

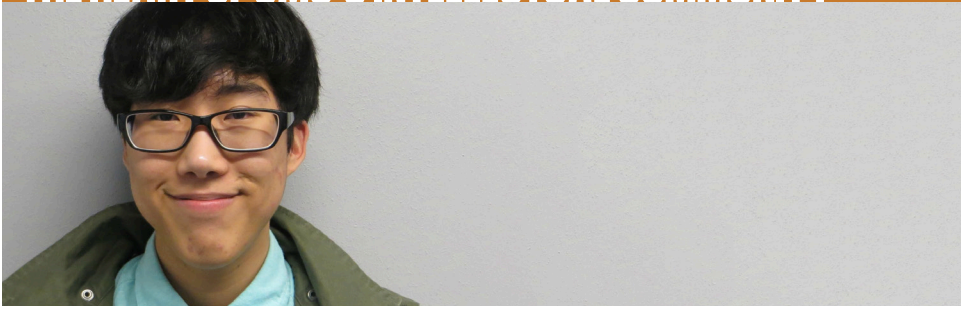


# Hilltopics

## *Tearing at the Seams*

**THE DIRECTION OF OUR COUNTRY, AND  
MORE, UP FOR GRABS ON NOVEMBER 8TH**





## Remembering Jaime Shim: Writer, Scholar, Friend

BY KENNY MARTIN

We, as a human people, are living in strange times. For those of us here at SMU, and particularly in the UHP, the times are also sad ones.

It's hard to know the best way to remember a classmate, especially one who wasn't all that well-known among the general student body. I knew Jaime from Introduction to Creative Writing, where, to be frank, he sometimes rubbed people the wrong way. If he thought something was trite or unclear or unexciting or just plain stupid, he'd tell you straight up. That's something you don't often encounter in a creative writing workshop, and it could be shocking. But Jaime knew how good writing is done, and once you got over the initial sting you couldn't help but feel an immense sense of gratitude for his honest and insightful comments. In fact, Jaime was the person in the class whose opinion you simply couldn't ignore, and couldn't do without. At a school where real writers are hard to come by, Jaime was one of our best, and his loss will be felt for a long time to come.

That's how I remember Jaime; many others remember him, and miss him, too. I'll let their words speak for themselves:

**Anton Nemirovski** said that "more than any other student I've met at SMU," Jaime was the type of person whose "drive and brilliance...bowls you over at first, but then completely inspires you."

**Linda Evans** recalled that "Jaime's playful spirit was in fine form as

Halloween approached in Fall 2014, the first semester that he and Taysha began serving as "ESL Volunteers" in one of my courses. They showed up that evening in Halloween costumes (as did I, but theirs were better!) and engaged students in discussion of the holiday traditions...The students adored them both."

**John Ruggio** noted that in fiction workshop "you could often see the comment he was going to make before he spoke. He would turn his head sideways and smile, regarding the writer almost like a tiger does its prey, before unleashing a tirade that was sometimes harsh, but never untrue... those writers who would have been in class with him are unfortunate. Because they will never get to experience what it's like to see Jaime's heard turn sideways before smiling at them, knowing that they're about to become better writers."

**Daniel Muehring** spoke of how Jaime was "intimidating to a naïve freshman, as he was more than willing to call people out on their half-assed answers or ridiculous theories (myself more than once). This isn't to say that he was always abrasive, but that he cared about the quality of work being done around him. He was more than willing to talk with you or walk you through an argument if you asked." Daniel remembers Jaime's struggles too: "One could see that he struggled with bigger issues that many of us are fortunate enough to never have to consider...It's immensely easier to ignore the problems afflicting our community than to acknowledge these issues and help. Let us try to

do now what we can as a community to improve and seek out help for one another—before the unthinkable happens, rather than afterward."

**Terisha Kolencherry** said that Jaime's "work ethic was almost unmatched, his passion for the Supreme Court was ferocious... But even in his fast pace and determination, there was a gentleness that existed within him. I remember going over to Dr. Kobylka's house and sitting around in the backyard. We always knew where to find Jaime—with Karl, the dog." She also recalled how "at his prayer service, his father talked about how for Jaime this world was like a piece of uncomfortable clothing that doesn't quite fit. I wish that wasn't the case...If there is an afterlife, I hope Jaime's there talking to all the Supremes and giving them hell about their constitutional interpretations."

**River Ribas** chose to memorialize Jaime in a poem:

You were the only person as nerdy as me in Astronomy freshman year. Now, you've graduated to the stars. and I'm sure you'd slice through that metaphor in workshop but you aren't here now and there's no one to smack level-headed sense into my airy work anymore and I hope you had a chance to listen to Seoul's song Stay With Us. It sounded like one of the universes you wrote.

**Michael Robertson** remembered the origin of Jaime's name, saying that "Jaime was not his real first name...he adopted it because in the French 'J'aime' translates as 'I like' or 'I love'...Jaime sacrificed and suffered to love as he wanted and live as he wanted."

I would echo a sentiment felt by everyone I talked to, and verbalized by Terisha: "He was one of the best of us, and he will be sorely missed."

*Work is underway to create the Jaime Shim Memorial Scholarship Fund. If you are interested in donating, helping out, or learning more, please contact Michael Robertson at [mjrobertson@smu.edu](mailto:mjrobertson@smu.edu) or Val Erwin in the Women & LGBT Center at [verwin@smu.edu](mailto:verwin@smu.edu).*



*Saturday Night Live's* take on the first presidential debate currently has close to 18 million views on YouTube, while the debate itself only has 12.5 million. It has become easy for comedians to joke about both sides of the political spectrum because it's pretty hard to turn on the news and not see something about either Clinton or Trump.

## The Current State of Meta-Comedy in TV and Film

BY ALEX GURASICH

How do you feel when a movie breaks the fourth wall? Betrayed? Humored? Confused? Meta-comedy is responsible for such approaches to the genre. What makes it so interesting is that there isn't really another genre of comedy quite like it. It forces the viewer to step back and confront the fact that what he or she is viewing is a performance and that none of it is actually real. Classic examples include the work of Woody Allen and Shakespeare, where characters constantly step out of the action of the plot to talk to the audience about their current state or future plans, or even just to make a joke.

Meta-comedy really reached its height with the movies of Mel Brooks, who went out of his way to not only break the fourth wall but to absolutely destroy that wall and never look back. In the climax of Brooks's *Blazing Saddles*, the characters literally bust through the wall onto another Hollywood set and continue the

action there. It was his taste for meta that drove most of Brooks's films into the iconic statuses they hold today; movies such as *Spaceballs*, *Young Frankenstein*, and *The Producers* are brimming with meta-comedy and are considered some of the staples of the comedy genre.

So with all of the promise and cleverness that meta-comedy can provide, why is it that instances of it in film and TV are now few and far between? I'm hard-pressed to find examples of clever meta-comedy nowadays, and I can't understand why. Perhaps with the current state of the country, with all of the political fervor and clashing ideologies, people want to escape to the alternative worlds that TV and film have to offer more than ever.

Or perhaps people feel that meta-comedy is old news and that topical humor is the only way to bring in the views, and they're not wrong.

But with so much of the current political discussion revolving around transparency (whether it be email servers or tax returns), why not bring some transparency to our entertainment? Enter Dan Harmon, producer of such shows as *Rick and Morty* and *Community*, which are helping to revitalize the niche of meta-comedy. Harmon wants to make it incredibly clear to the audience that what they are watching is a TV show and that real issues are happening out in the real world. Characters in *Community* even make reference to this, saying that life isn't a TV show where everything wraps up nicely. Harmon shakes us back into the real world with his cleverly written meta-comedy, and I hope his work brings about a second life for the long-forgotten genre.

We are living in a constantly-changing world where it can be easy to escape into the worlds of TV and film to get away. As Mel Brooks even said, "Humor is just another defense against the universe." What I hope is that, like Brooks, comedians begin to use humor not as a defense against the universe, but as a way to tell us to look at it.

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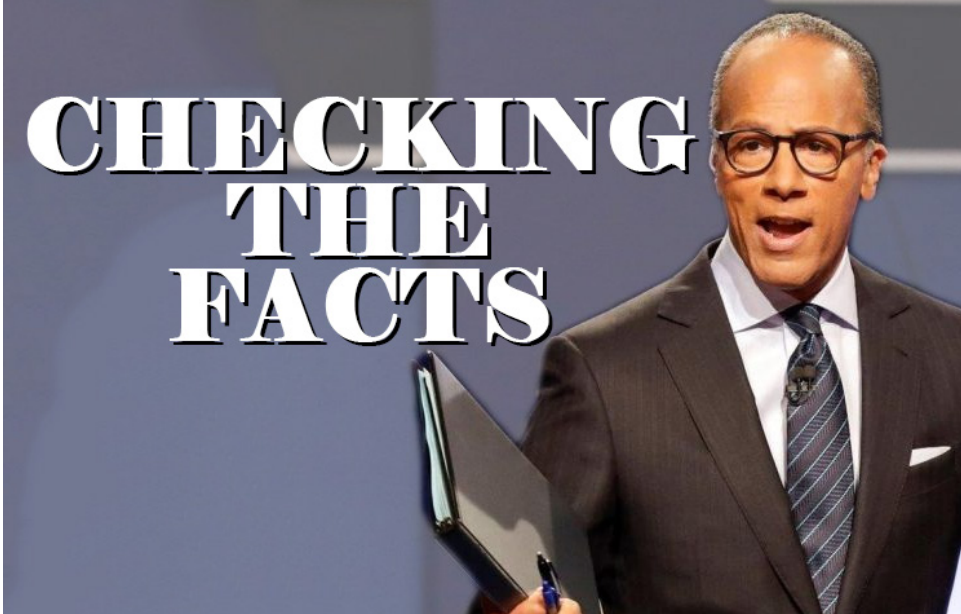
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## CHECKING THE FACTS



### Facts Are Debatable

BY DREW SNEED

Less than a month ago, the media bashed Trump's campaign manager Kellyanne Conway for complaining that the presidential debate moderators should not act as "virtual fact-checkers." At first glance Conway's stance against the use of facts seems both suspicious and ridiculous; however, upon inspection I have come to agree with her. While I do not back Conway's candidate, I do agree with her position on this issue due to three truths that have manifested themselves throughout America's seventy-six years of general presidential debates.

"I'm sorry, what?...did I understand you to say, sir, that the Russians are not using Eastern Europe as their own sphere of influence?" Max Frankel, the moderator of a 1976 presidential debate, asked Ford after the then-president falsely claimed, "There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe." Frankel has since admitted that his question was a biased attempt to throw Ford a "lifeline" and give him a chance to correct his devastating blunder. Although Ford refused to recant, this brings us to our first truth: people, including moderators, have biases. Often these biases manifest themselves in

action. In this instance and others, presidential debate moderators have targeted a chosen candidate for help or harm.



Thirty-six years later, in a 2012 presidential debate, moderator Candy Crowley interrupted Mitt Romney and stated, "He did in fact, sir, call it an act of terror." Crowley's comments ignited laughter and cheers from an audience who just heard Romney insinuate that Barack Obama failed for two weeks to call the 2012 Benghazi attack "an act of terror." However, a careful reading of Obama's speech to which Crowley

referred reveals that Obama may have been speaking of 9/11 when he used the term "acts of terror." People have debated the intention of Obama's ambiguous words ever since, and it remains a hazy issue. So our second truth becomes clear: the truthfulness of some claims cannot be resolved in a simple and *timely* fact-check.

During the first 2016 presidential debate, Donald Trump claimed his animosity toward the 2003 invasion of Iraq but moderator Lester Holt insisted, "The record shows otherwise." Contrary to Holt's statement, the record does not show otherwise. In fact, the record shows no clear or convincing evidence putting Trump for or against the Iraq War prior to invasion. This brings us to our third and final truth: people lie. Yes, even moderators. So unless the solution is to have a second table of moderators who fact-check the first, and possibly a third fact-checking the second and so on, then we must search for a better process.

Some say we should rely on the candidates to fact-check each other; however, I believe it is safe to presume that each candidate is biased toward one particular party and one particular candidate. If so, then they are susceptible to the same pitfalls of Frankel and Holt. I present a different solution. That is: just do it yourself. Due to the real possibility of skewed, indefinite, and untrue fact-checks, our trust in the infallibility of presidential debate moderators should dwindle, and our reliance on our own investigation should increase. Indeed, if we truly wish to know the validity of each candidate's claims, then it is time to start reading up on the issues ourselves.





## Wanted: Nasty Women

BY TERISHA KOLENCHERRY

When I was a senior in high school, my debate partner and I decided to run an argument about double standards that women faced in the Public Forum Debate community. The basic premise of our argument was that in order to have productive debate, we needed to address issues that pervaded the community, such as sexism. As two young women, we felt overwhelmed by comments on our clothing rather than our arguments, by being called “bitchy” when we were assertive in debate rounds, and by being told that we were more likely to win if we partnered with men because it was “more balanced.” The responses to our argument were mixed. We had many experiences in which other female debaters would come up to us and share their stories of implicit and blatant sexism, but there were also many times when people would accuse us of trying to “break” debate by speaking out about this problem. In one instance, we sat there as a white man in the back of the room told us that he “was sorry we felt oppressed, but this isn’t the place to talk about it.”

Although this reaction might be surprising to some, it isn’t a particularly new phenomenon.

Often, when systematic biases are addressed, people tend to turn away or try to put those accusations in a corner and forget about them. However, this election cycle has been exhilarating because for the first time, concerns about the double standards women face in politics, and in life, are being broadcast on a national stage.

Not everyone is a fan of Hillary Clinton. I’ve heard many women frustrated with the idea forced upon them that since she’s a woman and they’re women too, they must vote for Hillary. This isn’t true, but what is undeniable is that through her candidacy, Hillary Clinton has brought to light problems that women, no matter their party identification, face all the time. Hillary is the epitome of the woman who is simultaneously doing one thing and its opposite, trying to balance the often contradictory demands our society places on women and making the best of it. She wears heels in an attempt to be the perfect amount of female while also being aggressive, but not too aggressive. She’s pretty, but if people say they don’t like her smile she’ll pivot to the “smart and qualified” look—but not too smart and qualified. Hillary Clinton has

spent a lifetime negotiating the impossible conditions for success our culture places on women, and she has figured out how to play the game to her benefit: in short, she is a nasty woman.

We need more nasty women—and it’s not just about equality. A study by the Credit Suisse Institute showed that firms that were dominated by men on average took longer to recover from the 2008 financial crisis. In their book “Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, and Future,” Sue Thomas and Clyde Wilcox argue that the democratic value of representation depends on, among other things, having more women in political leadership. If we truly want to be a representative democracy, then it doesn’t make sense to have men making decisions about women’s issues when women could easily represent themselves. Even on a less scientific scale, an increase in strong female role models helps to foster a sense of confidence in younger generations of girls. We already see this with stories of young girls who are excited to be the President of the United States when they grow up. We see tides turning and Hillary is just the beginning.

Her poised demeanor when people make her defend her husband’s policies, or her campaign manager’s actions, or President Obama’s decisions, or her contributors’ activities—as well as her own—are inspirational, because in the face of a double standard that allows her opponent to get away with

1 Brodock, Kate. “Equality Is Great, But What About The Real Benefits of Women in Leadership?” *Forbes*. *Forbes Magazine*, 26 Sept. 2012. Web. 21 Oct. 2016.

2 Thomas, Sue, and Clyde Wilcox. *Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, and Future*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998. Print.



## We Are Being Haunted by the Spirit of Intolerance

BY CECILIA WEIGMAN

As Halloween approaches, we excitedly anticipate what we will be doing on the night where most anything can happen, be it pulling crude pranks, attending crazy parties, or just going door to door getting free candy. The nature of this holiday, however, is also problematic, in that it promotes an anarchy of behavior, attitude, and dress. The mysterious, scary, and nocturnal aspects of Halloween combine to produce an attitude similar to that of Mardi Gras in New Orleans. It is needless to say that for many people, what happens on Halloween night stays there.

This moral relativity causes us to think twice about how we as a culture define what we value. After all, if something is precious enough to us, then no amount of rebelliousness will sway us from holding what we value sacred. For example, as a nation, we value safety, so for a person to go out on Halloween and proceed to shoot a gun everywhere would mean immediate arrest. No one would stand for this form of anarchical behavior even on a night when many things normally considered harmful are pretty much accepted.

Yet, there is another form of anarchy—one that attacks our beliefs as a culture—that is reflected in our choice of costumes this Halloween season. Seemingly inconsequential to some people, costume trends can in fact speak strongly to the values we hold as a nation, especially because companies selling these costumes

market them to the consumer. If the demand for these costumes is high, then they will likely be on the shelves in bulk. Therefore, we must turn our attention to the website of one of the largest Halloween costume manufacturers: Spirit Halloween.

Scrolling through the hundreds of costumes on this website, one sees interesting trends. Each of the costumes has a title or one line description usually containing a catchy pun or joke of some sort. Among the men's costumes are the "Zeus Costume," the "Beef Taco Costume," and the "Hipster Nerd Costume," to name a few. However, under the women's section the names tell a completely different story.

Most of the female costume names contain sexually explicit or provocative words like: rebel, sexy, cutie, enchanting, brazen, curvy, hot, dazzling, princess, hottie, etc. Also of note, the women's costumes do not use "woman" or "female" as part of their names but "girl" or "doll." These may sound harmless at first look, but let us compare them to the names of the men's costumes which mainly just state the title of the costume objectively like: "Doctor Costume," "Beef Taco Costume," "Pope Costume," etc. Clearly, the standards and expectations for men's and women's costumes are vastly different and serve to insult—if not outright deny—women's dignity.

Of course, we cannot ignore the

various *culturally* offensive costumes listed on the Spirit Halloween website. The website contains countless "Indian" costumes as well as others like "Los Muertos Day of the Dead Costume" and "Cantina Gal Costume." The latter two play on stereotyped traditions of Mexican culture as well as of Hispanic/Latinx culture in general. These costumes should not be costumes—they not only generalize multiple traditions into one stereotypical portrayal but also delegitimize the validity of these cultures as reverent and beautiful. There is a reason that every Halloween we hear outcries against the "gangster" and "Indian" costumes. They are culturally insensitive and insulting to people who identify with the cultures they exploit.

Halloween costumes are not simply fun outfits people bring out for one night of the year; they reflect our culture and beliefs as a society. If girls and young women see hundreds of "sexy" yet demeaning costumes, will they see themselves as women who are valued and dignified? Or will they buy into the idea that women are somehow less than men? Likewise, if people think it is okay to buy and wear "Indian" costumes as casual displays of entire cultural and religious traditions, then we have a lot of work to do as a nation. The simple rule of economics is that companies will not sell products that people do not buy, so the fact that these costumes are still on sale means that people are still buying them. This is the issue: not the fact that these offensive costumes exist, because unfortunately in this world of prejudice and intolerance those things will always be there, but the fact that they exist in popular culture and that people largely accept them. Lately, our country has been dealing with problems of racial and religious intolerance and people are seeking to change this, but if we propagate these prejudiced ideas in something as mundane as Halloween costumes, what hope do we have of solving these issues at a higher level?





## Pepe: The Meme, The Legend...The Hate Symbol?

BY KAREN GUAN

Virtually all of us Internet dwellers have, at one point or another, encountered what might possibly be the most famous meme on the Internet: Pepe the frog. Pepe's image is distinct due to his bulging eyes, humanoid body, and most obviously, his frog face. Created in 2005 as part of artist Matt Furie's comic series *Boy's Club*, Pepe has evolved on a journey from mere comic character to widely-beloved Internet sensation within a decade. However, the anthropomorphic frog has recently been misappropriated as a hate symbol by the burgeoning alt-right political movement, most prominently by fervent supporters of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump.

Pepe's humble beginnings as a stoned

frog (seriously) and eventual meme were benevolent. Captions such as "Sad frog meme" and "Feels good man" don't exactly spawn any sort of negative message. However, during the current, contentious presidential election, Pepe the meme has been utilized in new contexts through its misappropriation in the conveyance of Anti-Semitic, Confederate, and Nazi messages. Last month, the Anti-Defamation League, an international organization advocating against anti-Semitism, declared Pepe to be a hate symbol after the alt-right's infamous exploitation of the meme proliferated on the Internet. This shocking announcement underscores the frequent negativity of the 2016 presidential election and also brings to light a new issue: the misuse of an originally benevolent symbol to

advance controversial and extreme interests.

Supporters of the usage of Pepe as a symbol representing the alt-right's interests could obviously use the "free speech" argument to support the (mis)appropriation. There is also a subtler argument that could be made that Pepe is neither good nor bad inherently. After all, he is just a frog. But it is unfair to the creators and many admirers of Pepe to twist an innocent symbol for the purposes of drawing attention to a political agenda, especially one that espouses rhetoric offensive to immigrants and minorities, among other groups. The original purpose of Pepe, according to creator Matt Furie, was to spread "peace, togetherness, and fun." At the very least, using Pepe, an apolitical symbol, to advance a political agenda detracts from that purpose.

Although the Internet is a public platform and it would be virtually impossible to prevent an extremist movement from misappropriating Internet symbols, there is a rising movement to restore Pepe to his former glory as a symbol of humor and relatability. This movement should be supported because no rational, levelheaded person would want to see Trump's face on a frog body. But most of all, the Internet could use some positivity, and what's a better symbol of enlightenment than an innocent and blissfully stoned frog?

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\* Using classical conditioning on humans is not supported by the UHP or Hilltopics.

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## When Did God Die?

BY A.J. JEFFRIES, THIRD MESSIAH

As we all know, the Constitution is the divinely ordained document that guides American leaders' every action. Unfortunately, however, the divine being who wrote our constitution through the pens of the Founding Fathers inexplicably chose not to grant them eternal life. In their absence, we have been forced to turn to mortal men (and, recently, a few women) to interpret the words of our lord and savior James Madison. I am presently taking a course on the constitutional law of civil rights, so I have had the opportunity to immerse myself in the wisdom of these arbiters of America's holy piece of hemp paper, and I made a startling discovery: somewhere in the course of American history, God died.

In *Bradwell v. Illinois*, a woman named Myra Bradwell had the gall to apply for a license to practice law. Within a concurrence by Justice Joseph P. Bradley (with whom Justices Swayne

and Field joined), a passionate Presbyterian, we find God's presence in the constitution. Bradley explains that in addition to the obvious place of women in the natural order of the world, divine law itself clarifies the issue. He says, "the constitution of the family organization, which is founded in the divine ordinance, as well as in the nature of things, indicates the domestic sphere as that which properly belongs to the domain and functions of womanhood." Voila! Divine ordinance. God, the same God that once spoke through James Madison's holy pen, has spoken again, and he says that "the paramount destiny and mission of women is to fulfill the noble and benign offices of wife and mother." This is the law of the Creator. Women belong in the "domestic sphere," and as the Constitution builds on Christian ideals (as many who oppose gay marriage would tell you), it incorporates that all-important

divine law.

Why, then, are modern women choosing to disobey God's express orders, as explained by His holy prophet Joseph Bradley? Again, we must turn to the Supreme Court for answers. In *Reed v. Reed* a separated husband and wife, Sally and Cecil Reed, were in disagreement over who should manage their deceased son's estate. Idaho code, evidencing a clear understanding of divine law, made clear that in determining who should administer an estate, men should always be preferred to women. According to God's chosen prophet Joseph Bradley, this should have been an open and shut case. Obviously the husband was the preferable choice. After all, administration of an estate does not fall within the "paramount destiny and mission of women." And yet the Court disagreed. Chief Justice Burger, deranged liberal that he clearly was, managed to persuade all of the other eight justices that distinctions based on gender should no longer be part of America's divinely ordained Constitution. And not one of the nine justices was immediately struck down by lightning!

How to reconcile this? Given God's omniscient, omnipotent nature, we surely could not just "slip one by Him," so what changed? There is only one explanation. Somewhere in the 98 years between *Bradwell* and *Reed*, God died. This seems drastic, I know, but how else to explain a divine being letting his mortal voices disobey His plan? There is simply no other explanation. May He rest in peace.

*In loving memory of God,  
9800 B.C. – 1971.*







## For Hillary Rodham Clinton

BY FAIROOZ ADAMS

Let us imagine that I am a “germophobe.” Someone next to me is choking. I can easily give this person the Heimlich Maneuver to save his or her life. But I am opposed to doing so because it would put me in contact with all sorts of microorganisms on another person’s body. The person choking eventually suffocates and dies, but that’s perfectly fine with me because I was able to remain clean. My purity matters more than anyone else’s wellbeing.

I am reminded of such a scenario every time I am told by a supporter of Dr. Jill Stein that their ideological purity trumps any concern for the consequences of handing the election to an authoritarian crypto-fascist with stunningly limited senses of self-awareness and empathy—a man with clear disdain for established fact, political discourse, and American political norms.

One of George Friedman’s great insights is that every few generations there is a president who casts an outsized shadow on what his successors will do. Abraham Lincoln was one such president, creating an

era of Republican Party dominance with increasing federal power over the states. Franklin Roosevelt was another: in his shadow, government undertook a progressively more activist role as it sought to use the instrument of collective action to confront a myriad of social problems. Ronald Reagan, in other ways, was also generationally consequential; his influence is still prominently felt today.

Hillary Clinton may or may not be a generational president, but those political epochs do explain how a staunch progressive and fighter for liberal causes (and one who was raised in a conservative household) is today seen as an opportunistic career politician without a coherent ideology undergirding her policies. With this outlook on political history, it’s easier to understand how someone like Hillary could go from supporting George McGovern in 1972 to supporting the infamous crime bill in the 1990s.

What is important to note is that whatever the disagreements over economic theory, it is unmistakable

that in Clinton’s early years, state intervention in the economy had become increasingly suspect. In the 1970s, economies the world over saw stagnation along with decline and turmoil in some sectors, whether they were Soviet bloc economies or nominally capitalist economies with large state sectors.

Franklin Roosevelt in the United States and the Labour Party in the United Kingdom had led their respective countries to great economic growth in the middle of the 20th century, so much so that Republicans and Conservatives, in their respective countries, had largely adopted many of the economic philosophies and assumptions of the Democrat and Labour Parties. This process was mirrored in many places around the world (but was perhaps exemplified here in the U.S. when President Richard Nixon declared himself a “Keynesian”).

The following era of “stagflation,” as it is known, saw climbing inflation matched with rising unemployment. It was this environment, in which Keynesian economics and policies seemed to fail, that made it possible for people like UK Conservative Party leader Margaret Thatcher and Republican Party nominee Ronald Reagan to rise to power.

Hillary Clinton should not be lambasted for tempering her economically liberal proclivities. She is first and foremost an excellent statesman; admittedly, she’s a mediocre politician. But she is not an ideologue, and that’s a very good thing. An ideologue is someone who is wedded to an ideology, regardless of circumstance or outcome. Ideologues include the likes of Mao Zedong and radical Islamists. A politician is one who runs for political office; a very good one will not give voters the impression that he or she is a politician. Statesmen, on the other hand, have a set of guiding principles undergirding their policy preferences, but they advocate for different applications of government power or use of government action based on necessity and evidence.

In the post-stagflation world, it made sense to lower taxes to free up dollars for investment and spur economic growth. Now, after the Great Recession, we know there was an overcorrection into neoclassical economics, just as there was an overcorrection into Keynesianism after the Great Depression and the Second World War. Hillary Clinton saw a series of problems and adjusted her policy positions from supporting McGovern Democrat policies to positioning herself on the center-left. The 2007-2009 global financial crisis and rising income inequality led to another adjustment and support for progressive policies.

Some of this shifting probably does have to do with an electorate that moved to the center and then became polarized. But this is much less problematic than many people make it out to be. We should be concerned if a politician refuses to adjust his or her policy prescriptions for a rapidly evolving world in which the global economy and our interconnected society place increasing demands based on evolving needs. The saying "a broken clock is right twice a day" is very apt. We ought not to be impressed by ideologues who just happen to be right, but by those willing to continuously use flexible solutions for evolving problems. No one has access to perfect and immutable information; thus, we cannot rationally expect a policymaker to be right all of the time. However, it should raise red flags when someone seeking a role in policy formation is unwilling to consider new information or changing circumstances.

Few instances provide as clear an example of this than the crime bill that Bill Clinton signed into law in 1994, with Hillary's support. In 1990 in New York, there were roughly a million reported instances of property crime, compared to 317,529 in 2015, a decline from 5182.8 instances per 100,000 residents to 1604.0. Murder went from 14.5 to 3.1, while robbery went from 624.7 to 120.9. Vehicle theft decreased from 1042.7 to a stunning 77.4 per 100,000 residents. A similar

pattern occurred in cities large and small throughout the country. This is not a defense of the crime bill, because evidence suggests that the bill itself had negligible impacts on crime rates and levels of incarceration. What it does demonstrate is why leaders in the black community and those across the political spectrum demanded government action when Bill Clinton won the election in 1992.

It is incredibly ironic that today millennials criticize Hillary Clinton for supporting her husband in his response to the overwhelming demand from the black community that something needed be done, and then those same millennials engage in conspiracy theories suggesting that Hillary Clinton has a secret desire to incarcerate black Americans. In criticisms of Hillary Clinton on this point, one almost gets the impression that among some millennials, a belief exists that an international cabal of conspirators is organizing to diminish non-white people's prospects in life in a way that mirrors the irrational fear of Jewish people on the far right and left.

Perhaps those millennials ought to consider why Hillary Clinton had overwhelming support in the primaries from black voters, particularly those that were alive to remember the 1980s and the early 1990s. There is no doubt in my mind that had Bill Clinton been granted magical transport to the future to see the negative repercussions of the crime bill and then been sent back to the 1990s, he would have refused to sign the legislation. Even under these circumstances, the very same millennials that now criticize the Clintons for listening to the black community would instead point to Bill's refusal to support an expensive government program as a sign that he never had the interests of the black community at heart. One can imagine him facing an indictment similar to the one leveled against President Bush by a pop culture figure who declared that Bush "does not care about black people."

Hillary Clinton fell short of becoming an ideologue when competing for the Democratic Party's presidential primaries, and a significant portion of the party punished her for it. Clinton's lack of fealty to progressive orthodoxy meant she had a formidable competitor in the form of Bernie Sanders, and a large number of voters will now support Jill Stein and, perhaps most bizarrely, Gary Johnson.

All of this is not to say that there should not be a set of guiding principles for a leader, but merely that policy prescriptions will have to change. This is the fundamental difference between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Whereas Clinton is a technocrat with a set of organizing principles, Donald Trump allows his principles to change like the weathervane, depending on his whim and audience feedback. Trump is not strong; he is an infantile, wishy-washy candidate who has the childlike tendency to be the most impressed with whoever spoke to him last and offered the greatest amount of praise. That ought to be a concern for everyone as it leaves him open to manipulation from special interests at home and foreign interests abroad.

Complacency is the enemy in this election. The now iconic 1948 photo of President Truman triumphantly holding a newspaper prematurely declaring "Dewey Defeats Truman" exemplifies an election similar to this one. In addition, think about other upsets: the 2008 Iowa Democratic caucuses, the 2016 Michigan Democratic primaries, the 2016 Iowa Republican caucuses, and the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom. Recently, the Labour party in the United Kingdom and the Zionist Union in Israel lost by a far larger margin than expected, as the Conservative Party and Likud won their respective elections. All this is to say: Trump may yet win. Trump may yet defy expectations and algorithms behind poll numbers to carry Pennsylvania, Michigan, Florida, North Carolina, and Nevada, among others.



For people in Texas, there's a reason to vote perhaps more than ever in history. A series of recent polls placed Hillary Clinton within striking distance of Donald Trump. A multitude of factors puts Texas within Clinton's reach, including Texas's rapidly growing Hispanic population, declining conservative Christian support for Trump due to his conduct and comments, and the fact that Hillary Clinton is using the

world's most sophisticated campaign infrastructure to date while Trump has invested very little in this area.

Donald Trump can be thwarted from winning the White House—even if he wins virtually every swing state—should he lose Texas to Hillary Clinton. Polls have been wrong before. The challenge here in Texas is a case of the tortoise and the hare: if voters fall prey to the temptations

of the hare, the people who say they want to see Donald Trump kept out of office may be the very ones who end up putting him in it. It would be a tremendous shame if America finds herself under the leadership of an unintelligent, unthoughtful, vengeful narcissist only because too many people were confident in the race's outcome before reaching the finish line.



## The Echo Chamber of (Political) Death

BY ALEC MASON

When Donald Trump entered the spotlight of presidential politics back in June 2015, many thought his campaign would never succeed in the primaries. One might think that Trump's extreme brand of right-wing politics resonated with a significant portion of the population simply because it corresponded with a majority of Republican beliefs, but the truth is much more complicated than that. According to the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, the two major parties have drastically polarized in the past twenty years. A major contributor to this trend is a basic but often overlooked trait of human social habits: we see those who disagree as the enemy and therefore refuse to associate with them.

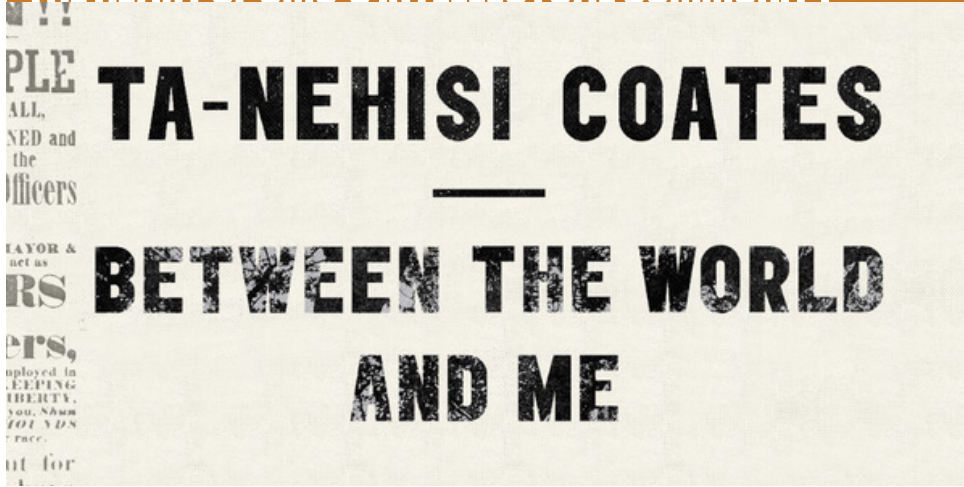
An echo chamber is defined as any social environment in which opposing views are disallowed, condemned, or suppressed by some other means. Every person has some sort of echo chamber in his or her life, and to a certain extent, it is not necessarily detrimental to associate with people

who agree with you as it allows for mutual support. The problem arises when people live a majority of their social lives in environments saturated solely with views they already hold. In this case, those comfortable ideologies are repeated and praised constantly, and extremist views slowly begin to enter the sphere. These radical beliefs are not condemned as much inside the echo chamber as they would be in the outside world because they are less ideologically distant from the one-sided beliefs of the echo chamber.

A modern example of this phenomenon can be seen in portions of the social media website Tumblr. Originally benevolent mutual support groups for feminism and tolerance began to become echo chambers, allowing extreme misandrists and hateful rhetoric to eventually hijack the original narrative and defile the original intent. Such problematic results occur when those who were not originally involved in political discourse are introduced to it inside of one of these echo chambers. Instead of looking at all perspectives

before forming their own opinion, these people become mouthpieces for those who speak the loudest within whatever particular circle—the extremists. Additionally, most echo chambers have a tendency to make people dependent on being surrounded only by opinions they agree with, leading eventually to the highly controversial and polarizing phenomenon of “safe spaces.”

So let's take a look again at this year's election—what exactly has caused the Trump candidacy to gain so much ground with such a significant portion of the population? The answer is radicalization of conservatism due, in no small part, to the formation of echo chambers. People, no matter their political orientation, tend to only befriend and listen to people with whom they agree. Websites like Facebook make this process easy: “like” or “friend” the people you agree with and ignore the rest. When people start viewing political discourse from the sole perspective of influential, highly commercialized people like Michael Moore, Tomi Lahren, or Ann Coulter, it is not surprising that their views radicalize, leading to our current atrocity of a political system in which people like Donald Trump can gain the spotlight. In order for democracy to work, people need to be impartially informed of all perspectives while they form their own opinions. So evaluate how you treat those who differ from you, and when you meet someone with a different opinion, keep an open mind. Civil and open discourse is the key to repairing the damage done by polarization and mutual antipathy.



# Strength Through Fatalism

BY DANIEL MUEHRING

*Between the World and Me* is a 2015 National Book Award for Nonfiction-winning work by prominent author and Atlantic contributor Ta-Nehisi Coates. Written as a letter to his 15-year-old son, *BTWAM* winds through Coates's life first in Baltimore, then to his college days at Howard University (or "the Mecca"), and eventually to his transition into adulthood and parenthood, all the while describing the struggle of being labeled as black in America. It's difficult to describe the force this book contains within its ostensibly short 152 pages. While Coates's poetic narration melts words off the page at 100 miles per hour, it can also jar the mind to a grinding halt just as easily. It demands digestion and contemplation, and trying to consume it in one session will leave you with an upset stomach. Behind every page is a resigned voice telling readers that the moral arc of the universe does not necessarily bend toward justice, but toward those who already hold power.

It is painfully obvious that Coates gave up on people like me—white moderates—quite some time ago. *BTWAM* was not written to persuade; it serves to show black bodies how to literally survive and understand the world around them rather than to teach supposedly enlightened, self-styled "woke" millennials about the

black condition in the same manner a college freshman enjoys a particular class one semester and subsequently forgets everything about it the next. We (white people) have the luxury of choosing when we want to walk away from the harsh reality Coates details; those who are labeled black do not have that choice. As such, Coates advises his son:

"You cannot arrange your life around them and the small chance of the Dreamers coming into consciousness. Our moment is too brief. Our bodies are too precious."

Even Coates himself shies away from the more activist approach seen by protest movements like Black Lives Matter. When asked in a recent interview about the future of the BLM movement, and how one should try to change the public discourse surrounding the fragility of the black body, he responded that those actions weren't his to undertake. He claimed that despite the celebrity status he has gained in academic circles in recent years, he's merely a journalist, a historian, and a writer, and that by consciously and actively entering the world of persuasion he would lose something in himself that lets him sleep at night as an author. Unlike Bryan Stevenson's defiant optimism, Coates holds a deep-set belief that history is apathetic to

the claims of the oppressed. To the unseasoned reader this attitude seems astonishing. What are we supposed to think when Coates, the most prominent author on race today, the man Toni Morrison has called the new James Baldwin, subscribes to a pessimistic philosophy?

"Perhaps struggle is all we have because the god of history is an atheist, and nothing about this world is meant to be. So you must wake up every morning knowing that no promise is unbreakable, least of all the promise of waking up at all. This is not despair. These are the preferences of the universe itself: verbs over nouns, actions over states, struggle over hope."

Following up on this philosophy, Coates is quick to criticize the "just-world" myth pervasive in American culture that can be summarized as follows: Good things happen to good people because they do good deeds, bad things happen to bad people because they do bad deeds, and the universe actively works to ensure this balance. He also unapologetically notes that the black community is one of the strongest believers in this myth, which is part of what makes it such a powerful one. But this belief—that one can achieve in life independent of limiting factors—is both tempting and poisoning when trying to develop a sense of empathy with those who have to deal with the uglier factors of life more closely than others. It is a great privilege to believe that every man is an island, and that our accomplishments are entirely the products of our own determination. This is not to say that individual effort and responsibility aren't values that should be esteemed and venerated, but rather to say that a significant number of people in this country are punished seemingly for being born on the wrong side of a tilted playing field. These circumstances particularly bother Coates not because they entail suffering, but because America accepts this reality as an unfortunate consequence of its existence while simultaneously claiming itself to be exceptional. As



Coates says, "One cannot at once, claim to be superhuman and then plead mortal error."

Nothing in this review will shatter expectations. *BTWAM* is a year old already and everything there is to say about it has been written in a million think-pieces by a million aspiring authors. But despite the fact that most of us will never write anything

truly groundbreaking, there is some beauty in struggling through one's thoughts no matter how contrite or commonplace. I'll finish with one last quotation from Coates:

"I think God is fatalistic. In the end, we all die. As do most societies. As do most states. As do most planets. If America is fatally flawed, if white supremacy does truly dog us until we

are no more, all that means is that we were unexceptional, that we were not favored by God, that we were flawed—as are all things conceived by mortal man. I find great peace in that. And I find great meaning in this struggle that was gifted to me by my people, that was gifted to me by culture."

# Comic Relief

BY ANDREA DEL ANGEL



AFTER 10 MINUTES OF WALKING ON THE BOULEVARD







# Saved by the Bell, but Now What?

BY NICOLE KISER

*Girl Meets World* is a Disney show that hoped to gain success by piggybacking on the previous popularity of *Boy Meets World*. The show attracted the usual young audience for which Disney is famous, but it also gained an audience for which it was not fully prepared: the former (and much older) viewers of *Boy Meets World*. This phenomenon begs the questions: Why are adults returning to children's programming? Just what are they looking for?

One would think they're searching for that feeling of innocence, even naivety, they possessed when they were younger. If you have ever seen *Shrek* as an adult, you know that watching your favorite children's media too late in life can destroy whatever innocence you have left.

Adults write children's media, and adults can only spit rainbows and sunshine for so long. Inevitably, a double entendre will slip, and you will question just what Kool-Aid you were drinking as a kid.

Nostalgia is the obvious reason to return to children's programming, but nostalgia for what? Wholesome family values? Since when has America ever really been a wholesome family? America is constantly in a state of division: class, race, peace and war, Apple or Android, Yankees versus Red Sox (or, now, Cubs versus Indians). When we get over one thing, we find something new to fight about. Yearning for "the good ol' days" harks back to a golden age that simply didn't exist.

I think, in many cases, people long for the time when it was okay to admit that they were clueless. Children's television is all about discovering your identity and learning about how you relate to the world around you; there's none of the pressure of pretending you already understand how a bill becomes a law, because the bill will SING it to you. And even as shows such as *Steven Universe* and *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* have become aware of their audiences' shifts to the more mature, the themes have remained focused on just figuring life out.

Many are taking a new perspective on this nostalgia by animating shows for adult audiences. Social and political commentary is being wrapped in the same packages that teach kids their ABCs. Shows like *Family Guy*, *Archer*, and *South Park* use comedy and satire to criticize ideas that adults use to make big decisions. Audiences are squeezing back into the playpen to find joy in admitting that sometimes they just don't know what's going on.

Increasingly, children's media, such as television shows and movies, are being marketed as "fun for the whole family." As a self-respecting teenager, I used to scoff at such a claim. But now, as an adult facing some tough life decisions, I can admit that I need a little help figuring it all out—and Ms. Frizzle almost certainly has just the advice I'm looking for.

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