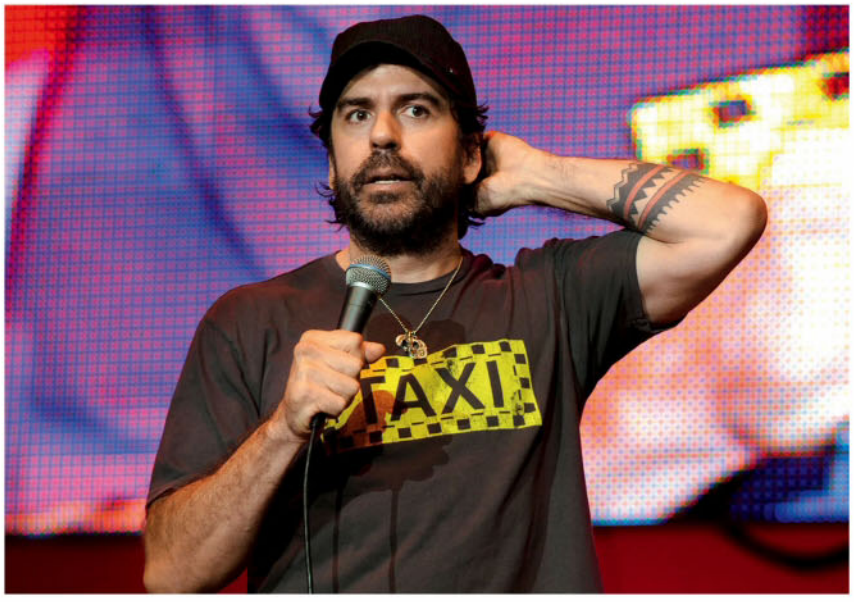
Greg Giraldo always had jokes at those roasts that were fearless not only in what he said but how he said it. He would always go up first, before the audience had anything to drink. It's five o'clock, they're settling in, not focused, taking selfies, they haven't heard any jokes yet. The first comic always gets a lot of cringes and jeers, and Giraldo would kind of break them open. That's what he did. When they would jeer, he'd go, "Really? We're at a roast and you're going to jeer me? Okay, fuck you guys."

One of his jokes I love is about Ice T. He said, "Ice T, you're so old, the first thing you bought with your record-deal money was your freedom." And then he followed it up with "On your first album, the *N* word was *Negro*." It's like the two biggest taboos, a slavery joke and an old-person joke, all wrapped into one. He just knocked it out so hard. It was super cool to watch.

You never saw a twitch in his eye if something didn't go the way he wanted it to. And not only did he always have the most daring jokes, but he'd also berate the audience if they didn't give him the appropriate response.

The purpose comedians serve in society is to find the line and then cross it. It's our job to constantly poke people to see what offends them and what their boundaries, limits, hypocrisies are. What offends us says a lot about who we are. And people love being offended, because it gives them the opportunity to be sanctimonious, to be above something and feel better about themselves. They get a hit of dopamine when they say they're offended, and they take time out of their day to do it on Twitter or Instagram. Being offended becomes a large part of our neurological reward system.

The rule we have for the roasts is that it has to be funnier than it is offensive. So if you're going to make a race joke, it had better be an A-plus race joke.



Whitney Cummings on Greg Giraldo (pictured): "The rule we have for the roasts is that it has to be funnier than it is offensive. So if you're going to make a race joke, it had better be an A-plus race joke."

JEFF ROSS: Dave Attell on Terrorism

It was right after the first World Trade Center bombing at the base of the tower in 1993. It was the first act of terrorism I was really aware of. It was tragic, and New York was on high alert. No one knew what domestic terrorism was all about back then.

As a comedian I didn't know how to handle something like that. But I went to the Comedy Cellar, and I watched Dave Attell go on. By then he already had the beard and everything. He went up and said, "Okay, maybe now they'll start taking me seriously." He basically took credit for the first World Trade Center bombing. The place just erupted with a guttural laugh of "I can't believe he said that. I can't believe I'm laughing at that. And I can't believe we still don't really know what happened." That was probably the first time I remember a comic, a contemporary, just going for it.

And then we roasted Hugh Hefner in 2001. I mean, this was three weeks after the Twin Towers came down. I remember writing a letter to Hef, the Friars Club and Comedy Central, saying if we didn't go on with the show, the terrorists win. That was before it was such a clichéd statement. It was obviously a profound moment in our history. Even people Hef's age, even my manager at the time, Bernie Brillstein, who was in his 70s, were scared. No one knew what was happening.

To be honest, New York still smelled like death. It still smelled like smoldering remains of buildings and everything. It was a sad time, but we felt an obligation to go on with the roast.

Then Gilbert Gottfried went up and basically changed the way everyone in that room thought about comedy.

GILBERT GOTTFRIED: Gilbert Gottfried on Terrorism

It was a few days after September 11, and there was talk about canceling the roast altogether. A lot of people who were going to be there were afraid to fly. To make matters

Gilbert Gottfried on his 9/11 joke: "I was up there for what felt like—I mean, if you said I was there for 200 years after I said that joke to when I said the next one, I would believe it."

worse, the roast was in New York. But they decided to have the roast anyway. All over the country, people were in a daze. But in New York, forget it. So there was tension in the room, to say the very least. I figured I wanted to be the first one to make a bad-taste September 11 joke. The first one was sort of mild. "Tonight I'll be using my Muslim name, Hasn bin Laid." And then I talked a little more, a couple more jokes. And then I said, "I have to leave early tonight; I have to catch a flight to L.A. I couldn't get a direct flight; we have to make a stop at the Empire State Building."

That got the crowd booing and hissing and gasping—every bad reaction you could possibly get. You could hear chairs moving around. One guy yelled, "Too soon!" At that point, I thought maybe he meant I didn't take a long enough pause between the setup and the punch line. I was up there for what felt like—I mean, if you said I was there for 200 years after I said that joke to when I said the next one, I would believe it.

Then I went into the aristocrats. It's a vaudeville-era joke that opens with the same premise each time: A father walks into a talent agent's office to pitch his family's act. Every comedian has their own variation. Mine involves the father fucking the wife, who's jerking off the son, who's going down on his sister, who's sticking her finger in the family dog's asshole.

That joke caused a whole turnaround. The audience was laughing hysterically, what sounded like coughing up blood. Howling and cheering. It seemed to turn into a party atmosphere.

People wrote about it, saying it was like the first time they breathed. Some said it was like the joke at that point was a healing process. One person compared it to performing a mass tracheotomy. For me, it struck me that terrorist jokes were bad taste; incest and bestiality, good taste.

PENN JILLETTE: Gilbert Gottfried and a Private Conversation

The importance of obscenity and disgust in the wake of tragedy is really important to me. I did a whole movie about it, a 90-minute essay about Gilbert telling the aristocrats joke after 9/11. But I'm not leading with a story about a publicly funny thing.

Gilbert and I are both mama's boys. We were both extremely close to our mothers. When my mom died, it was devastating. Then about a year and a half later, Gilbert's mom died. As stricken as I was about the death of my mom, Gilbert was more stricken about the death of his. I talked to Gilbert on the phone and went to New York City to see him. And what happened that evening—I've never spoken about this publicly—I can't explain.

Gilbert and I met for supper at Café Un Deux Trois, a French restaurant. We went to a back table. This was within a week of his mom's death, one-on-one with a friend who'd also lost his mom. You'd expect Gilbert to maybe tell stories about his mom, maybe get a bit philosophical.

But what we did was sit across from each other and just vomit up the most offensive jokes we could think of. Now, when you talk about Gilbert Gottfried, it's hard to even imagine the level he would go to. We went to every taboo in society. It's not an exaggeration to say that if that conversation had been recorded and disseminated with our names on it, it would be the end of both our careers.

I'm talking about sexist, racist, any sort of distasteful, horrible feeling. We sat back there for probably three hours. And the jokes weren't punctuation; it wasn't that we would say, "Oh, and by the way...." It was talking about raping his dead mother. It was anything you could imagine that was taboo. It was just this gigantic, raging fuck-you to life. It was black vomit of hate spewing out of us, punctuated with insane, mirthless laughter. It was one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life.

Although I was in the middle of it, neither Gilbert nor I instigated it. Neither Gilbert nor I were part of it. Neither of us knew what was going on. Yet we were the only ones there.

It was the most visceral, personal interaction with comedy I've ever had. It wasn't comedy used in the way I'd seen it used before. It wasn't "We went to the wake and we were telling jokes to stop from crying." That wasn't it at all. It was not a celebration of our mothers' lives. It was pure hatred for everything unpleasant in the world.

I've thought about that evening many times since. It was our way of throwing a tantrum, destroying a hotel room. It was our way of grabbing a gun and running amok in public. It strikes me as a wonderfully safe, kind, cathartic way to do it. And it remains that way—as long as I never repeat the jokes. ■

ali michael

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON LEE PARRY

Ali Michael sports a threadbare Marilyn Manson T-shirt with enough holes to pattern a slice of Swiss cheese. “I took this shirt home to Texas once,” she says, sipping instant coffee in her SoHo apartment—her preferred joe on mornings like this when she lacks the energy to brew the real thing. “My mom and I were heading out when she said, ‘Sorry, can you please change?’ But overall, I don’t have to tone it down.” Such is the life of a woman who belongs to two worlds. Miss July grew up riding horses outside Fort Worth, the daughter of a man who shoots guns and rides a Harley. Today, she lives in Manhattan—a successful runway model whose career spans a decade and whose Twitter feed drips with borscht belt cynicism. Both places are home; Ali is a product of the two of them. “I have polarities. I listen to Deftones and gravitate to dark things, but I grew up in the middle of nowhere, going to Walmart. I’m weird but also completely normal.” For the 26-year-old, reconciling these disparities is her coming-of-age. “Living in New York City is like being in an abusive relationship. I get burned out. It’s important to go back to Texas, where my heart is, and hear no sirens and see the sky. You never see the sky in New York. But then I’m like, Fuck, I want to be back there. It’s an addiction.” Therein lies her quarter-life calling. “Like many people my age, I’m still figuring myself out—and I’m okay with that. I like being human. Nobody really knows what the fuck they’re doing, and that’s totally fine.”


Camper
Special


MISS JULY 2016

ALI MICHAEL

AGE: 26 **BIRTHPLACE:** Grapevine, Texas **CURRENT CITY:** New York

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL

I'm Texan. I'm American. PLAYBOY has always been iconic to me. I love that my photo shoot has stars and stripes to represent where I come from. My mom is my best friend, and she and my dad are so excited and proud, which has always been important to me.

MY FAVORITE ARTIST

I love the Austrian painter Egon Schiele. Sometimes I'll go to a museum and not feel much, but when I saw a Schiele show at New York City's Neue Galerie, I wanted to spend the entire day there. That tells you how much his work resonates. It's weirdly uncomfortable to look at, yet delicate and beautiful.

WHY I ALWAYS KEEP UP WITH THE KARDASHIANS

I'm a big fan of the Kardashians. I have two personalities. I can be weird and dark, but I think the Kardashians appeal to the basic side of my personality. I also try to intellectualize the show in an anthropological way. They're human and no less valuable than anyone else.

MY TOP SUMMER BBQ FARE

Last year I spent the Fourth of July in London. My friend's family felt so bad that I wasn't in America for the holiday, they threw me a barbecue and cooked English sausages in lieu of hot dogs, which were amazing. But my favorites are still burgers and hot dogs—with mustard. I hate ketchup.

WHAT LOVE FEELS LIKE

How do you know you're in love? When you don't have to think about it. I've always been overly analytical when it comes to emotions. In past relationships I've felt a kind of separateness I thought would never go away, no matter who I was with. I was trying to convince myself I should be with someone. You shouldn't have to think about it like that. I learned the separateness I felt was because I wasn't with the right people. It's basic, but it's really all about your gut feeling.

THE MOST UNATTRACTIVE TRAIT

Anyone who's always overly polite bores me. That's how you know they're bullshitting you.

@Ali_Michael @AliMichael

BABYLON

A marine finds a fleeting glimpse of fellowship as she tries to keep the peace on a Brooklyn kickball field

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SKIP STERLING

They called me the Fat Dyke Ref that summer. It didn't hurt my feelings so much as it violated my sense of exactness. Fat? I'd always been cinder-block thick, and it was true that I'd put on some weight since the desert. Dyke? Yeah, I liked vaginas more than dicks, they had me there. But a ref, in kickball? ¶ "Bitches, I'm an umpire," I'd say, because that's what I was, and because it was fun to watch strangers' faces when I called them bitches. "Get it right or get off my field."

BY **MATT GALLAGHER**

The kind of people who played Sunday kickball at McCarren Park weren't used to being talked to that way, not by people like me. Some were staunch Brooklyn dwellers, freelancing hipster types welded into the rails of L-train culture. Others were wayfarers from across the bridge, ad execs, digital communication associates, office ilk with salaries and titles. Whichever borough they claimed, most were actually expats from Middle America, whiter-than-snow 20-somethings loaded up on brunch mimosas. Monday through Saturday they might've been able to handle a fag with a butch cut and a homegrown fuck-all attitude. We'd talk deli sandwiches, or weather, or maybe Obama. It was an election year. But Sunday, at the kickball fields? That was supposed to be theirs. My presence screwed with the equilibrium of it all.

And I got that. Ooh-rah to diversity, but sometimes we just need to be around our own kind. Wednesday nights, when I went to Mama's Lounge to get faded and maybe laid, the last thing I wanted to see was a Hasid or a pack of finance bros. Same with Saturday evening mass at St. Francis's—if you went there, you were either old, Italian or both. Those two parts of my existence, and the people in them, stayed separate. I was grateful for that. After coming home from Iraq, it took me a while to figure out that getting through life meant compartmentalizing it. New York was as tribal as the desert. It just had more compartments.

After a few weeks, the various kickball tribes got used to the Fat Dyke Ref. If I wasn't quite welcome, I was at least tolerated, like a neighbor's Christmas decorations in May. They'd taken to my cousin Squatch more easily—he'd become the Ref With the Burned Face—mostly because he'd just flex his biceps when they tried to argue a call. Six-foot-four and 280 pounds, Squatch was the Eurasia of big people—sprawling but shiftless. The kickballers didn't know that, though. They just saw a mute giant with a face of brain. Not even the man-roosters wearing their high school baseball cleats messed with that.

Our downstairs neighbor Chad was the league commissioner, and how we'd gotten the jobs. Squatch already worked as a bouncer at the local bar Chad owned, Not Chad's. Apparently muscle was needed at the kickball fields too. I got the league a tax credit; Chad had seen something on the news about hiring veterans being good business and texted me immediately. He wasn't so bad, as far as grown men who wore backward caps to hide their baldness went, but him rolling around the park on a Segway drinking from a plastic chalice did little for Williamsburg's reputation.

The gig proved simple enough—out, safe, fuck off, that sort of thing. Other than whining about calls, no one said much of anything to me, not directly. Then, three weeks in, one of the man-roosters noticed my tats.

"Yut, yut," he said as he walked up to kick, nodding to the black SEMPER FIDELIS ink slashing my forearms. He had a wood necklace on, common enough in north Brooklyn, except for what hung from the end of it—a hand-carved EGA. Unless something had changed in the four years I'd been out, the eagle, globe and anchor was still the official emblem of my beloved Corps.

"Kill," I replied. Another marine, here? I couldn't believe it. The only other vets I'd met in the hood had been a dipshit fobbit writing a screenplay and the old-timers at the VFW beer hall on Grand Street. The maybe-marine with the wood necklace was built like one of us, firm and knotty, but he had long drummer hair and skin bare as Saran wrap. The only marines I'd known without tattoos were officers. But this guy didn't walk the way they did. He had swag, shoulders rolling forward like a proper grunt. He looked Asian, or maybe half Asian—he was pretty enough, under all the fuzz on his face.

Before I could sniff his war balls—where, when, what unit—he kicked a two-run double into a banking red sun. It won the game, and he didn't bother to circle all the bases, disappearing between the dog-run and the big sycamore *Girls* filmed in front of one time. This vanishing act didn't seem to trouble his team, though. They were already talking victory drinks. Later, during the evening games, I wondered if I'd imagined it all, the EGA necklace, the hair, the yuts. The new pills from the VA had been messing with my dreams; maybe they could mess with my not-dreams too. Or perhaps he'd been a goddamn ghost. Some leatherneck who hadn't made it back from the desert.

Or he was just some idiot who'd played too much *Call of Duty.* That felt right.

I mentioned the hipster marine to Squatch that night as we walked back to our apartment.

We lived in a sleepy trapezoid of east Williamsburg that was still more Italian than gentrified. Our grandma had bequeathed the place to the two of us in the hospital, after making us promise we'd sell only to fellow descendants of Lo Stivale.

"That's how the Polacks kept Greenpoint," she'd said. Her final words, actually.

THE GUYS WERE BETA MALES WHO LOOKED LIKE THEY SUBSISTED ON KALE.

"You sure he said *yut*?" Squatch had been umping another game, so he hadn't seen the guy with long drummer hair. "That's not really a word, Marti. He could've said cut. Or butt. Or he was burping."

"There's the way marines say yut, and there's the way everyone else says it." Squatch himself had said it like a slow kid trying out phonics. "This guy said it the way we do."

Squatch shrugged. He was unconvinced, I could tell. He wanted me to go back to school, on the G.I. Bill, but I'd tried a couple times already and it hadn't taken. He'd also suggested I find some vets group in the city, like a political thing or whatever. "Put that wrath to use," he liked to say. I'd done some disaster relief in the Rockaways after Sandy, joining up with an organization made up of a lot of young vets and first responders. It'd been a good experience, and real work. Even made my heart glow for a couple days. Then I'd come home and looked up the org's public financial records. I stopped volunteering after that.

The evening air was broth; New York Junes weren't much for mercy. Other than some traffic din from the BQE, the only noise in the neighborhood came from a block over, where some kids had opened a hydrant. It sounded wet. To the west, distant and bound by broken clouds, the Freedom Tower jutted through the sky. A small beacon blinked at the top of it, a bright red light there to ward off planes. It sort of reminded me of the Eye of Sauron, but I pushed that thought away. If there was anywhere left in the world where we were still the good guys, it was there.

On Humboldt Street, someone had tagged the metal shutters of an auto-body shop closed for the weekend. A large orange bull's head gleamed from the shutters' center, horns filled in with a black burnish like midnight. Squatch cursed at it. Lately a lot of spray-painted bull's heads had been appearing in the area.

We passed by Mr. Pisano, probing down the sidewalk with his cane, fitting and refitting his tweed hat. He'd lived in the walk-up across the street since the Depression and done a tour in the Coast Guard. We said hello, but he looked back blankly, his face a map of deep wrinkles. He smelled like Vaseline.

"He thinks we're them," Squatch said. He meant gentrifiers, or hipsters, or scenesters, or anything other than a native. "I've known that man since Little League."

"Naw, dude. Ain't that." There'd been a distant look in Mr. Pisano's face, more amnesia than anger. "Just old."

Squatch held open the front door of our apartment building with a sarcastic "Yut." I ignored him. Chad was in the hallway, folding up his Segway. He smiled wide at us, his backward cap angling out to the side.

"My people!" he said. "Another day of triumph and glory."

"Ask Chad about the hipster marine," Squatch said. "He probably knows who he is."

"Whoa, don't use that word." Neither of us knew what Chad meant, so he continued. "The hipster is dead. We're post-hipster now."

I didn't want to talk hipsters, and I definitely didn't want to talk post-hipsters. "When we getting paid, Chad?" I asked. My monthly disability check covered most of the bills, a recurring gift from the hidden artillery shell that'd blown out my left eardrum. But a girl could always use some spending money. I had my eye on a new pair of wedges I'd seen at a store along Metropolitan. "This isn't easy work."

It was easy work. But after spending all day in the sun, my feet barking and a head like ash, it didn't feel like it just then.

"End of the month, end of the month," Chad said. "And I appreciate what you do, remember that! But, well. Marti. There's been some—not complaints, really. More. Observations?"

"You want me to be nicer."

"Please."

"Fine." I was surprised it'd taken this long; some raptor-faced skank had called me the meanest person she'd ever met the week before. "I'm working on my people skills."

"That's great, really great." Chad was one of those earnest souls deaf to sarcasm, like it was a dog whistle beyond his range. "Gonna need my umps ready for next week! Balls and Dolls are playing the Swashbucklers in the night game. Have assigned you both to it. Last season the two teams—well. They got into a fight. And the cops came! Can't have that happening again."

I hadn't umped the Swashbucklers yet, but Balls and Dolls were a team from Bushwick, a walking, talking testament to the new Brooklyn privilege. The guys were scraggly barista-poets, beta males who looked like they subsisted on nothing but kale and chai lattes. And the girls all seemed shaken out of an Urban Outfitters catalog. Their captain was an editor at Vice, an outlet I wanted to hate, except it'd done better work on the Libyan civil war than anyone. How that team had brawled was beyond me—most of them probably couldn't make a proper fist. But damn if they weren't good at kickball. Even the bitches knew when to tag up, how to bunt.

Chad and Squatch wanted to talk about the other team, though. The Swashbucklers.

"The ones with the pirate flag?" Squatch had a sloppy grin on his face, the kind boys got when they thought they were being clever. "The crazy blonde pitcher, right?"

"You didn't," Chad said, his own sloppy grin sliding across his face. "You did!"

"I'm gone," I said. My cousin could poke holes in all the hood rats he wanted, but that didn't mean I had to hear about it. "Hate to miss boys' club shit, but I got a bottle of wine to pop."

They just snickered as I climbed the stairs. Fucking Peter Pans, I thought. Must be nice.

Our apartment was dim and cool. Squatch had left the kitchen ceiling fan on again. It creaked with every rotation, like a tongue popping off the roof of a mouth. I grabbed a red

from the wine rack and a half-eaten roast beef sandwich from the refrigerator. The fan kept creaking. Need to get that looked at, I thought. Before it flies off and slices my jugular.

My room smelled of hamper. Three weeks' worth, I figured, the floor a Pompeii of sports bras and button-ups. I stepped through the rubble and opened a window. Eating my half sandwich on my bed, I streamed an episode of *Broad City.* Squatch didn't like the show, said it used too much gross-out humor. I'd told him it was because he was sexist. We'd had to listen to generations of dick jokes, what was wrong with hearing about how the other half lived? He'd wanted no part of that discussion, for some reason.

Unlike the floor, the walls of my room were bare. Nail holes from my grandmother's time could be found here and there, remnants that looked like dark scars but felt like nostalgia. When I couldn't sleep I'd try to remember what went where, back when my bedroom had been her sitting room. The crucifixes, all four of them, had been easy enough to place. But what about that photo of Frank Sinatra? And the Virgin Mary? How about that other photo of Frank Sinatra? And the other Virgin Mary? What about the canvas of a Tuscan marketplace that our aunt had taken? I'd wanted the piece but hadn't fought her on it. Seniority and all.

I had something of my own to put up on the wall, if I ever got around to it: a color photograph of Al Hillah. The ministry dominated the foreground of it, a sandstone fortress engulfed by dust. Behind it, the muddy Euphrates ambled by, rows of date trees posting guard on both banks. The sun was high, proud, all the bright of noon cast down upon the quiet Iraqi town. In a far corner of the photo, a keen eye could make out black, vertical slashes—the streets and alleys of the vegetable market. Beyond that, five miles or so to the north, were Nebuchadnezzar's ruins—supposedly, at least. Eight months of war and occupation, and we never found the time to go see what remained of the ancient Hanging Gardens.

The photo's likeness was buried somewhere in the trunk in my closet, under a pile of uniforms and boots and certificates of commendation. I'd taken the original on my alive day with a disposable Kodak, hours after we'd rolled over the artillery shell and stumbled into an ambush. Squatch had gotten the picture blown up and framed last Christmas, a gesture I appreciated but didn't need. The sight had been carboned to my mind the instant I snapped it, as well as all the other things cameras can't seize. The feel of sweat running down the nape of a neck. The sting in the back of one's eyeballs from smoke billows. The smell of canal stink. The rush of having located the enemy, closed with the enemy and destroyed the enemy. Of having laid into the Golf from a Humvee turret and filled the day with brass and cordite and sour, supreme death. Of becoming a true marine.

I knew then what I had trouble remembering now. That I'd have given much more than an eardrum for that moment, for that feeling, perverse as it was. I'd proved myself worthy. Not bad for a female lance corporal banished to a cultural support team with the Army, all because she'd head butted an E-4 stateside who'd grabbed her ass. I'd gone to Al Hillah an exile, to feel up haj women, patting down burkas and abayas to make sure Grandma wasn't packing heat or little Suzie Akbar wasn't strapped down with a suicide vest.

I'd left there a magician. I'd turned alive men dead.

There was a quick knock at the door, then it swung halfway open. It was the man himself, his face carrying a pink shine from the day, as well as the beginnings of a sunglass tan. Moron, I thought. I'd told him to put on sunscreen. If anyone needed to be careful, it was him.

"Marti—got a minute?" Squatch asked. I nodded, and he sat down on the foot of my bed. He looked around my room, faux-admiringly. "Interior decorating. That's what you should do."

"What is it."

"Where to begin." He sighed, cleared his throat, then sighed again. He pointed to his face. "Remember this?"

"Yes." We'd been 12, the summer between sixth and seventh grade, and the family had gone to the Poconos for a long weekend. To embrace the outdoors or something. As city folk, we'd neglected many of the essentials, like bug spray and ice, but by night two, everyone seemed to have adapted, maybe even relaxed. Then young Squatch, tasked with refueling the outdoor generator that powered the cabin, bumped the metal fuel spout against a starter cable hanging across the tank. After a long summer day under a big summer sun, the positive-to-negative charge contact ignited the fuel, then the fuel can, and then the boy holding the fuel can. It took two extinguishers to put him out, and his face had resembled beef stroganoff ever since.

"It's not been easy. I used to be normal. You know?"

"The point, Squatch." He wasn't one to talk about this. I couldn't recall if we ever had. It made me nervous.

"Fine." He sighed one more time, short and sharp, like a dart of air. "Some people in the league heard there's an ump who's a vet. Those people assumed it was me. They asked about it. I didn't correct them."

Now that we'd crossed some sort of mental Rubicon, the words flowed. A group of kickballers were regulars at Not Chad's. Squatch had stayed after his shift a few weeks back to drink with them. They'd assumed he was the vet they'd heard about. While he kept trying

to correct them, they wouldn't listen—thought he was trying to be humble. Then the thank-you-for-your-services started. Then the free beers began coming. Then the blonde pitcher from the Swashbucklers had sat on his lap, saying she felt like doing something patriotic. He never actually said he'd served, or been to Iraq, or been shot at, but he knew that was semantics and he was sorry, he was sorry about everything, but could I maybe not blow up his spot if it came up at the big kickball game next week?

"This is...."

I didn't know what to say. I needed to be angry, righteous. Pretending to be a combat veteran wasn't just an abuse of common decency, it was actually illegal. Stolen valor and shit. Every time I turned on the news, my generation of vets was being exploited by this politician, or that cause, or for whatever argument. We were ciphers to most of America, other people's sons and daughters, and other people's sons and daughters didn't possess nuance or agency. And my cousin, my own blood, a guy who'd never been further from home than Daytona fucking Beach was freebasing all that for a few high-fives and a drunken blow job?

I couldn't muster anything, though. Some of the biggest posers I'd known were vets. The pogue who never left Kuwait but needed to pretend he'd crossed the brink. The staff officer whose lone patrol off base became more dangerous with each of her retellings. Even the grunts, it was rare for them to stick to the truth, because the truth was never enough. War stories meant bullshit, that's just how it was. Deep down, I knew I'd exaggerated what happened that day in Al Hillah to people, be they surly uncles I wanted to impress or lipstick dykes I wanted to screw. I wasn't proud of it. But still. It'd happened, and it'd probably happen again.

Maybe we'd earned the right to bullshit, while Squatch hadn't. That made sense. But he'd never wallowed in what'd happened to him. Maybe he'd earned a right to bullshit too.

"Fine," I said. Surprise fell down his chewed-up face like rain. Something else was bothering me more than his lie. "Long as you promise to get that kitchen fan fixed. It's driving me crazy."

He agreed so readily I thought he was going to hug me. I scooched back, then made him watch a *Broad City* episode, the one about vaginas being nature's pocket. Halfway through, during an ad, he asked if I missed it.

"Sometimes," I said. "And sometimes I don't. Had my reasons for getting out."

"Sometimes I think I should've joined up," he said.

"Now you're pissing me off," I said, because he was.

The week came. The week went. I went to mass. I went to the VA. I went to Mama's. It remained Africa hot outside. On the subway I listened to a realtor explain the difference between east Williamsburg and East Williamsburg to a tech bro with a baby slung to his chest. I ate at something called Muffin Town, a new breakfast joint on Graham Avenue. It wasn't bad. I searched the streets for the hipster marine, but the only person I recognized was tweed-hatted Mr. Pisano, rifling through recycle bins and smelling of Vaseline and wine.

"Hello, Mr. Pisano," I said.

"Marduk," he said, tipping his cap to me. I figured it was progress, him almost getting right my name.

"Marti," I corrected. "Mar-ti."

He shook his head and pointed to the side of a recycle bin. A small bull's head had been spray-painted there, electric blue.

"Marduk," he repeated.

Sunday landed like a groan. I'd been half-awake and hungover when Squatch knocked at my door, saying we needed to be at the kickball fields in an hour. One shower, two glasses of water and three Advil got me upright and moving, even if I wasn't happy about it.

The day defied me, though. A valentine of a sun shined above, pallid clouds and a light breeze checking the heat. Some black kids walking from Bed-Stuy to the pool were blasting Biggie from a small boom box, snapping each other with towels. A couple guidos in muscle tees loitered in front of the corner deli, admiring a large setter on a leash. The bells of St. Francis clanged through the neighborhood, newly redeemed souls spilling onto the concrete with a verve the priest had to know wasn't because of any homily.

At the fringe of McCarren, callow stoners filled the skate run, some with boards, most not. Sweet tangy herb tickled at my nostrils. I'd always wanted to like weed more than I did.

Four stark bull's heads marked the entrance to the run along a concrete slab, all different colors and sizes, like strange hieroglyphics of a mystical temple. Across the street, a group of lumbersexuals drank PBRs on a bar patio, all wearing cut-off flannels. "Urban rustic woodsman" was the look of the year; *New York* mag had told me so. I remembered the Rapture had played that bar a couple years prior. It'd been a good show. That'd been before the band sold out, and before that bar had become a place frequented by lumbersexuals.

As the world turns.

Cutting across the bottom of the park, I stopped to watch a game of Mexican volleyball. While their families grilled and gossiped, the young men hustled and set, hustled and set, over and over again, only pushing the ball over the net when they had to. They played the game so differently than the long Californians on television: more quickness than power, more care than craft. I found it transfixing, like looking into a kaleidoscope. When they breaked for cervezas, I continued on my way.

The kickball fields lay in a north-side hollow of the park, two perpendicular diamonds of silt and sand. During the rest of the week, and for most of the year, they were just fields—for softball, for Frisbee, a place where teenagers could grope and heroin junkies could drool. But on summer Sundays, thanks to a permit secured through the parks department, the fields belonged to us. Like a kickball Stalin, armed with a fat grin instead of a mustache, Chad had a series of five-year plans for the league: first Brooklyn, then the other boroughs, then the entire Eastern seaboard. It hardly mattered to him that those other places already had their own recreational pursuits meant to evoke the wonder of childhood; those games and organizations would be conquered, then appropriated, all in good time. Fate demanded it.

"We have something those places don't," Chad liked to say from his Segway throne. "Remember that." Then he'd roll away, not having said what, sipping from his plastic chalice.

Both afternoon games passed without much incident. There was a 50-50 call when a sliding hipster's foot met home plate the same moment the ball reached her skull. I called it safe, mostly because her glasses flew off from the impact. A man-rooster from the other team protested, red-faced and hysterical, something I entertained for a few seconds before snorting and crossing my arms.

"You done?" I asked. His eyes were all over the SEMPER and FIDELIS tattoos I'd brought to the conversation. They went from interest, to confusion, to fear. The sound of his voice was threatening to rouse my hangover, so I flexed my forearms to make sure.

"Yeah," he said. "Guess I am."

The evening game arrived a few hours later. As the teams got settled in their respective dugouts, Chad and Squatch waved me over to the first-base line. I took my time getting there. I wanted them to know I thought they were being dramatic.

"Be ready," Chad said. "There's already been a lot of smack on the online message board."

"Oh," I said. "Not that."

"I'm serious," he said. "One of the Swashbucklers posted that he'd—well. That he'd donkey-punch another player's grandmother. Not even his mom. The grandmom."

Chad had a point. Mom jokes were one thing, but grandma jokes were another. We briefed our roles. Chad would be behind home plate, calling fouls and strikes. I'd be in the shallow outfield, responsible for second base. And Squatch would be behind the pitcher's mound, nominally responsible for calls at first and third, but also strategically placed in the center of the diamond.

"FIRST HINT OF TROUBLE, BOUNCE 'EM. THE LEAGUE CAN'T ALLOW A RUCKUS."

"Same rules as Not Chad's," Chad said to him. "First hint of trouble, bounce 'em. I can't have the league getting a reputation for allowing ruckus."

I wanted to make fun of Chad for using the word *ruckus,* but the park lights turned on that moment, illuminating the fields in a murky glow. I took my position in the outfield center, facing home plate. To my right, the Swashbucklers had raised a black pirate flag above their dugout, held fast to a long radio antenna. Across from them, Balls and Dolls were jumping rope to warm up, wearing matching tie-dyed uniforms and a rainbow array of Chuck Taylors.

It was then that I promised myself to go back to college, for good this time, to get a real-person job, to live a real-person life. I wasn't sure I could ever be more than a marine. But that didn't mean I couldn't be something other than one.

The game began normally enough. The Swashbucklers scored two runs in the first inning, which Balls and Dolls equaled in the second. Nearly everyone seemed well behaved, placid even. I couldn't decide whether we were dealing with overhype or just yuppie blowhards. From the outfield, it was tough to tell.

The exception proved the Swashbucklers' blonde pitcher. I kind of liked her, despite the holes Squatch had poked, despite the pit of whiskey she'd fallen into. She was alpha and suffered no fool. When her third baseman bobbled a bunt, his name became Swamp Donkey. When a kicker kept letting pitches roll past in the hope of a perfect ball, the blonde told her she'd "cunt punt" her if the next pitch wasn't kicked. And when Chad called a ball fair that she'd believed foul, she went in on his baldness with a cold, dark rage.

"Can you believe she teaches sixth graders?" I overheard some of her teammates. "Pre-algebra."

During the fourth inning, I looked up to find the moon punching through a dirty sky. Something about it reminded me of Al Hillah—the crescent silhouette, the flashlight authority, the way it stirred gooseflesh on my arms even though I'd put on a long sleeve to cover my tats, per Squatch's request. If I'd been the kind of person who believed in signs, I'd have taken it as one. But I wasn't, so I didn't. I just checked my phone for text messages I knew weren't there.

The whiskey was beginning to affect the blonde's command. Most of the Balls and

Dolls squad adjusted accordingly, but with the bases juiced and two outs, the Vice editor wasn't having it. After the third straight ball, he called out to the mound, "Roll it to the middle one, Lady Lush!"

The blonde was halfway to the plate when her catcher, a man-rooster greasy enough to be from Jersey, cracked the Vice editor from behind with a right cross to the ear.

I learned a few things about myself in the melee that evening. For one, while it didn't quite compete with combat, a stray elbow to the jaw got the blood howling too. For two, while I didn't like barista-poets, or hipsters, or post-hipsters, or privilege, I disliked assholes more. That's what the Swashbucklers were—nothing but a tribe of assholes. And for three, while carnage had its perks, it required more stamina than I'd recalled. If kickball ruckus was to become a recurring part of life, I'd need to hit the McCarren track more.

I also learned a few things about my cousin. Perhaps Squatch should've joined up after all. He was a goddamn hero that night in Williamsburg, tossing angry little people around like they were made of plush. Even Chad wasn't spared; our chrome-domed, chalice-sipping leader got mistaken for a kickball insurgent and wheeled into the infield dirt. By the time some semblance of order was restored, the greasy catcher had a torn shirt and a busted eye socket, the Vice editor was staggering off a concussion, and Squatch had gotten hold of the blonde pitcher, picking her up from the ground like she was a fitting toddler.

"Chill, Amy," Squatch said. She was kicking and trying to pry out of the grip he had around her waist. "It's over, it's all over. And it's all good."

"Fuck that!" She wasn't having any talk of peace, let alone reconciliation. "And fuck you. Lemme go, you fucking ogre fuck."

Squatch laughed her off, which only incited the whiskey fury. "You think that's funny? At least I have a real face."

Squatch tried to laugh that off too, less convincingly this time. I heard some snickering behind me. "Probably did something retarded to get like that," a voice said. It was hushed, but not hushed enough. "Like tripped over a bomb."

I didn't see what team the guy was on. It didn't matter. After a quick sweep of his knees, I had him on the ground and prostrate. I dug a sneaker into the back of his head and yanked up on his left arm, securing a wristlock. I heard some what-the-fucks and Fat Dyke Refs from the group but knew I was good. The women weren't man enough to come after me. Neither were the guys.

AFTER A QUICK SWEEP OF HIS KNEES, I HAD HIM ON THE GROUND.

"Apologize," I said, gritting my teeth out into a fake smile. "What you said wasn't nice."

The body beneath me objected, saying he didn't know what I was talking about. I raised up on his wrist ever so slightly, yielding a sharp whimper. A few more degrees and I'd snap it clean.

"Let's try again," I said.

"Sorry!" the body said. "Just let me up."

"Not good enough." Something like wrath, or clarity, or maybe even duty coursed within. I thought about Al Hillah, and the marines and soldiers there. I thought about the Iraqis there, and still there. Then I thought about Squatch, stupid Squatch and his stupid face and his stupid, stupid lie. All of that was this motherfucker's fault. He was everyone and no one all at once, which is not someone to be while snared in a wristlock.

"Repeat after me," I said.

"Okay," the body said.

"Marti," Squatch said. "Stop."

"I am a coward," I said.

"I am a coward," the body said.

"This isn't necessary," Squatch said.

"I don't appreciate what you did for me," I said.

"I don't appreciate what you did for me," the body said.

"Please stop," Squatch said.

"I am an infantile piece of shit," I said. "I play a child's game once a week to escape the yuppie void of my life. When confronted by a real person of experience, I mock, because I know how meaningless I am in comparison. Things like 'honor' and 'courage' and 'commitment' are just words to me, not values. Not ways of being."

"I can't remember all that!" the body said. "But yes, yes to it all, just let me up!"

"Marti," Squatch said. His hands were on my shoulders now. "Let go."

We decided to call the game, something even the man-roosters didn't protest. Squatch and I stood off to the side while Chad played negotiator and placated. Hands were shaken, backs were patted, half-assed apologies were half-assed. No one approached us, though, not even the blonde. She didn't look so drunk anymore, and wouldn't look Squatch's way. Balls and Dolls collected their jump ropes while a Swashbuckler lowered the pirate flag slowly, like it wasn't an act of acquiescence.

Though the police hadn't come this time, Chad thought it best he file a report, just in case. He thanked us, meaning it too, and walked off to the local precinct. Squatch asked if I'd join him for a beer at Not Chad's.

"We'll sit on the deck," he said. "Our people. Kickballers don't go back there."

I told him next time, not because I didn't want a drink or to talk things out, but because I needed to find someone, or at least try to.

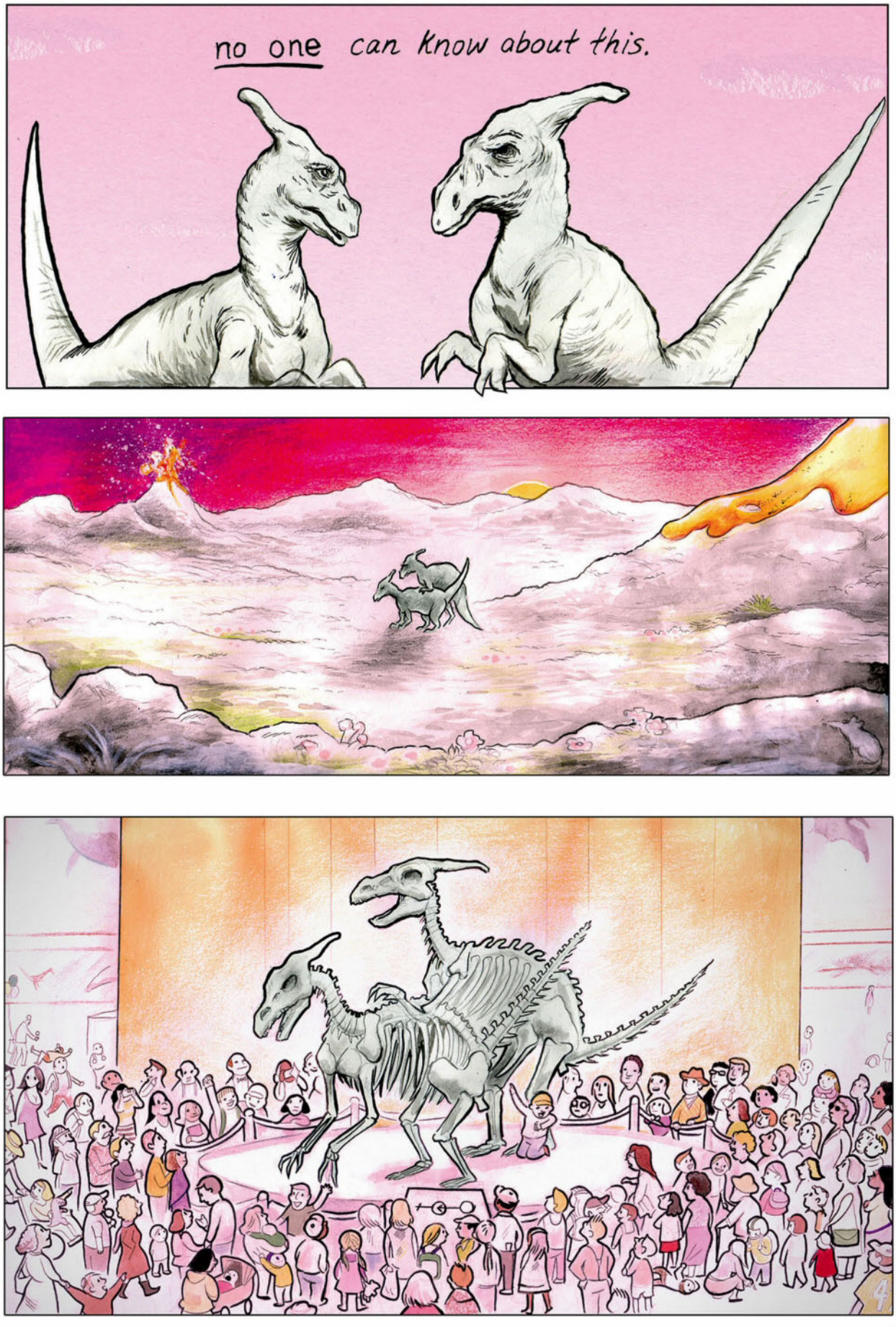
He exists, I thought. He always has.

I headed east, the direction he'd run the week before. East, away from the waterfront, away from the luxury condos and the vacant sugar refinery and the kickball fields in the hollow, away from fire-hydrant summers and spray-painted bull's heads and Muffin Town, away from everything I'd once known and then returned to.

The moon had fallen behind an armada of gray clouds, leaving the Brooklyn streets fantastically dark. Behind me, across the river, the Freedom Tower burned bright. I didn't turn around to find its red eye, though. I was walking east, east then east again, not slow, not fast either, thinking about what I'd do when I found the hipster marine.

"Yut, yut," I'd say.

"Kill," he'd say. ■



NICHOLAS GUREWITCH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID BELLEMERE

"The Dutch are very direct," says Miss August **Valerie van der Graaf,** who was born in Rotterdam, half an hour south of the Hague. "We prefer being honest. If we don't want to do something, we'll tell you." She pauses, thinking about whether her bluntness has ever gotten her into trouble. "I've been told I was rude at least a few times by an ex-lover," she adds with a chuckle. "But I'm just being me." Valerie, who now lives in London, loves talking about her hometown, a thriving modern city rebuilt after World War II whose government appointed a Muslim immigrant as mayor in 2008. "It's like a little New York and beautiful in a different way from Amsterdam," she says. When not traveling the globe for work, Valerie spends her downtime rooting for her local soccer clubs—Feyenoord in the Netherlands, Arsenal in England—and watching Eurovision obsessively. "I love traveling and exploring foreign cities. It's the best part of modeling, but I'm also pretty—how do you say it?—Euro trash," she says, laughing. "I love being European."

MISS AUGUST 2016

VALERIE VAN DER GRAAF

AGE: 24 **BIRTHPLACE:** Rotterdam, Netherlands **CURRENT CITY:** London, U.K.

THE VERY SMALL DOWNSIDE OF BEING DUTCH

I've been taking acting classes for the past year and a half. I appreciate both drama and comedy, as long as it's well written. But with my accent, a future in acting is not very realistic. It's going to take me a long time to get rid of it.

MY TYPICAL WEEKEND

My hometown is only an hour-long flight from London, so I can easily go visit friends and family on weekends. But I recently moved into a new flat in northwest London with a good friend, so I'm looking forward to having girlie time with her, watching movies and drinking malbec.

MY ATHLETIC SIDE

I'm not the best at sports, but I do love watching soccer. In 2012 I got tickets to the Olympic gold-medal women's hockey match between Argentina and the Netherlands. I went with three other Dutch women, all wearing orange, and the Netherlands won! We celebrated all night.

WHAT IS EUROVISION ANYWAY?

For the unfamiliar, Eurovision is one of the biggest music and song competitions in Europe, featuring competitors from every country. The contest promotes togetherness across the continent, and millions of viewers tune in to watch. The catch? You can't vote for your own country, but since I live in London I can get around that rule.

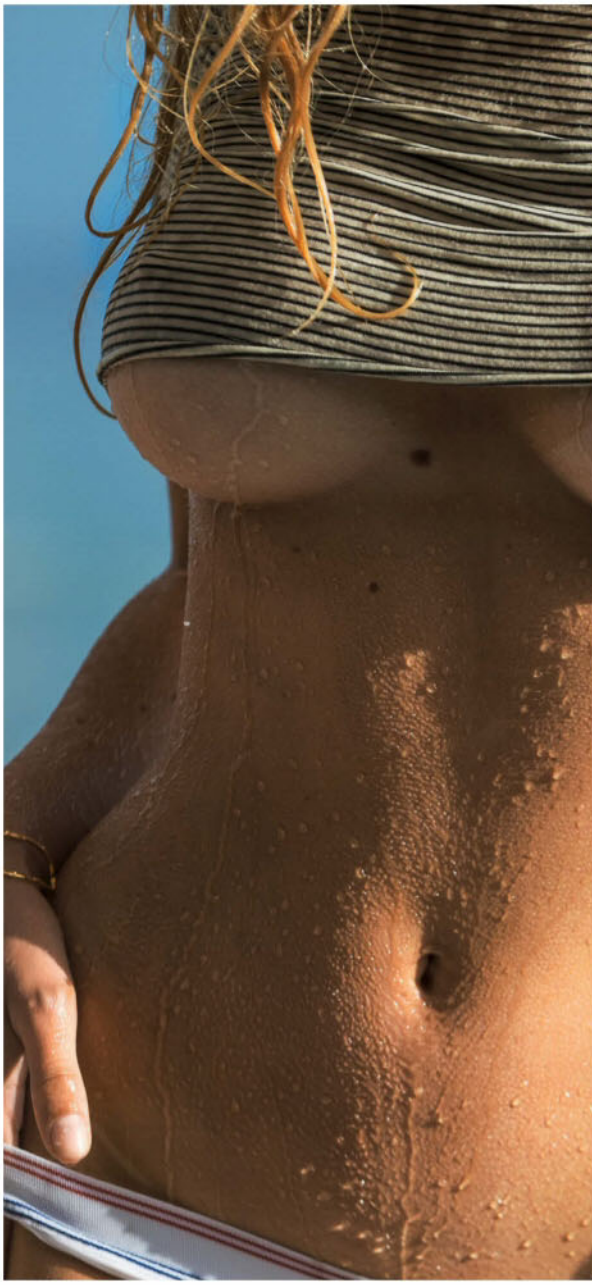
LONDON CALLING

If you're visiting London for the first time, go on the London Eye on a clear day. Then walk along the South Bank, which is lovely even in winter because of the stands selling mulled wine along the way. And of course you must go to a proper London pub.

BUT FIRST, WINE

The best thing about traveling in France, Italy or Spain is that you can go into any café and get an amazing glass of wine for four euros—practically nothing. Wine is cheaper there than Diet Coke, so why not drink it?

@ValerievdGraaf @ValerievdGraaf



The Gospel According to PAUL

In which we praise Ghostbusters director Paul Feig for challenging the way Hollywood handles freaks, geeks and funny women

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
DAN MONICK

BY **NEAL GABLER**

When Paul Feig, the enormously successful director of the comedies *Bridesmaids, The Heat* and *Spy,* arrives on the set of the female-led *Ghostbusters* reboot he's making in a cavernous football-field-size former Reebok warehouse off a lonely road in suburban Boston, it's hard to know what to make of him. Among the crew in their sneakers and T-shirts, Feig—who's six feet tall but so erect he looks taller and who speaks in a rich baritone that slices through the din—stands out in an impeccably fitted burgundy three-piece Savile Row suit from Anderson & Sheppard, with a matching polka-dot tie and a gold-headed walking stick. He's so well gotten-up, in the sort of outfit nobody outside *Downton Abbey* wears anymore, right down to the boutonniere in his lapel, that you might mistake him for a parody of the well-dressed man. Or you might figure that anyone who dresses so meticulously and anachronistically, so 19th century formal (who carries a walking stick these days?), must be some sort of geek.

And on this last point you'd be right.

Feig (pronounced FEEG) is not only a geek, he's a proud, self-professed geek. He earned this reputation with the much-loved and critically revered 1999 high school TV series *Freaks and Geeks,* which he created and which introduced audiences to James Franco, Seth Rogen and Jason Segel. Now, at 53, Feig is a master of the Hollywood universe. Although he's arguably the best comedy director around, he doesn't look like a Hollywood heavyweight, doesn't act like one and, he'll be quick to tell you, doesn't feel like one. The Beau Brummell clothes aren't the only things that make him different, though he admits they're another way he's out of sync with Hollywood: He used to wear jeans and T-shirts to meetings with the so-called suits, then decided he'd meet them on their own sartorial turf by wearing suits too. It was the very moment the suits did a 180 and decided to dress down. "And it immediately became this thing," he says, "where they're like, 'Here's this rube who's got his Sunday suit on.' "

But the other reasons Feig seems so un-Hollywood-like are his casual manner, his boyish diffidence, his accessibility and candor and niceness—all of which are remarkable in an industry notorious for its arrogance, machismo and secretiveness. To put it bluntly, for all his success, Feig is still a geek—the guy the popular kids bullied in school. But he's a geek who discovered something on which he has predicated his entire career. Feig discovered that feeling like an outsider is universal and that there are a lot more outsiders (more of him) than there are cool kids.

That's Paul Feig's secret: He's an outsider who makes movies about outsiders for outsiders.

• • •

Start with *Freaks and Geeks.* Feig says that when he began writing scripts in Los Angeles, he got it in his head that "if you're writing about stuff that has happened to you or happened to people you know, you're not really writing. A real writer invents everything from scratch." Unfortunately, he found that the ideas that came from his imagination didn't seem to work. He also found that when he was out with friends, regaling them with stories of his excruciating childhood in Mount Clemens, Michigan, outside Detroit—"the most humiliating stories"—he would "just destroy everybody." And, he says of the stories, "I had a million of them, because they all happened." There was the story of the time his middle-school classmates "dog-piled" him in the locker room because he was too modest to take a shower in front of them, or the time they pummeled him during a sadistic game of dodgeball. Or the one about finding a Nazi flag his father had brought back from World War II

and innocently hanging it in the window of his house. Or the one about dressing up like a girl for Halloween. Or the one about taking a job announcing the high school football game and mangling the players' long Polish names. And there were the ones about his cowardice, his germophobia, his mild case of undiagnosed Tourette's, which he expended enormous energy trying to mask, and his detestation of athletics: "I enjoy playing sports about as much as I enjoy slamming my fingers in a car door." And then of course there were the ongoing humiliations, being called everything from "Fig Newton" to "Paul Fag," which became his unshakable tag throughout school.

It helps to understand that it's highly unlikely anything good would have happened to Paul Feig if he hadn't lived through adolescent torture. Sitting in that Reebok warehouse amid the sweet odor of sawdust, surrounded by 10 massive sets including a full-scale hotel lobby and a New York subway station complete with gum on the floor, he admits he takes a different approach from many other directors—the martinets who demand the upper hand. "I have a very hard time yelling at people or having any kind of ugly moment with anybody," he says, "because those moments in my life were so terrible that the thought of browbeating anybody or being mean to anybody...." The rest goes unspoken. This is, after all, a man who once moved across the country, from Detroit to Los Angeles, in large part because he didn't have the heart to tell a girlfriend he wanted to break up with her.

FREAKS AND GEEKS WAS A REFUTATION OF THE "COOL GUY" TEENAGE SHOWS AND MOVIES. THE SCRIPT POURED OUT OF HIM.

The Feig directorial style is loose and happy and nonconfrontational, and he says he wants his pictures to feel like a party. On the *Ghostbusters* set, Feig shoots a scene a few times the way he and his co-writer, Katie Dippold, originally scripted it. Then he lets the actors play with the lines while he and the crew stifle their laughs. "Oh, that's just an invitation for the annual flapjack breakfast," Kristen Wiig says nonchalantly when Melissa McCarthy sheepishly proffers her an envelope from Columbia University she's been hiding because she's afraid it contains an offer for Wiig to go back to work there. "But you like flapjacks," McCarthy says quietly. When Wiig rips up the envelope and tosses it away, she pauses nervously: "That was probably my last paycheck." Or there's a scene when another ghostbuster, played by Kate McKinnon of *Saturday Night Live,* is toying with a complicated contraption and proudly announces, "I call it the nutcracker." To which Wiig says, "Because it will crack the ghosts?" "No, because I use it to crack nuts!" They may do as many as 15 takes. As Feig puts it, "I try to shoot as much as I can so things can just happen in the moment." He realizes that's the reason he and most other comedy directors aren't likely to get much credit. "Comedy has to look effortless," he says. "But in looking effortless, it looks like it was easy."

It's hard to ascribe the word *easy* to Feig, because so little has come easily to him. He was an only child of two parents who met at a Christian Science church social just over the Michigan border in Canada and got married late in life. His dad, a frustrated performer with a file of jokes he'd heard, ran an army surplus store. His mom, a housewife, was a frustrated performer too, but she channeled her ambitions into her son. Feig's epiphany came in second or third grade during a school assembly when the class sang the calypso number "Yellow Bird" and, with a conga drum strapped across his chest and a straw hat on his head, he began to exaggeratedly pretend to play and, hearing "huge laughs," kept milking them. A classmate told him later that their teacher, Miss Hill, on whom young Feig had a huge crush, was "laughing so hard she was crying." He recalls, "That was when I said, 'I want to do this.' "

His mother became his accomplice. With her encouragement, Feig took dance lessons, guitar lessons, drum lessons, even ballet lessons. At 15, after seeing stand-up comedians on a show called *Make Me Laugh,* he came up with his own act comprising terrible jokes ripped off from Johnny Carson. He had his parents drive him to a comedy club cum biker bar called Delta Lady in a rough section of Detroit, where he performed and got "hooked just being in front of a crowd." In his room at night he would put on a white suit, pick up a RadioShack microphone, play Steve Martin's album *Let's Get Small* and pantomime the entire thing. He may have had no control over the abuse heaped on him in real life, but performing was a "way to control people's perception" of him.

After high school, Feig attended Wayne State University in Detroit and took a screenwriting class. His teacher said she thought he was good enough to write comedy for a living, which is all the encouragement he needed. He applied and was accepted to the University of Southern California's film school and, with a deep sense of homesickness, headed out to Los Angeles to become another Woody Allen.

The trouble was there weren't many would-be Woody Allens at USC. "It was all about art films," he says. "I would come in with these goofy comedies, and they wouldn't even know what to do." He made an animation about Pac-Man eating too many dots and throwing up, and his senior project was a film about a man whose girlfriend goes off to sea and leaves him with a gift that, she says, he must take with him everywhere he goes to prove he loves her: a giant stuffed albatross. A perplexed professor asked him if he had suffered some trauma that made him afraid of drama. "No, I just like funny," he said.

Among his fellow students he was an outsider and a "kind of Midwestern yokel." He gravitated toward oddballs, and his friends were, he says, "all shades of nerd." Although he had many girl friends, he didn't have many girlfriends and didn't lose his virginity until he was 24.

After graduation he got a job reading scripts for producer Michael Phillips, discovered he could write as well as the folks who made a living at it and began to work his way back into performing stand-up. But he felt comedy required a full-time commitment that he didn't have the resources to support. And then he found those resources in the nerdiest way possible: He won $29,000 on the Dick Clark–hosted quiz show *The $25,000 Pyramid.* With this grubstake, Feig began performing seven nights a week, doing a set that consisted less

To one nasty critic of his female-led *Ghostbusters* reboot, Feig tweeted, "You've been ranting at me and my cast for months with misogyny and insults. So go fuck yourself. Good night."

of jokes than of characters, including a humorless wood-shop teacher named Willard Schmidt who decides to do comedy. After six months, Feig earned a spot on the TV show *Paramount Comedy Theater,* hosted by Howie Mandel, got an agent and a few small parts in such movies as *Ski Patrol* and *Zombie High,* and for the next several years worked as a comic on the West Coast circuit. He eventually left stand-up for acting full-time, landing small parts on a variety of shows, from *The Louie Show* starring Louie Anderson to *The Jackie Thomas Show* starring Tom Arnold to *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch,* playing Sabrina's odd science teacher. "They were big shows," Feig says, "but they all bombed"—all except *Sabrina.* He took $30,000 of his earnings from that show to underwrite *Life Sold Separately,* a small indie he wrote and directed, finishing the film just as he was written out of *Sabrina* after the season one finale.

"That led to the worst year of my life," Feig says. "I was fucked." He couldn't get the film into festivals. He had run out of money. His agent had let him go. And after a good 15 years of stand-up and acting, he saw nothing on the horizon. He was so desperate he contemplated leaving show business and going to work in a bookstore. And then he got *Freaks and Geeks.* And then it was canceled.

• • •

Feig was 37, ancient for Hollywood, by the time he realized the appeal of his teenage embarrassments. Feig was on a college tour for his film when, partly inspired by *Felicity,* a show his friend J.J. Abrams had co-created, he sat down in his hotel room and began to dash out the pilot for *Freaks and Geeks.* For him, the script was a refutation of what he calls the "cool guy" teenage shows and movies. "I don't like bullies," he says, "and I don't like the confident guy who comes in kind of swinging his dick." The guys he knew in high school never had any confidence. The script poured out of him. The timing couldn't have been more propitious. His friend Judd Apatow had just signed a deal with DreamWorks to develop television projects. Feig sent him the script; Apatow loved it and said he wanted to make it. And as Feig puts it, "Everything changed there."

Freaks and Geeks was Feig's life story—the story of a small band of geek-nerds who love science fiction, film their own clay animations, make friends with girls, creep cautiously through the minefield of adolescent angst and, as a result of all these things, are the targets of teenage savagery. "We would sit around the writers' room and everybody would be telling a terrible story," Feig recalls of working on *Freaks and Geeks,* "and then I would tell the most horrendous story ever." It was actually a great time, transforming humiliation into entertainment, and Feig got to write and direct. Then NBC scheduled the show during the Saturday night TV graveyard, then rescheduled it on Monday—against the ratings juggernaut *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire.* Critical praise notwithstanding, the show tanked. It lasted 18 episodes, only 12 of which aired. Feig's own postmortem: "It was just the wrong time for us to be on." Still, with its cult status Feig could have expected to have finally arrived.

"Right after it, everyone wanted to work with me," Feig recalls. "It was always, 'We want your voice.' But then I'd develop these things, and it was like, 'Oh, well, we want your voice, but not doing that!' " He was sent scads of scripts about cool teenage guys with nerdy best-friend sidekicks, but he demurred, knowing firsthand that cool guys never had nerdy best friends. Meanwhile, Apatow had landed the new series *Undeclared,* and suddenly *he* was acknowledged as the creator of *Freaks and Geeks.* "I just kind of erased myself" is how Feig describes

"I don't like bullies, and I don't like the confident guy who comes in kind of swinging his dick," Feig says of the inspiration for *Freaks and Geeks.*

that period in the early 2000s. "I really went into a bad place."

To make matters worse, Feig's beloved mother had died just weeks before *Freaks and Geeks* was canceled. When a producer sent him a novel about a boy in an Eastern European Communist relocation camp who goes looking for his mother, hoping Feig would direct it, he took it. The movie, *I Am David,* bombed, putting Feig in what he calls "movie jail." He went back to TV, directing episodes of *Arrested Development, The Office* and half a dozen other shows, which in turn led to another movie—a comedy based on a story from the radio show *This American Life* about children of divorced couples caught in limbo during the holidays. The trouble was that the studio head, who was divorced, thought the script denigrated divorced parents, so he demanded a rewrite that gutted the divorce element, which was the whole movie. If *I Am David* put Feig in movie jail, *Unaccompanied Minors* tossed him into solitary.

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Feig is sitting in a small, dimly lit gray room in a storefront off a quiet Burbank street where he has been spending 11-hour days in front of three computer screens. There are hundreds of jokes in the new *Ghostbusters,* and Feig and his longtime editor Brent White will keep changing them in and out, finally testing them at eight or nine screenings to see which ones the audiences like best. His movies can be hysterically funny, but Feig would be the first to tell you that a movie can be too funny for its own good and that a joke isn't just about getting a laugh; it's about touching the audience's own experience. The source of his comedy, he says, is sadness—"people trying to find out who they are and trying to do the right thing." He believes he has been successful because all his films connect to his own mortification. When audiences laugh at a Feig movie, he believes they're laughing at embarrassments he has suffered and, more important, that they might have suffered themselves. His is the comedy of humiliation, abuse, sadness and, finally, redemption. It's the revenge of the outsider.

Fittingly, it was sadness that finally earned him his release from movie jail and catapulted him into the top directing ranks. It was 2007. He was 45 and directing a lot of TV, even an episode of *Mad Men,* but he still yearned to make movies. He had just directed a group of internet ads for Macy's starring Donald Trump, Tommy Hilfiger and Martha Stewart in New York when he suffered what he called a mini-breakdown—a sense that he was just "running down the clock" on his career and had to come to terms with the fact that he would never realize his dreams. That very night he got a call from his agent telling him that a script he'd worked on with Kristen Wiig of *SNL* and her writing partner Annie Mumolo that had been left for dead was suddenly alive again. It was a dramedy about a maid of honor who humiliates herself in the run-up to her best friend's wedding in a jealous competition with a richer, more chi-chi bridesmaid she thinks is usurping her. Feig could identify.

Apatow had commissioned Wiig and Mumolo's script and asked Feig to tweak and direct it. Although Feig felt that having his old friend revive his film career was like "crawling back to Dad," he also realized it was his last chance to direct again—his strike three, as he calls it. He hoped it would succeed, but he had no expectation it would be a breakthrough. "It was a wedding movie," he says with mock derision. But it wasn't like any other wedding movie, and the scene in a haute wedding-dress shop, where the bridesmaids suddenly find themselves suffering a serious bout of food poisoning, became an instant classic. "Something terrible is happening," he says, "and everybody is trying to pretend it's not. That's what's funny to us." It is Feig in a nutshell.

The other funny thing about *Bridesmaids* is Melissa McCarthy. Feig hadn't known McCarthy when her friend Wiig suggested she come in to read for the part of Megan, the groom's dotty sister. Though nothing in the writing indicated it, McCarthy played the role as though Megan were butch. Feig recalls, "I was going like, What is she doing? Is she playing like a guy?" And then she suddenly pirouetted and became oversexed. When he showed the audition tape to Apatow, the producer said, "This is one of the funniest people we've ever seen." McCarthy is the perfect Feig actress because, like Feig himself, she knows how to play humiliation and how to wring laughs out of her ability to withstand and even be impervious to it.

After *Bridesmaids,* which grossed nearly $300 million, Feig was determined not to make another career mistake. He signed on to do the third *Bridget Jones* movie, discovered he didn't have the heart for it and then wrote a romantic comedy for McCarthy and Jon Hamm. When the two stars began to waffle, Feig was certain he'd blown another opportunity. Weeks later, he got an untitled script for a female-cop buddy picture that Sandra Bullock was interested in. He read it and immediately thought of McCarthy. They shot the film quickly, and *The Heat,* which doubles down on geekdom with two outcasts—one an

officious neat freak, the other an incorrigible slob—became Feig's second giant success.

He didn't write his next film, *Spy,* for McCarthy, but she was having dinner at his Burbank home one night, asked if she could see what he was working on and called him the next morning to say she wanted to do it. He says he rewrote the role of the shy CIA secretary who's enlisted for fieldwork to reflect the kind and decent woman he knew McCarthy to be, but one who doubts herself and is underestimated, which also describes Feig. (He says the film relationship between McCarthy and superspy Jude Law draws on his relationship with Apatow.) *Spy* became Feig's third critical and financial success, and it made him and McCarthy the funniest comedy team in the business.

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It was no accident that with *Spy* Feig had made three movies with female protagonists. "I'm not interested anymore in the problems of men," he says. "I've seen them portrayed ad nauseam over my whole life." Feig loves women—not in the sense that he's a lothario (he says that he has slept with only three women in his life, including his wife), but in the sense that he loves who women are and how they act. "I'd go and hang out with the guys outside of my geeky friends," he says of his childhood, "and I was like, Ah, I don't like what's happening here; it's too aggressive. They were punching each other and punching me." With girls it was different. He was more comfortable being with them. "I guess I'm just a feminine kind of guy," he admits. Even when he met his wife, Laurie, through a mutual friend, part of the attraction was that she was a Jerry Lewis fanatic and thought Feig had a Jerry Lewis vibe. They've been together for 25 years, the first four of which she served as his manager, and married for 21. They have no children, in part because, Feig confesses, "I was terrified I would have a boy" and wouldn't know what to do with him. "If I had a girl, she would be golden."

"I'M NOT INTERESTED IN THE PROBLEMS OF MEN. I'VE SEEN THEM PORTRAYED AD NAUSEAM."

The irony isn't lost on Feig that the leading director of women happens to be a man. Women relate to geeky Feig—his production partner, Jessie Henderson, is a woman—and they appreciate his sensitivity in an industry where men can be dismissive or even hostile toward women. Citing comments that women's comic sensibility is different from men's, Wiig, who has been in three of his movies, says, "Women like to work with him because he really doesn't see them as any different. He's always just been like, 'Okay, funny is funny.' "

More, Feig resents the way women are treated in Hollywood, and just as *Freaks and Geeks* was his antidote to the macho way men are portrayed on screen, his films are an antidote to the way women are typically portrayed. "A powerful woman is an ice queen" is how he describes the ways most screenwriters depict women. "The wife is overbearing and keeps the hero from saving the world because he has to spend time with his family. The girl is a bitch because she won't let you hang out with your friends." Above all, as an outsider himself, he understands that women are gender outsiders in a man's world. In fact, he thinks women are portrayed negatively either because most men in Hollywood are adult adolescents making films for adolescents who don't take women seriously, or because they were once wronged by women and movies are their revenge. Feig is the women's revenge. The logo of his company, Feigco, is a well-dressed woman (naturally) hiding a large and ominous pair of garden shears behind her back.

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So now Feig is in his office at the Burbank editing room, on a conference call with the producer of *Ghostbusters* and the marketing arm of Sony Pictures, the film's studio, debating a new teaser trailer that Feig isn't happy with. They want to end it with a scare. He wants it to end with the ghostbusters standing bold and defiant. On the walls are a black-and-white photo of McCarthy with her hands clamped over Wiig's breasts, a huge metal S&H Green Stamps sign, a *Peanuts* cartoon (Feig, a human Charlie Brown, produced the recent *Peanuts* movie) and a vintage World War II sign featuring a woman in uniform, with the inscription WHEN SOMEONE ASKS OF A FEMALE SOLDIER, ARE YOU A GODDESS, YOU SAY YES!

Ghostbusters is by far Feig's biggest movie, but when Ivan Reitman, who'd produced and directed the first two *Ghostbusters* films, asked Feig if he might be interested in doing the third, he was loath to make it. Although ecstatic that he'd reached such a point in his career that he would be asked, he also saw the pitfalls of taking on a classic. He declined, then declined again when Amy Pascal, Sony's co-chair at the time, tried to change his mind. And he wasn't the only one who had doubts. No one seemed to want to risk the sacrilege of making another *Ghostbusters*.

Still, the prospect haunted him. He was out on his daily morning power walk when he got to thinking about how one could do a new *Ghostbusters* without violating the original. Let's just think of the dumbest possible solution, he told himself. And what popped into his head was not making a third installment but doing a reboot showing what would happen if ghosts suddenly started to appear again and doing it with a female-driven cast. Sony loved it.

Not everyone was enamored of the prospect of casting women as ghostbusters, even women as hilarious as McCarthy, Wiig, McKinnon and another *SNL* regular, Leslie Jones. Feig was excoriated in social media for daring it—the geek once again being bullied. "We would joke about it," Wiig says. " 'Oh, people think we're just breaking nails and running from ghosts, screaming.' " Feig and his cast were offended by the misogyny, and they fired back. To one especially nasty critic, Feig tweeted, "You've been ranting at me and my cast for months with misogyny and insults. So go fuck yourself. Good night," and McCarthy organized a huge group photo of all the women on the set with the sign GIRL POWER in front.

It's good to be king of the underdogs, but even after making *Ghostbusters* Feig doesn't feel unassailable. An eternal pessimist, he conducted a personal study of how people he admires, mostly comedy directors, have gone off the rails and ruined their careers. But watching his comedy epic on the monitor in his editing room, wearing his three-piece suit, his walking stick at his side, and idly tossing a Hacky Sack in the air, he has a wide smile on his face that no one can wipe off. For the time being at least, geeks rule. ■

Cuba *Libre*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JEAN PIERROT** MODEL **LISE OLSEN**

Americans are free to visit Cuba for the first time in decades. Although politics stipulate that such trips be predicated on cultural education, Cuba's rich traditions, from rum to baseball, ensure that any lesson the island imparts will be decidedly recreational. To celebrate the end of the travel ban, PLAYBOY commissioned photographer Jean Pierrot to shoot model Lise Olsen on the vibrant streets of Havana and in the historic Flamboyanes House, designed by renowned Cuban architect Emilio Castro. "Havana is surrealistic—the last defiant stand against the forces of globalism," Pierrot reports. "The first glance is overwhelming, but an hour after the shock, one may already be sipping mojitos. The Cuban life can be easygoing and unbothered."

MOLLY CRABAPPLE

I first met Molly Crabapple, the sexy goth girl next door—she'd be as comfortable in the PLAYBOY *of yore as she is in this feature—at an alt-comix festival in lower Manhattan about eight years ago. At the time, she was drawing an erotic fin-de-siècle-styled comic book about a Jewish fire-eating burlesque queen named Scarlett O'Herring. Molly, who had actually worked as a fire-eating burlesque queen herself while a struggling art student, soon figured out that comix was a sucker's game: One usually gets paid far less for making lots of illustrations on a page than for drawing just one. "Comix required a work ethic I didn't have," she tells me. ¶ Living across from Zuccotti Park when it was ground zero for the Occupy movement radicalized her—though if the personal is political, she always had a heightened political awareness—and Molly reinvented herself (she's done a lot of that) as an artist-reporter engagé. She's an accomplished writer (her jazzy memoir, Drawing Blood, proves that), but her journalistic drawings return art to its Goya-like function of announcing, "I saw this." The age of Photoshop and Instagram has outed the camera as a slicker liar than any presidential candidate, but a drawing is personal, so you can decide to trust it. (As Molly puts it, "You take a photo, but you make a picture.") Even documenting recent trips to Guantánamo, Turkey, Dubai, Syria and Gaza, her sensuous devouring eye leads to pictures that are simultaneously earnest and smart-assed, serious and playful. Her art proclaims, to paraphrase what her hero Emma Goldman insisted a century ago, "If I can't dance, I don't want your revolution!"—Art Spiegelman*

Above: Portrait of the artist. **Opposite page:** *Toppled statue of Hafez al-Assad in Raqqa.* Pen, ink and dye on Arches paper, 12 x 16 inches, 2016.


سيعود

Opposite page: *Illustration for "In the Court of Purity"* (from *Index on Censorship*). Pen, ink and dye on Arches paper, 16 x 12 inches, 2015. **Top:** *Israeli soldiers confiscate my friend's ID in Hebron, Occupied West Bank*. Pen, ink and dye on Arches paper, 12 x 16 inches, 2016. **Bottom left:** *Son of a militia sniper in Tripoli, Lebanon*. Pen, ink and dye on Arches paper, 16 x 12 inches, 2016. **Bottom right:** *Israeli soldiers guard settlers in the old city of Hebron, Occupied West Bank*. Pen, ink and dye on Arches paper, 12 x 16 inches, 2015.

VIETNAM, 1966

Playmate of the Year 1965 Jo Collins signs her Centerfold while visiting troops in Bien Hoa.

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REVERSE:
An eagle holds both arrows and an olive branch, symbolizing strength as well as the desire for peace

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