

Trump's Trillion-Dollar Scheme / Cuba's 'Secret Sonic Weapon'

Newsweek

09.15.2017

Blame Clinton

?



EVERYTHING YOU HATE ABOUT 2017 GOES BACK TO THE '90s—AND SLICK WILLIE

by DAVID FRIEND



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PRESS AND THE FLESH: When Gennifer Flowers went public about her affair with then-Governor Bill Clinton, she called a press conference that devolved from farce to vaudeville. It became clear that the retaining wall between news and entertainment had collapsed.

FEATURE

20 The '90s Made Us Do It

How sex, scandal and media scrutiny in the age of Slick Willie led to the tawdry Trump teens.

by David Friend

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BIG SHOTS

USA

A Hard Rain

Houston—Thousands of homes near Lake Houston were flooded after Hurricane Harvey struck in late August. Harvey was the first major hurricane to make landfall in the U.S. in more than a decade and the wettest on record, displacing more than 30,000 people and causing at least 47 deaths. Preliminary estimates suggest the storm could be the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history, with a price tag of up to \$190 billion.



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Scaling Back

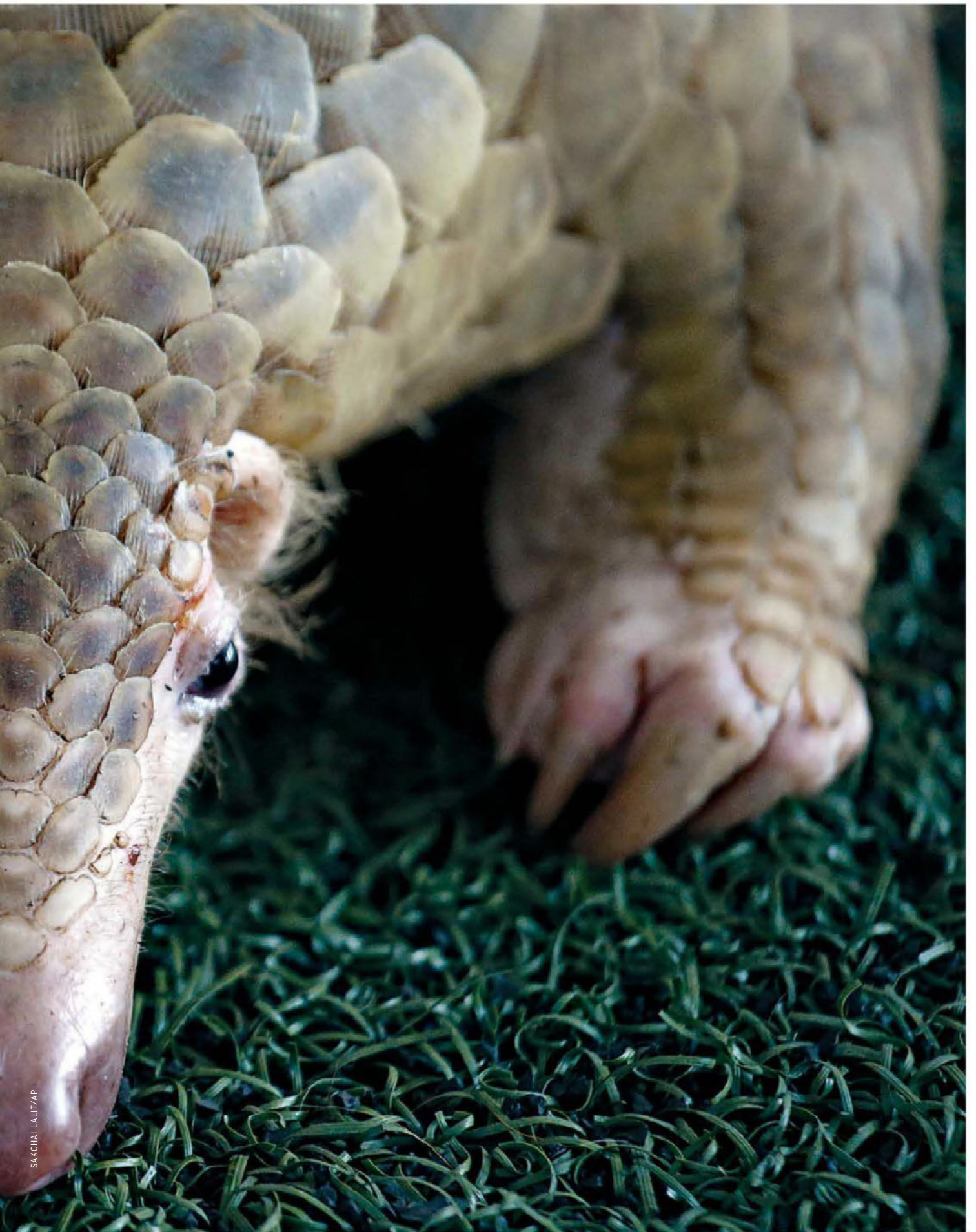
Bangkok—The star of an August 31 press conference in Thailand was one of the 136 pangolins recently seized by customs officials there. The massive haul came after officials received a tipoff about an upcoming attempt to smuggle the highly endangered species from Malaysia. Pangolins, the only mammals with scales, are the world's most trafficked wild mammal, and poachers have ravaged populations in Asia.

Their meat is considered a delicacy in Vietnam and parts of China, and traditional Chinese medicine uses the animal's keratin scales, which are dried and roasted and consumed for everything from treating palsy to stimulating lactation.



SAKCHAI LALIT







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GETTING TAKEN FOR A ROAD

If you want a peek at Trump's grandiose infrastructure plan, look at how Indiana drove the privatization of public roads into a ditch

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump's \$1 trillion plan to rebuild America's infrastructure may be unprecedented in size and ambition, but it mimics a controversial scheme championed by Vice President Mike Pence when he was Indiana's governor. That's why he is the public face of the Trump initiative, and executives from financial companies that helped privatize Indiana's toll road are in the White House, sculpting Trump's national plan.

Pence and his allies like to boast about how Indiana sold control of major roads to private companies, claiming the move prompted corporations to invest money in infrastructure that would otherwise have been funded by taxpayers. But opponents say Indiana made some bad deals that offer a cautionary tale of get-rich-quick scheming, secrecy and cronyism that led the state to sell off valuable assets that were then mismanaged.

Public-private partnerships involve private companies investing in, constructing or main-

taining public assets such as roads, bridges and airports, in exchange for those companies raking in tolls, fees or other revenues generated by those assets. The model—sometimes called “asset recycling”—has been prevalent in Australia, Asia and Europe, and since the turn of the 21st century, more American cities and states have begun to embrace it. Few, however, have been as aggressive as Indiana in pursuing such partnerships.

The American Society of Civil Engineers estimates it will take \$4.6 trillion to maintain and upgrade infrastructure throughout the U.S., a ripe profit opportunity for politically connected companies. Trump recently secured a pledge by Saudi Arabia's government to invest billions in American infrastructure. That money is slated to flow through Blackstone Group LP—the private equity company run by Trump adviser Stephen Schwarzman.

Pence began his vice presidency with an Aus-

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AJ MAST/AP



MAN WITH THE PLAN: Vice President Pence is spearheading Trump's infrastructure plans, which are modeled on an initiative he championed as Indiana's governor.



tralia trip to promote Trump's infrastructure plan to foreign investors. Only weeks later, the Interstate 69 privatization deal he championed as Indiana's governor collapsed amid construction delays, allegations of financial mismanagement and a spike in traffic accidents, culminating in the return of the section of the road under private control to the state in mid-August of this year. At the same time, the foreign company Pence approved to run the 156-mile Indiana Toll Road announced it would be hammering economically battered northwest Indiana with huge toll increases.

Those two road deals are precisely the kind of arrangements Trump's infrastructure plan hopes to replicate across the nation, led by a team with ties to the privatization in Indiana. Along with Pence, White House officials Gary Cohn and D.J. Gribbin are spearheading the White House proposal to let private companies invest in, operate and purchase public assets. Cohn and Gribbin worked for two companies—Goldman Sachs and Macquarie, respectively—that helped privatize the Indiana Toll Road. Meanwhile, federal records reviewed by *Newsweek* show the same foreign company Pence approved to run Indiana's toll road has hired the same Pence-connected lobbying company to lobby the vice president on federal infrastructure policy. If Trump has his way, all of America's roads might be said to run through Indiana.

A DRAG ON MAINSTREET

The project that best embodies Trump's infrastructure model—and its challenges—is the Indiana Toll Road, an east-west artery that serves an area with more than 15 percent of America's population. The effort to privatize the so-called "Mainstreet of the Midwest" was launched by Mitch Daniels soon after he was elected governor in 2004. Daniels, a Republican anti-tax crusader who served as George W. Bush's budget director, wanted to raise revenue for new road construction and maintenance without raising taxes.

Soon after his inauguration, Daniels's administration announced it had given a contract to Goldman Sachs to begin soliciting bids to man-

age the highway. Goldman Sachs would go on to reap \$20 million in fees from Indiana taxpayers for its work there.

Daniels faced staunch opposition from Democrats in his state Legislature. "This is a 75-year surrender of an interstate highway and all the [toll] revenue we could have brought in," House Democratic leader Patrick Bauer said at the time. "If there is any 'wow,' it's the new sign that says 'Indiana for sale or rent.'"

In pushing the deal, the Daniels administration estimated the road would generate \$1.92 billion in revenue over the next 75 years in state hands. That's why it was crowing when it accepted a \$3.85 billion bid from Spanish company Cintra S.A. and Australia's Macquarie to manage the road until 2081. The lease effectively exempted the consortium from state open-records laws but gave Indiana the right to take back the road if the companies went bankrupt.

State lawmakers narrowly approved the deal Daniels promised would fund infrastructure priorities across the state. Not everyone was as

“PENCE BELIEVES IN THIS RELIGION—THE MAGIC AND MYSTERY OF MARKETS IS SOLVING ALL THE PROBLEMS.”

optimistic. A report by Northwest Financial, for instance, found that the consortium was relying on punishingly steep toll increases to recover its investment. The report warned that over the long haul, the scheme would “result in depriving the public transportation funding network of very large and much-needed future revenues.”

Over the next few years, revenue from the deal funded Daniels's “Major Moves” initiative, which financed the renovation and construction of 87 roadways, constructed or renovated 60 interchanges and fixed or replaced a quarter of Indiana's bridges, “with no new state debt and no increase to taxpayers,” according to the Indiana Department of Transportation.

The deal benefited Indiana's short-term infrastructure budget, as well as the companies that had delivered big money to Daniels. *The Times of Northwest Indiana*, for instance, reported that legal and consulting companies that worked on the deal contributed more than \$90,000 to his

FOR WHOM THE ROAD TOLLS: Pence and his allies boast about how Indiana sold control of major roads to private companies. But opponents say Indiana made some bad deals that offer a cautionary tale.

campaigns. As critics called for tougher oversight of the road, the lobbying company for the private consortium also gave more than \$114,000 to the governor's re-election campaign.

The companies' management of the toll road drew criticism over everything from emergency management to toll increases. In September 2008, for instance, the state ordered a suspension

of tolls so residents could evacuate a flood zone, and, as a result, the state had to pay the consortium nearly \$450,000 in forgone revenue. Additionally, the Pew Charitable Trusts found that, on one occasion, "the operators did not allow state troopers to close the road during a snowstorm, claiming it was a private road." Meanwhile, the consortium began raising tolls—a main reason for the 21 percent decline in traffic on that road between 2006 and 2010, according to a Congressional Budget Office report.

Audits obtained by *Newsweek* also flagged deteriorating conditions after the road was privatized. While the toll road consortium reports noted an improvement in the highway's pavement, a 2010 report said, "All bridge element conditions have worsened." A 2014 audit showed that 21 percent of the concrete bridges over the highway had become structurally deficient. That represented a near doubling of the road's bridge deficiency rate in the eight years since it had been privatized—and it was well above the 5 percent deficiency rate that state officials set as a maximum limit for roads in Indiana.

A HEAVY TOLL

Soon after Pence was elected to succeed Daniels in 2012, he faced a crisis over that toll road when the consortium declared bankruptcy in 2014. Democratic U.S. Senator Joe Donnelly of Indiana urged Pence to consider following through on Daniels's promise to invoke the bankruptcy clause in the privatization contract and bring the road back under public management. "I ask that you prioritize maintaining safe and appropriate road conditions, the adequate staffing and service of toll booths, and the good conditions and cleanliness of rest plazas and restrooms," Donnelly wrote in a letter obtained by *Newsweek*. "If these conditions cannot be met, I ask that you consider reverting the toll road to state control so we can begin the task of restoring the toll road's reputation and quality."

Donnelly's argument was buttressed by a paper authored by College of William and Mary professor John Gilmour that estimated Daniels lost the state millions by leasing the road, rather than keeping it and raising tolls gradually. Pence's administration countered with a study arguing that Indiana would receive \$2 billion less in toll revenue if it held on to the road, rather than leasing it to other private companies.

Pence—whose campaigns received more than \$116,000 from the private road consortium's lobbying company, Bose—rejected Donnelly's request. Instead, his administration opened up a new round of bidding to resell the lease.





Among the bidders were two northwest Indiana counties. In considering the new bids, Pence's administration commissioned accounting firm KPMG to evaluate different scenarios for the road—but then refused to release the company's findings. Pence then rejected the counties' proposal and approved the purchase of the road by Australia-based IFM Investors (which this year hired Bose to lobby Pence on federal infrastructure policy). "Pence believes in this religion—the magic and mystery of markets is solving all the problems," says Shaw Friedman, an attorney who represented those Indiana counties that tried to buy back the privatized road.

Less than a year later—and after the new corporate owner moved to sell part of the road to another investor—proponents of public owner-

ship said Pence's decision had harmed the state. "It is clear to anyone who has driven on the toll road that conditions have worsened, and continued state or local ownership could have avoided this situation," Donnelly said.

ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN

The Indiana Toll Road wasn't the only roadway run into a ditch by Pence's privatization fervor. As he took over for Daniels in January 2013, Pence began eyeing public-private partnerships for the construction of a segment of Interstate 69 that runs through the southern part of the state. In his first year as governor, Pence and Indiana Republican lawmakers approved a consortium led by Spanish companies to oversee the construction and management of a

+
SHOVELING IT:
Critics say Trump's infrastructure plan could lead to problems similar to what Pence's efforts brought in Indiana, including cronyism and mismanagement.



VICTOR J. BLUE/BLOOMBERG/GETTY

21-mile upgrade of I-69. In addition to over \$100 million in funding from the state, with more to come on an annual basis, the partnership received more than \$243 million in tax-exempt bonds, a federal funding mechanism that Trump's infrastructure plan aims to expand.

Only two years after the deal was cut, the Spanish firm, Grupo Isolux Corsán S.A., faced sanctions from Indiana transportation officials, who said it was behind on its payments to construction subcontractors. Soon after, the project began to stall, with an 18-month delay pushing expected completion back to May 2018, according to *The Indianapolis Star*.

Within months of taking over the governor's office, Pence's successor, Governor Eric Holcomb, announced that Indiana would take back



control of the project and terminate the contract with the private operators.

In a June report, the *Star* found that the roadway saw a 48 percent spike in car accidents since the project's construction period began. In August, the Indiana Department of Transportation took back that section of the road, with the state promising in a press release to have it completed one year later.


TAXPAYERS WON'T PAY

David Wolkins, the sole Republican state representative who voted against the Indiana Toll Road deal back in 2006, now believes such deals are the only way to fund major infrastructure projects. "There's a general anti-tax sentiment out there,"

“THEY SAY, ‘IF WE SELL IT TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR, WE DON’T HAVE TO PAY FOR IT,’ AND THAT’S OUTRIGHT BULLSHIT.”

he says. "Anything new is either going to have to be a toll road or a public-private partnership, because taxpayers won't let you raise taxes."

Donald Cohen, the executive director of the government contract policy think tank In the Public Interest, says the deals mislead taxpayers into thinking there are no real costs associated with improving infrastructure. "They say, 'If we sell it to the private sector, we don't have to pay for it,' and that's outright bullshit."

As for Daniels's argument that the state won out by receiving the money up front, Cohen says that while some deals can help taxpayers, investors typically get the better end of the bargain. "They're doing the math," he says. "They're not stupid." 



HEAR NO EVIL

Did Cuban spies attack American diplomats with a secret sonic weapon?

IT SOUNDED like something out of *Spy vs. Spy*, the satirical Cold War comic strip featuring two black- and white-clad slapstick characters trying to destroy each other with bombs and booby traps. Last year, secret agents in Havana began bombarding American diplomats with a mysterious weapon that used sound waves to damage their hearing, among “other symptoms.” Or so the Trump administration indicated in August, months after it announced the expulsion of two low-ranking Cuban officials in retaliation for the alleged attack.

As critics began to ask why U.S. officials have yet to identify the victims or a motive, the State Department backed away from blaming Cuba for the assault. Meanwhile, scientists and intelligence analysts continue to question whether undetected sound waves could cause a sudden onset of hearing loss. “[Audiologists] are all scratching our heads about what the cause could be,” says Colleen Le Prell, a professor of hearing science and head of the doctoral audiology program at the University of Texas at Dallas. “None of us have a good explanation.”

On August 9, the Associated Press broke the news about the attacks, and the State Department acknowledged there had been a series of “incidents which have caused a variety of physical symptoms,” effectively confirming the story without mentioning hearing loss. U.S. officials contacted doctors at the University of Miami Health System after the incidents were first reported. Weeks later, CBS quoted an unnamed

medical source at the University of Miami, who said an American doctor had diagnosed American and Canadian diplomats working in Havana with “mild traumatic brain injury” and “likely damage to the central nervous system.”

Two days after the Associated Press report was confirmed, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson backtracked from directly implicating the Cuban government. The State Department said that the U.S. was still trying to figure out who was behind the “health incident” and that investigators had still not determined what had happened to the “at least 16 U.S. Government employees... [who] have been provided medical treatment in the United States as well as in Cuba.”

The Cuban government has denied any role in harming the diplomats and offered to work with Washington to figure out what, if anything, happened. Meanwhile, intelligence analysts remain baffled by the incident, saying it’s unclear what could cause such symptoms. “The entire story is bizarre,” says a former senior diplomat once stationed in Havana, who asked not to be quoted by name when discussing intel methods. “It doesn’t make any sense. The U.S. military and other militaries have developed low-frequency devices [that produce] temporary hearing loss. It is no secret that this technology exists. But nothing that is permanent.”

He and other analysts say intelligence organizations sometimes employ microwave technology that bounces beams off windows to detect conversations in targeted rooms and buildings.



BY
PETER EISNER
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But these methods, they add, are not believed to cause hearing loss, neurological damage or other physical harm.

Also, they're typically used on secure rooms in official buildings such as embassies. Anywhere else in Havana, U.S. officials assume that Cuban intelligence is monitoring them with traditional eavesdropping methods, such as tapping telephones or planting radio transmitters. The victims in this case apparently were lower-ranking diplomats, and the alleged exposure to what caused the symptoms apparently occurred in Cuban-built residences, the diplomatic source tells *Newsweek*.

As the mystery surrounding the symptoms continues, some speculate that malfunctioning equipment could be to blame. "We have very little experience anywhere in the world with... attacks designed to physically harm our diplomats," said John Sipher, a former high-ranking CIA clandestine service officer, writing for the blog Just Security.

The former diplomat agrees, saying, "It is

possible that there is some new weapon never heard of. [But] the purpose of espionage is not to destroy people's ears...[it's to]...encourage them to talk."

Researchers say hearing loss generally occurs with extended exposure to blaring sound at rock concerts or other high-decibel events. Temporary hearing loss can also occur due to viral or chemical exposure unrelated to espionage. Le Prell, the University of Texas audiologist, says the sudden onset of hearing loss without an audible source is "very unusual."

"We know that sound that is not audible can have effects on the ear and on general health," Le Prell tells *Newsweek*. "However, the literature does not provide any examples of a sudden change of hearing from non-audible sound."

Either way, the alleged attack occurred at a time when Cuba and the United States enjoy a relatively good relationship. Two years ago, President Barack Obama restored diplomatic relations with Cuba after more than half a century. Despite criticism, President Donald Trump has left Obama's agreement with Cuba intact, with only minor restrictions on trade and on Americans traveling to Cuba. Cuban President Raúl

SPY VS. SPY:
Analysts remain baffled by the Trump administration's claim that an enemy spy service may have used sound waves to cause American diplomats to lose their hearing

SVEN CREUTZMANN/MAMBO PHOTO/GETTY



“THE ENTIRE [CUBA] STORY IS BIZARRE. IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.”

Castro criticized Trump's moves but said the two countries should “cooperate and live side by side, respecting their differences.”

Since then, Cuban diplomats in Washington appear to be going about their normal business, says William LeoGrande, a professor of government at American University. “I heard absolutely no inkling of anything along these lines until the story broke,” says LeoGrande, co-author of *Back Channel to Cuba*, a book about the history of secret negotiations between Washington and Havana. “It's a serious issue, as indicated by the expulsion of the two Cubans. But I do think the U.S. side has proceeded cautiously, not making unfounded accusations until they figure out exactly what happened.”

Doing so won't be easy. Spies—both real ones and the *Spy vs. Spy* kind—prefer their cloak-and-dagger methods to remain in the shadows. ■

THE KING AND CHAI

Morocco's Muslim monarch is trying to preserve the country's Jewish history—before it's gone

A DECADE AGO, when Elmehdi Boudra began attending college in his native Morocco, he didn't expect to see swastikas scrawled on his door. Like almost every other student at his school, Boudra is Muslim. But growing up, his grandmother cooked him Jewish food and told him stories about Jewish friends—including the woman who nursed her. “We didn't care who was Jewish and who was Muslim,” Boudra recalls his grandmother saying. “We were Moroccans—and human.”

Yet Boudra's peers didn't like his fondness for Jewish culture, and they let him know it, both with the swastikas on his door and with the names they called him: rabbi, Zionist, a traitor to the Palestinian cause. “They never met Jews before,” says Boudra. “To them, Judaism is Israel. It's the Palestinian conflict.”

For the past 10 years, Boudra's organization, Mimouna, has worked to educate young Moroccans about the nation's Jewish history. (The group is named after a religious festival that Jews in Morocco used to celebrate with their Muslim neighbors.) They've even convinced Morocco's Al-Akhawayn University, Boudra's alma mater, to make Hebrew and Jewish studies classes part of the curriculum.

Boudra and his 90-member group are part of a campaign to educate this majority-Muslim country about its Jewish past, to restore its ancient Jewish sites and to support its dwindling Jewish

community. These efforts are occurring at a time when anti-Semitism and radicalism are on the rise elsewhere in the Arab world. Morocco is facing some of the same forces of Islamist extremism, but Moroccan Muslims are hoping that their efforts to preserve their nation's Jewish history will also protect the pluralism and tolerance that have become such a rarity in the region.

Jews have a deep history in what is now Morocco. They were among the first people to settle in the area, arriving in the sixth century B.C. after their first exile from Jerusalem—long before the birth of Islam. In 1492, Jews fleeing the Spanish Inquisition found refuge in the North African kingdom just 8 miles south of Spain.

In 1948, after the creation of Israel, other Arab nations systematically expelled their Jewish populations. The Moroccan exodus was different, says Michael Laskier, a professor of Middle Eastern studies at Israel's Bar Ilan University—most Jewish Moroccans chose to emigrate voluntarily; more than half settled in Israel. The reasons they left varied: Some wanted to live in a Jewish homeland; others were escaping joblessness and growing Arab nationalism at a time when France ruled the nation. Despite the long Jewish history in the country, many Muslims associated Jews with Israel and European colonialism, says Laskier, and riots killed dozens of Moroccan Jews between 1938 and 1954. Yet these bloody incidents were rare, especially



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REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST: A rabbi offers free meals to Muslims in Marrakech, Morocco. Jews have a long history of co-existence here.

compared with elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa.

Today, there are only 3,000 Jews left in Morocco, down from nearly 300,000 in 1948. That still makes the community the largest in the Arab world. But it's rapidly disappearing, as most young Moroccan Jews are leaving for countries with larger Jewish populations in hopes of finding a spouse. Leaders of Morocco's Jewish community predict that in 10 years there will be few, if any, Jews left.

As Jews continue to leave, a small but growing number of Morocco's young Muslims have been trying to draw attention to an earlier time in the nation's Jewish history—the Holocaust—and the heroic role their country played in it. In 2011, Mimouna hosted the Arab world's first-ever Holocaust remembrance conference. The topic is controversial in Muslim nations, where Germany's Jewish genocide is tied up in Israeli-Palestinian politics. In 2014, for example, a

Palestinian professor received death threats after bringing his students to Auschwitz. He was accused of being a Zionist traitor and peddling pro-Israel propaganda. (He later resigned and now lives in the United States.)

The conference almost didn't happen because Al-Akhawayn University administrators opposed it. Boudra and other organizers eventually convinced the university to hold the event. For many young Moroccans, the conference was their first time learning about the Holocaust. During World War II, Morocco was controlled by the Nazi-aligned Vichy government in France. Yet ordered by French officials to send Jews to concentration camps, Sultan Mohammed V refused. As a result, Moroccan Jews weren't sent away, forced to wear yellow stars or give up their property. The sultan's decision stood in sharp contrast to the actions of other Muslim leaders who supported the Nazi cause. Among them: Haj Amin Husseini, the

LOVE IN THE TIME OF HANUKKAH: A Jewish wedding in Marrakech in 1980. Today, the Jewish community in Morocco is so small, many are moving abroad to get married.



former grand mufti of Jerusalem, who recruited European Muslims to fight for the Nazis.

Today, many Moroccans continue to view Jews through the lens of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But those who are trying to revive the country's history of tolerance are turning to their leader for inspiration. King Mohammed VI, Mohammed V's grandson—a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad—was among the first Muslim heads of state to publicly acknowledge Jewish suffering during the Holocaust. In a 2009 speech in Paris, read on his behalf by his adviser André Azoulay, who is Jewish, the king called it “one of the most tragic chapters of modern history.” In 2010, King Mohammed VI initiated a program to repair hundreds of ancient synagogues and cemeteries scattered throughout Morocco. Since then, the kingdom has spent millions of dollars to repair nearly 200 of these sites. In 2011, in the wake of the Arab spring, Judaism became enshrined in the country's new constitution as a key part of Moroccan identity. “Judaism in Morocco is more than 3,000 years old,” says Azoulay. “It is deeply, deeply rooted in our history. The king is committed to keeping this history alive.”

Morocco has pushed for pluralism and religious tolerance without much blowback. But like his grandfather before him, King Mohammed VI is taking a risk. In 2003, an Al-Qaeda-inspired attack in Casablanca killed 45 people in five synchronized bombings, some targeting Jewish sites. A smaller attack shook Casablanca in 2007. In 2015, a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Casablanca featured men dressed as Orthodox Jews destroying a model of Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque before being led to a mock execution.

Compared with other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, however, Islamist extremists haven't had much success in Morocco. That's largely due to the country's moderate traditions of Maliki and Sufi Islam—as well as its security services, which human rights groups say have treated suspected radicals harshly, imprisoning some without trial and torturing others.

The country's Jews, however, say the tolerance and acceptance they've experienced here are unparalleled in the Arab world. On a sweltering day in June, Hafid Nuaman was wiping sweat from his face as he cleaned the graves of Casablanca's Jewish cemetery and greeted the local Chabad rabbi. The Muslim groundskeeper has been working here for 25 years, and said there's never been any vandalism at the Jewish



burial ground. That same week, at a Jewish cemetery in Marrakech that dates back to 1537—one of several that have been restored in recent years—another Muslim groundskeeper even spoke some Hebrew. The cemetery sits next to the king's palace, inside the Jewish quarter, whose streets still bear their Hebrew names.

Jewish organizations such as Chabad, a global Orthodox Jewish movement, are also heavily involved in the preservation of Jewish history and culture here. At a food distribution in Marrakech in late June, 350 Muslims gathered at a 500-year-old synagogue built by Jews who fled the Spanish Inquisition. This is part of a three-year program by Mimouna and Chabad to feed Muslims in need during Ramadan. The groups distribute the meals inside synagogues, said Chabad Rabbi Levi Banon, to show Muslims that they have the support of Moroccan Jews.

“WE DIDN'T CARE WHO WAS JEWISH AND WHO WAS MUSLIM. WE WERE MOROCCANS—AND HUMAN.”

“Jews were here first, so of course we have good relations with them,” says Khadija Bnidan, a Muslim woman who came to the Slat Laazama synagogue for her meal package.

For Boudra, comments like Bnidan's exemplify the kind of country he hopes Morocco will remain—even as the Middle East and North Africa continue to reckon with radicalism.

“I love my country, and I want to keep it as it was before,” he tells *Newsweek*. “A place where Muslims and Jews and anyone from any place can live together.”

Travel for this story was paid for by the nonprofit International Fellowship of Christians and Jews.





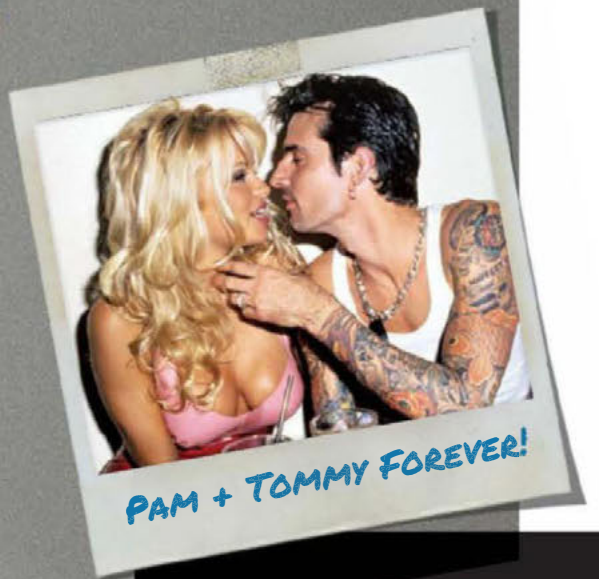
HOW **SEX, SCANDAL**
AND MEDIA **SCRUTINY** IN
THE AGE OF SLICK WILLIE
LED TO THE TAWDRY
TRUMP TEENS

THE 90s MADE US DO IT

By DAVID FRIEND
PORTRAIT BY PETER YANG

BIG LITTLE LIES:
Even Clinton's
supporters say he
would try to lawyer
the truth to leave
himself wiggle room
to change his mind.





Kneecaps and Honey Traps

DURING THE 1990S, AMERICANS BECAME OBSESSED WITH FAME AND DISGRACE. HERE ARE SOME OF THE DECADE'S MOST NOTORIOUS SCANDALS



TWO DECADES AGO, ON A FRIGID night just before the New Hampshire primary, America first met Bill and Hillary Clinton as a couple.

It was January 26, 1992, a drowsier time when daily papers controlled the narrative of presidential campaigns; when CNN was the only cable news network on the air, and blogs didn't exist. Bill Clinton was the favorite to win the Democratic nomination and face President George H.W. Bush in November.

And then he had what a chief adviser of his would call a catastrophic "bimbo eruption." Her name was Gennifer Flowers, and the *Star*, the supermarket tabloid, was about to publish a story saying she and Clinton had had a 12-year affair. In response, Arkansas's first couple had agreed to do an emergency interview with Steve Kroft of *60 Minutes*, to talk about their marriage. The Arkansas governor and his wife insisted on appearing together, and it was her words, more than his, that saved his candidacy.

The Clintons sat beside each other on a couch: Bill, in a suit, with his hands almost prayer-like between his knees, and Hillary, with her arm draped on his back or straying occasionally to settle on his arms. She wore a thin black headband and a turquoise suit with matching turtleneck and eye shadow. She examined her husband lovingly, yet maintained a commanding air, nodding approvingly as he spoke, then jumping in as necessary.

Her husband's responses to Kroft's questions were measured, firm and softly delivered. At some points, a viewer couldn't help think he was a nimble actor, patting his heart and leaning forward. Now and again, he appeared hurt, even vaguely aghast, his bottom lip resolutely chewed or his eyebrows gone all circumflex. Other times, he shook his head or narrowed his eyes to express exasperation with his interrogator.

KROFT: You've said that your marriage has had problems.... What do you mean by that?

CLINTON: I think...people that have been married a long time know what it means and know the whole range of things it can mean.

KROFT: Are you prepared tonight to say that you've never had an extramarital affair?

CLINTON: I'm not prepared tonight to say that any married couple should ever discuss that with anyone but themselves.... And I think what the press has to decide is: Are we going to engage in a game of "gotcha"?

Finally, Kroft tried to articulate what many viewers were thinking: "I think most Americans would agree that it's very admirable that you've stayed together—that you've worked your problems out, that you've seemed to reach some sort of understanding and an arrangement."

"I wanted to slug him," Clinton would later concede in his autobiography, *My Life*. "Instead, I said, 'Wait a minute. You're looking at two people who love each other. This is not an arrangement or an understanding. This is a marriage.'"

Hillary pounced, and her cool-headed response was the reverberating sound bite: "You know, I'm not sitting here, some little woman standing by my man, like Tammy Wynette. I'm sitting here because I love him, I respect him, and I honor what he's been through



January 1990
Marion Barry

The mayor of Washington, D.C., is nabbed in an FBI sting while smoking crack with a former girlfriend. The scene is recorded on videotape as Barry is placed in handcuffs and declares, "Bitch set me up."

February 1990
Donald and Ivana Trump

The couple announce their separation after the *New York Post* trumpets an alleged comment from Marla Maples, Trump's lover: "BEST SEX I EVER HAD."

May 1990

Christian Brando is arrested and later found guilty of voluntary manslaughter in the death of the boyfriend of his half-sister.



FROM LEFT: WALLY MCNAMEE/CORBIS/GETTY; MITCHELL GERBER/CORBIS/GETTY; WILLIAM NATION/SYGMA/GETTY; PREVIOUS SPREAD: PETER YANG/AUGUST; S. GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE/GETTY; TOLGA TEZCAN/GETTY



FROM TOP LEFT: CBS/GETTY; KYPROS/GETTY; LANNIS WATERS/SYGMA/GETTY; MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

and what we've been through together. And, you know, if that's not enough for people—then, heck, don't vote for him.”

Then, in a portion of the segment that was never broadcast, the overhead lights that had been set up somehow became unmoored, along with their wood-beam mount. The rigging toppled over, with a clamber, barely missing Hillary. “They just kind of popped off,” Kroft remembers, “and came crashing down on the back of the sofa behind the Clintons...[who] lurched forward [to avoid the] burning filaments and flying glass.”

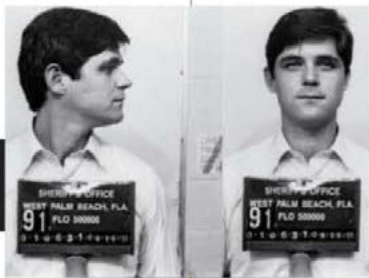
A tragedy averted, Bill Clinton took his wife in his arms, clutched her close, and kept telling her, softly, that he loved her—that everything would be OK. The couple would be fine, but the interview—and Clinton's presidency—marked the beginning of a seismic shift

+ **LOVE AND DAMAGE CONTROL: After the Gennifer Flowers accusations in 1992, Hillary Clinton's words, more than Bill's, saved his candidacy and helped him win the presidency.**



July 1990
Roseanne Barr

At the start of a San Diego Padres baseball game, a jeering crowd drowns out the comedian's controversial rendition of “The Star-Spangled Banner.”



March 1991
William Kennedy Smith

After going out with uncle Edward Kennedy, the med student returns to the family home with a young woman. He is arrested on—and later cleared of—rape charges.



July 1991
Pee-wee Herman

The comedian, whose real name is Paul Reubens, is caught in an adult movie theater and charged with indecent exposure. Claiming his innocence, he pleads no contest and avoids a public trial.

in American culture, which led to much of what we abhor about the present day.

Sex, Voyeurism and Reality TV

THE SHAME-STRAFED 1990S began two years before that infamous interview, with a blaring tabloid headline in the *New York Post*: “Best Sex I’ve Ever Had.” The story was about real estate mogul Donald Trump and his lover, Marla Maples—she was supposedly talking about his prowess in the bedroom. This was well before Trump’s career as a reality-TV star (though he had already boasted he could become president).

The decade ended on the eve of the 2000 election with Americans in suspended agitation. They were doubtful that presidential hopeful Al Gore could emerge from the shadow of yet another Clinton extramarital relationship (with White House intern Monica Lewinsky) and his subsequent impeachment (he couldn’t). They also hoped that our computer programs could avoid a global Y2K meltdown (they did, though many tech fortunes would evaporate a few months later with the end of the dot-com bubble).

In between those events, it was much ado about Clinton, the man whose time in office perfectly captured the rapid changes taking place in American culture during the 1990s—the voyeurism and virulence aroused by social media; the thirst for scandal incited by 24/7 tabloid news; the false narratives concocted by reality TV; the breakdown of private barriers (as a result of the World Wide Web); the tacit permission to lie about unethical conduct; and the partisan rancor perpetuated by the culture war.

This was the decade when Americans, as never before, confronted an expanding public encroachment on their personal lives. They were entertained and alarmed by tales of well-known figures ensnared in scandal. They grappled with matters surrounding

sexuality, the web and nascent social media. Sex moved to the forefront of their lives—from the creation of Viagra and the growth of internet porn to the sometimes venomous backlash against both.

Today, a generation after Clinton was sworn in as president, it's no coincidence we ended up with President Donald Trump. Clinton's naughty '90s led to the prevaricating age of George W. Bush (remember "Mission Accomplished"? Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction?). Those 16 years created an environment in which, after two relatively scandal-free terms of Barack Obama, a divided America, accustomed to its versions of faux reality, chose Trump, a serial untruth-teller as president—a man many voters felt they knew because of his reality-TV show.

'You Ate Good Pussy'

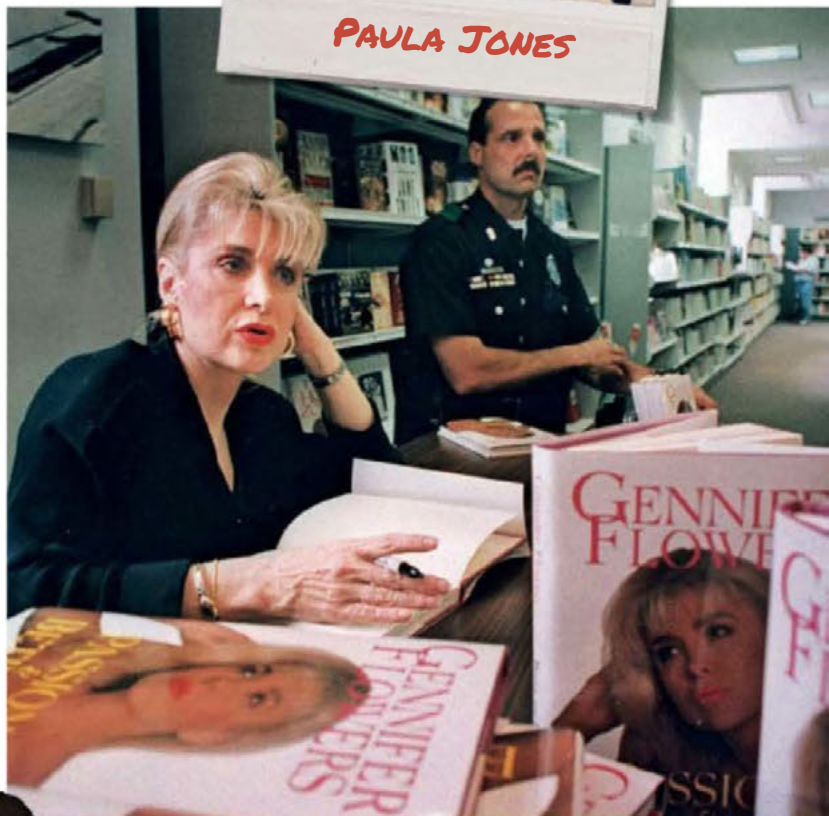
IN EARLY 1992, after the Clintons appeared on *60 Minutes*, many voters admired their unflinching commitment to each other. But at least one viewer was aghast. "I was seething with outrage," Flowers would recount in her memoir, *Passion and Betrayal*. "To watch the two of them sit there with innocent looks on their faces, lying to the entire country, was infuriating."

The next night, Flowers showed up at a packed press conference. The media free-for-all—350 people by one estimate, with CNN covering it live—represented a nadir in real-time TV news. Flowers wore a bright honeysuckle suit with black lapels and some majorly '80s shoulder pads. Her lips were full and red and almost cartoonishly solemn. Her pyrotechnic blondeness, with its cascade of dark roots, wreathed her face like a spray of goldenrod. "The truth is I loved him," she said. "Now he tells me to deny it. Well, I'm sick of all the deceit, and I'm sick of all the lies."

BELITTLED WOMEN: After going public with their stories about Bill Clinton, both Jones, top, and Flowers became fodder for an increasingly scandal-hungry 24/7 press.



PAULA JONES



October 1991

Elizabeth Taylor

The actor weds her seventh husband, Larry Fortensky. As ceremony takes place, a paparazzo paraglides down from the sky and lands on the lawn, only to be clocked by security guards.



February 1992

Mike Tyson

The boxing champ is convicted of raping Desiree Washington, a beauty queen. Released from jail in 1995, Tyson regains his title but later forfeits his boxing license after biting off part of Evander Holyfield's ear in a bout.



May 1992

May Fisher

Smitten with her married lover, Joey Buttafuoco, the teenager shoots his wife (she survives). Buttafuoco does four months behind bars for sleeping with a minor. Fisher serves seven years for reckless assault.

“WILL YOU BE **SLEEPING** WITH ANY OTHER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES?”

She had the tapes to prove it too. In one snippet, she and Clinton talked about what she might say if reporters asked about the rumored affair; what she recalled with a naughty laugh, was that she would tell them, “You ate good pussy.” Later, Clinton seemed to be urging Flowers to deny what sounded very much like an affair. “If they ever hit you with it, just say, ‘no’ and go on.... If everybody sort of hangs tough, they’re just not going to do anything.... They can’t, on a story like this...if they don’t have pictures.”

The press conference soon devolved from farce to vaudeville. One reporter asked if Flowers would “be so kind as to elaborate on the sex and the relationship you say you had with him over 12 years? We want you to talk about it. That’s why the cameras are all here.” (Flowers declined, telling her to read the *Star*.)

As the crowd continued to fire off questions, one man distinguished himself from his peers—“Stuttering John” Melendez, a fixture on the Howard Stern radio show who’d made his name by ambushing celebrities with comically confrontational queries. “Did Governor Clinton use a condom?” he asked, straight-faced. At once, it became clear that the retaining wall between news and entertainment had collapsed. And now a mock reporter appeared, using tabloid language to lampoon the press, politicians and their pieties.

Stuttering John’s follow-up question: “Will you be sleeping with any other presidential candidates?”

His one-liners underscored why the press pack was there. This was the dawn of the sex-scandal lynch mob. They had come to listen in on what they normally wouldn’t hear. They had come to see for themselves what Bill Clinton might have seen in Flowers. And they had come, cheeky devils, to be in the same room with a woman lusty enough to charm a governor—and crafty enough to switch on a tape player.

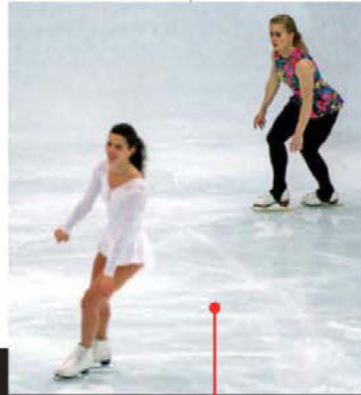
Flowers had merely whetted their appetite. They would soon be salivating for more.

The Great American Sex Tape

SOME TIME IN THE MID-’90S, American decorum disappeared. The media began to pay far more attention to the disgrace of others. If there was a tipping point, it may well have been May 6, 1994, the day Paula Jones filed a civil lawsuit against Bill Clinton, alleging that he had made an insulting sexual proposition to her while he was the governor of Arkansas—and later defamed her. (Clinton would deny the charges.)

A month later, an audience of nearly 100 million watched what’s now deemed one of the first real-life reality-TV shows: a phalanx of police cars pursuing former NFL star O.J. Simpson in his white Ford Bronco, days after the killings of his wife and her male companion. Simpson’s subsequent trial would dominate national headlines for more than a year.

The Jones and Simpson cases signaled a massive cultural shift. In previous decades, Americans, as a rule, had tried to suppress many of their baser instincts. Upon encountering a humiliating real-life circumstance, they may



December 1992

Lyle and Erik Menendez

The brothers go on trial for killing their parents. Despite claiming their father sexually abused them, they are convicted of first-degree murder and conspiracy and must spend the rest of their lives in prison.

January 6, 1994

Figure skater Nancy Kerrigan is whacked with a baton during practice. Kerrigan’s rival, Tonya Harding, and her husband, set up the hit.

January 1994

Michael Jackson

The king of pop agrees to an out-of-court settlement in a child-molestation suit, reportedly paying out \$20 million.



FROM FAR LEFT: KIP RANO/LIAISON/GETTY; T. STRATTMAN/ALLSPORT/GETTY; NEW YORK POST ARCHIVES/GETTY; SHELLEY KATZ/THE LIFE IMAGES COLLECTION/GETTY; CYNTHIA JOHNSON/THE LIFE IMAGES COLLECTION/GETTY; MIKE NELSON/AFP/GETTY; PASCAL RONDEAU/ALLSPORT/GETTY; PHIL DENY/RED FERNS/GETTY

have been drawn to it, but they were simultaneously repulsed. No more. By the mid-'90s, with the rise of the media's tabloid fixation, 24/7 news and the internet, our dominant impulse was to eavesdrop, to leer, to pry into the private affairs of others, particularly famous people. The decision by many in the media to turn every alleged wrongdoing into an excuse for spectacle helped news consumers accept and then expect explicit details about embarrassing, sexually compromising or criminal events.

Many of those events stand out—from the Simpson trial to “the wife with the knife,” Lorena Bobbitt, who cut off her husband's penis after she says he raped her (he denied it). But one incident speaks most clearly to the collision of celebrity media, sex and voyeurism, and foreshadowed how the internet would play such a paramount part in our everyday existence.

In late October 1995, disgruntled handyman (and sometimes porn actor) Rand Gauthier reportedly stole a safe from the home of buxom *Baywatch* star Pamela Anderson and her husband, Tommy Lee, the tattooed drummer of the heavy metal band Mötley Crüe. The contents included a home video showing the newlyweds in various states of connubial union. Somehow that footage was then duplicated, packaged and sold off. Despite the lawsuits that followed, an internet porn mogul acquired a copy of the pirated tape and marketed it as a triple-X film.

The video became the *Citizen Kane* of celebrity sex tapes, and people all over the world—some of whom had never before felt compelled to watch porn—or use the internet, were eager to see it. In her 2005 book, *Pornofied*, Pamela Paul wrote that the video “is credited with bringing more users online than any other single event.”

This celebrity sex tape scandal wasn't the first (in 1988, actor Rob Lowe filmed an encounter with two

THE PAM ANDERSON AND TOMMY LEE VIDEO BECAME THE *CITIZEN KANE* OF CELEBRITY SEX TAPES.

young women, one of them a minor), but it was shocking because it was explicit, it was off-limits—clearly intended for the couple's private consumption—and it was among the earliest videos to show famous people getting it on. Its reach was also immense. Before the end of the decade, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, a not-insignificant percentage of the internet's tens of millions of webpages (many not related to porn) would be meta-tagged with the words “Pam” or “Pamela” or “SexTape”—as the site's owners were hoping to draw residual clicks, gelt by association. A bevy of purloined sex tapes have followed—starring Paris Hilton, Kim Kardashian and Kendra Wilkinson, all of whom became reality-TV stars. (It wouldn't be until 2017, however, that major media outlets would speculate about a phantom—and likely bogus—sex tape involving the president of the United States.)

By the mid-'90s, the web was the world's masturbation mecca and the epicenter of the culture wars.

Electile Dysfunction

AMERICA'S RABID, HYPERPARTISAN divide began in the early '90s—and it was mostly about sex. Pop culture had become crude. Pornography was rampant. Casual sexual encounters were more prevalent and less stigmatized. There was a major upsurge



June 1995
Hugh Grant

The actor is arrested with a hooker in Hollywood. He tries to redeem himself by going on *The Tonight Show*, saying, “I did a bad thing. There you have it.”



June 1994
Anna Nicole Smith

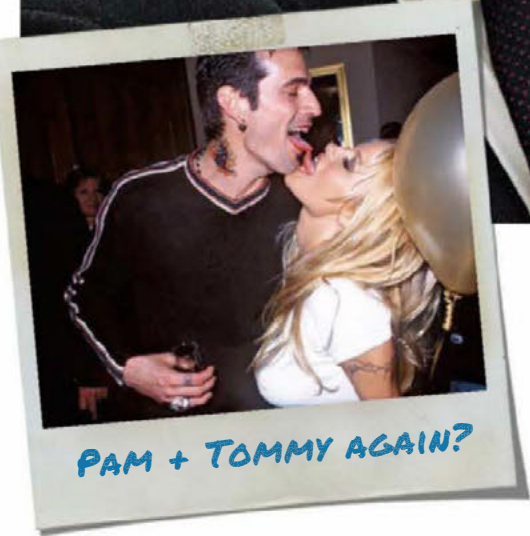
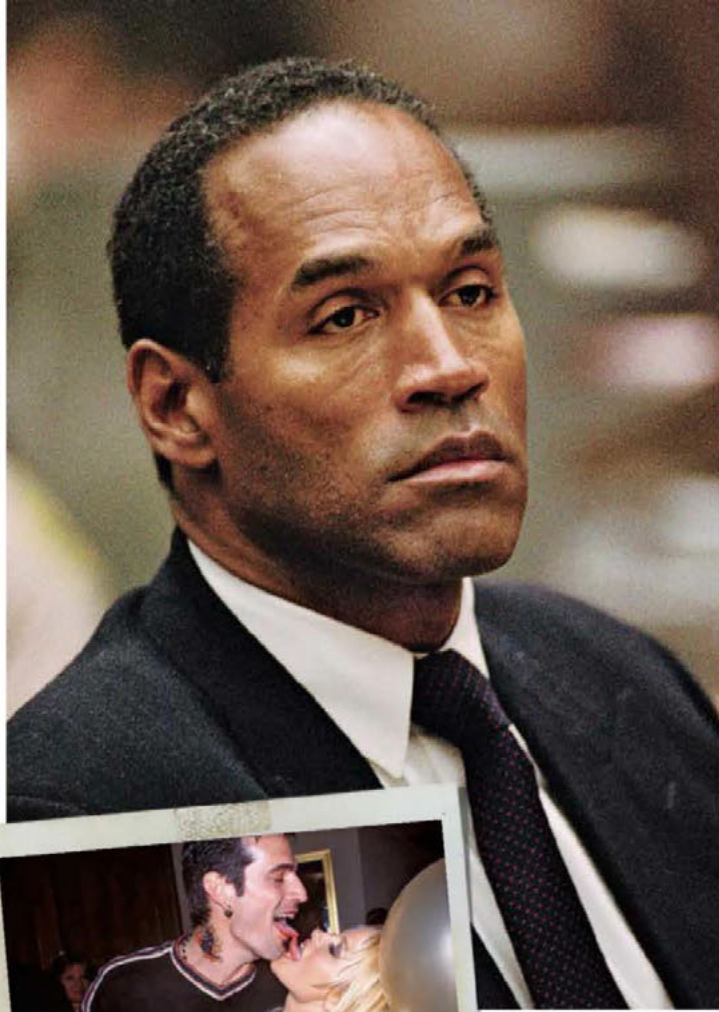
The pillowy model marries 89-year-old J. Howard Marshall II, an oil baron six decades her senior, who is worth half a billion dollars. He dies the next year.



July 1995
Princess Stephanie of Monaco marries her ex-bodyguard Daniel Ducruet, who is already the father of two of her children.

FROM LEFT: GREGORY SMITH/CORBIS/GETTY; TED SOQUI/SYGMA/GETTY; AFP/GETTY

FROM LEFT: S. GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE/GETTY; TOLGA TEZCAN/GETTY; WILLIAM NATION/SYGMA/GETTY; EVAN AGOSTINI/LIAISON/GETTY; HELEN H. RICHARDSON/THE DENVER POST/GETTY



+ MUST-SEE TV: The release of the Pam Anderson and Tommy Lee sex tape and the coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial were two pivotal events that marked the disappearance of American decorum.

in cases of sexually transmitted diseases. And “the divorce rate remains, stubbornly, one in two,” journalist Joe Klein wrote in a 1992 *Newsweek* cover story: “The out-of-wedlock birth rate has tripled since 1970.... A nauseating buffet of dysfunctions has attended these trends—an explosion in child abuse, crime...name your pathology.”

Neither Democrats nor Republicans celebrated these developments, but Bill and Hillary Clinton were in the left place at the right time. In the seven months between their *60 Minutes* appearance and the Republican National Convention, the couple brought animosity against those who would defend one’s right to choose—and one’s right to love whomever one chose. Despite Bill Clinton’s broad appeal, he and his wife, both proud feminists, were widely vilified. They were the dreaded duo of the 1960s counterculture. Or so said Republicans, evangelicals, right-wing radio hosts and secular and religious conservatives.

Whether out of genuine concern or cynical electoral politics, Republicans tried to capitalize on that view, using increasingly harsh rhetoric and tactics against the Clintons, beginning with their 1992 National Convention in Houston. The gathering was supposed to propel President George H.W. Bush, a moderate, to a second term. But inside and outside the antiquated Astrodome, a far more radical, trash-the-bastards theme had taken hold. Decades before the crowd at the 2016 GOP convention chanted: “Lock her up!” T-shirts at the ’92 Republican confab advised: Blame the Media. Stickers urged: Smile If You Have Had an Affair With Bill Clinton. One placard bore a cannabis logo: Bill Clinton’s Smoking Gun. Another: Woody Allen Is Clinton’s Family Values Adviser.

The virulence went beyond the mordant slogans. Former Nixon speechwriter and ultraconservative commentator Patrick Buchanan had secured nearly a

August 1996 Dick Morris

During the Democratic National Convention, the *Star* informs President Clinton’s political strategist that it’s about to publish a story saying the married Morris had been spending time with a prostitute. He resigns.



December 1996 Jon Benét Ramsey

The brutal slaying of the 6-year-old in Boulder, Colorado, sparks obsessive press coverage and intensifies criticism of the child beauty pageant boom. Ramsey’s murder remains unsolved.



quarter of all Republican votes in the primaries. Bush had to appease Buchanan's forces or have his convention implode, so he and the GOP mandarins gave over large swaths of the party platform to the hard-liners. It was packed with provisos related to sexual mores, cultural kashruth and the supremacy of the nuclear family. It sought to ban gay marriage, adoption by gay couples, the sale of porn and public funding that might be used to "subsidize obscenity and blasphemy masquerading as art," among other things.

The moderate Republicanism of Bush would struggle to wear two masks—and he wound up losing to Clinton that fall. And during the new president's first term, radical GOP insurgents, led in part by Newt Gingrich, inaugurated an era of "hyperbolic partisanship," according to historian Geoffrey Kabaservice. "It was Mr. Gingrich who pioneered the political dysfunction we still live with...usher[ing] in the present political era of confrontation and obstruction."

An erudite history buff with a cherubic presence and silvery helmet of hair, Gingrich became a quantum force in American conservatism. On September 27, 1994, he assembled 367 men and women, all running in that year's midterm elections, and assembled them as one battalion on the Capitol steps. As the cameras rolled, he had each candidate sign a so-called Contract with America. This measure, beyond addressing popular issues such as tax breaks, street crime, an invigorated military and a balanced budget, focused on some of the same culture-war priorities laid out at the 1992 Republican National Convention. This was great political theater. It also animated and unified the party. Gingrich helped Republicans make massive gains in Congress. And though he'd eventually overreach, leaving an opening for Clinton to win



FAR-RIGHT SUPREMACY? At the 1992 GOP convention, Republican mandarins gave over large swaths of the party platform to hard-liners such as Pat Buchanan.

re-election, the hyperpartisan environment he helped create presaged the Tea Party, the rabid Republican response to Obama and the rise of birtherism and other bloviating buffoonery.

He also had some crucial help.

A Brief History of Right-Wing Slime

GINGRICH, BUCHANAN AND other forces on the right received a major boost from a newly resurgent right-wing press—from talk radio's angry high priest of the right, Rush Limbaugh, to the GOP's fair-haired hatchet man, David Brock—a journalist who slimed the likes of Anita Hill, the woman who accused Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment. (He would deny all charges.)

Joining Limbaugh and Brock was the decade's most transformative conservative voice: Fox News. The right-wing cable network, devised by Rupert



April 1997

Michael Kennedy

Robert F. Kennedy's son is alleged to have been carrying on with his children's underage baby sitter. Michael Kennedy dies several months later in a skiing accident.



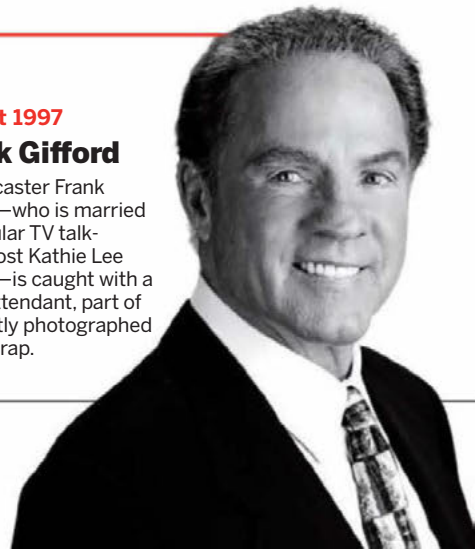
May 1997

Police stop Eddie Murphy while he's with a transgender prostitute. The comedian is not charged and says he was just helping someone in distress.

August 1997

Frank Gifford

Sportscaster Frank Gifford—who is married to popular TV talk-show host Kathie Lee Gifford—is caught with a flight attendant, part of a secretly photographed honey trap.



TOP: STEVE LISS/THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY; FROM BOTTOM LEFT: BROOKS KRAFT/SYGMA/GETTY; RON GALELLA/WIREIMAGE/GETTY; ABC/GETTY

CLINTON PERFECTED THE SPIN
 DEFAULT AT THE VERY MOMENT
 THAT **TRUTHINESS** WAS BECOMING
 AN ACCEPTABLE RESPONSE.

Murdoch and developed by Roger Ailes, premiered in 1996. At the time, CNN was being derided on the right as unapologetically leftist; some called it the Clinton News Network. Ailes formulated Fox during the GOP's stunning Gingrich-led resurgence. It went on the air as Bill Clinton ran for his second term. And Ailes would prove to be its ideal architect: a TV sage with McLuhanesque instincts; a political strategist who had helped shape hard-right "brands" such as Nixon, Limbaugh and eventually Trump.

Ailes envisioned his channel building its brand on the rancor of the disenfranchised, the public itch for tabloid stories and a moral seething about the Clintons and the culture's progressive drift. Tempestuous and incestuous (many of its commentators were GOP stars), Fox News would become the party's 24/7 infomercial, a handmaiden of the right's successes into the next century. All the while, it would advertise itself as politically evenhanded—what Sam Tanenhaus, the conservative historian, would describe as a "sardonic parody ('fair and balanced') of a mainstream media [that] it assumes to be rife with contempt."

The fourth horseman in this posse was Matt Drudge. He grew up as a Beltway boy who delivered *The Washington Star*, moved to Hollywood, managed the trinket shop at the CBS Studio Center and in 1995 started a gossipy email blast. He called his creation

the Drudge Report—the first comprehensive online aggregator of opinion, headlines, and celebrity and political poop. For a while, his target audience was the *rumorati* within Washington, Hollywood and the media. But by June 1997, once AOL started co-hosting his site, Drudge was a webwide phenomenon and a fedora-wearing favorite of American conservatives.

With his web links and gossipy droppings, Drudge was a national nemesis and a guilty pleasure. He linked to far-right columns and home pages, some of them borderline batshit—and gave their rants and rumors equal weight with wire-service items. He reported on other reporters' reporting—and got the biggest political news break of the decade—Bill Clinton's extramarital relationship with Lewinsky, which in turn, would lead to the president's impeachment.

Limbaugh, Brock, Ailes and Drudge ruled right-wing radio, print, cable and the web. In the '90s, media types would debate whether the ethical standards of mainstream newsmen and -women applied to bloggers and their ilk. But within a decade, that question was moot. And thanks in part to this quartet of rogues, the dividing lines were ever less distinct between news and rumor, between information and entertainment, between the media's treatment of one's public and private behavior.

A clear line can be drawn, attests Tanenhaus, from Drudge in the 1990s to Donald Trump 25 years later. "It all goes back to Drudge in Hollywood," he says, in an assessment of Trump's advisers: "From Drudge to the late alt-right news pioneer Andrew Breitbart and then to Steve Bannon, President Trump's [former] chief strategist. It's not just the alt-right. It's alt-politics—outside the two parties, all via sensationalist media."

As the web and social media gained currency, these new-media,

FROM LEFT: BERNARD BISSON/SYGMA/GETTY; HARRY HAMBURG/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS ARCHIVE/GETTY; DIANA WALKER/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY



August 1997
Princess Diana

Diana and a male companion die shortly after their car crashes in a Paris tunnel. Their driver—legally intoxicated at the time and killed in the accident—was reportedly trying to elude the paparazzi.

September 1997
Marv Albert

The sportscaster is convicted of assault and battery, stemming from an incident involving a woman he had occasionally trysted with.

January 1998
Bill Clinton

The Drudge Report says Clinton had extramarital encounters with Monica Lewinsky, a White House intern. The president's testimony about their relations leads to his impeachment.



ultraright conspirators were disseminating rumor, agenda-bent screeds and a long and gnarly anti-Billary thread—from the slur that they had set up the “murder” of confidant Vince Foster to the loony concoction of the Pizzagate child-sex ring. That blurring of fact and fiction, and the far right’s accusations of a “liberal bias” by a supposedly monolithic mainstream media, led many to see the press, not the politicians, as *the* problem, despite the bevy of reporters still unearthing legitimate corruption and scandal.

But the damage was done. The definition of truth and facts had become malleable.

The Michael Jordan of Mendacity

IN *MY LIFE*, BILL CLINTON finally admitted the obvious: that he had lied. “Six years after my January 1992 appearance on *60 Minutes*, I had to give a deposition in the Paula Jones case, and...I acknowledged that, back in the 1970s, I had had a relationship with [Flowers] that I should not have had.”

It wasn’t just the Flowers affair that fit into his lying theme. In the fallout of his second-term scandal, he almost lost the presidency by lying under oath about whether he’d had sex. Yet many Americans weren’t fazed by this pattern. For all the pique and wincing and mincing, this tendency to parse the truth was a Clinton habit, a strategy, an ethical tic—and one that many appeared to be adopting in their own lives.

The lesson of the Watergate scandal of the 1970s was that the cover-up—the lie—is always worse than the crime. But modern presidents have long terms and short memories. Clinton and George W. Bush after him would elevate lying into spin art. Over the 16-year span of their back-to-back administrations, truth—as presented by presidents, White House aides, political spinmeisters and media outlets—became rhetorical taffy. News consumers became seasoned skeptics, learning to expect and tolerate a certain level of elastic veracity (a quality the comedian Stephen Colbert later identified as “truthiness”).

Much of this flimflam, of course, predated the 2000s. In his book *Fantasyland*, Kurt Andersen traces alternate American reality back 500 years. More recently, some form of elastic veracity had been rolled out by Lyndon Johnson’s Vietnam advisers and spokesmen, honed by Nixon and his White House aides during Watergate and fine-tuned by Reagan during the Iran-Contra scandal—all before the pre-eminence of cable news and the internet.

Yet Slick Willie turned out to be the Michael Jordan of this craft. He perfected spinning as his default mode at the very moment truthiness was becoming an acceptable response in human interactions of every kind—from Wall Street to the ballfield (remember the juice-induced Sammy Sosa-Mark McGwire home-run race of 1998?).

As the ’90s progressed, Clinton began to incarnate

+
THE NAUGHTY
'90S: Decades
after Jones, far
right, accused
Bill Clinton of
making unwanted
advances,
Americans
elected Donald
Trump as president.
His messy
divorce from
Ivana Trump,
left, no longer
seemed to
matter.



the equivocal. “A clear pattern has emerged—of delay, of obfuscation, of lawyering the truth,” Joe Klein wrote in a 1994 essay in *Newsweek*. “With the Clintons, the story always is subject to further revision. The misstatements are always incremental. The ‘misunderstandings’ are always innocent—casual, irregular, promiscuous. Trust is squandered in dribs and drabs. Does this sort of behavior also infect the president’s public life, his formulation of public policy? Clearly, it does.”

Dee Dee Myers, Clinton’s former press secretary, is more charitable: “[It] was a tactic that Clinton used more effectively—and I don’t mean it in a good way—than anyone I’d ever worked for. In politics, people lawyer the truth, and Clinton did. [He] would say things that were technically true but that created a misimpression that kind of intentionally sent people in the wrong direction. Or, more often, I think he

TRUMP’S JOURNEY TO THE
WHITE HOUSE WOULD HAVE BEEN
INCONCEIVABLE WITHOUT THE
COARSENESS OF THE CLINTON YEARS.



tried to leave himself wiggle room and change his mind and say he never said [that].”

Years later, both Hillary Clinton and Trump, perhaps the two most distrusted opponents in a modern presidential contest, perpetuated the post-fact syndrome during their 2016 race for the White House. Clinton, from her tenures as first lady (Travelgate) up through her time as secretary of state (Emailgate), was considered by many to be an unconscionable obfuscator, while Trump elevated lying to a dark art. “On the PolitiFact website,” *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof would report, “53 percent of Trump’s [public statements were rated as demonstrably] ‘false’ or ‘pants on fire’—a number that would climb to “71 percent...‘mostly false’” on the eve of the election. This endemic fabricating was tactically deceptive in a manner reminiscent of totalitarian leaders—a pattern made all the more ominous, as *Vanity Fair* editor Graydon Carter has pointed out, since Trump would routinely crib his “talking points from the dark corners at the bottom of the Internet.”

Trump would prove to be the ideal candidate for the era of fake news, hate blogs, “agita”-prop, fear-and-ballast news networks, nonstop gossip and

Twitter-feed screeds. And it is no exaggeration to state that his candidacy would not have been possible, or viable, had it not been for the rhetorical and stylistic precedents set by the ever-parsing Bill Clinton—and his mendacious detractors on the right.

Crude and Canny

TWO AND A HALF DECADES after the Clintons appeared on *60 Minutes*, America elected a president, who once bragged that fame allowed him to grab women by their genitals—largely without consequence.

By then the rules of sex scandals in American politics had changed. The 1990s had ushered in personal branding, reality programming, 24/7 news, tabloid scandal coverage and online self-expression. Although crude and predatory, Trump was a media maestro. He seemed to understand that harnessing the twin forces of traditional media and social media was the new mode for asserting power, for manipulating public opinion (to acquire power), for humiliating or undermining others (who were displaying too much power) and for perpetually deflecting or diverting the influence of those in other power centers (to maintain power). Kim Kardashian knew it, the Islamic State group knew it, Russian President Vladimir Putin knew it. And Trump did too.

His victory augured a new and chilling reality in American life. And there was an unmistakably '90s tenor to it all. Trump’s journey to the White House would have been inconceivable without the coarseness of the Clinton years, a coarseness equally attributable to popular culture and the newfound web, the president’s scandals and the prurience of his right-wing critics.

As Nina Burleigh wrote in *Newsweek* after the 2016 presidential election, “Amid Trump confirming the size of his manhood on national TV, the return of Bill Clinton’s sexual-assault accusers and a gnarly campaign-capsizing FBI announcement regarding Anthony Weiner’s sexting, election 2016 was a national referendum on women and power.”

And on men in power. And race and power. And the substitution in American politics of rage for reason, entertainment for information and bluster for truth. ■



» DAVID FRIEND is a *Vanity Fair* editor, journalist and Emmy-winning documentary producer. This excerpt has been adapted from his new book, *The Naughty Nineties: The Triumph of the American Libido* (Twelve Books, 2017).

FROM LEFT: TOM GATES/GETTY; PAUL K. BUCK/AP/GETTY; HAPPYFOTO/GETTY; TWELVE



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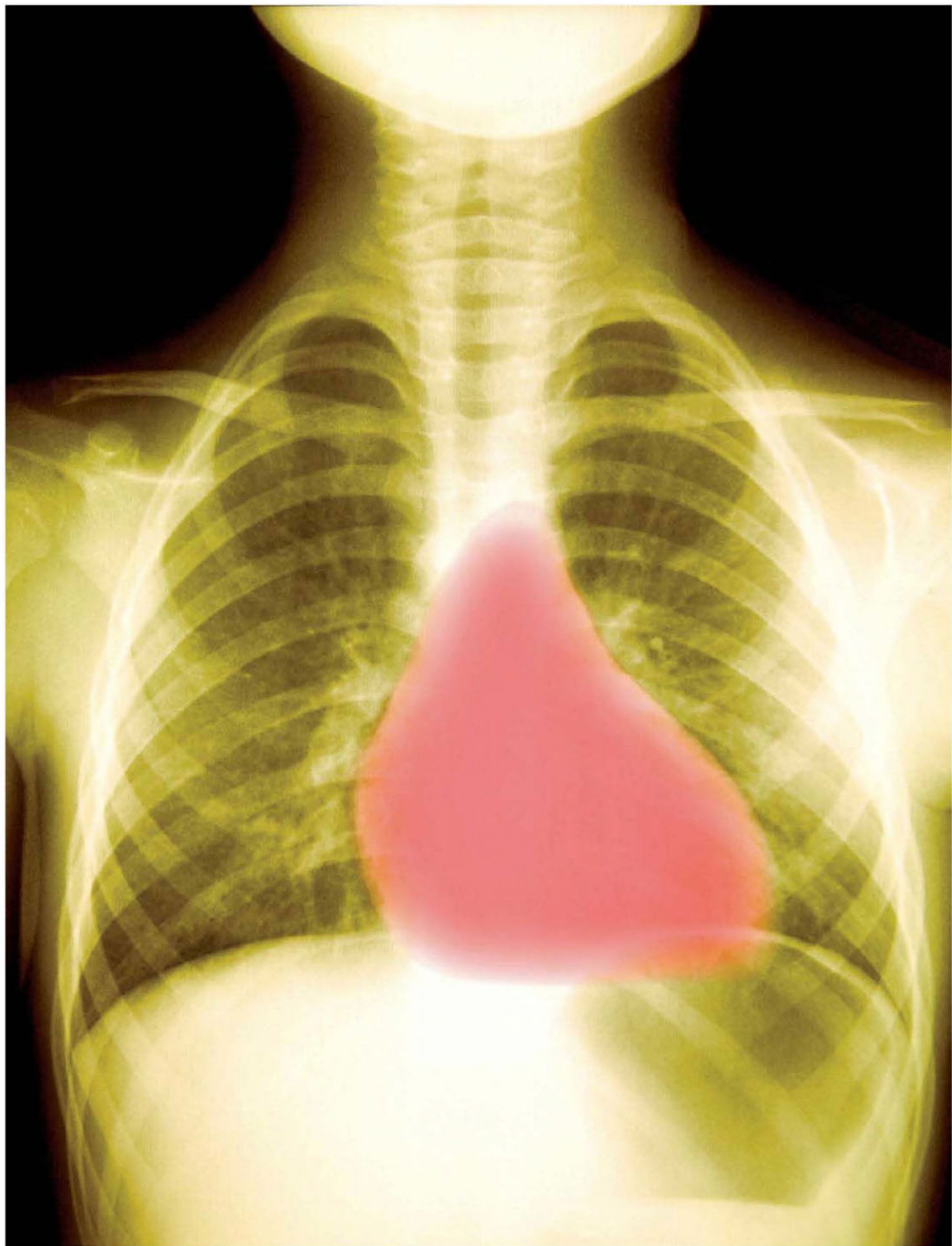
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HEART DISEASE

INDIA

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GOOD SCIENCE

OLD AT HEART

An increasing number of children are developing hypertension, a major risk factor for heart disease

+ HYPER ABOUT TENSION: Without intervention, children with high blood pressure are likely to become adults with high blood pressure, a risk factor for potentially fatal heart disease.

“**BEING YOUNG**” is not a typical risk factor that comes to mind when thinking about dangerous heart conditions, nor do we expect the pediatrician to test for signs of such problems at an annual checkup. But in August, the American Academy of Pediatrics revised its guidelines for the screening, diagnosis and treatment of high blood pressure in youth, the first time these standards have been updated since 2004. The new recommendations simplified the diagnostic procedures for pediatric and adolescent high blood pressure, made the definition for hypertension more similar to adult guidelines and changed the term “prehypertension” to “elevated blood pressure.” The changes make it easier for doctors to spot a growing health threat that seems unbelievable: Children and adolescents are increasingly at risk for a heart condition that has always been tied to aging. “We think of someone with hypertension as being that 50-year-old man down the street, but it’s becoming more and more common even

in young children,” says Dr. David Kaelber, a pediatric and internal medicine physician at Case Western Reserve University.

The shift hints at problems to come. Hypertension affects 3.5 percent of U.S. children, or more than 2.5 million people under 18. That number may seem puny compared with the one-third of U.S. adults with high blood pressure, but Kaelber says it is still worrisome. High blood pressure rates in children and adolescents have risen in line with higher rates of childhood obesity. Without intervention, children with high blood pressure are likely to become adults with high blood pressure, a risk factor for potentially fatal heart disease.

Thousands of studies have linked hypertension in adults to heart attack, stroke, angina and peripheral artery disease. This threat is why adequate screening in young people is so important, says Janet de Jesus, a program officer at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. “Kids definitely aren’t as healthy as they

BY
CARRIE ARNOLD
 @edbite



used to be, and these guidelines are going to be a huge asset to the field.”

There are a variety of causes of high blood pressure in children and adults. Elevated blood lipids can form plaque deposits on arteries, making them narrower and stiffer, which can increase blood pressure. People with higher body weights have more blood, raising the amount of pressure on the walls of arteries. Smoking damages arteries and leads to inflammation. Kidney problems, obstructive sleep apnea and even medications and thyroid issues can all lead to hypertension.

But high blood pressure isn't just a sign that something is wrong in the body—it's a problem in and of itself. Hypertension further damages arteries, and the excess strain on the heart can cause that muscle to grow thicker, which can interfere with its ability to deliver blood, oxygen and nutrients to the body. This cascade of maladies makes hypertension one of the major risk factors for heart disease, along with obesity, high cholesterol, smoking, physical inactivity and diabetes.

CONFUSED DOCTORS

The problem, according to Dr. Carissa Baker-Smith, an epidemiologist at the University of Maryland and the lead data scientist on the new American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines, is that many of these issues go undetected until disaster strikes. She points to several studies that provided the definitive evidence that although heart disease often may not become apparent until adulthood, its seeds are planted in childhood. A study called Pathobiological Determinants of Atherosclerosis in Youth in the 1990s and the ongoing Bogalusa Heart Study have measured the prevalence of narrowed and hardened arteries (atherosclerosis) in adolescents and young adults who died accidentally. Both studies show strong associations between atherosclerosis—a leading predictor of heart disease—and smoking, cholesterol levels and hypertension. “I really want people, especially parents, to understand that high blood pressure does occur in kids. We're seeing adult disease in children,” Baker-Smith says.

These results challenge the now-outdated notion that hypertension in kids was primarily the result of congenital conditions that affected

the kidney and heart. Although genetics accounts for one-fifth of all high blood pressure cases in kids under 18, the remainder are “adult-style” hypertension issues, caused by a convergence of biological and environmental factors. Large epidemiological studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have documented a rise in systolic blood pressure and in diastolic blood pressure in children between 1988 and 2000, which suggests the increase in pediatric hypertension isn't just the result of heightened awareness. Although adults have a single cutoff for potential blood pressure problems, determining that point is more complex for pediatricians because blood pressure in growing children varies by age, height and sex. Even when doctors were vigilant about screening for blood pressure issues in children, they struggled to interpret those results. “A lot of doctors were very confused,” says Dr. Suzanne Lazorick, a pediatrician and preventive medicine physician at Eastern Carolina University.

Kaelber puts it more starkly. “If you reviewed electronic medical records [for children], you could see blood pressures recorded, but the pediatrician never diagnosed hypertension,” he says. Physicians were unclear about what blood pressure level was too high, so the condition in children went unnoticed.

REVERSE ANY DAMAGE

These challenges led Kaelber and Dr. Joseph Flynn, a nephrologist at the University of Washington, to call for a revision of the 2004 guidelines they had authored. Baker-Smith led a review of the 15,000-plus studies published since 2004 to create a rigorous base from which to distill findings. From there, they reviewed how well the current standards were working and what scientists were learning about high blood pressure in children and adolescents. The final document contains several major changes from previous recommendations, including how to measure blood pressure and how doctors diagnose hypertension, as well as the terminology to use.

Instead of screening for high blood pressure at every health care visit, the new guidelines say to screen only at annual well-child visits beginning at age 3. Many transient factors can affect blood pressure, including stress and caffeine, which could lead to inaccurate data and unnecessary testing. And doctors need several blood pressure readings to make a diagnosis of hypertension.

The panel also altered the transition from pediatric blood pressure tables to the 120/80 mmHg cutoff used for adults. The transition used to come at age 18, so a child could have abnormal blood pressure at the age of 17 years and 364 days and



+
GETTING PUMPED:
The new guidelines call for pediatricians to start screening annually for high blood pressure beginning when a child is 3.

then be fine the next day, Kaelber says. The new tables begin transitioning children to adult markers at age 13, depending on height and weight. This provides more consistency and will ease the transition to adult blood pressure standards.

To de Jesus, the importance of the new guidelines in ensuring adequate diagnosis and treatment of childhood hypertension can't be overstated. When kids are young, they can completely reverse cardiovascular damage from



hypertension or high cholesterol. By the time they reach adulthood, however, this ability diminishes.

Kaelber, Flynn, Baker-Smith and colleagues also recalibrated the blood pressure tables to include only children with normal weights. Pediatricians decide if a child's blood pressure is high by comparing it with those of a group of healthy children. But the growing numbers of children who are overweight and obese, two traits strongly linked to increased blood pressure, have skewed that benchmark data. Using only normal-weight children provides a better definition for a healthy blood pressure, Baker-Smith says. The team also eliminated the need for echocardiograms (an ultrasound of the heart) unless the child requires medication, a change that reflects the growing

number of hypertensive children without underlying congenital heart issues. For those with more severe hypertension in need of medication, echocardiograms have revealed cardiac complications more usually seen in adults, such as left ventricular hypertrophy, a thickening of the heart muscle.

Lastly, the guideline revision group changed the term "pre-hypertension," used to indicate children whose blood pressure was a concern but who didn't meet clinical definitions of hypertension, to "elevated blood pressure." The new language is intended to sound an alarm. "Parents tend to hear pre-hypertension and think it's not a problem because it's before a disease, but that's not what we're trying to say," Lazorick says.

The increasing reliance on ambulatory blood pressure monitoring devices could pose a challenge. Although these monitors provide increased accuracy, not all pediatricians have access to them. Ramping up the availability of ambulatory monitoring will be key to putting the recommendations into practice, Lazorick says.

Although some of these guidelines may seem more conservative—hypertension screening only at regular preventive care visits, reduced

"KIDS DEFINITELY AREN'T AS HEALTHY AS THEY USED TO BE."

recommendations for echocardiogram—they actually decrease the potential for overdiagnosis of pediatric hypertension. "No one wants to give kids a diagnosis they don't have or a treatment they don't need," Baker-Smith says.

No standards can eliminate the risk of overdiagnosis. But given that first-line treatment for children with high blood pressure is dietary and physical activity changes, Baker-Smith says this advice is low-risk and can benefit many children, even those without hypertension. Making these changes isn't easy, especially in a culture awash in salty, fatty foods. By starting early and modeling healthy behaviors, de Jesus says, parents can teach their kids to make good decisions about food and exercise as they get older and have more autonomy. "Even adults struggle to choose water over soda or juice. How can we expect a 10-year-old to do that?" Lazorick asks.

But for children diagnosed with high blood pressure, having an adult disease requires growing up fast. **■**



IRIS SCANS AND SCAMS

Over a billion people in India gave biometric data to the government for IDs, but what else have they surrendered?

THE OMINOUS changes at Ryan Sequeira's workplace began in early 2015. First came the biometric machines, two on every floor of the New Delhi office where he worked as an architect for a government think tank. Then, about a month later, they did away with sign-in sheets—instead, employees had to clock in and out on the new machines by scanning their fingerprints and keying in their Aadhaar numbers.

This was all part of a radically ambitious plan set in motion in 2010, when the Indian government decided to enroll its 1.3 billion residents into a central database and issue unique identification numbers. Aadhaar, which means “foundation” in Hindi, was to form the backbone of social welfare programs by ensuring that beneficiaries could be properly identified, which in turn would help reduce fraudulent claims.

So Aadhaar was rolled out, and Indians all across the country headed to enrollment centers and had their biometrics taken—a photograph, 10 fingerprints and two iris scans—then waited for their free identity cards to arrive in the mail. Enrollment continues today, and the world's largest biometrics database is now nearly complete, with over 99 percent of Indian adults—nearly 1.16 billion people—registered as of July.

Seven years on, the 12-digit Aadhaar number continues to be used in social welfare, but it has pervaded many other areas of Indian life—from banking to baby bonuses, mortgages to

marriage licenses. For government employees like Sequeira, Aadhaar now means having to log their hours using biometric-based machines. The benefits of a unique ID number may seem plentiful, but there may be just as many risks.

When the new machines arrived at his office, “people didn't know their numbers,” Sequeira says. “So the company put up a large sheet next to the machines with everybody's name and Aadhaar number to ‘help’ them.”

He recalls, “That was stupid—I was really irritated at the callousness with which they treated our data.”

FRAUD AND LEAKAGE

The idea for Aadhaar was first floated in the early 2000s, under the premise that welfare systems would become more efficient (and save money) if residents had a unique personal identifier. At the time, the government was having difficulty identifying who should rightfully receive rations of food, fertilizer, cooking gas and other necessities. People were siphoning off rations—over a quarter of all issued—by making fraudulent claims. The root of the problem, the government said, was a lack of proper identification among its people. Less than half of all Indians have a birth certificate, few pay taxes and even fewer have a driver's license or passport.

“There were two main drivers behind Aadhaar,” says Nandan Nilekani, who in 2009

BY
SANDY ONG
[@sandyong_yx](https://twitter.com/sandyong_yx)

+
EYE ON YOU: A villager performs an iris scan at an Aadhaar enrollment center in Rajasthan, India, in February 2013.



helped set up the statutory board, the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), responsible for rolling out Aadhaar. “One driver was inclusion, because many people in India didn’t have any form of an identity, especially poorer Indians. The second was that in the last 15 years, the government has been spending billions of dollars—at least \$60 billion to \$80 billion a year—on entitlements and benefits, but there was a lot of fraud and leakage. Therefore, we needed to have a robust, unique ID system to make sure the benefits went to the right person.”

Already, says Nilekani, Aadhaar has saved the government close to \$7 billion. Roughly \$2.5 billion of that came from plugging the leaky tap of cooking gas benefits. For a country that this year became one of the world’s largest importers of liquefied petroleum gas—after the government began offering in 2016 free connections to poor families to switch them from more polluting biomass-based fuels, like firewood and cow dung—that’s good news for India and the planet.

But some say Nilekani grossly overestimates the savings. “It’s a lie—most of the de-duplication that the government claims has been dealt with without the use of Aadhaar,” says agricultural economist R. Ramakumar from Mumbai’s Tata Institute of Social Sciences. List-based de-duplication—getting officials to “sit with the local data to identify who came from the same address”—was reported to be 15 to 20 times more effective than Aadhaar-based de-duplication,

FEWER THAN HALF OF ALL INDIANS HAVE A BIRTH CERTIFICATE, FEW PAY TAXES, AND EVEN FEWER HAVE A DRIVER’S LICENSE OR PASSPORT.

Ramakumar says, citing a 2016 study by the International Institute for Sustainable Development, a Canada-based research organization.

Whether the figures tell a tall tale or not, however, doesn’t seem to be a pressing concern for those on the ground. Instead, ordinary Indians are more focused on how Aadhaar has changed their lives. “I think it’s a good idea because before this, my two children and I had no identification, no passport, only a ration card,” says Anita Pereira, a domestic helper from the city of Pune. “The Aadhaar card supports so many things—if I want to do a passport, go to the bank, book a railway ticket.”

The Aadhaar card has allowed millions to finally be included into the formal economy. They can now open a bank account, borrow money from the Reserve Bank of India (the country’s largest lender), send and receive remittances, and purchase SIM cards. It has also enabled mobile payments and other cashless transactions, crucial in light of last year’s



disastrous demonetization drive, when the government suddenly removed 500 and 1,000 rupee banknotes from circulation, or 86 percent of its currency, leaving many in limbo. In Aadhaar's few short years, financial inclusion among Indian women rose by 24 percent, more than 270 million Aadhaar-linked bank accounts were opened, and mobile phone penetration doubled to 79 percent of the population.

Aadhaar has a "tremendous potential to foster inclusion by giving all people, including the poorest and most marginalized, an official identity," a United Nations report declared last year. This includes women, ethnic minorities, the illiterate and those in the lower castes—populations that typically live on the fringes of society in many parts of India.

Having an identity document that's recognized throughout the country is also a boon, given how many millions crisscross the vast subcontinent every year—mostly to bustling metropolises like Kolkata, Mumbai and Delhi—for marriage or in search of work. One in every three Indians, according to a 2016 census, lives outside his or her hometown.

Having Aadhaar to verify identity also ensures that migrants don't lose out on government benefits that might have required ration cards dependent on a local address, or health care access "mediated by familiar and familial contacts, a form of old-fashioned biometrics," write Harvard human rights expert Jacqueline Bhabha and her doctoral student Amiya Bhatia in a 2017 paper published in the journal *Oxford Development Studies*.

Even residents who are noncitizens—5.2 million people, according to 2015 figures, mostly from neighboring countries Bangladesh and Pakistan—can apply for an Aadhaar number. Including immigrants is an unusual move, one that most other national identity schemes can't boast of. "That's huge when it comes to thinking about inclusion, migrant labor and that basic fundamental right to identification and legal identity," Bhatia says.

WANT AN AMBULANCE? GET A NUMBER

Aadhaar can break down barriers, but it also

creates them. Without their 12-digit identification number, schoolchildren can't claim their free midday meal, new mothers don't receive their cash bonuses, farmers can't apply for crop insurance benefits, and the disabled aren't able to purchase discounted train tickets.

And Aadhaar isn't just synonymous with poor Indians seeking benefits anymore. The *Hindustan Times*, a leading Indian newspaper, reported in April that for all 61 services where Aadhaar is mandatory, only 10 are welfare schemes. Indians now need their ID to file taxes, open an account at major banks and get mobile phone connections. Last July, the southeastern city of Tirupati, acclaimed for its temples, made Aadhaar compulsory for booking one of the 750 tickets issued daily to devotees seeking to perform the AngapradaKshinam ritual—an ancient rite where worshippers roll in wet clothing on temple floors to express gratitude and ask for blessings from the presiding deity, Lord Venkateswara. The temple minders do so to control the crowds and to "make sure that the same person is not using the facility repeatedly."

The Uttar Pradesh government in north India made it compulsory this June for those hailing an

GOT YOUR NUMBER: Ghewar Ram, right, 55, and his wife, Champa Devi, 54, display their unique identification cards outside their hut in Rajasthan, India, in February 2013.



ambulance to produce their Aadhaar card before getting on board. If the patients aren't well enough to do so, their next of kin has to present the right documents.

"Getting the number is voluntary," says Nilekani, who left UIDAI in 2014 to become a congressman. "But as more and more programs require you to have it, effectively you *have* to get the number."

Still, the Supreme Court of India declared in 2015 that "it is not mandatory for a citizen to obtain an Aadhaar card." To this day, citizens continue to file petitions with the court, complaining that Aadhaar infringes on their right to privacy.

Others, however, believe something more sinister underlies Aadhaar's growing ubiquity: state surveillance. "It's like boiling the frog slowly," says Sunil Abraham, executive director of the Centre for Internet and Society, a Bangalore-based think tank. "Initially, they made it sound like it's for the poor.... Then, slowly, it creeps in, and more and more middle-class people and taxpayers have to get the card. So you pretend you're improving governance, but on the other hand, you keep increasing surveillance. It serves both agendas." Abraham resisted getting an Aadhaar number, but he had to fold when the law changed in 2017, requiring all taxpayers to have one.

Another big concern for Abraham is security for all that data. "Biometrics are irrevocable," he says. "Once they're compromised, they can't be re-secured. Once somebody has stolen your biometrics, that's the end of it."

India doesn't have a privacy law, nor does it have one that protects all the biometric data collected. Although Nilekani says he favors creating such laws, he insists Aadhaar is safe. With all biometric data encrypted and stored offline behind multiple firewalls, he says, "Aadhaar is well designed for privacy." Agencies and merchants seeking to use Aadhaar as an identification and authorization tool, whether it's to distribute benefits or enable cashless payments, have to be licensed. "It's not a free-for-all, anyone-off-the-internet kind of thing," Nilekani says. "It's based on a very regulated and managed ecosystem."

To that, Abraham says: So what? "I think it's only a matter of time before the database is breached—unless you're telling me my government's security experts are better than Facebook's."

Already, the names, bank account details and Aadhaar numbers of more than 130 million people have been leaked from four government

websites and published online. Abraham's Centre for Internet and Society published a report in May blaming the leaks on UIDAI for not implementing stringent regulations on third-party users regarding their use of Aadhaar data (for example, barring the publication of private details online). When you have a centralized database like Aadhaar, Abraham warns, you "end up with a honeypot that all the terrorists, foreign states and criminals will want to attack."

BANDWIDTH STARVED

Security isn't the only gripe Abraham has about Aadhaar. "In bandwidth-starved India, it's just inappropriate technology," he says. Fingerprint-scanning machines that verify a person's identity require electricity and an internet connection to carry out cross-checks using the database. But India's infrastructure works against such digitization—an estimated 240 million Indians have no electricity at all; power cuts are frequent, especially in the hotter months; and the average internet speed ranks the lowest in Asia, at 4.1 megabits per second, or about a third of what the average American enjoys.

Then there's the problem of whether the technology actually works. Fingerprint authentication fails 5 percent of the time, on average, but reports suggest that figure can be as high as 36 percent in some parts of the country. In many

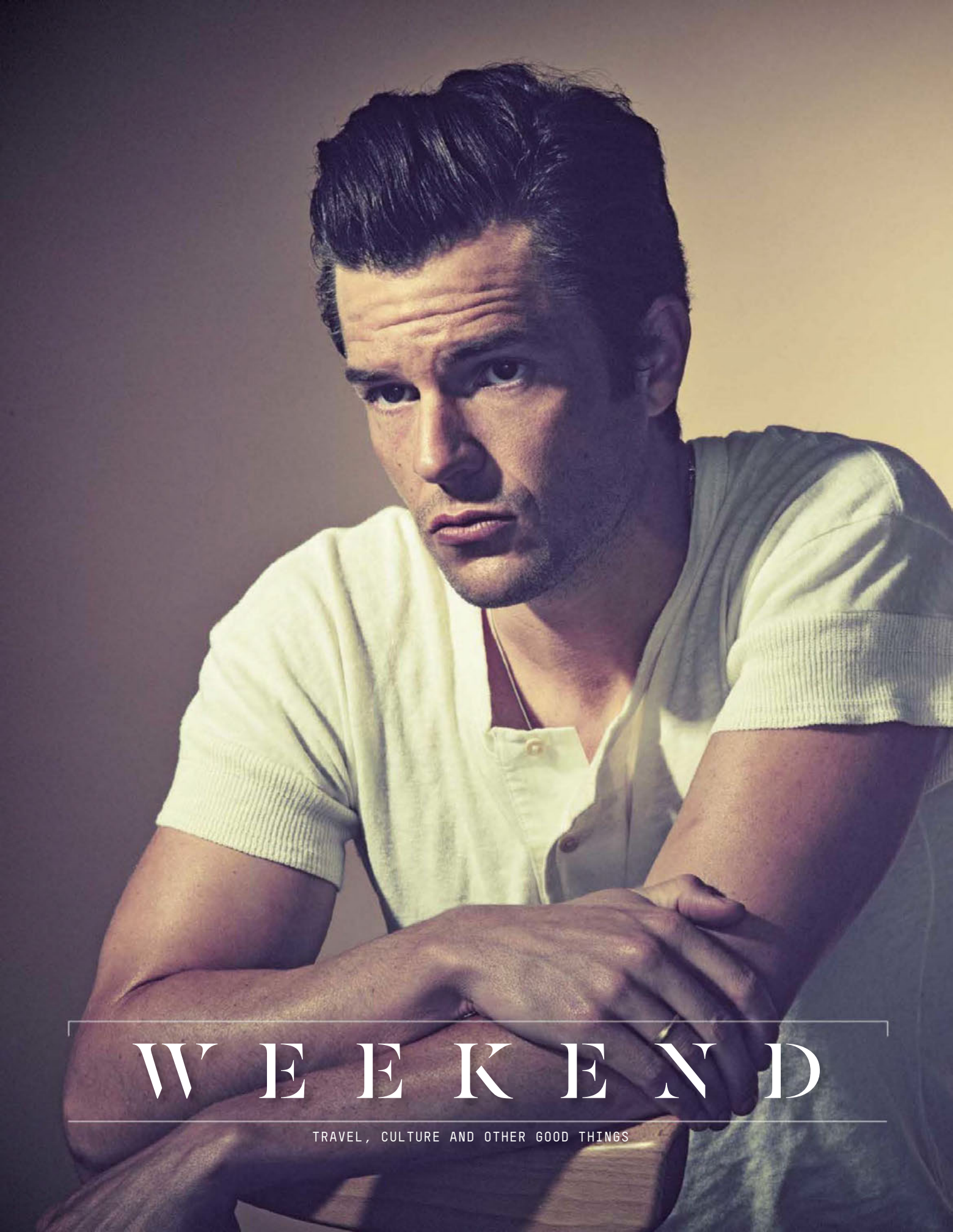
"YOU PRETEND YOU'RE IMPROVING GOVERNANCE, BUT YOU KEEP INCREASING SURVEILLANCE."

instances, it's poor manual laborers who have problems, because relentlessly grueling work can wear out fingerprints.

Still, Aadhaar continues to grow. The beast of a database is expected to enfold all Indian residents by the end of the year, and the reach of its tentacles expands ever further to more programs, schemes and applications. Will this massive beast remain docile, bringing benefits to millions, or career out of control?

"When it comes to Aadhaar, I don't think everyone trusts the government to do what is right only," Sequeira says. "Like the Latin saying goes, *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes*—Who will watch the watchmen?" ■





W E E K E N D

TRAVEL, CULTURE AND OTHER GOOD THINGS

Brandon Flowers Mans Up

THE KILLERS FRONTMAN TONES DOWN THE SWAGGER, BUT STILL THINKS HIS BAND IS THE BEST IN THE WORLD

BY AMY FLEMING [@Amy_Fleming](#)

THE PRE-CONCERT obsessions of some rock stars revolve around green room snacks or the order of the song list. For Brandon Flowers, the sinuous frontman of Las Vegas band the Killers, it was the color of the confetti. When bits of paper rained down on a crowd of 65,000 fans at London's Hyde Park in July, they perfectly matched the bubblegum pink of his leather blazer. "I had been planning that for months," says Flowers the next day, adding that the crowd's euphoric response was "like plugging into the universe—almost like eternity or something. I hope I never get used to that."

The Hyde Park show, the Killers' first major concert in five years, was a walk-up to the release of the band's fifth album, *Wonderful, Wonderful*. And the pink jacket—a nod to the theme of the record's first single, "The Man"—was what the now-36-year-old Flowers wore for the release of the band's debut album, *Hot Fuss*, in 2004. It was the moment that introduced a key ingredient in the Killers' popularity: Flowers's rakish public persona. The lyrics for "The Man" subtly mock a hubris once compared to that of a TV evangelist: "Nothing can break, nothing can break me down/Don't need no advice, I got a plan."

"My vision of what masculinity is has definitely changed," he says. "As I've had more experience, I've come to realize it's more about compassion and empathy."


Flowers grew up idolizing the battling Gallagher brothers of Oasis, inspiration, perhaps, for his early swagger; in an early interview, he remarked of emo and pop-punk bands, "There's a creature inside me that wants to beat all those bands to death." Not long after, he apologized for that comment, and the bad-boy shtick was always an awkward fit; Flowers was raised, and remains, a devout, teetotal Mormon who frequently and unironically exclaims, "Holy cow!"—as in his response to early efforts by the band's label, Island, to sensationalize them. "Holy cow," says Flowers, "I've heard label presidents talk about how their favorite artists are stars both on and off stage—because of the controversy that they were whipping up—and my internal conscience, or

whatever, just knew that wasn't right."

The Killers's global popularity (with roughly 22 million albums sold to date) comes with benefits. "I don't want to cater to a specific thing to try and be on the radio," says Flowers. *Wonderful, Wonderful*, produced by Jacknife Lee (U2, REM), introduces funkier layers to the band's anthemic synth pop, as well as decidedly un-poppy themes. The song Flowers is proudest of, "Rut," is from the perspective of his wife, Tana Mundkowsky. "She has a complex version of [post-traumatic stress disorder] from her childhood, and it's her speaking," he says. "It's emotional and the only song I've had to sit down with her and play at the piano, just to make sure it was OK with her."

Mundkowsky and Flowers met as teenagers in Las Vegas and have three young sons. Parenthood, he says, has had its own softening effect. "When I see how different my kids are—yet they came from the same two people—it just opens your eyes to every person you see on the street, and the differences in the struggles."

A third track, "Some Kind of Love," offered a chance to meet a longtime hero, Brian Eno. The song was written over an Eno instrumental, but his camp wouldn't permit the Killers to release it. "We tried to change the song," says Flowers, "but we could never make it as good." Shortly before the album was mastered, Flowers enlisted mutual friends to email and text Eno: "Just at least let me talk to him and explain it." Finally, he got Eno on the phone, and permission was quickly secured.

Their conversation offered something else: the opportunity to clear up a perceived slight. Flowers was told that Eno had declined to produce the Killers' second album, *Sam's Town*. "For 11 years, every time I've gone on stage or put my pen to paper, I've carried with me that I'm not good enough for Brian Eno," says Flowers. "So I said to him, 'Were you asked to do *Sam's Town*?' He said no. Who knows if it was some shady move from my record label or whatever, but that felt good." 

Wonderful, Wonderful will be released on Virgin EMI on September 22.



TV: INTERVIEW

Blowing Up Vietnam

THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD AMERICAN WAR GETS
KEN BURN-ED IN A 10-PART DOCUMENTARY

DOCUMENTARY filmmakers Ken Burns and Lynn Novick are essentially detectives, exposing new layers of entrenched facts about facets of American history, whether it's the Civil War, World War II, jazz, Prohibition or baseball.

Their latest film—a typically exhaustive 10-part, 18-hour inquiry into the Vietnam War, written by Geoffrey Ward—turned out to be the most challenging project of their careers, involving 100 interviews over a period of 10 years.

BY
RYAN BORT
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ROLLS PRESS/POPPER/GETTY



BATTLE LINES: U.S. Marines with suspected Viet Cong in the rubble of a village in 1965, the 10th year of the war, with 10 more to go.

The duo had no way of knowing when they began the project that their documentary would be released during the presidency of Donald Trump, whose short, controversial tenure has been compared to that of Richard Nixon, accused of escalating the Vietnam War, which lasted from 1955 to 1975. As Burns tells *Newsweek*, “What if I told you I’d been working on a film about mass demonstrations against the political administration occurring across the country, about a White House in disarray, about a president convinced that the press is lying and out to get him, about document drops of classified material, about an asymmetrical war and accusations that a political campaign reached out to a foreign power at the time of a national election?”

I’d say, sounds familiar. And then ask them some questions.

I’m 30 and, like a lot of my generation, don’t know much about the Vietnam War. Why should I care?

BURNS: So much of what we’re experiencing today—the hyperpartisanship, the divisions between each other, the inability to have a conversation—is the result of seeds planted during the Vietnam War period.

NOVICK: People ask us what anyone under 50 knows about this war, and the answer is, not much. It’s shocking how little it’s taught in school. It’s also contested history, so there’s no one book you can go to to bring out the story you’re trying to tell. When we make a film, we’re trying to tell a good story. In a case like this, it’s hard to do. It required a lot of triangulation of multiple sources for us to put together a narrative that makes sense.

How would you characterize your understanding of Vietnam before you embarked on it 10 years ago and now?

BURNS: I don’t recognize the person who started this project. I lived through the 1960s as a kid and a teenager, up to being draft-eligible by 1971. You think you know [about it]. You possess the conventional wisdom. [Researching this], almost everything I presumed was turned upside down. Because the war didn’t turn out so well for the United States, we tend to ignore it. It’s a very contentious topic, which makes it safer not to talk about it. It’s no accident that the first English you hear in the film is from a Marine who describes being friends with another couple, and the two

wives, after 12 years as friends, learn that their husbands had been Marines in Vietnam, and they hadn’t said a word about it. The Marine said it’s like living in a family that had an alcoholic father. *Shhh*—you don’t talk about that.

One of the ways this differs from your other war documentaries is the number of primary sources who are still alive. With 100 interviews, how did you decide which to include?

BURNS: We have probably a 40-to-1 or 50-to-1 shooting ratio—we have an 18-hour finished film with hundreds of hours we haven’t used, that we’re aware of not using. This documentary is not an encyclopedia of the war. What we wish to do is to tell an epic story with lots of primary and secondary and tertiary cameos, and to do it in a fashion in which some stories, like a POW story, will have to stand in for all POW stories. Five Army grunts will have to stand in for the hundreds of thousands of Army grunts who went into Vietnam. It’s not that what we didn’t use isn’t good. Some of it is spectacular; it just didn’t fit into that moment.

“THERE IS SOMETHING RIVETING ABOUT WATCHING BATTLES; IT’S THE CAR WRECK YOU SLOW DOWN FOR.”

Is there an interview that stands out?

BURNS: An Army guy, Mike Haney. I found myself in tears, with him, at the moment of an attack. I had a knot in my stomach from that anxiety as he made this moment become real.

What can policymakers learn from what was happening then?

BURNS: I never think in those terms because I make these films for everybody. For some strange reason, people have an enthusiasm for war. There is something riveting about watching battles; it’s the car wreck you slow down for. I just hope the cost of it would give policymakers pause, that it will be a cautionary tale. That ought to be the only reason to investigate wars—except to also prove, paradoxically, that while it brings out the worst in us, it can sometimes bring out the very best. I think our film shows moments of humor and fellowship and courage and great love. I love the idea of love being a byproduct of a film about war.

Part of me is embarrassed by that. *Love* is a really tough word to say when you're dealing with history and politics and war. But I look back at my films and feel that at the heart of all of them is love.

Are there historical insights that might lend context to America today?

NOVICK: There are many resonances. One of the big questions is, 'What does it mean to be an American? What does it mean to be a citizen of a democracy?' That was a big question being asked during the Vietnam War and is certainly an extraordinarily important question right now.

BURNS: People make a lot of essayistic declarations, and they really go nowhere. Sometimes, you say Vietnam is a negative story of how we came apart. But it could also be the story of a democratic people who say we don't want to do this anymore. You could look at this moment in our history, and maybe this is a phenomenally beautiful test.... This may be a test of our ultimate devotion to the principles on which we were founded.

It's hard to think of this time as something we'll look back on with pride in 50 years.

BURNS: In the early years of Franklin Roosevelt, in the depths of the Depression, as many countries were flipping to a totalitarian thing, the question was, would we also do that? Somebody said to Roosevelt that you're either going to be the best president or the worst president. He said, if I don't succeed, I'm going to be the last president. 🇺🇸

The Vietnam War debuts on PBS September 17.



HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF: Longtime collaborators Burns and Novick.



VALE OF TEARS: Moss as Detective Robin Griffin.

TV: REVIEW

Female Trouble

Jane Campion's highly anticipated *Top of the Lake: China Girl* is a feminist sledgehammer

THE SECOND SEASON of the art-house TV detective series *Top of the Lake* begins at the watery bottom. Through a crack in a suitcase pushed into the ocean, long black strands of human hair swirl in a delicate dance of horror. The image is eerie, beautiful, feminine and chilling—a hallmark of New Zealand filmmaker Jane Campion, who, with series co-creator Gerard Lee, introduced viewers four years ago to an incandescent Elisabeth Moss as the damaged, undaunted woman-of-feminist-sorrow Detective Robin Griffin.

We quickly learn that the hair is attached to the body of a young Asian woman, a prostitute who worked in a brothel in Sydney, where sex work is legal. We learn, too, that she was being used as a pregnancy surrogate, managed by a singularly creepy man who goes by the singularly creepy name of Puss (actor David Dencik). This makes for the umpteenth creepy man in Griffin's life. In the first season, she faced down the drug-dealing patriarch of a clan of thugs in her native New Zealand while tracking the disappearance of a pregnant 12-year-old. Also, she shot a cop colleague who pimped young offenders. Also, she had been gang-raped as a teenager, so her affinity for young women in distress is acute.

Campion, the only female director to have won the Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or—for *The Piano* in 1993—has long been interested in the havoc wreaked by terrible men on vulnerable women. Into this all-too-fertile feminist territory, *China Girl* brings the psychology and biology of motherhood: It turns out Griffin's adolescent trauma resulted in a daughter given up for adoption at birth, and her investigation into the world of surrogacy adds guilt and maternal longing to her portfolio of melancholies now bulging nearly as much as that sad suitcase—a catchall metaphor, it seems, for all that is troubling in the lake of womanhood.

China Girl has moments of brilliance, particularly the performances of co-stars Nicole Kidman, Gwendoline Christie (of *Game of Thrones*) and the fine young actor Alice Englert, who plays Griffin's lost daughter and is Campion's real daughter (a gift to armchair psychologists). But so much is madly, gyno-centrally cuckoo that the saga simultaneously implodes and spirals out of control. As Lynchian-nightmare-strange as Campion's vision can get, it's the heavy-handed gender politics and cartoonish demonstrations of male treachery and stupidity that do the story in. The male cops taunt and titter at Griffin with unrelenting sexist provocation, and even "good" men turn out to be cheaters. None are more pointless or idiotic than the dudes who hang out in a coffee shop, sharing online ratings of prostitutes they claim to have banged, in a confederacy of *Beavis and Butt-Head* dunces. Meanwhile, the women weep or circle one another distrustfully, a spirit-draining ladies' misery litany. Had a man made this, he would have been womansplained into contrition. —LISA SCHWARZBAUM

Top of the Lake: China Girl debuts on Sundance September 10.

MAARTEN DE BOER/GETTY

HITTING HOME:
Keaton in the new
film *American
Assassin*.



MOVIES: 'SPLAINING

American Overload

WHY DOES SO MUCH POP CULTURE INCLUDE THE A-WORD IN THE TITLE?

COMING to a theater near you: the films *American Made*, *American Assassin* and *Steve McQueen: American Icon*. On TV, you can look forward to the shows *American Horror Story: Cult*, *American Housewife* and *American Vandal*. And that's just September.

In 2016, we got, among others, *American Gods*, *American Play-boy*, *American Crime* (not to be confused with *The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story*), *American Anarchist*, *American Honey*, *American Grit*, *American Epic* and *American Satan*.

"There do seem to be a lot of these things," says actor Michael Keaton, the co-star of *American Assassin* (opening on September 15). "You think, Hey, maybe we should be careful with how we throw that word around. Come to think of it," he adds, "I was just sent another script that I'm not going to do that has the word *American* in the title."

Theodore Dreiser has the distinction, perhaps dubious, of inaugurating the trend in

pop culture with his 1925 novel *An American Tragedy*—a book that also popularized the links between sex and violence and made in the USA. *American Pastoral*, *American Psycho*, *American Gigolo*, *American Beauty* and *American Pie* (to name a few) followed, all enormously successful as books and films. Did those commercial wins have anything to do with the setting? And might not the word be a liability today, when the meaning of America is so hotly disputed?

Quite the opposite, says A.S. Hamrah, a semiotician and a film critic for *n+1*. "Hollywood loves things that appeal to both the left and the right equally. By adding the adjective *American*, you can appeal to the right by making it seem nativist and jingoistic and uniquely important. And to the left, you can make it seem ominous, heavy, dark and potentially evil. Its ability to be deployed as an empty signifier is what makes it appealing."

For screenwriter and director

Max Landis—who has written three entertainment properties with *American* in their titles (including the upcoming remake of his father John's *An American Werewolf in London*)—a titular association with the home of the brave serves to soothe and familiarize potentially disquieting subjects. "*American* is almost like a spice or a salt that you put on a scary word," he says. "A sniper? He feels dangerous and foreign. But *American Sniper*? He brings it home. Or *American Alien*: It's an inherent contradiction. It makes you say, 'What's that?'"

Based on the lists of impending American titles unspooling into eternity on IMDb, we have yet to reach saturation. "I think the tipping point will be when people start making fun of it," says Tony Yacenda, who is taking a stab at that as co-creator of the eight-episode true-crime spoof *American Vandal* (debuting on Netflix September 15). "Evolution comes with satire and parody." —CHRIS LEE

TWO QUESTIONS

+ STRINGS ATTACHED: Martin, seated, far right, with his band, the Steep Canyon Rangers.



Steve Martin BANJO ON HIS KNEE

STEVE MARTIN has been a sadistic dentist, an out-of-towner, a frustrated traveler, a father of 12 and a jerk. Now he's just happy to be a banjo player—in real life, not on screen. In recent years, the comedy legend has stepped away from Hollywood and shifted his focus to theater (his comedy *Meteor Shower*—starring Amy Schumer—is set to open on Broadway in November) and a longtime passion: bluegrass music. On September 22, the skilled banjo player will release a new album, *The Long-Awaited Album* (yes, that's the title), with his band, the Steep Canyon Rangers. The songs are up-tempo, goofy stories of love (“Caroline”) and family awkwardness (“Strangest Christmas Yet”).

Martin, who famously incorporated the banjo into his '70s standup act, is pretty sure the bluegrass community doesn't see him as an actor-dabbler. “Well, I don't know what they say about me behind my back,” he says with a laugh.

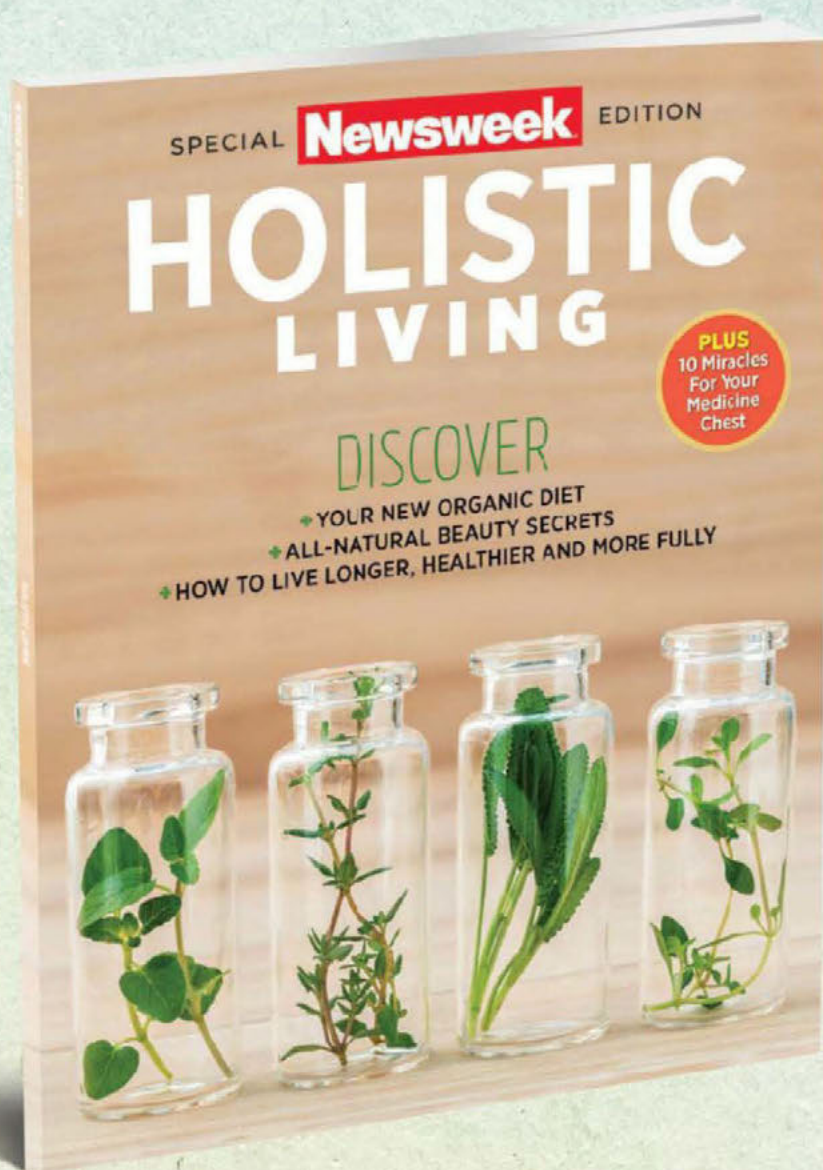
The banjo hasn't been a popular instrument for some time. What attracted you to it, and do you wish more people shared your affection for it?

I loved the banjo from the first time I ever heard it. I found it to be quite an emotional instrument. Its popularity is just right. It's a specialized instrument, it's a specialized sound, [and] not everyone's going to gravitate to it or needs to know about it.

Even though movies are no longer a priority for you, are there any filmmakers you'd like to work with, given the opportunity?

Oh yeah. Coen brothers. There's so many people. I did work with Ang Lee. Unfortunately, the movie [*Billy Lynn's Long Haultime Walk*] was a flop. But I liked it. Directors' names aren't on the tip of my tongue anymore; I'm in such a different world now.... I think a new comedian is Jerry Seinfeld. That's how behind the times I am. —ZACH SCHONFELD

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