Will Solar Eclipse Be Unnatural Disaster?

Newsweek

INTERNATIONAL

11.08.2017

SIX *months in office*

40 *days at golf clubs*

ZERO *pieces of major legislation*

LAZY BOY

Donald Trump is bored and tired. Imagine how bad he'd feel if he did any work

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HEBA KHAMIS

+

PAINFUL MISTAKE: Breast ironing is an attempt to prevent rape and other sexual abuse. But in reality, the process won't stop breasts from developing, and won't stop the abuse, making it extra tragic.

FEATURES

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Tinalbarka wants to be a lawyer.
She and her family fled violence in Mali.

We stand together #WithRefugees

PHOTO: © UNHCR / A. DRAGAJ

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BIG SHOTS

PHILIPPINES

Cops and Toddlers

Saguiaran, Philippines—Displaced children stand next to police gear on July 24. Fierce fighting between government forces and militants inspired by the Islamic State group (ISIS) has prompted hundreds of thousands to flee Marawi, the only predominantly Muslim city in the country. The authorities set up evacuation centers, but many are overcrowded and unsanitary, according to Reuters. The Philippine Congress voted to extend martial law in the country's south in hopes of crushing the militants, leading some to fear that President Rodrigo Duterte is trying to impose permanent authoritarian rule.

JES AZNAR

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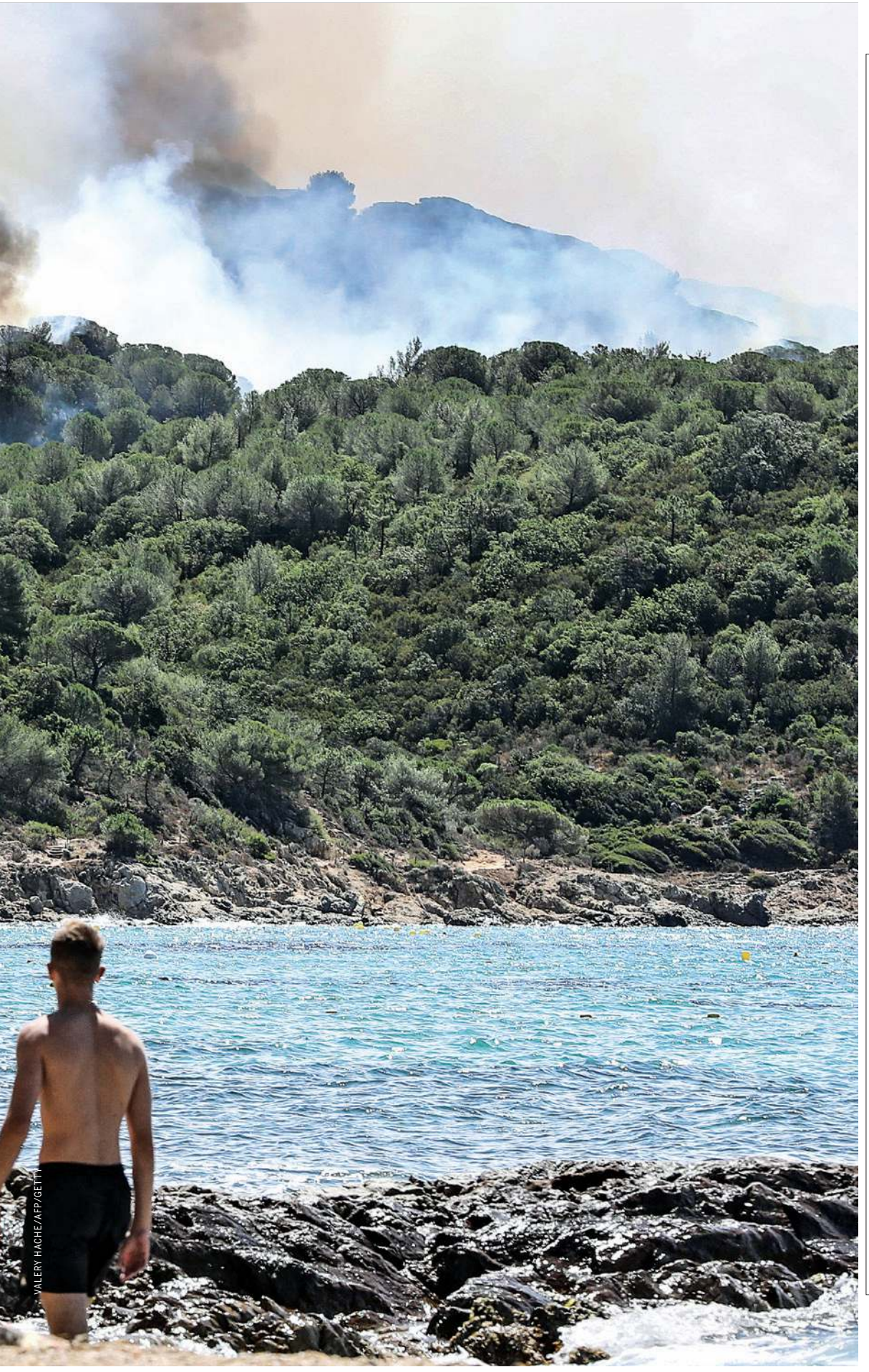

VALERY HACHE/AFP/GETTY

FRANCE

Sun. Burn

La Croix-Valmer, France—Beachgoers have too good a view of a forest fire in La Croix-Valmer, near St.-Tropez, on July 25. France's Mediterranean coast is experiencing a particularly dry, hot summer, making it more susceptible to fire, according to *The Guardian*, and wildfires have forced thousands of people to evacuate the area. Thousands of firefighters have been battling the flames, which have consumed large swaths of southeastern France and spread to Italy, Corsica and Portugal.

VALERY HACHE

THE DONALD'S DUMPSTER FIRE

President Trump has a majority in Congress. So why has his agenda largely gone up in flames?

IT WAS CHAOS—even by the standards of Donald Trump. In one 24-hour period in late July, the president announced—on Twitter—that the U.S. would ban transgender people from serving in the military. Despite Trump's claims to the contrary, the move stunned the military brass, who said the president's tweet was not the law of the land.

If that wasn't bizarre enough, hours later, the new (and already departed) White House communications director, Anthony Scaramucci, accused Reince Priebus, then White House chief of staff, of leaking information to the press. "If Reince wants to explain that he's not a leaker, let him do that," Scaramucci fumed on CNN. On top of that, he told *The New Yorker* that Priebus is a "fucking paranoid schizophrenic." (Trump later replaced his chief of staff with John Kelly.) Across town, Senate Republicans were unable to repeal Obamacare, while the president continued his campaign to bully Attorney General Jeff Sessions into resigning. The reason: Sessions's March decision to recuse himself from the investigation into Russian interference in the presidential election. Meanwhile, as that scandal continued to play out, the White House refused to say if Trump would sign a sanctions bill against Russia (as well as Iran and North Korea) that Congress overwhelmingly passed. (The White House later signaled he would sign it.)

The president's erratic behavior, the infighting among White House staff and the slapdash creation of public policy have taken a toll on even hardcore conservatives. Just six months ago, Republicans believed Trump, despite his flaws, would notch at least a few legislative victories. Instead, all they've gotten is one dumpster fire after another. As John McCain put it, following his dramatic return to the Senate after surgery for a brain tumor, "Nothing is getting done." And it was McCain's dramatic, middle-of-the-night vote against a "skinny repeal" of Obamacare that delivered the coup de grâce to GOP efforts to repeal it.

BY
MATTHEW COOPER
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JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY

MAVERICK MOVE: John McCain's dramatic, middle-of-the-night vote against a "skinny repeal" of Obamacare delivered the coup de grâce to GOP efforts to repeal it.

+

MOOCHO PROBLEMAS: In a strange public spat, then-White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci accused Reince Priebus, then White House chief of staff, of leaking to the press.

JABIN BOTSFORD/THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY

Health care is the prime example of why the Trump years are proving so unproductive. In late July, after weeks of floundering, the Senate opened up the floor to any and all ideas. Normally, this kind of "vote-o-rama," as it's called, is used to amend legislation. But there was no bill to amend because lawmakers had rejected all previous iterations. "Let the voting take us where it will," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, abandoning his normally meticulous leadership to fate.

Republicans were riven over how to change Obamacare. GOP moderates didn't want to roll back the law's expansion of Medicaid. Almost 70 million Americans get Medicaid benefits, including 64 percent of people in nursing homes. Conservatives hated that their party was even considering keeping regulations and expenses, such as requiring insurance companies to adhere to pricing guidelines and handing out large subsidies for those same companies. Compromise proved impossible.

But the big question plaguing Republicans isn't just why health care died. It's why they can't pass much of anything at all. The country has a GOP president, the largest GOP majority in the House of Representatives since 1928 and a GOP majority in the Senate. Surely the Trump administration should have real accomplishments to brag about, not just the president's empty bluster. The answer lies in questionable decisions by Team Trump and the Republican leadership in Congress, as well as structural problems that have made it more difficult for lawmakers to be as productive as they were in previous decades.

The worst decision the White House made was starting with health care instead of tax reform, which has wider support, or infrastructure, which even has support from Democrats. Health care has bedeviled presidents for generations, beginning with President Harry Truman's failed attempts to create national health insurance in the 1940s. Two decades later, President Lyndon Johnson signed Medicare and Medicaid legislation, but sweeping health care reform has proved to be a political nightmare. It led to the Democrats' loss of control of Congress in 1994, when Hillary Clinton's health plan was too weak to even bring to a vote. President Barack Obama was able to push through the Affordable Care Act—

barely—even with a huge Democratic majority in the Senate. And the fallout cost the Democrats control of Congress.

There was no reason to assume changing the nation's health care system would be any easier under Trump. Though the public initially blanched at it, Obamacare, with its mammoth expansion of Medicaid, has become ingrained. And Republicans have only a slight Senate majority: 52 votes out of the chamber's 100 members. That gives just a few grandstanding senators power to derail legislation—even if there's no use of the filibuster, which raises the bar to 60 votes. Vice President Mike Pence had to break a tie in the Senate just to get the health care debate started.

It's possible to push through legislation on party-line votes, which is what Obama did with the Affordable Care Act. But big pieces of legislation tend to require bipartisan support to pass, such as Reaganomics in the 1980s, welfare reform in the 1990s and the No Child Left Behind Act in the 2000s. All have their critics now, but they had major bipartisan support at the time. The late New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan understood this, which is why the Democrat begged the Clinton White House to work with him and Republican Senate Leader Bob Dole on a bipartisan health care bill in 1994. "I pleaded with the White House that in the Senate a measure of this importance either has 80 votes or 40 votes," Moynihan said. No one listened.

The other problems hobbling Trump and the GOP majority are manifold and may even hurt Democrats if they take over one or both chambers. There's been a breakdown of the historic "regular order" by lawmakers considering bills. Normally, Congress goes through committees, debates legislation in public and votes on it in the respective chambers, before a House and Senate conference committee hammers out the differences between the two chambers. In the case of health care, McConnell bypassed committees and handed crafting something to 13 members—all white men—and came up with a bill no one liked that never passed.

But McConnell is hardly alone. Over the past few years, the White House and the congressional leadership have mostly hammered out big deals in secret, bypassing the normal committee system. Former Speaker of the House John Boehner infamously tried to come up with a grand spending bargain with Obama in 2012 and failed.

Yet the Trump White House is making things far worse for Republicans because it's unable to create policy in a serious way. Consider infrastructure. The administration still hasn't offered more than a skeletal outline of what it wants. This is a wasted opportunity. Democrats like Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi have signaled that they want to participate in an effort to repair the nation's roads, bridges and electrical grid. Democratic constituencies are on board too, including multiple unions. And so are Republican governors, who largely opposed the GOP's health care efforts. Yet infrastructure is a fairly low priority for many Republicans in Congress, who are resistant to additional spending and repeatedly called Obama's stimulus plan wasteful. To win them over, Trump needs to have a more concrete—pardon the pun—proposal, and he has to sell it. So far, he hasn't.

THE WORST DECISION THE WHITE HOUSE MADE WAS STARTING WITH HEALTH CARE INSTEAD OF TAX REFORM OR INFRASTRUCTURE

The administration's next best hope is tax reform, and that won't be easy either. The last time Congress simplified the tax code, by eliminating deductions and lowering rates, was in 1986. At the end of July, Trump's top economic team and the GOP leadership in Congress put out a statement calling for reform, along with some broad principles. But they have yet to focus on closing a single tax loophole, and high-priced lobbyists will line up to preserve the status quo.

Back in the '80s, tax reform was dubbed the Showdown at Gucci Gulch. Can Trump prevail in this year's version of the OK Corral? If his July antics were any indication, don't bet on it.

DESERTED DESERT

Can trained Bedouin guides lure tourists back to Egypt?

HOSNI MUBARAK has been walking the Egyptian desert for most of his life. He knows where to find shelter in a flood, what plants are medicinal and when a storm is coming. As a Bedouin from the Jabaliya tribe, his territory lies in the hills surrounding Mount Sinai, where Moses is said to have received the Ten Commandments from God. Last year, he was selected for a program training young Bedouin to become guides to the south Sinai, and he has mastered skills like first aid and GPS navigation. He wants to be part of a grassroots tourist industry that will revitalize a community battered by geopolitical disaster.

Tourism became a mainstay of the economy

BY
BETHAN STATON
@bthsts

TOURIST TRAP: After an ISIS-affiliated insurgency overwhelmed parts of the north Sinai, tourists stopped coming, fearing violence and unrest.

DAVID DEGNER/GETTY (2)

of Sinai in the 1980s. The peninsula's coral-rich waters and rugged mountains attracted hikers, divers and sunseekers, providing lucrative work for local Bedouin. But Egypt's 2011 revolution destabilized what had been a thriving industry: Unrest, autocracy and instability swept Egypt, and an insurgency affiliated with the Islamic State militant group (ISIS) overwhelmed parts of the north Sinai. Frightened tourists stopped coming. In the first quarter of 2016, after militants bombed a Russian jet that was flying out of Sharm el-Sheikh, tourism revenue in Egypt fell 66 percent.

Departing tourists left behind more than empty hotels. The local people who now worked in tourism had shifted away from traditional ways of life. Some Bedouin families sold their goats or abandoned the gardens they had tended for years; skills like navigating the desert or surviving in nature, developed over centuries, began to fade. "We lost a lot of things: our traditions, our culture," Sheikh Ahmed Abu Rashid, from the Jabaliya tribe, says. "Young people have started to move away. They don't know about the different herbs, where to put your camel...about how to be in the desert." The traditions have intrinsic value, but skills for self-sufficiency are also necessary to protect the Bedouin against future economic bumps.

With that in mind, the Sinai Trail, Egypt's first long-distance hiking path, promises to preserve Bedouin culture as well as encourage tourism. It could work: Despite the turmoil in Egypt, the south Sinai feels relatively calm. Tribes cooperate with the government to monitor the area, provide information and ensure the community is invested in keeping the region stable. There has never been an attack in the high mountains that has resulted in civilian loss of life.

The trail follows a route traders and pilgrims to Mecca used for centuries. Now, it is carefully planned, complete with accredited guides and detailed maps. Hikers walk 137 miles from the coastal plains off the Red Sea through canyons and deserts before ending at the 8,668-foot-high Mount Catherine, the tallest mountain in Egypt.

"YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE STARTED TO MOVE AWAY. THEY DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE DIFFERENT HERBS, WHERE TO PUT YOUR CAMEL...ABOUT HOW TO BE IN THE DESERT."

The first group completed the 12-day hike on the trail in December, sleeping outdoors and eating around a campfire. Looping through the mountains, it contains the hidden treasures of the desert: a mysterious pebble maze; sandstone cliffs eroded into shapes like bubbles in risen dough; dunes spilling out from between rocky stacks.

Will all the effort that went into building the Sinai Trail be worth it? The Bedouin of the south Sinai know that what is built up can be easily swept away. If the outside world pays attention, and the trail attracts tourists, it would give locals the chance to make a living while nurturing their own identity. If it doesn't, the project has cultivated a supportive network, skills and traditions that will prove reliable companions, whatever happens in Egypt. N

EXILER ON MAIN STREET

Trump said he would target 'bad hombres,' but the U.S. is arresting immigrants without criminal records

JUST BEFORE 7 a.m. on May 11, Jonatan Palacios quietly closed the door to his apartment in Haverford, Pennsylvania, to avoid waking his wife. In the parking lot, he got into his car to drive to the restaurant where he works as the head cook. But as he pulled out of his parking space, Palacios saw two law enforcement officers in his rearview mirror walking toward his car. As they got closer, Palacios, who is an undocumented immigrant, could see the small logo on the upper-left side of their chests—and knew they were from immigration. He checked the door handles and felt a moment of relief when he realized the doors had locked automatically.

The immigration agents knocked on the window and asked him to get out of his car. Palacios froze. After a few seconds, he told the agents through the glass that he needed to make some phone calls. He called his boss to tell him he wouldn't make it to work, his lawyer and his wife, an American citizen, who was still asleep in the apartment. She came to the parking lot to ask the agents if they had a warrant to arrest her husband.

They didn't have an arrest warrant, they told her, but they did have a deportation order issued by a judge in 2008—a couple of years after Palacios had arrived in America from Honduras when he was 17. Seeing no way out, Palacios opened the car door, hugged his wife and allowed the officers to bind his arms behind his back with plastic zip ties. They brought Palacios to a processing center in Philadelphia before moving him to Pennsylvania's York County Prison. "I was so panicked," Palacios says. "I was trying to think through every little detail. Eventually, there was nothing else we could do, and I just got out of the car, gave Lillie a hug and went with them."

For the 11 million immigrants living illegally in the United States, fear of deportation isn't new. Former President Barack Obama deported 2.7 million undocumented immigrants, the majority of them with criminal records, during his eight years in office—more than any other president before him—causing some immigration groups to nickname him "deporter in chief." Yet barely six months into Trump's presidency, immigrants like Palacios—people without criminal records who are working and raising families, and who have been living in the U.S. for a long time—are feeling even less secure. That's because although Trump campaigned on an immigration policy that he said would target the "bad hombres," his executive orders don't fall in line with his candidate promises. In the time since Trump has taken office, immigration lawyers and advocates in cities such as Philadelphia have seen a spike in the number of people detained who they say fall outside of the realm of the "bad hombre" definition.

In a statement to *Newsweek*, a spokesman for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

BY
ERIN BANCO
@ErinBanco

JAKE NAUGHTON FOR NEWSWEEK

NEW ICE AGE: In May, ICE agents arrested Palacios outside of the apartment he shares with Williams, his wife.

says the agency is focusing first on detaining people who post a threat to national security, but he adds that officers would also pick up anyone they encountered who had entered the country illegally.

Under Obama, the White House issued clear policy memos that directed ICE agents to prioritize criminals when sifting through the mountains of files of people facing deportation. The policy directed agents to focus on deporting only recent arrivals, repeat immigration violators and people with multiple criminal violations. Under the former administration, about 1.4 million people were considered priorities for removal.

Trump has taken immigration enforcement in a different direction. His orders effectively overturned Obama's policy. Whereas before, agents had to follow a specified list of priorities, they can now go after any undocumented immigrant they deem to be a "risk to public safety or national security"—a deliberately vague mandate, say immigration experts, that gives individuals in the agency a lot of leeway to make their own choices. "With his executive orders, Trump played into [ICE officers'] worst instincts," says Matthew Archambeault, Palacios's lawyer, adding that officers "feel like they can be mean and not give any breaks to anyone."

The result has been an increase in enforcement against immigrants without criminal records. Several lawyers in Philadelphia tell *Newsweek* that ICE officers are arresting any undocumented immigrant they encounter,

> "[ICE OFFICERS] FEEL LIKE THE CHAINS HAVE COME OFF. THEY RAID HOUSES ALL THE TIME."

even ones who run red lights or stop signs. ICE agents now routinely raid houses, take in undocumented immigrants picked up for minor traffic violations like speeding, or go after old cases of illegal re-entry or missed court dates for immigrants who otherwise have no criminal records, according to Peter Pedemonti, the director of the New Sanctuary Movement, a grassroots, interfaith organization that works with immigrant families in Philadelphia during their court cases. "[ICE officers] feel like the chains have come off," he says. "They raid houses all the time."

The head of ICE "wants everyone to be afraid, and that policy and mindset trickle down through the ranks to the lower-level officers," says Archambeault. "The real difference between Obama and Trump is tone and attitude. There is no one in the executive checking in on what ICE officers are doing."

And Trump's administration has been apprehending immigrants more swiftly than Obama's did. In the first 100 days of Trump's administration, ICE made 41,000 arrests of individuals

known or suspected to be in the country illegally, about a 38 percent increase from the same time period in 2016. But those numbers, it seems, cannot be achieved by focusing on criminals. The biggest jump in arrests since January comes from undocumented immigrants without criminal records. Between January 22 and April 29, ICE arrested 10,845 people whose immigration violations were the only marks on their record. That's nearly triple the number of immigrants, most of them criminals, arrested in total during the same time period in Obama's final year in office.

The increase has been particularly dramatic in the mid-Atlantic region, where Palacios lives. The detention rate of undocumented immigrants without criminal records in Philadelphia (where the ICE field office has jurisdiction over Pennsylvania, Delaware and West Virginia) is six times higher than during the same period in 2016.

Such a shift has directly impacted immigrants like Palacios. Now 27, he left Honduras for the U.S. at 16 in hopes of making money for his family. He worked odd jobs for a few months in Mexico before crossing the border to America in 2006, where he was caught and transferred to a detention facility in Texas for unaccompanied minors. He says the government got in touch with his cousin, who had married an American citizen in Philadelphia, and he went to live with

DEARLY DEPORTED: A drawing by a young girl hangs in the offices of the New Sanctuary Movement, a nonprofit working with immigrants in the Philadelphia area.

JAKE NAUGHTON FOR NEWSWEEK

them, attend high school and get his immigration status sorted.

But in his senior year of high school in 2008, he missed a court date related to his immigration status—he was busy with school, working late and sleeping four hours a night after making the last train home. At 17, it just didn't seem worth it. "I was young," he says. As a result of the missed hearing, the judge in charge of his case issued an order of deportation. From then on, he would have to stay working in the U.S. illegally.

Palacios graduated high school, attended college, got a job and married Lillie Williams, an American citizen who works at an education tech company, in 2014. He couldn't get a green card through marriage because the process was complicated by his deportation order.

This past October, Williams filed an I-130—the paper a U.S. citizen must submit to the government to establish a relationship with a relative who wants to immigrate to the U.S., a move that the couple believes may have triggered ICE to start looking for Palacios.

When he arrived at York County Prison this past May, Palacios met dozens of other men whom ICE had rounded up at the same time. The majority of them, he says, had no criminal record. Hundreds of undocumented immigrants were detained in the Philadelphia area in April and May. He made friends, most of them from Latin America or countries farther away, like Somalia. "A lot of them didn't have lawyers," Palacios says.

York County Prison includes a separate wing for ICE detainees, but it filled up quickly, and Palacios and the others had to move in with the criminal prisoners. Behind bars for one month until his bail hearing, Palacios says he took care of another immigrant—a mentally ill 22-year-old man who couldn't feed himself. In the afternoon, he took naps on his bunk, often waking up to see a line of men waiting for the nurse. He says almost all of them had "fungus bubbles" on the back of their heads from contaminated water. Palacios slept on what he called a "thinner than rug" mattress.

Yet these conditions didn't compare to the fear he felt during the middle of the night. That's when officers would come into the cell and snatch detainees from their beds before deporting them back to their home countries. "Now, every night," he tells *Newsweek*, "I wake up at 3 a.m."

At Palacios's bond hearing on June 15, he and his lawyer pleaded over teleconference to the judge in Virginia that he should be let out because he is not a threat to his community. The judge set bail for $4,000. When Palacios heard he would get out on bail, he was still anxious. There is no guarantee that he will be able to stay in the country, though his lawyer and advocacy group contacts say he has a good chance. They point to things like the fact he has no criminal record, he came to the country when he was an unaccompanied minor and that he comes from a notoriously dangerous country where his family was often robbed.

For now, Palacios is learning how to re-adjust to living at home. He plans to go back to work and continue following up with his immigration case, fighting deportation. He and his wife will have to file more paperwork.

Meanwhile, they have yet to hear back on their I-130 aplication, which would begin the process of him becoming a legal citizen. He also has a pending asylum case—which often takes a long time to process. Applicants must go through several rounds of interviews and prove that they need to stay in this country because return to their home would place them in imminent danger.

> OFFICERS ARE ARRESTING ANY UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT THEY ENCOUNTER, EVEN ONES WHO RUN RED LIGHTS OR STOP SIGNS.

Both Palacios and Williams know the path will be long, but they are determined. "At this point, I am just happy I am home," he says. "Everything else I can deal with. Just being here with Lillie is all that matters." N

SLACKER IN CHIEF

DONALD TRUMP CAME INTO OFFICE PROMISING TO WORK HARD FOR FORGOTTEN AMERICANS, BUT HE'S BEEN VERY LAZY SO FAR

BY ALEXANDER NAZARYAN

The week that began on August 8, 2011, found President Barack Obama in the midst of what *The New York Times* would call "the most dismal stretch of his presidency."

Days before, Congress had finally managed to strike a deal on raising the debt ceiling, thus averting a disastrous default on the national debt. But the process had been long and hideous, like an ugly domestic argument waged in front of the neighbors. On the 5th, a Friday, Standard & Poor's had handed the United States its first ever credit-rating downgrade, citing a lack of "predictability of American policymaking and political nstitutions."

Obama tried to calm Americans with a speech that Monday, in which he declared the nation's economic woes were "eminently solvable." The financial markets disagreed, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average dropping 635 points that day. There was talk of a double-dip recession. And there was anger at Obama, whose approval rating drop to 40 percent, the lowest yet of his presidency. Seeking a respite, Obama went golfing that Saturday, ahead of an "economic bus tour" of the Midwest.

The following Monday, the 15th, there came a tweet from Donald Trump, host of the popular *Apprentice* franchise. He'd recently become a hero of the right for insisting Obama may have been born a Muslim and outside the United States. It was not his first tweet needling Obama, but it was the first on a subject to which Trump would return time and again: the president's love of golf. "@BarackObama played golf yesterday," Trump's tweet announced. "Now he heads to a 10 day vacation in Martha's Vineyard. Nice work ethic." (Obama had actually played golf two days before, and his vacation wasn't until week's end.)

Trump pounded this plaint for the next five years, even as the economy improved, the Affordable Care Act provided health care to millions and the war in Afghanistan came to an end. Every time Obama picked up a golf club, it was incontrovertible proof that he was incapable of feeling (or addressing) the pain of ordinary Americans. Obama, as Trump put it in a tweet in 2011, "plays golf to escape work while America goes down the drain." His last tweet on the subject came in the summer of 2016, when Trump was already the Republican nominee for president.

Were he to reach the White House, Trump wouldn't make the same mistake for which he'd been lambasting Obama since 2011. "I'm going to be working for you," he told supporters in August 2016. "I'm not going to have time to go play golf."

Now that he's president, Trump frequently departs the White House and spends the weekend golfing at either his South Florida resort, Mar-a-Lago, or his country club in the New Jersey suburbs, Bedminster. The promise he'd made a year before was discarded so quickly, you have to wonder if he even remembers making it. Politico did the legwork: George W. Bush didn't golf for the first five months of his presidency, while Obama stayed away from his beloved links for four months following his inauguration. Trump held out for all of two weeks. He has visited a golf club on at least 40 days since taking office in January, according to the self-explanatory site Trump Golf Count, which estimates the forays have cost American taxpayers $55 million. Another Trump tracker, this one by *The New York Times*, finds that his visits to Trump-branded properties total 56 days, nearly a third of his time in office.

Trump's friends say golf is important to his well-being, just as cycling or rock climbing is de rigueur for the younger titans of Silicon Valley. "He is always working," longtime confidant Roger Stone Jr. tells me, "even while socializing,

WHERE'S DONALD? Most weekends, Trump flees the White House like a factory worker screaming "TGIF!"

playing golf or traveling. He is constantly asking questions, taking notes and placing phone calls.

"A better question would be: Does he ever really relax?"

His many detractors see it differently. If the golf bothers them—and judging by the number of websites devoted to chronicling Trump's excursions, it does—it is only because they see it as symbolic of a lackadaisical approach to the presidency. "This is the laziest, most ignorant president in history," says MSNBC host Lawrence O'Donnell. Sure, take MSNBC with a grain of nonpartisan salt, but all those who believe, as O'Donnell does, that Trump is the most ineffectual occupant of the Oval Office in the nation's history cite, for one, his well-reported lack of involvement in congressional legislative efforts. They point to the numbers, like doctors surveying grim lab results: only one solo press conference since his inauguration (he has held joint press conferences with foreign heads of state, after which he usually entertains questions from the press) and just a single foray west of the Mississippi since taking office (and that for a campaign rally). He's visited neither Iraq nor Afghanistan.

In the first six months of his presidency, Trump found the time to send 1,029 tweets. These include accusations of Obama "tapping" Trump Tower, juvenile taunts hurled at North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, warmed-over insinuations about the Clintons cribbed from Fox News, complaints about Attorney General Jeff Sessions, complaints about "the Republicans" and endless laments about "fake news," many of them followed by assertions that were comically untrue.

Of course, many critics want Trump to fail. To them, reports of his ineptitude may be the only good news coming out of the White House. As the editorial writer Steve Chapman of the *Chicago Tribune* mused in May: "The people who fear that Trump is trying to subvert democracy, persecute Muslims and dismantle the rule of law can take heart that he won't put much effort into it."

"This is the laziest, most ignorant president in history."

Yet in the uncertain autumn days following Trump's victory, there was budding hope of a "pivot" from the bluster of his campaign to the pragmatism some claimed lay underneath the spray-tanned surface. There was the $1 trillion infrastructure plan, for example. What happened to that? For the love of Lincoln, someone tell him to forget tax cuts and Muslim bans. He should be out there paving I-95, slapping fresh paint on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge.

Instead, he is playing golf and tweeting anti-CNN wrestling memes. When the weekend concludes, Trump returns to the D.C. swamp with all the enthusiasm of an office lackey slouching toward his cubicle on Monday morning. Only six months in, he seems "a most unhappy warrior," in the words of Trump biographer and CNN commentator Michael D'Antonio. The scowl that haunts his face, the monotone he uses to deliver official pronouncements, suggest a second-term lame duck dreaming of a lucrative post-Washington book deal.

These should have been sunnier times. Trump got the biggest political victory imaginable last November, stopping

Hillary Clinton's "inevitable" coronation. Only he didn't quite realize that the campaign was the beginning of the hard work, not the end. That his supporters would repeat back something he'd said in Cedar Rapids or Harrisburg two years ago and ask him if he'd meant it about prosecuting Clinton or making Mexico pay for a border wall.

So he sits and stews, like Al Bundy, the shoe-selling protagonist of *Married...With Children*, the sitcom of roiling white discontent that predicted Trump better than any political scientist or pundit. Unsatisfying job, ungrateful children, all around him a nation in decline. Bundy dreams of the days when he was a high school football star; Trump of his election-night romp through the Upper Midwest.

But that was long ago. Reality is here, an unwelcome intrusion for the aging reality-television star. That "reality" was fun. This one isn't. This one has special counsel Robert Mueller rooting around like a bloodhound in his personal finances and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell droning on about budget reconciliation, *whatever that is*, and right-wing pundit Ann Coulter hectoring him on Twitter about illegal immigration. On the television, there is always California Representative Adam Schiff, talking about collusion with Russia and looking pissed.

Is it Friday yet?

FROM LEFT: PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS/AP; TWITTER; PREVIOUS SPREAD: BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP/GETTY

+

QUIET ON THE SET! Trump got trolled for posting a picture of him allegedly writing his inaugural speech at what was later shown to be a desk in the reception area of Mar-a-Lago.

OVERWHELMED AND FRUSTRATED

TWO DAYS before the presidential inauguration, Trump tweeted a picture of himself seated at a desk, pen hovering above a stack of papers. On his face was the faraway look of a great man lost in deep thought: Pericles pondering the Athenian dead, Churchill surveying a blitzkrieged London. The accompanying text revealed that the president-elect was composing his inaugural address at the Mar-a-Lago resort, which he'd already rebranded "the Winter White House."

The tweet was supposed to show leadership at work, but it instead revealed the lengths to which Trump will go to foster the image of diligent leadership. It didn't take a team of CIA digital forensicists to figure out that the Spanish tile wall behind Trump in the photograph matched the one in the reception area at Mar-a-Lago. A photograph soon surfaced of a young woman at the very same desk, looking as if she was ready to confirm your dinner reservation. Further scrutiny—that is, clicking a magnifying glass icon to zoom in—revealed that the papers on the desk were seemingly blank, while the writing instrument in Trump's hand appeared to be a Sharpie, not especially useful for writing out a lengthy speech. Wanting to look like a head of state, Trump instead ended up looking like a concierge-in-training.

That wasn't Trump's first lesson in the perils of faking it, or his last. His campaign was the most engrossing spectacle in the history of American politics, so terrifyingly entertaining that many failed to grasp its hold on the public until the returns from Florida and North Carolina started to come in on November 8. Trump's presidency, however, has been a listless sequel, its leading man seemingly no longer interested in his role.

I raised the issue of Trump's work ethic with White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders. "Completely false story," she says. "The president is focused on creating jobs, securing the border, protecting Americans and growing our economy, and has been working on those issues every day."

Every day? In April, Elaine Godfrey of *The Atlantic* used news reports about Trump's well-chronicled habits to calculate that he watches about five hours of television daily. That makes him an average American; whether it makes him a sufficiently engaged American president is another matter. He seems to trust *Fox & Friends* more than the members of the intelligence community who brief him each morning. He certainly finds the former more compelling. "He gets bored and likes to watch TV," as Politico summarized the insight of one White House insider.

Seemingly aware that he's being called lazy, Trump claimed in a May 12 tweet that he's "a very active President with lots of things happening," which only made him sound like a teenager informing his parents he'd *definitely* done his homework. A writer for *The Washington Post* decided to investigate, using publicly available logs to conclude that Trump's schedule was "awfully light.... We are left to make one of two assumptions," the *Post* concluded. "Trump either is hiding a lot of his presidential business from the public, or he is not doing much at all." Reuters, in turn, found that, in his first 100 days in office, Trump "made fewer appearances outside of the presidential bubble than his three immediate predecessors," confining himself for the most part to the White House and Mar-a-Lago.

It may be that Trump is overwhelmed. When I was training to become a teacher, veteran educators said students would use boredom to mask their inability to do the work. Is that what's happening here? Well, to use a Trumpian construction, some people are saying so. One of these people is Donald Trump. In late April, the president confessed that he was both overwhelmed and frustrated. "I loved my previous life," he said. "I had so many things going. This is more work than in my previous life. I thought it would be easier." That may be the most remarkable admission ever made by a sitting American president. Clinton's infidelities, Nixon's paranoia: Those were the usual failings of the powerful. But a disdain for power because wielding power is harder than

pretending to wield power in a reality-TV television series? That is Al Bundy coming home from another miserable day of work at the New Market Mall, cracking open a beer and wondering when his nightmare of shoe-selling drudgery will end.

THE ROYAL ENNUI

NOW COME the excuses. "Nobody knew health care could be so complicated," Trump said in February. Oh, but *everybody* knew. That's why Obama spent months explaining his Affordable Care Act to Americans. Trump never held a town hall to sell his own "terrific" health plan, which mysteriously turned into the less-than-terrific slop cooked up by congressional Republicans. He didn't campaign for that either, doing nothing to remake the lackluster legislation in his own splendid vision.

There were tweets from the president. There are always tweets. But little else. He maligned the House proposal as "mean" and casually introduced his own suggestions on Twitter to compete with McConnell's in the Senate. Eventually, those Republicans concluded it would be infinitely more effective to craft the bill and marshal support without him. "White House officials privately concede that it is actually better for Republicans when the president disengages more from being a policy negotiator," reported The Daily Beast as the Republican health care scheme headed for predictable disaster. It's hard to imagine them seeking his engagement on other complex legislative matters. "His idea of work is a Hollywood idea of work," says D'Antonio, author of the biography *The Truth About Trump*. "He 'works' in the way a king would work."

"Trump believed the human body was like a battery, with a finite amount of energy."

The most impressive quality of Trump's myth is how thoroughly, even aggressively, it contravenes easily confirmable fact. When he *was* king, he was the King of Debt, and he may still owe as much as $1.8 billion to creditors. His casinos closed. His airline went bust. But even as he accrued failures, lawsuits and debts, Trump managed to turn "Trump" into a synonym for success. The letters were made of plastic, but they were dipped in gold.

In a May interview with Maureen Dowd of *The New York Times*, Trump biographer Timothy O'Brien explained that after the erection of Trump Tower in midtown Manhattan in 1983, "he never cared again," so impressed was he with that monolithic monument to his ego. "He's fundamentally lazy," O'Brien told Dowd. "He free-rides so many processes he doesn't know anything about. He used to do it in the business world, and now he does it in the political world."

Trump's foray into politics would have been impossible without *The Apprentice*, which introduced him to Middle America, the onetime King of Debt reborn as a capable chief executive both ruthless and uncannily perceptive. But this was also an illusion, as we were recently reminded by Clay Aiken, the singer and onetime *Celebrity Apprentice* contestant. On a podcast last month,

NICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT: Trump says he developed a great relationship with Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe when he hosted him at Mar-a-Lago over a weekend in February.

Aiken revealed that Trump wielded the show's famous slogan—"You're fired!"—at the instruction of others. The great leader of men was, at least in Aiken's telling, a puppet. "The show's producers from NBC made those calls," explained a report in *The Washington Post*, "giving Trump instructions through a teleprompter on his desk that looked like a phone."

Something must be said here in Trump's defense. Laziness is frequently a trait we ascribe to politicians we dislike. Roger Ailes, the former Fox News chairman and Trump mentor, mused to a biographer of Obama: "How often does he play basketball and golf? I wish I had that kind of time.... He's lazy, but the media won't report that." Liberals weren't especially nice to George W. Bush either, lambasting Dubya for exercising too much, for going to bed at 9 p.m., for clearing brush on his Texas ranch when he should have been, well, not clearing brush on his Texas ranch. His forays from the White House were covered just as assiduously as Obama's and, now, Trump's.

Tommy Vietor, a longtime Obama campaign and White House staffer, compares Trump's schedule to Obama's. "It doesn't seem like he works very hard," Vietor tells me. "More importantly, it doesn't seem like there's any structure to his day. That's a huge problem. It takes discipline to keep yourself from getting buffeted around by events of the day."

Trump's activities are hard to pin down because his daily schedule includes "downtime," for which the White House does not provide detailed descriptions. Figuring out the president's doings is "the holy grail of reporting" on Trump, Maggie Haberman of *The New York Times* told *New Yorker* editor David Remnick. Haberman, who probably knows Trump better than any other journalist, is still on the hunt.

There have been clues. Mark Leibovich, a politics reporter for *The New York Times Magazine,* recently paid a visit to the White House and was, to his

FROM LEFT: JUJI PRESS/AFP/GETTY; REX/AP; CARLOS BARRIA/REUTERS

great surprise, led into "a small dining room just off the Oval Office" to meet the president. It was a weekday afternoon. Trump was alone, watching a recorded episode of *Fox & Friends*.

DONALD, NOT RONALD

WHEN TRUMP hit the six-month mark of his presidency, Mike Pence, his unfailingly loyal vice president, marked the occasion with an op-ed for Fox News. Doing his best Soviet apparatchik imitation, Pence wrote that "President Trump's accomplishments are nothing short of historic."

Even by the dismayingly loose standards of political discourse, this is untrue. Although Trump has signed 42 bills since taking office, they are mostly minnows, whereas his supporters thought he'd be harpooning whales. An analysis by CNN found that 15 of those bills "have rolled back rules and regulations issued under Obama's administration, eight had to do with designating something or working to create a new initiative, five changed or expanded existing legislation, and 11 were related to government funding or operations." One act renamed a courthouse for Fred Thompson, the actor and Republican senator. Aside from the ban on travelers from some Muslim-majority nations, his 42 executive orders have also been minor, undoing Obama's legacy as opposed to creating his own. The grand gestures he promised remain the stuff of fantasy. The dealmaking he claims to have mastered remains holstered.

It's not *just* Trump. The entire White House is in disarray. White House political adviser Steve Bannon once grandly boasted that the Trump administration would undertake a "deconstruction of the administrative state," but controlled shrinkage of the federal government would have required far more focus than the exhausting disarray now at work. *The Washington Post*, for example, has found that Trump has done little to fill "key positions" in his administration, with only 50 confirmed so far. Another 165 have been nominated, and while the White House will blame Democratic "obstructionism," that hardly explains the 357 positions for which no one has been nominated.

Trump has held several rallies since becoming president. He clearly enjoys them. Even non-campaign events, like his appearance at the Boy Scouts Jamboree in late July, tend to remind us less of Ronald Reagan battling communism than of Donald Trump spatting with Hillary Clinton. That isn't an accident. During the campaign, Trump worked hard, because it was on his own behalf, the glory of rapturous crowds redounding directly to him, not to some abstract institution of government. He branded

FREQUENT FLIER: Trump reportedly watches five hours of television a day, whether he's in the Oval Office or at his Florida estate.

THE TWEET MACHINE: Some of Trump's friends and confidants insist he has a tremendous work ethic and is "always working," even when he's socializing, playing golf...or watching recorded episodes of his beloved *Fox & Friends* on television.

himself as the can-do outsider who'd build that wall and lock her up. He branded his opponents as crooked, lying, low energy, emasculated, corrupt, crazy. It was a marketing campaign, and to Trump's apparent dismay, it worked just a little too well.

Trump does have defenders more principled than Hannity and the Fox News commentariat. One of them is Greg Ip, a business-friendly economics commentator for *The Wall Street Journal*. In late July, Ip disputed the claim that Trump is a "do-nothing president." Acknowledging that Trump hasn't scored any legislative touchdowns, Ip claims that Trump's appointees "have begun nudging the economy and the country in a more conservative, pro-business direction." Then again, Trump was never about incrementalism. "Make America great again" was policy shock-and-awe, not small-bore executive memoranda celebrated as if each were the Louisiana Purchase.

Unable to take credit for his own achievements, Trump has laid claim to those of his predecessor. Obama took office during the Great Recession, when the unemployment rate was 7.8 percent and rising. Eight years later, as he prepared to leave the White House, it was 4.7 percent, a nine-year low. And yet Trump cites "absolutely tremendous economic progress," as if he were the one who pulled the nation out of the foreclosure crisis. He brags about having quelled the flow of immigrants entering the United States illegally, but it was under Obama that illegal immigration fell to a 44-year nadir. Trump has, however, managed to keep out tourists. America has become so great, international travelers aren't coming as they used to.

If you are one of the millions of Americans counting the days until Trump is no longer president, his failures may seem like victories. Except he is your president, and nobody wants to live in a nation in decline, a superpower devolving into a laughingstock. And while several of Trump's proposals are either unworkable, unhinged or potentially disastrous, that's not true for all of his ideas. There is infrastructure, above all, blessed infrastructure. The firing of 59 Tomahawk missiles at the Shayrat air base in Syria was a sign that Trump knows Bashar al-Assad is a butcher of innocents who must be deposed. So why not marshal international support to remove him? And why expend so much energy keeping out the refugees who are Assad's victims?

"His work ethic is just fine," says Joe Walsh, the former Tea Party congressman from Illinois who now hosts a radio show. "His problem is he's focusing on the wrong things."

Some have likened Trump's governing style to Reagan's. Lou Cannon, who covered Reagan for *The Washington Post* and authored five books on his two terms in office, disagrees with any attempt to burnish Trump's reputation by comparisons to the hero of modern American conservatism. "I can't think of a single characteristic they share," Cannon says.

Reagan was "much more diligent than President Trump is, in every respect," Cannon tells me confidently. That diligence extended to the way he treated

FROM LEFT: JABIN BOTSFORD/THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY; YURI GRIPAS/REUTERS

others, including White House staffers and political opponents. "He might not have known the details of the missile thing," Cannon concedes in reference to 1983's Strategic Defense Initiative, often derided in the press as "Star Wars" for its futuristic vision of national security. "But he'd know if an aide had a sick mother." For example, after his mother died, Cannon got a call of heartfelt consolation from the president.

"Reagan had a conscious management style," the historian reminds. "He wasn't lazy."

A MODERN HARDING

"CHICAGO WINE PARTY" was the seventh episode of the seventh season of *Married...With Children*. It originally aired on November 1, 1992, a Sunday. On the following Tuesday, the nation elected William Clinton as its next president. Only five days later, a kind of despair had already set in, at least according to an unflattering report in *The New York Times*. Clinton's supporters, wrote David Rosenbaum, "clearly recognized that the policy changes Mr. Clinton promised daily during the campaign can only take effect slowly, incrementally and painfully."

MAKE AMERICA IRATE AGAIN: Some of the president's neighbors in Palm Beach think he's spending a little too much time there, and spending a little too much money to do it.

Bundy was waging a political fight of his own. The premise of "Chicago Wine Party" involves a proposed 2-cent beer tax. About halfway through the episode, Bundy, bedecked in anti-beer-tax buttons, gives a rousing address:

> *The USA has been run too long by people who know the issues. People that watch the news on TV, read books, generally pay attention. Well, no more. 'Cause now it's time that* we *had a say in the future of America. Family, the Bundys are gonna elect a president.*

It took 25 years, but the Bundys now have their man in the Oval Office. And while the election of Trump may have been a middle finger thrust at the coastal establishment by the white working class, it was also an expression of grievances legitimate and pervasive. Trump channeled those grievances masterfully for his campaign, but the urgency of those days is gone.

Trump is a fighter, but before November 8, 2016, he only fought for himself. He never served in the military. He rarely gave to charity. "He's a terribly self-indulgent individual," says Robert Dallek, the noted presidential historian, who doesn't think the weight of the presidency has "fully taken hold yet." It may never. In his firing of FBI Director James Comey, his humiliation of Attorney General Jeff Sessions, his casual disregard of ethics rules, Trump has made it clear that he sees the White House as little more than a branch office of his marketing business, the Trump Organization.

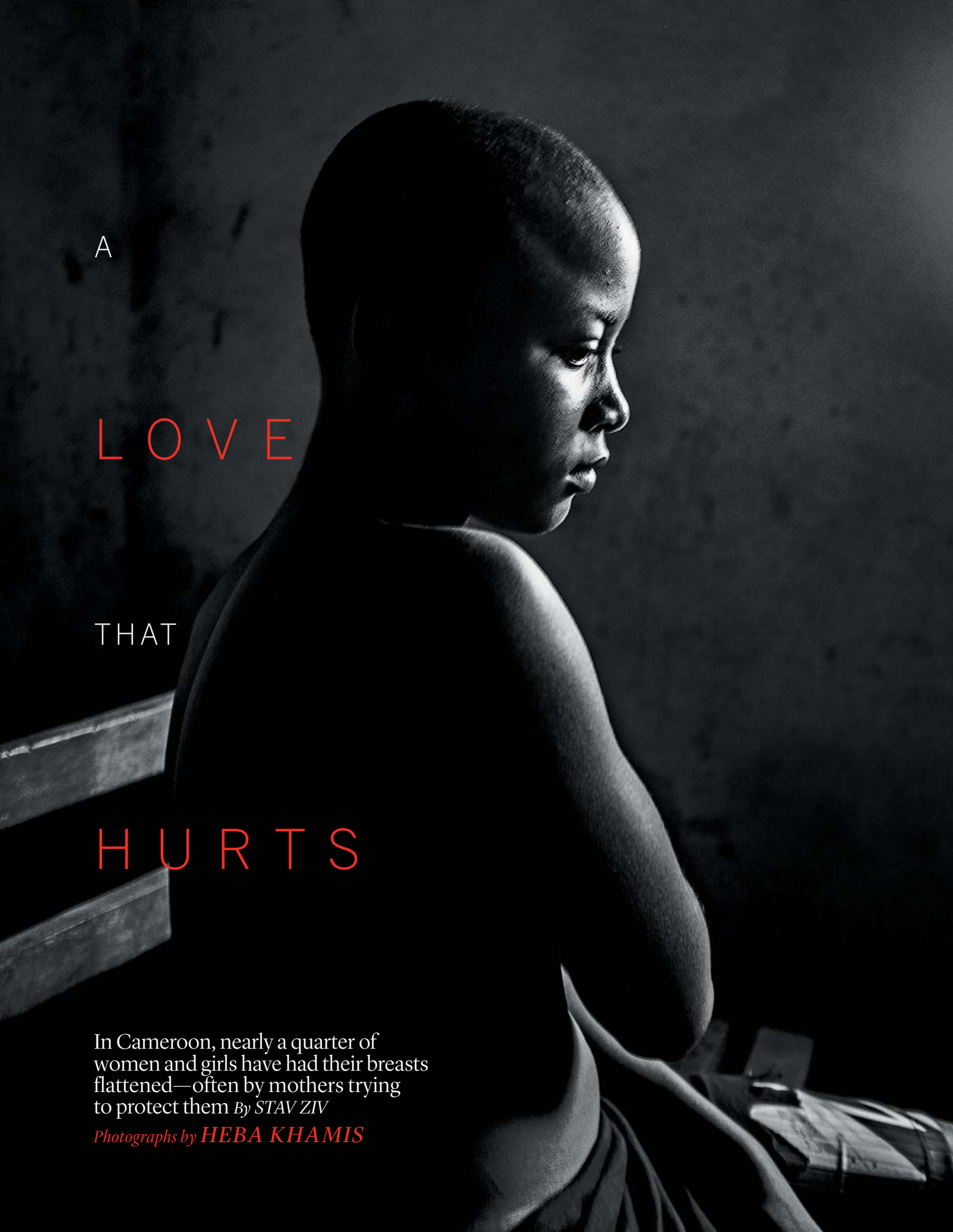
As his crude dismissal of Comey demonstrated, Trump has little interest in understanding the scope of the executive branch, of limits set by tradition and the U.S. Constitution. And he will always defend his gilded image, even when he should be defending loftier goals. There have been countless reports in recent months that Trump supporters "don't care" about the investigations of his campaign's possible collusion with Russian hackers and the Kremlin. What that statement—often treated like a revelation—misses is the obvious fact that Trump *deeply* cares about the Russia probes. Judging by his Twitter account, there are many days when he cares about nothing else.

Dallek compares Trump unfavorably to presidents like Lyndon Johnson, who endlessly "cajoled" legislators to pass landmark civil rights and anti-poverty bills. For all his dealmaking skills, Trump hasn't shown much ability to negotiate with Congress, probably because it would require a knowledge of what members of Congress want, need and, above all, fear. And that would require doing homework. It's much easier to just threaten Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski on Twitter. It's also a lot less effective.

Figuring out exactly what Trump does is "the holy grail of reporting."

Trump reminds Dallek of Warren G. Harding, whom he calls "the least effective president" before the current one. "He didn't have the big picture or the small picture," Dallek says of the man known as Wobbly Warren. "He was not very bright."

Trump plainly wants his legacy to be that slogan on the baseball hat donned by supporters. He wants to be the man who pulled America out of its postindustrial malaise, silenced talk of national decline and China's ascent. But he can't do that if he keeps sinking into his own debilitating malaise, weighed down by his shortcomings and an unwillingness to address them. He is entitled to rage at insults and defeats. Achilles raged too. But then Achilles fought, leaving aside personal slights to charge the ramparts of Troy. Trump's approach is the approach of Al Bundy. It begins in rage. It ends there too. Both the president and the shoe salesman are driven by their unreasonable demands and unsoothable grievances to the couch, where they sit in front of the television, stewing.



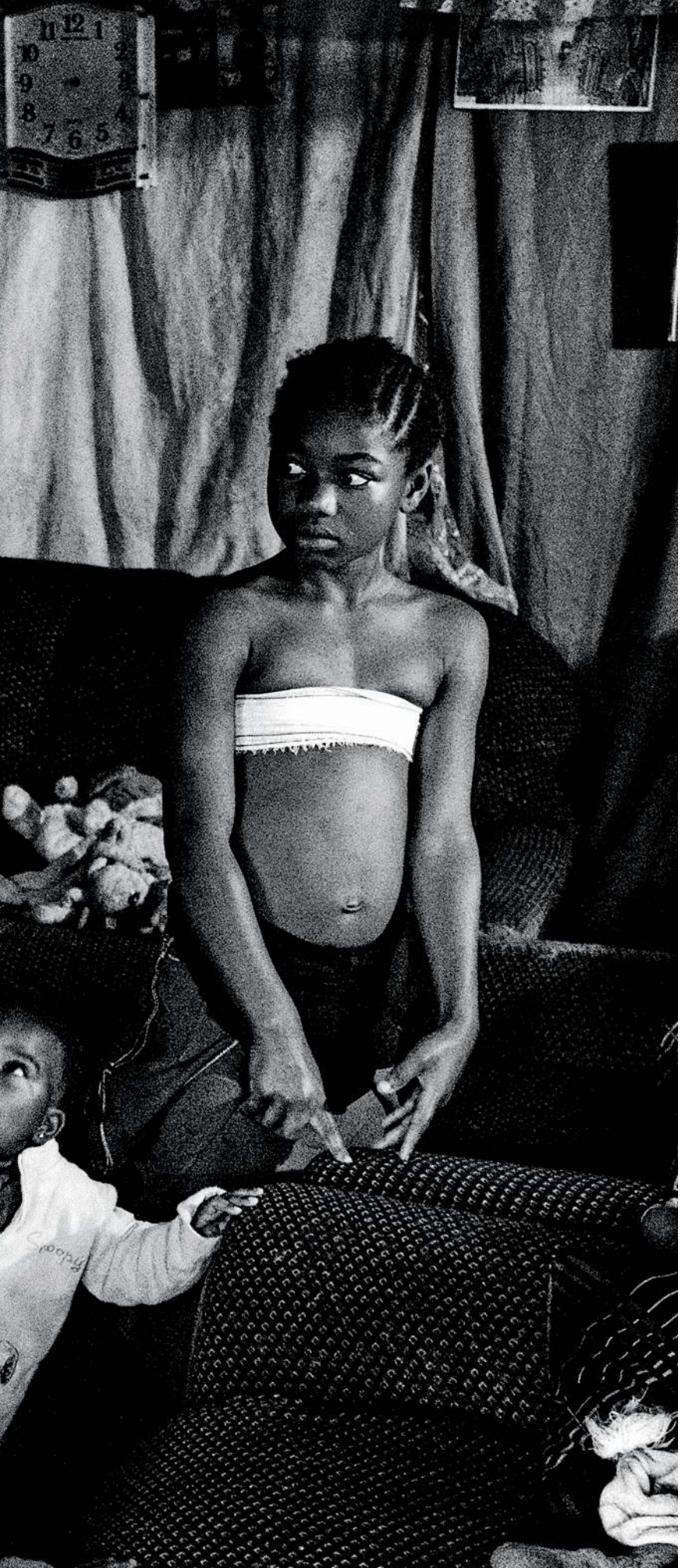
A LOVE THAT HURTS

In Cameroon, nearly a quarter of women and girls have had their breasts flattened—often by mothers trying to protect them *By STAV ZIV*

Photographs by HEBA KHAMIS

Breast ironing is almost always done by the girl's mother or another close female relative. The tools used vary from village to village, but heated stones or wooden spoons are the most popular implements. In some areas, seeds are wrapped in banana leaves and placed on a girl's breasts before they are massaged with a hot stone. It is believed the seeds absorb the girl's good luck, so they are then buried to protect them.

Veronica, 28, massages the breasts of her 10-year-old daughter, Michelle. Her eldest daughter, who refused to have her breasts ironed, got pregnant at 14.

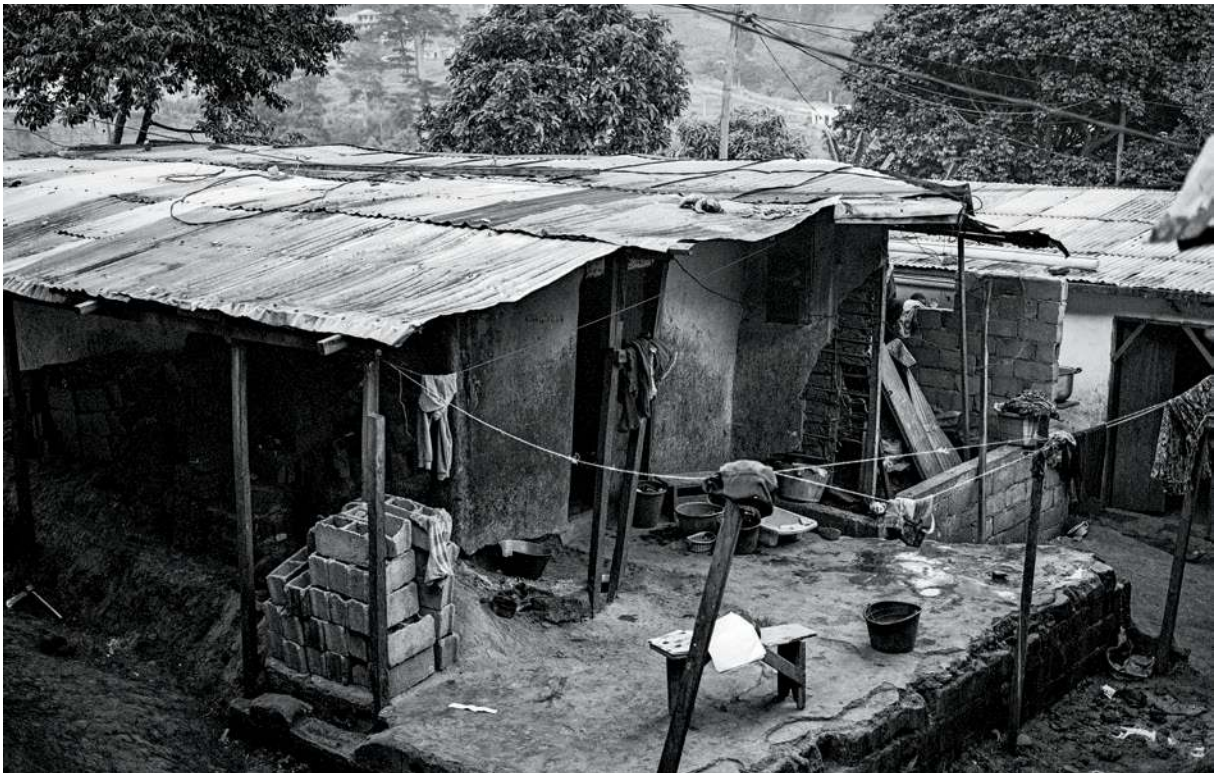


SHE WAS JUST 28, ALREADY A GRANDMOTHER,

and her eldest of five daughters had gotten pregnant at 14. She was determined to keep her other girls from making the same mistake, so this past November, in a village near the city of Bafoussam in Cameroon, she brought her 10-year-old and her 7-year-old inside to flatten their breasts. She took a stone the size of her palm, normally used to smash herbs, and, one at a time, pressed it into the sides of one girl's breasts and massaged it in circles for about 10 minutes as the other daughter looked on nervously. All the while, the woman's twin toddlers were running around the room, tugging at her dress. She wasn't punishing her daughters; she was trying to protect them.

Egyptian photographer Heba Khamis recently spent a month in Cameroon. She was based in the capital city of Yaoundé, but she traveled to villages and other cities to speak to girls and women about breast ironing, which is a futile attempt to prevent young breasts from growing. The practice takes different forms—some tie a belt to bind the breasts, while others heat a grinding stone, a spatula or a wooden pestle and then use it to press, pound or massage them—but the goal is the same. The victim is usually between 8 and 12 years old, and she is considered too young to have breasts and too vulnerable to boys and men around her to appear physically mature. Rebecca Tapscott, a Ph.D. candidate at the Fletcher School at Tufts University who has researched what she prefers to call breast flattening, says Cameroonian women describe it as "sending the breast back from where it's coming." Though no medical studies have looked at the short- or long-term effects of breast ironing, physicians told Tapscott that the practice could cause infections, benign lumps and other problems. But, in what is perhaps the most tragic twist, it will not stop breasts from developing.

Nearly a quarter of the women in Cameroon, a Central African nation of 23 million, have endured some form of breast ironing. Counterintuitive though it may seem, the women performing this painful procedure on young girls are trying to protect them. Girls in Cameroon are reaching puberty earlier and marrying later—and many mothers want to make sure their daughters don't get pregnant and miss out on opportunities to go to school and get jobs. Their hope is that breast flattening will help delay the appearance of these visible markers of maturity—and prevent men from making sexual advances or raping the



A house, top, in the village of Bafoussam, Cameroon. Breast ironing is performed in the home and rarely discussed publicly. It is sometimes done with a stone that has been heated on a grill.

Fabiola, 11, poses after having her breasts ironed. She endured the procedure twice a day for three months.

Chimone, 14, with her mother, who sends her to her grandmother to have her breasts ironed. Her grandmother has ironed the breasts of six young girls, including some of Chimone's cousins and neighbors.

girls. In Cameroon, a premarital pregnancy can derail a girl's economic and marriage prospects forever. One education official told Tapscott that 65 percent of female school dropouts left because of early pregnancy. Most never return. Breast ironing, many believe, can help protect girls in a society where sex education at home and school is lacking, where contraceptives are unpopular and abortion is illegal.

"When you look from outside, you feel like it is criminal. How could they do that to their daughters?" says Khamis. But it's more complicated than a Western observer might immediately see. "[It's]a mother who's trying to show love, to protect her daughter. I can see love, but also how it's hurting."

Breast ironing was first described to the international community over a decade ago, but its origins are still not well understood. In 2005, the German development agency GIZ and the National Network of Aunties (RENATA), a nongovernmental organization based in Cameroon, interviewed more than 5,000 girls and women, ages 10 to 82, and found that roughly 25 percent had been subjected to some form of breast ironing—with the rate as high as 53 percent in some regions. The study also found a girl's mother is most likely to perform the practice.

Breast ironing or similar procedures are also conducted in Benin, Chad, Togo and several other West and Central African countries. British politician Jake Berry has called it a "hidden... crime against women" in the Cameroonian diaspora in cities such as London and Birmingham.

Since the 2005 report, there have been several campaigns to raise awareness and halt the practice, including by the same development agency's German-Cameroonian Health Sector Program, which organized campaigns against incest, rape and breast ironing. Its partner on the report, RENATA, launched its first efforts in 2006, and Cameroonian journalist Chi Yvonne Leina founded the organization Gender Danger in 2012 to eradicate breast ironing.

While persuading women to stop the practice is important, addressing the issue with girls and women isn't enough. Breast ironing won't fix the deeper gender inequities that motivate mothers to hurt their daughters, even if they do so out of love. "Men should just respect women more," Khamis says, "[but] to change the whole culture is really hard." N

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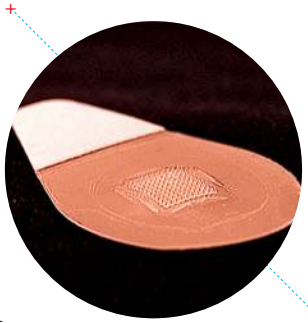
MAGIC PRICK: As much as 10 percent of the U.S. is needle-phobic, which is why the flu patch, inset, which has tiny needles, each a hair's width and less than one-twentieth of an inch tall, might be a happy alternative.

GOOD SCIENCE

SYRINGE BENEFITS

Flu vaccines could be delivered via a painless, Band-Aid-like patch



FROM LEFT: JESSICA PETERSON/GETTY; GEORGIA TECH

BY **SANDY ONG**
@sandyong_yx

WHENEVER Andrew McDonald, 42, sees a needle, he gets physically sick. There are also panic attacks and colorful language. It's an extreme reaction, albeit a surprisingly common one. But soon, McDonald's trips to the doctor might become much less unpleasant. U.S. researchers have come up with a way to deliver the flu vaccine using a Band-Aid-like sticky patch with 100 microneedles that painlessly dissolve into the skin. Preliminary testing showed the patch to be as safe and effective as the standard flu shot. The findings from the study were published in *The Lancet*. "More than 70 percent preferred the patch way better than the flu shot," says Nadine Rouphael, an associate professor of medicine at Emory University who led the study. She says applying the patch feels a little like pushing Velcro onto your skin.

That will be good for the needle-phobic, and it has other benefits, says epidemiologist Stephen Morse of Columbia University. "It would make vaccination much simpler. Self-administration, slapping it on like a Band-Aid—people can do that from the comfort of their own home." That might increase vaccine uptake during the flu season, especially among busy working adults. Last November, only 37 percent of adults in the U.S. were vaccinated against influenza, which kills roughly 48,000 people in the country every year. "The reality is that for a lot of people, they're too busy. They don't want to wait in line or make appointments to see the doctor," Morse says.

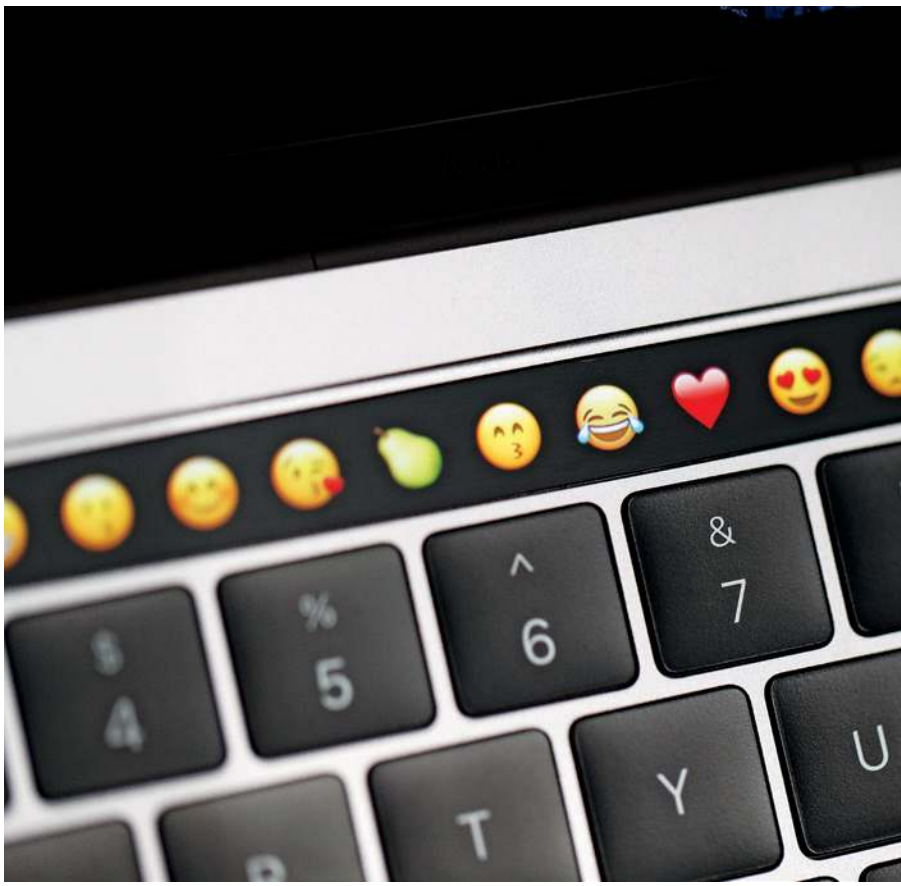
And because the patch remains stable in temperatures up to 104 degrees Fahrenheit, it can be used in developing countries without the hassle or added cost of refrigeration. It could also be distributed quickly, through the mail, during an influenza outbreak.

The sticking point here: You may have to wait five years for the patch. Further testing needs to be done in larger populations. In the meantime, researchers are working on newer-generation patches with needles that dissolve faster and cause less local irritation. They're also exploring whether the patch can be used to deliver other vaccines, such as polio and hepatitis A.

DISRUPTIVE

PIZZA SLICE ATE MY BRAIN

Emoji may overrun the world, but there's hope: AI may kill it



STEPHEN LAM/GETTY

FORGET DONALD TRUMP. Let's talk about something truly dim and oafish: emoji.

The world is in the middle of a disturbing emoji-gasm. You can go see *The Emoji Movie* and sit through a plot as nuanced and complex as an old episode of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. (Don't miss esteemed Shakespearean actor Patrick Stewart getting to be the voice of Poop.) July also brought us World Emoji Day. To mark the occasion, Apple trumpeted its upcoming release of new emoji, a milestone for society that might only be topped by a new shape of marshmallow in Lucky Charms. Microsoft, always an innovator in artificial intelligence, announced a version of its SwiftKey phone keyboard that will predict which emoji you should use based on what you're typing. Just one more reason to be scared of AI.

Billions of emoji fly around the planet every day—those tiny cartoons of faces and things that supposedly let us express ourselves in ways words can't, unless you know a lot of words. Emoji are such a rage, they have to be governed by a global nonprofit called the Unicode Consortium—kind of like the G-20 for smiley faces. Full members include companies such as Apple, Google, Huawei, SAP and IBM. The group has officially sanctioned 2,666 emoji that can be used across any technology platform. Obviously, the people who sit on the Unicode board do important work. This is why the middle finger emoji you type on your iPhone can look the same on an SAP-generated corporate financial report.

Maybe I don't get emoji because I'm a guy.

BY
KEVIN MANEY
@kevinmaney

At least that's what *Cosmopolitan* suggests in a story headlined, "Why Your Boyfriend Hates Emoji: Don't blame him, he can't help it." The story explains: "Straight guys aren't conditioned to flash bashful smiles. They don't do cute winks. They don't make a cute kissy face." Then again, the article's male writer might not be the most enlightened about gender roles in the 21st century. Another *Cosmo* story by the same person is headlined, "13 Things Guys Secretly Want to Do With Your Boobs."

Still, serious academics seem to think emoji are serious. (Oh, and I consider the word *emoji* to be both singular and plural. The kind of people who say "emojis" are the kind of people who say "shrimps.") Researchers from the University of Michigan and Peking University analyzed 427 million emoji-laden messages from 212 countries to understand how emoji use differs across the globe. Those passionate French are the heaviest emoji users. Mexicans send the most negative emoji—yet another justification for keeping them behind a wall. Or you can read *The Semiotics of Emoji*, by Marcel Danesi, an anthropologist at the University of Toronto. "The emoji code harbors within it many implications for the future of writing, literacy, and even human consciousness," he writes. Whoa, dude! Someday, we might *think* in emoji! Hold on while I fire up my Pax and let my mind be blown.

Much of the emoji trend can be blamed on the Japanese, who are fervent purveyors of creepy-cute characters like Hello Kitty and Pikachu. In the 1990s, when Japan was the smartest player in electronics, NTT DoCoMo introduced the first sort-of-smartphone service called i-mode. Shigetaka Kurita, part of the i-mode team, recalled being disappointed by weather reports that just sent the word *fine* to his phone instead of showing a smiling, shining sun like the one he often saw on TV. That gave him the idea of creating tiny symbols for i-mode. The first batch of 176 was inspired by facial expressions, street signs and symbols used in manga. The word *emoji* comes from a mashup of the Japanese words for picture and character.

The rest of the blame for this trend falls on Apple. After introducing the iPhone in 2007, Apple wanted to break into the Japanese market, where users had by then grown accustomed to emoji. So it had to include emoji on the iPhone. That led to people in other countries finding and using the emoji on their iPhones, spreading these things like lice. As emoji got more popular, users wanted more kinds for all kinds of devices. Companies such as Apple and Google keep creating new emoji and proposing them to the Unicode Consortium, which is how we've gotten so many odd emoji, like a roller coaster, cactus, pickax and the eggplant—which, if you don't know your emoji, you shouldn't send to your mother.

The question now is: What does emoji-mania mean? There are those, like Danesi, who believe we're inventing a new language based on pictograms—something like Chinese, except with no spoken version of the symbols. Generations from now, people will ride in driverless flying Ubers and communicate with one another in nothing but emoji. Novels will be written in emoji. (An engineer, Fred Benenson, already translated *Moby-Dick* into emoji. "Call me Ishmael" is a phone, a man's face, a sailboat, a whale and a hand doing an OK sign.)

That vision of the future, though, ignores an important trend. As Amazon's Alexa and similar interactive services are showing, AI software is going to get really good at communicating with us by audio. We're going to stop relying so much on typing with our thumbs and looking at screens. We'll converse with the technology and with one another. Then, the fact that you can't speak in emoji might actually be the end of the damn things. In another decade, we could look back at emoji as a peculiar artifact of an era, like "10-4, good buddy" chatter during the 1970s citizens band radio craze.

Then again, the prevalence of emoji might be another sign of the growing anti-intellectual, anti-science movement in America. Maybe emoji are, in fact, where language and thinking are heading—away from the precision of words and toward the primitive grunts of cartoon images. The nation has already elected a president who writes only in tweets. If he wins another term, he might go another level lower, thrilling supporters by communicating his foreign policy position in nothing but a Russian flag, hearts and an eggplant. N

EMOJI MIGHT BE ANOTHER SIGN OF THE GROWING ANTI-INTELLECTUAL, ANTI-SCIENCE MOVEMENT IN AMERICA.

TO EMOJI OR NOT TO EMOJI: Some believe devotees of these little pictograms are creating a new language. Others posit that we may someday think in emoji.

A BRIEF END OF THE WORLD

There's a good reason authorities are treating the upcoming solar eclipse like a natural disaster

PORT-A-POTTY shortages. Cellular blackout zones. Ambulances stuck in gridlock. These are the conditions emergency managers across the nation are expecting the week of August 21.

No, a major hurricane isn't forecast. This isn't preparation for a cyberattack after someone tipped the FBI. Beyoncé isn't doing a national tour—but the cause is a star of another kind.

The upcoming solar eclipse—the first in 99 years to sweep across the continental United States—has so many fans that disaster-level preparations are being put in place because of the large number of travelers predicted to jockey for prime viewing spots. As many as 7.4 million people are expected to pack into a 70-mile-wide band across the U.S. to watch the moon's umbra block out the sun for a two-minute window on August 21, according to solar eclipse education website GreatAmerican Eclipse.com. The path of totality, the area where the sun is completely blocked out, stretches from Oregon to South Carolina.

Here's why many folks are planning for a disaster: Oregon has a population of 4 million people, and the eclipse is expected to draw 1 million visitors to the state for a few days. In Missouri, preparations resemble that for a blizzard or "everything from St. Patrick's Day parade to a World Series celebration," says Chris Hernandez, city spokesman for Kansas City, Missouri, one of the larger metro areas in the path of the eclipse.

All of those visitors are expected to clog interstates, along with state and local roads, for days before and after the eclipse, much like the rush during emergency evacuations, says Brad Kieserman, vice president of disaster operations and logistics for the American Red Cross. "Some of these places are never going to see traffic like this," he says. In some areas, "the population will be double or triple."

Once visitors arrive, they'll need bottles of water, lodging and restrooms. And, of course, solar glasses.

In Columbia, South Carolina, the city's main museum has bought 5,000 bottles of water for thirsty eclipse viewers, and the city government plans to send out trucks to frequently refill planned water stations. In Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park staff have rented an extra 200 portable toilets to accommodate "their busiest day in history, meaning past or future," says Kathryn Brackenridge, eclipse coordinator for the town of Jackson, Wyoming.

She was hired earlier this year to organize details regarding emergency preparedness and marketing related to the solar eclipse.

Merritt McNeely, director of marketing for the South Carolina State Museum, called a local portable toilet company six months ago to reserve its services. She's worried about a national port-a-potty shortage.

National Construction Rentals, which rents portable toilets across the U.S., hasn't seen a

BY
MEREDITH RUTLAND BAUER
@merebauer

A DIM VIEW: The upcoming solar eclipse has so many fans that disaster-level preparations are being put in place because of the large number of travelers predicted to jockey for prime viewing spots.

MIKE BLAKE/REUTERS

spike in demand, but "there most likely will be last-minute requests as the date approaches," says the company's sales and marketing director, Scott Barley. "We advise customers not to spend too much time in our portable toilets on the actual date of August 21, or they may miss this very brief but memorable event."

And don't expect lodging to be available, experts say. Hotel rooms along the eclipse route were mostly sold out as of June, and Airbnb rentals in the path of totality are reaching $1,000 a night.

That's an issue for the Red Cross, which regularly gives victims of home fires and other destructive events hotel vouchers, so they can sleep comfortably while repairs take place, Kieserman says. "You're not going to have hotel space in most of these places. So where are these people going to stay?"

The Red Cross is preparing hundreds of emergency shelters in the 12 states that will be touched by the eclipse in case of other emergencies that could occur while millions of travelers are away from home, he adds. Everything from earthquakes to heat waves to hurricanes could cause thousands to need immediate shelter.

Hospitals are preparing for more cases of heat stroke, twisted ankles and car crashes, but two factors have Coleen Niemann, spokeswoman for Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center, particularly worried: With so much traffic, normal deliveries of medicine and supplies likely won't arrive on time, so her hospital is stocking up on emergency supplies.

Another concern: Cellular service towers aren't meant to handle the capacity of an additional half-million to a million people per state. Cellphone, GPS and smartphone internet services will likely be nonexistent near the eclipse zone, she says.

Cellphone companies often have priority channels for government agencies and emergency workers, Verizon spokeswoman Karen Schulz tells *Newsweek*. The company "has prepared our networks for the additional capacity needs we expect during the eclipse and have emergency contingency plans in place to ensure access for first responders and other authorities."

Niemann's hospital is turning to beepers and landlines if doctors need to be reached while outside of the building. It has even asked employees to provide the number of a neighbor who has a landline if they don't have one, and the hospital will begin an old-school phone tree to call in staff in the event it needs more emergency responders.

Kieserman says the Red Cross will use ham radio to communicate when cellphone networks inevitably go down, but its staff and volunteers working on emergency response will have some access to top-priority emergency cell channels.

> IN SOME AREAS, "THE POPULATION WILL BE DOUBLE OR TRIPLE."

Given all the hoopla involved in preparing for the event, how should eclipse gypsies get ready? Experts say pack enough food and water in your car in case you're stuck in gridlock traffic for hours, print out directions since GPS (especially Google Maps) likely won't be an option and know where you're staying at night. Don't wing it and expect to find a hotel room the day before the eclipse, or you may end up in an emergency shelter or sleeping in your car.

"Please come prepared," says Denise Germann, National Park Service spokeswoman for Grand Teton National Park. Also, "come with your patience." N

CALLING THE SHOTS: Sheridan directing on the set of *Wind River*, which takes place on the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming.

FRED HAYES/THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

WEEKEND

TRAVEL, CULTURE AND OTHER GOOD THINGS

Men Who Wear Hats

THE WRITER OF *SICARIO* AND *HELL OR HIGH WATER* RETURNS WITH ANOTHER CRACKLING MODERN WESTERN. HERO TO BE DETERMINED

BY
MARY KAYE SCHILLING
@MaryKaye4Real

IN THE FINAL moments of the film *Hell or High Water*, Sheriff Marcus Hamilton, played by Jeff Bridges, visits one of the brothers responsible for a string of bank robberies in several small, struggling towns of West Texas. After taking stock of what those acts have cost in lives, as well as what they have yielded for the brother and his family, Bridges chuckles: "The things we do for our kids, huh?"

The screenwriter, Taylor Sheridan, has a way with a wryly humorous and understated line. He came late to writing, but he came at it hard. The film *Hell or High Water*, only the second script he has written, was nominated for several Oscars, including best original screenplay (it was also 2016's highest-grossing indie). His first script, *Sicario*, another critical and commercial smash, came out the year before. Sheridan's latest, *Wind River*, he got to direct himself.

A loosely linked trilogy, the three films, all located in the modern American West, hold up a mirror to some very bad shit: *Sicario* centers on the militarization of the drug war in southern Arizona; *Hell or High Water* highlights the latest chapter in the multigenerational story of West Texas poverty, this one sparked by predatory loans; and *Wind River* addresses violence against Native American women on Wyoming's Wind River Indian Reservation, a place of near-impossible conditions, natural and otherwise. "The films explore how much and how little has changed since the American West was settled, as well as the consequence of that settlement." The reservations, he adds, are the most tangible remnant of that, "our country's greatest shame."

Thrillers—heavy on action and violence, lightly dusted with conscience—are Sheridan's sweet spot. If there are heroes in these stories, they're at the discretion of the audience; even the men or women in white hats sometimes get results in morally ambiguous ways. *Hell or High Water*'s good sheriff is a casual racist, and the antihero most people root for, played by Chris Pine, is "a 40-year-old fuck-up who finally realized that his kids were growing up to be just like him, because he'd given them no alternative," says Sheridan. "He's not a Robin Hood. He's not altruistic." Many people, though, can relate to his hatred of banks and house foreclosures, no matter that the mess he's in is largely self-created.

"There's not a lot of pure evil in the world, but it's amazing how little it takes to do great damage," says Sheridan. "Most of us don't confront *pure* anything. What our life does involve is a whole lot of 60/40 and 70/30. Bad people sometimes do good things, and good people do really bad things, or do something the audience disagrees with. I can't wait for PETA to get on me about what Cory Lambert's job is."

Wind River's Lambert, played by Jeremy Renner, is an animal tracker who shoots the coyotes and mountain lions that kill stock. "It's a real job. Don't bitch at me if you don't like it," Sheridan chides his imagined critics at People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. "I didn't romanticize the job, and I didn't demonize it."

Like his previous scripts, *Wind River* highlights a preoccupation of Sheridan's: the stressors that tear family structures apart, like drug wars or reverse mortgages or entrenched racist laws. Each of his stories features a father who will do anything to make up for, as he sees it, failing his family. Lambert is enlisted by a rookie FBI agent, played by Elizabeth Olsen, to investigate the rape and murder of a young woman on the Wind River Reservation. Lambert used to live there with his Native wife; they split up over the apparent death of their eldest child, a teenage daughter who disappeared three years before the film begins. "With *Wind River*, I

> "THERE'S NOT A LOT OF PURE EVIL IN THE WORLD, BUT IT'S AMAZING HOW LITTLE IT TAKES TO DO A LOT OF DAMAGE."

became fascinated with the notion of how you overcome a tragedy—accepting it, making whatever peace you can with it, without ever knowing what really happened," says Sheridan. "I wanted to watch someone go through that struggle."

Likewise, he wanted to explore a subject that is largely ignored. "The social issues that Native Americans face are the same as in other parts of the country—domestic abuse, poverty, drug addiction, alcoholism—but on the reservation, no one is watching or listening," he says. Most chillingly, rape—by Native and non-Native men—has become a rite of passage for adolescent girls, some of whom simply disappear. A note at the film's end reads, "While missing person statistics are compiled for every other demographic, none exist for Native American women." Sheridan had hoped to include an exact number. "I had two attorneys spend three months trying to get that statistic. But no one knows how many are missing."

Until 2013, he adds, "sexual assault of a Native woman by a non-Native couldn't be prosecuted because it was a state crime on federal land. At the same time, if you were a Native accused of assaulting a non-Native, you could be prosecuted twice, once by the federal government and once by the tribal police. It was a double standard of medieval proportions."

Sheridan doesn't want to, nor can he, offer solutions. "That's not my job," he says. "I can only pose the questions. Who wants to spend $15 on a ticket and be preached to? I can't stand that." But he can suggest the only option for most people: the power of personal choice, of "how we conduct ourselves within our reality." As Lambert says of the rez at one point, "There's no luck here, just survivors." For Sheridan, the mutable idea of heroism rests between responsibility and empathy.

SHERIDAN'S dialogue shares the pleasurable, easy lope of Larry McMurtry, who has written evocatively of the West's past and present. They both grew up on ranches in West Texas, and each had to leave to find his way—Sheridan to Hollywood, where he spent 20 years as a journeyman actor, most famously playing a cop on *Sons of Anarchy*. (He has said he learned to write screenplays from reading thousands of scripts, developing "an allergy to exposition" and a devotion to "absurdly simple plots.") When I mention the overlap with McMurtry, Sheridan is silent for so long I begin to think he might be offended. But then he says, "*Lonesome Dove* is one of the great books. It's the first I read by choice—I mean other than for school. I had never seen anyone get Texas right, to go beyond the clichés. So I'm a huge fan. He was very influential of my style of dialogue."

COWBOYS AND INDIANS: *Wind River*'s Olsen and Renner, above, and *Hell or High Water*'s Bridges and Birmingham.

You can hear echoes of McMurtry in the affectionately tart banter between Sheriff Hamilton and his half-Native, half-Mexican deputy, played by Gil Birmingham, as well as in the friendship between Lambert and the father of the murdered girl, also played by Birmingham. You can see the influence, too, in Sheridan's cast of indelible eccentrics, as well as the strong women characters (like Olsen's and Emily Blunt's FBI agent in *Sicario)* that sidestep stereotypes. Both writers are intent on demythologizing the American West, retaining the best of the frontier spirit—the self-reliance, the stoicism, the taciturn wit—while conjuring its worst aspects.

In addition to *Wind River*, Sheridan wrote the *Sicario* sequel, *Soldado*, due later this year, and is working on *Yellowstone*, the first series for the newly created Paramount Network (formerly Spike TV). The 10-episode show, which stars Kevin Costner, is set on a ranch in present-day Wyoming, where the writer lives with his family, and focuses on the tensions that preoccupy him. "I'm in prep, which is the point where I always feel like this is the thing that ruins my career," says Sheridan. "That one moment where you look at it and go, This is a really bad idea." N

AL TOGETHER NOW: Gore in Colorado in March, at a training session for his Climate Reality Leadership Corps.

MOVIE: REVIEW

A Snowball's Chance in the White House

IN HIS LATEST DOCUMENTARY, AL GORE TAKES ANOTHER PATIENT STAB AT INFLUENCING CLIMATE CHANGE DENIERS

IN AL GORE'S *An Inconvenient Sequel*, there's an enjoyable episode involving Dale Ross, the mayor of Georgetown, Texas. An affable booster built like a fireplug, Ross tells Gore he's spearheading the plan to get his town to switch to sustainable energy. His reason is that it's cheaper, and he has a responsibility to his ratepayers. The kicker is that Ross is a conservative Republican. It's a heartening moment at a time of horrendous political division, but it's also central to the movie's approach, which is to insist on facts over ideology and show why it's a good idea to present the practical as well as the moral argument.

The documentary, directed by Bonni Cohen and Jon Shenk, doesn't have to do much to make its case. This sequel to the 2006 Academy Award–winning *An Inconvenient Truth*, which inserted the climate change debate into popular culture, begins with an audio montage of conservative voices decrying that film. One ridicules the claim of ocean levels rising in lower Manhattan; later, we see footage of Hurricane Sandy flooding the 9/11 memorial. That's the canniest rhetorical flourish here—to pit the damage of national sacred ground against climate change deniers, the most powerful being Republican Senator James Inhofe from Oklahoma, whose genius refutation of radical weather disruption was to toss a snowball in the Senate chamber.

In the film, we see Inhofe browbeating Gore during a 2007 Senate hearing, to the point that Senator Barbara Boxer tells him to let Gore answer the questions he's been asked. The reason *An Inconvenient Sequel* succeeds is apparent in the former vice president's patient if weary response to Inhofe: the hope that they can talk one-on-one—that perhaps then, with sufficient calm and time and irrefutable evidence, Gore can convince the senator of the perils facing the planet. And that's the tone the movie takes. Persistence over ridicule. Understanding (or an attempt at it) over heated and partisan hectoring.

An Inconvenient Sequel is, like its predecessor, largely a slideshow presented by Gore, who remains a warm and likable presence. His onstage points are illustrated by footage of his travels to melting ice caps; to India, where he tries to discourage the building of coal-burning facilities; and to the Paris talks, where he helps broker a deal to give India the credit and decent interest rates that will allow it to invest in sustainable energy. A good portion of the film is devoted to the drama leading up to the 2015 Paris climate accord. Since President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from that agreement on June 1, the end finds Gore reassuring supporters that, despite the inevitable setbacks that will result from Trump's decision, the fight will go on.

The movie is a piece of advocacy, and it succeeds at that: The conclusive science presented is powerful evidence that there is only one side to this story. The filmmakers and Gore clearly want to re-energize climate change crusaders and persuade those on the fence to jump to their side. But will *An Inconvenient Sequel* influence staunch deniers? Will they even see it? Given the current rigid partisanship in this country, that's probably unlikely. And yet, there are worse ways to spend your time this summer than to slip into an air-conditioned theater to watch this film. After all, it's hot outside.

—CHARLES TAYLOR

FROM LEFT: LOREY SEBASTIAN; FRED HAYES/THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY; HELEN H. RICHARDSON/THE DENVER POST/GETTY

Writing Below the Belt

IN HIS FARCICAL DETECTIVE NOVEL, *THE SEVENTH FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE,* LAURENT BINET TAKES A POKE AT INTELLECTUALS, WITH WITHERING RESULTS

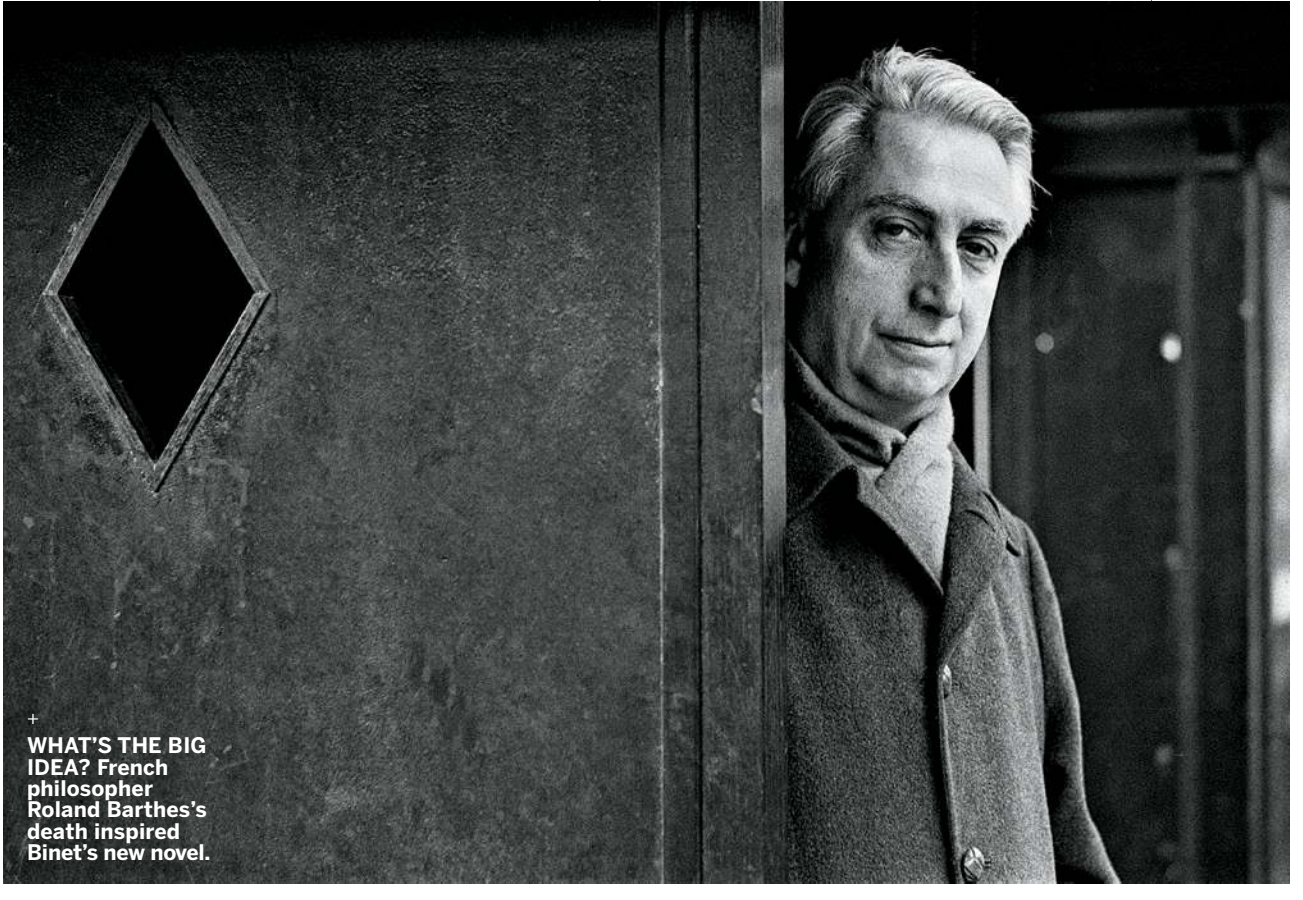
LAURENT BINET describes the 10 years he spent researching and writing his first novel, *HHhH,* about the assassination of Nazi leader Reinhard Heydrich, as "a neurotic search for the truth." The 45-year-old French author's second novel, *The Seventh Function of Language*, completed in half the time, has a more slippery grasp of reality.

Binet developed a passion for the French literary theorist Roland Barthes when he was a high school literature teacher. (Barthes's wide-ranging and influential criticism contributed to, among other fields, semiotics and structuralism.) In March 1980, Barthes was hit by a laundry van as he was walking home in Paris; he died a month later due to his injuries. It was an accident, but Binet began to spin a story in which the death was a targeted assassination. What could the motive have been? "I thought that it could be about language," says Binet, but "it also needed to be about power, so why not make the motive the power of language?"

The result is a frequently hilarious detective story that pitches a pair of oddly matched investigators into the intellectual maneuvering of 1980s Paris and beyond. Included are a cast of real-life international luminaries—philosophers and writers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco, Judith Butler, Bernard-Henri Levy, Noam Chomsky and Camille Paglia—cropping up in a variety of extravagant situations (including one memorable encounter between the detectives and Foucault in a gay sauna). Of such larky fictionalization Binet says, "I was more interested in the legends of these people than with who they really were."

The Seventh Function's publication in France in 2015 was met with well-publicized outrage; a critic for *L'Express* magazine described it as "the

BY
TOBIAS GREY
@YbotYerg



WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA? French philosopher Roland Barthes's death inspired Binet's new novel.

FROM LEFT: ULF ANDERSEN/GETTY; PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE (2); EDWIN TSE

most insolent novel of the year." (It also won the prestigious Prix Interallié.) Such a scandal is hard to imagine in America, given our anti-intellectual culture; think of it as Kanye West being portrayed as the second coming of Jesus Christ and serving Communion wafers at his concerts.

One of those most offended was author and gadfly Philippe Sollers, who, along with Barthes, was part of the French intellectual movement of the '60s and '70s; the two friends included each other in their work. Sollers objected to a scene in which the character named for him is castrated as punishment for losing a duel of rhetoric. "Are you happy with my emasculation? Everybody liked it," the disgruntled Sollers told an interviewer for the culture magazine *Transfuge*. (His wife, the philosopher Julia Kristeva, is a character as well.)

> "ARE YOU HAPPY WITH MY EMASCULATION? EVERYBODY LIKED IT."

"I won't lie to you. I'm not fond of Sollers, either as an intellectual or a writer," says Binet. "But I did not set out to mock him. I just sensed that he had big potential as a comic character."

Binet's novel is notable for its mixture of high and low culture. The author spent several years reading everything he could about so-called French theory and semiotics, but he drew equal inspiration from American TV series and films. The police detective on the trail of Barthes's killer is called Jacques Bayard—a nod to *24*'s main character, Jack Bauer—and *Fight Club* influenced the take-no-prisoners-style debating competitions organized by the novel's mysterious Logos Club.

"I was only 8 when Barthes died, but reading him makes me nostalgic for a time I didn't know," Binet says. The author regrets that "fierce arguments about linguistic problems" are no longer on France's intellectual agenda. "The main debate in France for the last 10 years has been to do with very right-wing topics like national identity," he says. "One of the big reasons I wrote this book was because I was fed up with all this bullshit."

Binet is now researching his third novel, which will take place in the 16th century. He is comforted by the thought that he won't be hurting anybody's feelings. "You don't have so much trouble with the dead," he says. "The Nazis [in *HHhH*] complained much less than Sollers did." N

The Seventh Function of Language
by Laurent Binet; translated by Sam Taylor
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
Out August 1 ($27)

BOOKS: REVIEW

High Noon 2.0

Adam Sternbergh imagines a town where everyone is guilty, if only they remembered why

HBO'S *WESTWORLD* has great moments, but too often it is more puzzling than pleasing. *The Blinds*, the third novel from Adam Sternbergh, is, like *Westworld*, a sci-fi Western thriller, equally wily in its vision, but it crackles with noir-ish delights, thanks to the author's flinty wit and a cast of indelible miscreants and psychopaths.

The book's inhabitants live in Caesura (rhymes with *tempura*), a fenced-in cluster of cement cottages in Texas, cut off from society. The name sounds like a brand of antidepressant, and that's essentially what the town is: Each Caesuran is either a former violent criminal who ratted or a witness to a crime, but they don't know which. Their worst deeds, impulses and memories have been wiped from their minds, an experiment in second chances—at least, that's what the secretive company behind the project would like people to believe. It's not a prison (everyone is free to leave), but it's made clear that whoever they testified against will likely find them on the outside.

One of the funnier conceits of the book is how the residents choose given and surnames for their new identities—a Chinese menu–style system of picking one-half from column A (movie stars) and the other from column B (vice presidents). This includes the tin-star sheriff, Calvin Cooper. He, like everyone, has secrets, not least of which is his relationship with the mother of the town's only child. Layers of betrayal and deceit are revealed, and the who-done-it clichés (Cooper hits the bottle hard) and a few improbabilities don't undermine the twists. Sternbergh writes a beautiful sentence, even when the subject is mayhem, and he has a talent for lean, propulsive plotting. There are obvious issues of identity and loss, but *The Blinds* also posits a theory, one many of us increasingly entertain: What if the only way to be truly safe—or happy—is to leave the modern world far behind? —*MARY KAYE SCHILLING*

The Blinds, by Adam Sternbergh, Ecco, $26.99

'Villa Iolas, 1982'

WILLIAM E. JONES

THE LEGENDARY gallerist Alexander Iolas gave Andy Warhol his first solo show, in New York City in 1952. The Egyptian-born curator, who owned a villa in Athens, Greece, collected painting, sculpture, ceramics and people. "He was afraid of being alone," says William E. Jones, who was invited to the villa in the summer of 1982, when he was a freshman at Yale (his classmate was the gallerist's grandniece).

Iolas greeted his young visitor from a bed flanked by two bronze horses. Jones recalls the atmosphere in the house as faintly sinister: "I was afraid that something not strictly legal was going on." But that summer inspired Jones to become an artist—the award-winning experimental filmmaker and photographer he is today.

One day at the villa, while Iolas was out, Jones photographed its contents. The most valuable work had already been sold—it felt, he says, as if he was documenting the end of something—but pieces like these sheep by François-Xavier and Claude Lalanne, a Pierre Soulages abstract and Moroccan decorative art remained. Iolas died not long after, in 1987, and the villa was ransacked.

"When I saw the aftermath of the looting," Jones says, "I became physically ill." These photographs record its pristine state: Tutankhamen's tomb as Howard Carter first entered it. "It's true," Jones says. "I have become an archaeologist." —*MATTHEW SWEET*

Hand-coated inkjet print, 20 x 16 inches, edition of six with two artist's proofs, $7,500; DAVIDKORDANSKYGALLERY.COM.

New photographs and a film by Jones are on view at the David Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles through August 26.

WILLIAM E. JONES/DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY/LOS ANGELES, CA

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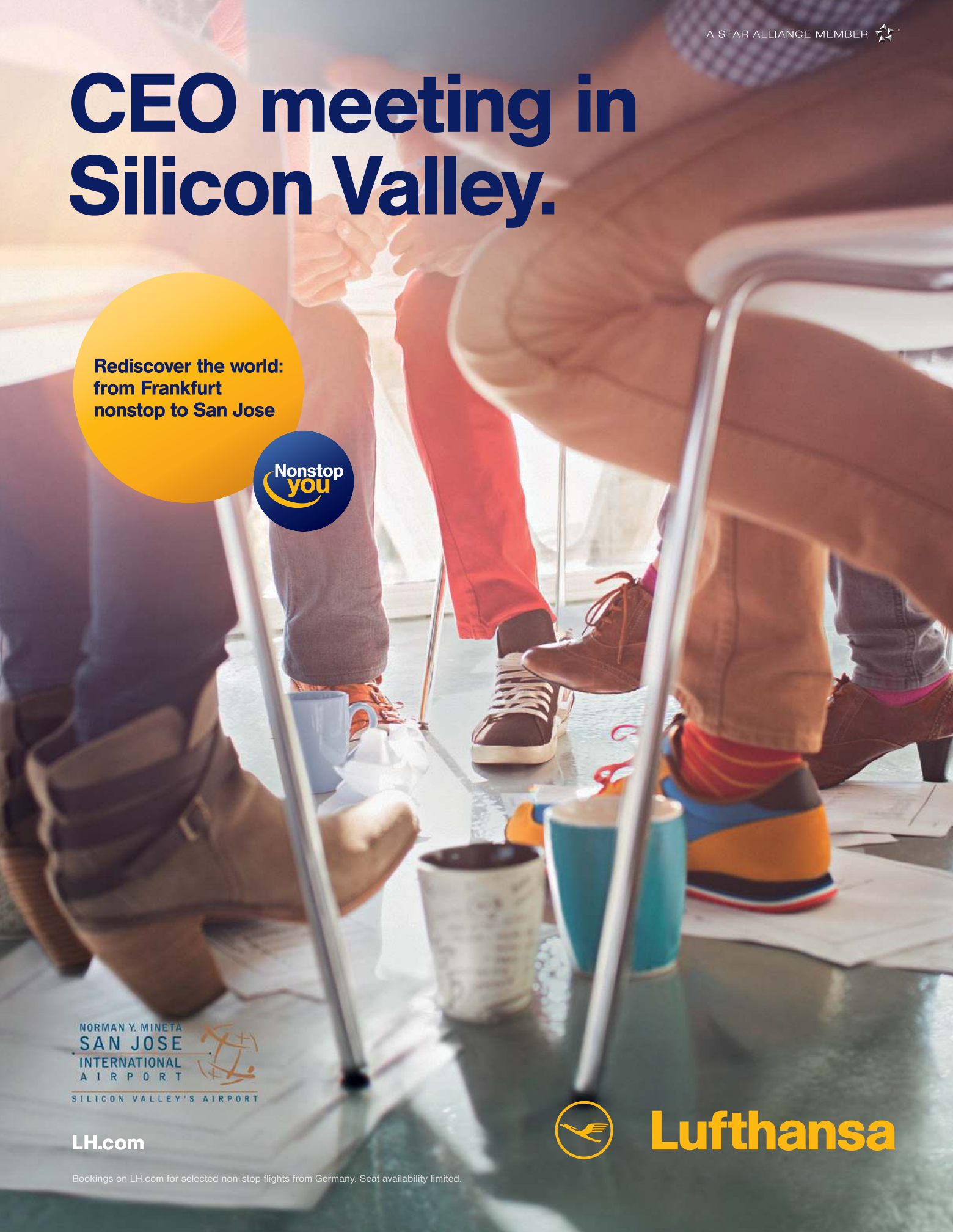
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