

A Series of Introductions

You'll find below ten introductions from pieces recently published in a variety of online and print venues. I've made some effort to select things I thought were especially good, but not always; in most cases the authors have PhDs in humanities fields. In some cases the pieces they're introducing are remediated versions of their academic research; in others, not at all.

Roxane Gay, "Reading the Stakes in Syria"

The Nation (Sept 17, 2013)

<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/reading-stakes-syria/>

The world is a fragile and often incomprehensible place. Syria has been embroiled in a civil conflict since March 2011. According to United Nations estimates, more than 60,000 are dead. There are 1.5 million Syrian refugees who have sought safety in neighboring countries. The Assad regime offers no indication it will cede power and the rebel opposition may not provide a viable alternative if they defeat Assad.

The Syrian conflict is complicated by so much circumstance. World leaders don't want a repeat of the Iraq war but they also don't want to sit idly by, bearing silent and impotent witness so that another genocide on the scale of what happened in Bosnia occurs. Syria is, unfortunately, not so much a country in the minds of many. It is a political problem or opportunity and most of the proposed solutions to the Syria problem serve the interests of everyone but the Syrian people.

It is a peculiar privilege to be able to have an opinion on fraught international conflicts, to be able to declare that you are for or against American military intervention or sanctions or arms support or humanitarian aid while knowing that your life probably won't be affected. And still, the world is as small as it is big. Syria is a world away but we are bound to her people by our common humanity. Even if we don't dare offer an opinion on what should be done, it is important to cultivate an understanding of the Syrian conflict.

In *The Syria Dilemma*, edited by Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, writers and thinkers including Richard Falk, Anne-Marie Slaughter, Fareed Zakaria, Radwan Ziadeh, Rafif Jouejati and Afra Jalabi offer a range of perspectives about the Syrian conflict and how it might come to an end. Some of the essays are overly academic and ideological, but, overall, the collection offers sober and well-considered opinions. *The Syria Dilemma* does a particularly good job of identifying what's at stake for Syria, her people, and the global powers with a vested interest in the region.

Merve Emre, "The Repressive Politics of Emotional Intelligence"

The New Yorker (April 19, 2021)

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/04/19/the-repressive-politics-of-emotional-intelligence>

My parents did not often concern themselves with my moral education, but, when they did, whatever wisdom or warnings they had to impart were accompanied by books—typically, pop-psychology best-sellers. Two stand out in my memory: "Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls," by Mary Pipher, and "Emotional Intelligence," by Daniel Goleman.

The first I read with great satisfaction. None of my transgressions were as alarming or exciting as what Pipher described—no drugs, no clandestine trips to the family liquor cabinet, no sullen application of nail polish—so her tales of bad behavior left me feeling both titillated and smug. The second book I set aside, as I suspected it had been purchased to point out my more common defects. I was an “angry teenager,” with a very sharp tongue and a prickly reserve—the armor I believed a girl with a funny name, born in a foreign country, needed to get through the school days in the American suburbs. “Emotional Intelligence” would have allowed no such excuses. “Anyone can become angry—that is easy,” Aristotle proclaims in the book’s epigraph, sounding, in this context, much like my middle-school health teacher. “But to become angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not easy.” I had no interest in a book that urged self-reform. It was not me that was in need of reform, I felt, but something else, though I could not have said what.

A.O. Scott, “The Movies are Back. But What are Movies Now?”

The New York Times (July 15, 2021)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/15/movies/streaming-theater-hollywood.html>

Have you seen “F9”? How about “A Quiet Place Part II”? “Black Widow”? “Zola”?

What I’m asking is whether you’ve gone back to a movie theater yet. In the past month or so, as pandemic restrictions have eased and multiplexes and art houses have edged toward full capacity, a handful of releases have done well enough at the box office to feed hopes of a return to pre-Covid normalcy. Vin Diesel, the “Fast and Furious” patriarch, declared that “cinema is back!” and who wants beef with Vin Diesel?

Certainly not the critics — I was one of them — who greeted the almost 150 minutes of extravagant action, baroque plotting and high-octane sentimentalism of “F9” with gentle sighs of gratitude. Let’s be honest: In ordinary times, the bloat and incoherence of this late installment in a weathered franchise might have elicited a measure of skepticism, if not outright scorn. But after more than a year of subsisting on screening links, we found the critical zones of our cerebral cortices flooded with fan endorphins. Maybe the fans felt the same way. Whether or not this was a good movie, it undoubtedly offered a good time at the movies, and as such a reminder of what we had been missing and what we really cared about.

Ian Walker, “Exhausted Man, A Game For All Of Us Right Now”

Kotaku (October 6, 2021)

<https://kotaku.com/exhausted-man-a-game-for-all-of-us-right-now-1847813659>

I’m tired. You, reading this right now, are probably tired. Tired is a constant state of being for most of us these days thanks to, you know, everything. Now, you can play a game that’s all about being tired.

Exhausted Man, the latest project from the Beijing-based developers at Candleman Games, is probably the most realistic game ever made. You play, naturally, as the titular energy-sapped protagonist, guiding him through an unfeeling world that cares little for his health or well-being. Using the WASD keys, you

slither along the ground and even up walls to complete simple tasks made unbearably difficult by the main character's weariness.

Lili Loofbourow, “John Mulaney and the Great Celebrity-Sympathy Overcorrection”

Slate (Oct 5, 2021)

<https://slate.com/culture/2021/10/john-mulaney-celebrity-scandal-vs-sympathy.html>

It is fine to gossip about John Mulaney.

I'm not proud of taking this *courageous* stand, especially after the Mulaney firestorm has mostly died down, but take it I must, because the angst is part of a larger phenomenon and the finger-wagging about how we talk about celebrities has grown strange.

John Mulaney, if you haven't had the pleasure, is a “clean cut” comedian whose star-making Netflix specials touched on his distant past as an addict and his spiky but happy rapport with his wife. In the past year, he has complicated that brand. First, he started using again. Fans took news of the relapse extremely well, offering support and compassion. This was nice! (As a veteran of vicious gossip sites from the early aughts, I was used to seeing relapses framed as scandals.) After a second stint in rehab, Mulaney embarked on a new tour this spring, called “From Scratch.” Here too, reactions were largely positive. Despite a few muttered objections (“Was it wise to start touring so extremely soon after leaving rehab?” some fans wondered), the show continues to sell out and receive rave reviews. But when news broke in May that he was divorcing his wife, artist Anna Marie Tendler, whom he'd immortalized as a character in many a funny videotaped bit about their life together and their decision to remain child-free—and broke again three days later that he was dating Olivia Munn—and then broke again recently that Munn is pregnant with his child and has been for some time—reactions were more mixed.

Evan Osnos, “After a Hundred Years, What Has China's Communist Party Learned?”

The New Yorker (July 1, 2021)

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/after-a-hundred-years-what-has-chinas-communist-party-learned>

Not so long ago, the Communist Party of China—which celebrates its hundredth anniversary this week—believed in the power of eclectic influences. In 1980, the Party's propaganda chiefs approved the first broadcast of an American television series in the People's Republic of China: “Man from Atlantis,” which featured Patrick Duffy, with webbed hands and feet and clad in yellow swimming trunks, as the lone survivor of an undersea civilization. In the United States, the show had been cancelled after one season—the Washington Post panned it as “thinner than water”—but the Communists in Beijing had embarked on an “open door” policy of experimentation. They knew that the political chaos of the Cultural Revolution had left China impoverished and weak—it was poorer than North Korea—and were acquiring whatever foreign culture they could afford, in order to close the gap with the rest of the world. After “Man from Atlantis,” Chinese television viewers were shown “My Favorite Martian” (though the laugh track was lost in the dubbing process, so there were long, puzzling pauses) and the capitalist soap operas “Falcon Crest,” “Dallas,” and “Dynasty.”

For years, the imports kept coming. The censors cut out references to major political taboos (such as the crackdown at Tiananmen Square, in 1989), but the aperture to foreign culture was wide enough that Chinese news broadcasts featured segments from CNN. Yet the appetite for international programming did not last. It peaked around 2008, when Beijing welcomed a surge of attention for the Summer Olympics. In the years after that, the Party moved to protect itself against the challenges posed by dissent and technology, and turned its suspicions again on American influence. When Xi Jinping became General Secretary of the Party, in 2012, he faced a worrying terrain: social media created in Silicon Valley, and cheered by Washington, had helped bring down authoritarian rulers in Egypt and Libya, and Chinese leaders jockeying for power and money had allowed internal feuds to tumble into public, reviving a congenital fear, deeply rooted in a party born of revolution, that it could all end in collapse. Flamboyant corruption was fuelling overt public resentment of the Party. In a speech, Xi warned that the Soviet Communists had lost control “because everyone could say and do what they wanted.” He warned, “What kind of political party was that? It was just a rabble.”

Anne Helen Petersen, “Against Kids’ Sports”

Culture Study (Sept 12, 2021)

<https://annehelen.substack.com/p/against-kids-sports>

When I was in second grade my mom signed me up to play Boys and Girls Club co-ed soccer. The cost, according to my mom’s memory, was around \$60, with scholarship available. My team was the kids from my school, and the practices were held in the playground of that school on Tuesday and Thursdays. One coach was the dad of the goalie; another coach was a guy from my church who loved soccer and didn’t have kids yet. We had matching screen-printed shirts that were blue, my favorite color. I mostly played fullback, because it meant less running and I could just hang out with my best friend who was also playing fullback. It was incredibly low-pressure and I still locked myself in the bathroom and refused to come out before my first game.

I eventually did play that game. I also played for the rest of the season, and watched as the enduring themes of youth organizations emerged: my mom got mad that the coaches gave the boys more playing time; various parents were known for providing “better” snacks; all sorts of racist assumptions were thrown at the team that came from the local reservation and played “dirty.” I played on that team until I didn’t want to play anymore, and I was ultimately grateful my mom signed me up and also still made me go to that first game even when I refused. But I am also grateful there weren’t options for anything more than casual play.

This is a piece about the professionalization of children’s sports — and how that professionalization has transformed and degraded the desire to play, the desire to be part of something, even just the desire to move into class-siloed, life-swallowing regimentation.

Leah Price, “A Corporeal History of the 19th Century”

New York Times Book Review (March 16, 2018)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/16/books/review/victorians-undone-kathryn-hughes.html>

The average biographer peers into a Great Man’s mind. Kathryn Hughes’s “Victorians Undone: Tales of the Flesh in the Age of Decorum,” in contrast, narrates the lives of five body parts: the stomach of one of Queen Victoria’s ladies-in-waiting, “suspected of expecting”; Charles Darwin’s unfashionable beard, which turns out to provide a key to his theory of sexual selection; George Eliot’s right hand, larger than her left thanks to a youth spent milking cows; the “bee-stung” lips of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s mistress; and the dismembered corpse of a working-class girl onto whose severed foot a late-19th-century shoemaker stumbled in a Hampshire hop garden.

While microhistorians have long zoomed in on individual case studies, Hughes pinpoints her subjects even more narrowly. Her method is laparoscopic, sectioning off bits of bodies as ruthlessly as did the Hampshire murderer. Her ultimate question, though, is a broad one: How did the Victorians understand the interplay between mind and body?

Ronald J. Daniels, “Abolish Legacy Admissions Now”

The Chronicle of Higher Education (Oct 7, 2021)

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/abolish-legacy-admissions-now>

In the late 1990s, I served as dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Toronto. As Canada’s most selective law school, the competition for admission was fierce. Applicants were always in search of anything they could do to secure an advantage in the application process. In my position as dean, it was not uncommon for alumni whose children were applying to the school to approach me and inquire what kind of admissions bump those children would receive by virtue of being a legacy. The answer I gave was always the same: none whatsoever.

One encounter stands out. A prominent and philanthropic alumnus whose child had been denied admission to the school contacted me in the hope that I would reconsider the application. After all, he reasoned, his relationship with the school must mean something. As I had done in many similar situations, I explained that there were clear guardrails in place that fettered my capacity to reverse this decision. I simply had no ability to admit his child. Before our phone call ended, he said something that has been etched in my memory ever since: “If you really want to stand shoulder to shoulder with the great Ivy League law schools in the United States, you better start acting like one.”

When I came to work in the United States, I saw firsthand how true these words were. For all of the progress that highly selective universities have started to make in recruiting low-income and historically underrepresented students, they continue to cling tenaciously to admissions policies that confer significant advantages on children of privilege. Legacy admissions, when coupled with the considerable advantages that many of these children already have — like stable families, engaged parents, high-quality K-12 schools, ample extracurricular opportunities for personal enrichment and development — set these applicants up to triumph over applicants from less-fortunate circumstances. Several years into my tenure as president of Johns Hopkins, we decided to strike at one particularly egregious instance of this system — we eliminated the use of legacy preferences in our admissions.

Roxane Gay, “I Am Giving Up Hating Valentine’s Day”

The Guardian (Feb 14, 2015)

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/14/hating-valentines-day-celebrating-love-beautiful-thing>

It is not every year that I appreciate Valentine’s Day. I have been in relationships and hated Valentine’s Day; I have been single and hated Valentine’s Day. I have railed against the corporatization of love and romance and how Valentine’s Day is, largely, a marketing holiday designed to exploit rank consumerism. I have rolled my eyes at commercials for shopping mall jewelry stores because I know for a fact that every kiss does not begin with Kay.

This year, I am surrendering to Valentine’s Day – willingly. It is far too exhausting to invest so much energy in disliking a holiday that, at its purest, is designed to celebrate love.

Jim Downs, “Queer History Should Focus on Queer People”

The Chronicle of Higher Education (Sept 22, 2021)

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/queer-history-should-focus-on-queer-people>

In 1972, a group of New York lesbians turned their Upper West Side apartment into the first-ever lesbian archive. They collected photographs, T-shirts, buttons, candlesticks, and letters; stuffed them into shopping bags; and went to teach in lesbian bars and homes. These women later founded what would become known as the [Lesbian Herstory Archives](#), one of the few repositories in the world committed to the documentation of a queer past. Reflecting on the archives’ origins, Joan Nestle, one of its founders, explained that her experience of “the criminalizing 1950s” underscored the importance of documenting history in a way that made sex visible. She did not want the archives to become a “collection of respectable lesbian role models. . . . Yes, we wanted the papers of Samois, the first national public lesbian S/M group. Yes, we wanted the diary of a lesbian prostitute. Yes, we would cherish the pasties of a lesbian stripper. Yes, we wanted collections of woman-with-woman pornography.”

Nestle’s archive symbolizes the first wave of LGBT history, which was written and read not by academics but by people within the gay community who were hungry for history about their ancestors. In 2006, while researching my book on gay liberation, I met with [Jonathan Ned Katz](#), whose pioneering 1976 book *Gay American History* was the first serious study of American LGBT history. When modern gay liberation began to heat up in the early 1970s, Katz began a sweeping research effort at the New York Public Library, reading newspapers, court cases, and other surviving materials to tell the history of gay people.

When I asked Katz why he turned to history amid the political excitement of the queer revolution, he recounted a scene from *Life of Galileo*, Bertolt Brecht’s short play about Galileo’s imprisonment during the Inquisition. The Roman Catholic Church had imprisoned Galileo for his theory that the Earth revolved around the sun and threatened to persecute him if he continued to promulgate this claim. Galileo ultimately succumbed to this pressure and recanted his heliocentric views, Katz explained, but at the last minute he passed along his thesis notes to his assistant, who spirited them out of the country. “I find it so moving,” Katz said, “because that’s the way we felt. This might be our only chance to sneak

everything we learned into this book.” He decided to become a historian to ensure that his people’s history would not be forgotten.

Rachel Louise Snyder, “I Don’t Want to Hit My Children. I Don’t Want to Hit Anybody.”

The New York Times (Oct 1, 2021)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/01/opinion/domestic-violence-hotline-uk.html>

When I was a young teenager, I was uncontrollable, rebellious. My father believed in corporal punishment, sanctioned by the evangelical church. My mother, who was Jewish, died of cancer when I was 8, and I believe my father’s response to his grief was to double down on his faith: to interpret the Bible literally, to make himself the ultimate authority in our home and to try to create the world he wanted through sheer force. He cobbled together a new family — stepmother, stepsiblings and then two more children from the new marriage. Overwhelmed with change and with my own grief, I defied his every edict.

We were kerosene and matches. Once, he splintered my mother’s sorority paddle over me. Another time, he punched me up and down my thighs, leaving me bruised from knee to hip and limping for days. My response was to punch back. To kick, to scream. I pulled a fishing knife on him. I threw a heavy landline phone at him. I swore. I ran away.

Researchers would call my brand of violence “retaliatory,” my father’s “situational.” It was occasional and sporadic; it never contained the potential to turn deadly. Still, neither of us — though especially him as the adult — felt we had anywhere to go for assistance. It never occurred to me to call the police, and the church merely parroted the biblical imperative for children to obey their parents. We had nowhere to turn, no one to help us navigate our blistering rage. How might decades of conflict and estrangement have gone differently if he’d had someone to call, someone whom he could ask for help?

Even today, 40 years later, this country’s primary approach to the problem of in-home violence has been to treat its aftermath. We send victims to shelters, to transitional housing, to court. We have created programming that includes, for example, free law clinics and victims’ compensation — but they almost always require physical abuse to take place before they’re made available. We rely heavily on the criminal justice system, which has often meant abusers get either prison time or nothing. This approach allows the rest of us to push a societal problem aside, to keep it hidden from view: shelters for victims, prisons for perpetrators.

Some years ago, Britain recognized the lack of programming aimed at either preventing domestic abuse or intervening early and created a help line for perpetrators of abuse. Called Respect Phoneline, it began in 2004 with funding from the government. Part of a larger anti-domestic violence organization called Respect, it normally receives around 6,000 calls, texts and web chats a year, but volume skyrocketed in the early months of the pandemic. From April to June of last year, phone calls went up by 200 percent; web chats went up by 400 percent and website traffic by 500 percent. These interactions are anonymous, unless the adviser on the phone believes a victim or the caller is in imminent danger and has a duty to report to the authorities. Last year, 84 percent of the callers were men and 15 percent were women. I was curious about the help line, in part because I was doubtful that a half-hour phone chat could make much of a difference. What might such a conversation with my father have sounded like or

accomplished? This past year, the people at Respect allowed me to listen in on their calls. (Callers to the help line heard a message at the start of their call that a writer working on an article for The New York Times might be listening, and they were given the opportunity to opt out.) What I heard both surprised me and left me strangely hopeful.

Annalee Newitz, “Americans Don’t Know What Urban Collapse Really Looks Like”

The Atlantic (Jan 31, 2021)

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/01/seductive-appeal-urban-catastrophe/617878/>

If you’ve ever seen a picture of a lost city—maybe in the pages of National Geographic or in the first Tomb Raider movie—you were probably looking at the crumbling temples and immense, empty canals of Angkor, the former capital of the Khmer empire in present-day Cambodia. Thick tree roots have wrapped themselves around massive blocks of stone in its legendary palaces. Flowers grow from cracks in hundreds of ornate towers carved with the Buddha’s serene face. A thousand years ago, Angkor was among the world’s largest cities, with nearly 1 million residents. Today its iconic ruins are as famous as the city itself once was, attracting millions of tourists to Cambodia every year.

Though Angkor has always been widely known in Asia, Europeans became obsessed with it after the French explorer Henri Mouhot claimed he discovered the place in 1860. Mouhot described Angkor as a lost city, its past a fairy tale with no connection to present-day Cambodia. His vision of Angkor captured the Western imagination and popularized a myth about urban life cycles, in which cities follow a linear progression from humble origins to spectacular heights—and then collapse into obscurity. This myth continues to shape public understanding of urbanism a century and a half later. It haunts news stories about “pandemic flight” from Manhattan and San Francisco, and it is the unspoken subtext of anxious questions about whether Detroit and New Orleans, cities battered by economic or ecological catastrophes, are at risk of dying.

Having witnessed a decline in U.S. cities’ fortunes over the past year, many American commentators are predicting the dissolution of entire communities too eagerly. Having spent the past several years researching a book about ancient abandoned cities, I’ve come to realize that urban collapse is a modern-day version of an apocalypse prophecy: It’s always lurking just around the corner, seductive and terrifying, but it never quite happens. Lost-city anxieties, like the ones aroused by the pandemic, result from a misunderstanding of what causes cities to decline. Pandemics, invasions, and other major calamities are not the usual culprits in urban abandonment. Instead, what kills cities is a long period in which their leaders fail to reckon honestly with ongoing, everyday problems—how workers are treated, whether infrastructure is repaired. Unsustainable, unresponsive governance in the face of long-term challenges may not look like a world-historical problem, but it’s the real threat that cities face.

Annalee Newitz, “Conservatism Took Hold Here 1,000 Years Ago. Until the People Fled.”

The Washington Post (June 1, 2018)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2018/06/01/conservatism-took-hold-here-1000-years-ago-until-the-people-fled/>

During the eighth century, a new kind of civilization arose in New Mexico's Chaco Canyon. It started a social movement that swept across what is now the U.S. Southwest, transforming people's beliefs about how to live, worship and farm. For the next six centuries, Ancestral Puebloan peoples built their communities in imitation of the ones at Chaco, celebrating its culture. But as generations passed, that culture became a rigid tradition, representing a history that some people wanted to escape. As the 14th century drew to a close, the entire Chaco population abandoned the canyon, never to return.

For archaeologists, the Chaco phenomenon offers a chance to understand the rise and fall of a cultural ideal. Though this ideal may have originated between the walls of Chaco Canyon, its power reached far beyond. When conditions changed, it appears that the Puebloan people survived only by letting go of tradition.

Some of the most distinctive archaeological sites in the United States show what remained when people turned their backs on Chaco after centuries of adulation. Visitors to Chaco Culture National Historical Park in New Mexico can wonder at the remains of 12 "great houses" in the rocky landscape. These monumental sandstone dwellings contain hundreds of rooms, sometimes towering five stories high. The canyon once teemed with people who amassed great wealth.

They also influenced other communities. One hundred miles to the north, in what is now Mesa Verde National Park, people shaped their settlements to resemble those at Chaco Canyon. Perhaps the most famous is called Cliff Palace. It's a great house designed to fit snugly in the crevasse beneath a bulging, rocky overhang. From a distance, the dwelling is almost invisible. Close up, it's an architectural marvel of perfectly interconnected forms, where square walls meet soaring curves of wind-carved stone.

Elsewhere in the region, people in smaller Puebloan villages imitated the Chaco style too. Even when they didn't have the resources to construct great houses, they always re-created the most striking part of great-house architecture: round, subterranean ceremonial rooms known as great kivas. Though kivas were part of Puebloan public life before Chaco Canyon's cultural dominance, the great-kiva tradition there brought an air of formality to these buildings, where benches and sumptuous fire pits had to be arranged on the floor just so.

It seemed that everyone wanted to live like they did in Chaco Canyon. And then times changed.

Tressie McMillan Cottom, "The Hustle Economy"

Dissent Magazine (Fall 2020)

<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-hustle-economy>

The futurism of technology discourse is ahistorical and ideological. Tech utopianism disembods the future from the political economies that produce its social relations, and it obscures the machinations of racial capitalism. When I was recently asked to consider how digital technologies shape "economic opportunity" and the "future of work," I started by examining what we mean by economic opportunity, and what counts as work.

In lay terms, economic opportunity in the future of work looks like hustling. Hustling traditionally refers to income-generating activities that occur in the informal economy. It has also become synonymous with

a type of job-adjacent work that looks like it is embedded in the formal economy but is governed by different state protections, which makes the work risky and those doing it vulnerable.

“Platform entrepreneurs” who trade their labor using a digital platform (like TaskRabbit or Takl) that extracts a portion of that labor in exchange for facilitating payments and promotion between provider and customer are hustling. So are independent contractors who enter arrangements with companies (like Uber, Lyft, or Amazon with its delivery drivers) that provide access to proprietary scheduling-based work in exchange for workers who will accept the risk of not being an employee. Hustling also refers to influencers, who develop personal brands on social media platforms and exchange their share of market capture in the attention economy for discounted products, free goods, and direct-to-consumer sales. While all of these types of hustling can happen in conjunction with waged employment and other forms of entrepreneurship, they all show how the assumption of risk has shifted from states and employers to workers. Today, inequality—especially racial inequality—is not only produced through the job market but through people’s ability to hustle.

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which introduced the term into public provisioning, was part of the massive investment in social welfare that happened in the middle of the twentieth century. The legislation, which included funding for a jobs program, adult education, and small business loans, was eventually replaced by the Community Services Block Grant in 1981. The trajectory from economic opportunity to block grants is an allegory for how the dominant economic logic in the United States shifted from an emphasis on civil rights to “investment.” By the 1980s, “economic opportunity” meant promoting entrepreneurship and securing formal credentials among poor people and minorities. By the 2000s, this approach was taken for granted.

Since March, tens of millions of people have filed for unemployment. Meanwhile many participants in the hustle economy have had to adapt quickly to the new context created by the coronavirus. The future is predicted to be less job-centric. It is predicted to be more competitive. It is predicted to shift more risk onto individuals and communities. Digital technologies—combined with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic—are speeding these processes up and making them more efficient. To understand these changes, we need to look to the borders between the formal and informal economy where entrepreneurship sits.

Kate Washington, “50 Million Americans are Unpaid Caregivers. We Need Help.”

The New York Times (Feb 22, 2021)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/22/opinion/us-caregivers-biden.html>

Five years ago I stood in a tiny hospital room wondering how I was going to care for the man I loved most without succumbing to despair.

For four months, my husband, Brad, had been recovering from a stem-cell transplant that saved his life from aggressive lymphoma. The hospital administration said he must go home, but he needed a level of support that, I thought, only a hospital could provide.

His homecoming ought to have been cause for celebration. But I felt anything but joyful. The night before his discharge, unable to sleep, I felt so trapped and terrified that I called a suicide hotline, even

though I wasn't really sure I wanted to harm myself. I was so desperate I needed to hear a compassionate human voice, and I couldn't think of anywhere else to turn.

Though isolated, I was far from alone: According to a 2020 survey by AARP, more than 50 million Americans now serve as unpaid caregivers for adult family members or friends. That number will rise as the baby boomers age. That's the bad news. The good news is that with the Biden administration committed to a bold, integrated vision of care, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity.

Patricia Lockwood, "Malfunctioning Sex Robot"

London Review of Books (Oct 10, 2019)

<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v41/n19/patricia-lockwood/malfunctioning-sex-robot>

I was hired as an assassin. You don't bring in a 37-year-old woman to review John Updike in the year of our Lord 2019 unless you're hoping to see blood on the ceiling. 'Absolutely not,' I said when first approached, because I knew I would try to read everything, and fail, and spend days trying to write an adequate description of his nostrils, and all I would be left with after months of standing tiptoe on the balance beam of objectivity and fair assessment would be a letter to the editor from some guy named Norbert accusing me of cutting off a great man's dong in print. But then the editors cornered me drunk at a party, and here we are.

One woman, informed of my project, visibly retched over her quail. 'No, listen,' I told her, 'there is something there. People write well about him,' and I saw the red line of her estimation plunge like the Dow Jones. 'Didn't he write that thing,' someone else said, 'about how women don't know how to piss, because their insides are too complicated?' (Yes, in multiple books. It is at best puzzling, and at worst an indictment of both Pennsylvania public schools and Harvard.) 'Please tell me you're writing something about Updike's 9/11 book,' another said. 'Can't do that,' I responded, 'because I'm pretty sure I would die while reading it, and that would be another victim for 9/11.' Taste and tact had departed hand in hand; I had been reading too much John Hoyer Updike.

In a 1997 review for the *New York Observer*, the recently kinged David Foster Wallace diagnosed how far Updike had fallen in the esteem of a younger generation. 'Penis with a thesaurus' is the phrase that lives on, though it is not the levelling blow it first appears; one feels oddly proud, after all, of a penis that has learned to read. Today, he has fallen even further, still in the pantheon but marked by an embarrassed asterisk: died of pussy-hounding. No one can seem to agree on his surviving merits. He wrote like an angel, the consensus goes, except when he was writing like a malfunctioning sex robot attempting to administer cunnilingus to his typewriter. Offensive criticism of him is often reductive, while defensive criticism has a strong flavour of people-are-being-mean-to-my-dad. There's so much of him, spread over so much time, that perhaps everyone has read a different John Updike.