


Laura van den Berg

the Revolution, wearing a white linen suit she's never seen before and looking up at the sky. The trip to Havana had been meant for the two of them; her husband, Richard, was a horror-film scholar, and they'd planned to attend a festival showing a Cuban zombie movie called *Revolución Zombi*. She begins following him through the city, watching him buying mangoes from a fruit market, eating alone in a spare apart-

ment, reading the newspaper at a café, drinking at a bar. blind to—willfully blind to—can unravel your life. That your secrets, your betrayals, your crimes—there comes a time when you have to reckon with the consequences.” Horror also explores how human crime can manifest in a large-scale social way. “Zombie films have been a really powerful medium for exploring social questions, questions of social violence, historical violence, historical trauma. All this is marrow-deep in horror.”

The Third Hotel also owes its surreal aesthetic to van den Berg's childhood in Florida (Clare has roots there, too), where “the pedestrian and the deeply strange are always afoot,” she says. She remembers on one hand the bottomless teenage boredom of wandering suburban malls and driving around endlessly. And yet “on the other hand, the uncanny is always there. Florida is a place of extremes: the weather is very extreme—the heat, the storms—and nature is very extreme.” Any body of water larger than a puddle is likely inhabited by alligators, and the animals were forever lumbering into her family's yard and climbing trees. “It took me a really long time before I could embrace swimming in a lake in New England without worrying about getting eaten by something,” she admits. Meanwhile, her parents, both raised rural, kept a running zoo in the house: cats, dogs, snakes, fish, ferrets, hamsters, chickens, and for one year a wolf named Natasha, with piercing blue eyes, which they adopted as a pup on a family trip to Utah. “I like making work where the uncanny and the ordinary are intertwined,” she says. “That doesn't feel alien to me; it feels real.”

was shallow—but she remembers feeling she had been “dwelling in a slightly supernatural space,” she says. “And also, this lightning strike of grief and a rash action that followed it—that kind of gave way to the world of the book.”

The Third Hotel is van den Berg's fourth book. In 2015, she published *Find Me*, a dystopian novel whose narrator is a young woman abandoned at birth, searching for her mother amid a deadly plague that begins with sudden memory loss. *The New York Times* called *Find Me* “pleasingly strange” and “impressively original,” and a *Salon* reviewer declared van den Berg “the best young writer in America.” Preceding the novel came two short-story collections: *What the World Will Look Like When All the Water Leaves Us* and *The Isle of Youth* (listed by a dozen outlets as one of 2013's best books of fiction). Now 35, van den Berg did not begin writing—or even, she says, reading much literature—until her second year at Rollins College, a liberal-arts school just outside Orlando. She signed up for a creative-writing workshop, looking for a straightforward course and finding instead a calling. Among the readings was Amy Hempel's “In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried,” and it set van den Berg on fire. She switched majors from psychology to English and after graduation began an M.F.A. at Emerson College in Boston. “So, a hard turn,” she says, “toward this amazing, brutal love.” She arrived at Harvard in 2016, along with her husband, fellow fiction writer and Briggs-Copeland lecturer Paul Yoon.

In the novel, Clare first catches sight of her dead husband outside the Museum of

ment, reading the newspaper at a café, drinking at a bar.

Dreamlike and mysterious and almost hypnotically absorbing, *The Third Hotel* is a moving exploration of grief and marriage. Experimenting with horror-film tropes and dynamics, van den Berg also mines sharp, subtle insights on gender and misogyny, art, loneliness, the afterlife.

A casual horror fan since childhood (“I'm one of those weird people who finds terrifying myself in a really scary movie to be cathartic and relaxing”), she became a bit of a horror-film scholar herself while researching the novel. “Good horror gets to the heart of some really difficult human stuff,” she says. “Death and the afterlife, and what, if anything, awaits us on the other side. And also: the way that what you're

True Lies

Jill Lepore excavates the history of America, down to its bedrock values.

by CASEY N. CEP

ONLY THE AMPERSAND is still visible; Benjamin Franklin's thick backslashes hide the words themselves. It was two weeks before the United States would declare its independence from Great Britain, and Thomas Jefferson, having finished tinkering with his draft of the declaration, asked Franklin to review it. The elder statesman's changes were few, but critical: where

Jefferson had written “these truths” were “sacred & undeniable,” Franklin crossed out the adjectives, and suggested instead that they were “self-evident.”

According to Kemper professor of American history Jill Lepore, it was the edit that changed the nation. Her astounding new ac-

These Truths: A History of the United States, by Jill Lepore (Norton, \$39.95)

count of the American experiment—from when Columbus first stumbled on its shores to when President Donald Trump promised to put walls around them—is titled *These Truths* because of that substitution of evidence for reverence. Lepore argues that the revision meant rights were no longer “the stuff of religion” but “the stuff of science.” The founders grounded their principles in reason, not because it necessarily conflicts with faith, but because anything self-evident could be observed, queried, and debated.

These Truths does just that, surveying American history to see when the country reflected its founding commitments and when it belied them. Historians are often cheerleaders or critics, but Lepore is less like Herodotus or Howard Zinn, and more like Hercule Poirot: sorting out what happened, but also why and how. “Between reverence and worship, on the one side, and irreverence and contempt, on the other,” Lepore writes of her single-volume endeavor, “lies an uneasy path away from false pieties and petty triumphs over people who lived and died and committed both their acts of courage and their sins and errors long before we committed ours.”

To walk such a path all the way through American history is an unlikely task for one of the country’s leading microhistorians, who previously focused her considerable intellect on obscure figures from Benjamin Franklin’s sister Jane to the peculiar psychologist who created “Wonder Woman,” using their lives to tell the story of broader cultural trends and historical movements.

Delightfully, though, Lepore conjures a cast in *These Truths* every bit as unruly as those in her earlier histories: Quaker preacher Benjamin Lay, who made his pokeberry-juice trick-bible bleed; activist Phyllis Schlafly, A.M. ’45, who torched the feminist tent of the GOP one newsletter at a time; black entrepreneur and intellectual David Walker, who stitched his revolutionary pamphlets into the lining of clothes; Samuel Morse, who sped up communication only by accident, while trying to create a code Catholics could not decipher; “Amazing Grace” Hopper, who programmed some of the earliest computers for the Navy; and the Christian conservative Rod Dreher, whose blog decries the end of Christendom and conservatism with every post.

In *These Truths* there are no heroes or vil-



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lains, only Americans. But the book is more than a collection of profiles in chronological order; Lepore considers ideas as much as individuals. She divides the country's history into four parts: its first 300 years, when ideas of natural rights were first taking shape; the antebellum nineteenth century, when



Jill Lepore

STEPHANIE MITCHELL/IFPAC

arguments over popular sovereignty divided the nation; from Reconstruction to the end of World War II, when the nation state expanded its ideas of political equality; and the technological age that followed nuclear warfare, when machines disrupt-

ed democracy. Writing in an era of fake news and four Pinocchios, when truth seems anything but self-evident, Lepore insists that the United States was founded on facts—and more surprisingly, that only facts can save it.

to revolt, too, and right away Americans were forced to confront their own mendacity. “How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes,” asked the writer Samuel Johnson, in eighteenth-century England’s version of a hot take.

Acknowledging the hypocrisy of men yelping for liberty while denying it to others has become standard for colonial histories, but Lepore goes further, arguing that the founders were not just hypocrites, but copycats: “A revolutionary tradition was forged not by the English in America, but by Indians waging wars and slaves waging rebellions.” Though the founders might have been reading John Locke and David Hume, none needed a treatise to know that tyranny could be resisted. They had heard about Metacom and the Algonquians who fought colonial encroachment in New England in

Off the Shelf

Recent books with Harvard connections

“Much of the time we spend in gatherings with other people disappoints us,” warns professional facilitator Priya Parker, M.P.P. ’12. After this deflating introduction, **The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters** (Riverhead, \$28) offers a breezy guide to running get-togethers of all shapes and sizes. Pointers include “the kindness of exclusion” (when it’s done well), a chart laying out the proper square-foot-per-guest allotment for dance parties, and an admonition: “Don’t be a chill host.”

Though at times his narration sounds tiny—“California lives on stories”; tech “put San Francisco at the center of the world”—Cary McClelland ’02, a lawyer and documentary filmmaker, mostly stays out of the way in **Silicon City: San Francisco in the Long Shadow of the Valley** (W.W. Norton, \$26.95). He gathers interviews from a host of subjects, from a veteran cabbie to an Uber driver, with a venture capitalist, a tattoo artist, and community organizers in between. They describe a city changing so tectonically it unsettles even the rich. Returning to her hometown, one corporate lawyer reflects:

“I’m gentrifying my own neighborhood. How weird is that?”

In the last year alone, renowned gay historian Martin Duberman, Ph.D. ’57, has published a memoir, a polemic about gay activism, and a “novel/history” about the inner circle of Kaiser Wilhelm. He adopts the third genre for **Luminous Traitor: The Just and Daring Life of Roger Casement, A Biographical Novel** (University of California Press, \$32.95): cleaving to the historical record and using “informed speculation” to fill in the gaps. Casement, who exposed colonial abuses in the Congo and Peru, and was executed for his role in the Easter Rising, cut a colorful figure. Duberman argues that until recently, biographies have tended to underplay, censure, or disparage his homosexuality and promiscuity—“thereby skirting certain essential ingredients in Casement’s startling contemporary relevance.”

Meanwhile, on the dating scene, “What’s your type?” is the new “What’s your sign?” But singles aren’t the only ones clamoring for a “people-sorting device.” As Merve Emre ’07 points out in **The Personality Brokers** (Doubleday, \$27.95), schools, employers, and even hospitals and churches use the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to scry human behavior. Emre offers a sweeping account of the personality testing phe-

nomenon, from its creation by Katherine Myers, an ardent devotee of Carl Jung, and her daughter Isabel Briggs, a housewife and murder-mystery writer; to its deployment in the Cold War; to its current status as a \$2-billion-dollar industry.

In 2015, authorities jailed the “Feminist Five,” a group who’d planned to hand out stickers against sexual harassment on Beijing’s public transit. Their detention became an international cause célèbre and, writes Leta Hong Fincher ’90, a turning point for women’s rights in China. **Betraying Big Brother: The Feminist Awakening in China** (Verso, \$26.95) shows how the movement has risen on social media and taken root abroad and in cities like Guangzhou. Hong Fincher argues that the Chinese Communist Party relies on patriarchal crackdowns for its post-Soviet survival—and, further, that “anyone concerned about rising authoritarianism globally needs to pay attention to what is happening in China.”

In the roving nonfiction collected in **Impossible Owls: Essays** (FSG Originals, \$15), Brian Phillips ’99 gets lost in Tokyo while reporting on a sumo wrestling tournament and learns to (safely) crash-land a plane while en route to the Iditarod, among other escapades. His stories feel boyish in the best sense: fresh-faced and adventuresome, casually funny or lyrical as

1675. And revolutions had been attempted all around them. George Washington's slave Harry escaped Mount Vernon to fight for the British alongside a man named Ralph who had once been the property of Patrick Henry, while James Madison had to take a break from the Constitutional Convention to track down a 17-year-old named Anthony who escaped from Montpelier. Keeping the word "slave" out of the Constitution did not mean slavery was absent from the document; in fact, Lepore calls slavery America's Achilles heel, narrating the tortured series of amendments, bargains, and compromises that only delayed the confrontation between the country's commitment to natural rights and its failure to extend them to African Americans.

Yet even after more than 750,000 men had died in the struggle over emancipation in

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OLIVIA MUNK

the Civil War, the question of citizenship remained fiercely contested. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments were drafted to preserve the rights of freedmen, but the substitution of "male inhabitants" for "persons" left suffragists protesting for the rights of women, and two decades later the first fed-

eral immigration laws revealed how the rise of nativism constricted the notion of political equality even more.

"The Confederacy had lost the war," Lepore argues, "but it had won the peace"—not only because the South retained so much political power, but be-

the moment demands. "Everybody pretty jaded here? Fantastic," he writes, describing a polar bear. "I couldn't feel my spine, she was so beautiful."

A Carnival of Losses: Notes Nearing Ninety (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$25), the last book by the late Donald Hall '51, JF '57, has the air of a rambly chat after a long meal. As the former U.S. poet laureate puts it: "Why should the nonagenarian hold anything back?" Much of the collection sweeps up stray anecdotes from a life in letters; other essays face mortality, relaying what it's like to lose his hearing (gradually) and his teeth (several times daily). The centerpiece is a remembrance of his wife, the poet Jane Kenyon, observing that "Poetry begins with elegy, in extremity, as Gilgamesh laments the death of his companion Enkidu, watching worms crawl out of Enkidu's neck." And just as verse miraculously does, this book finds grace.

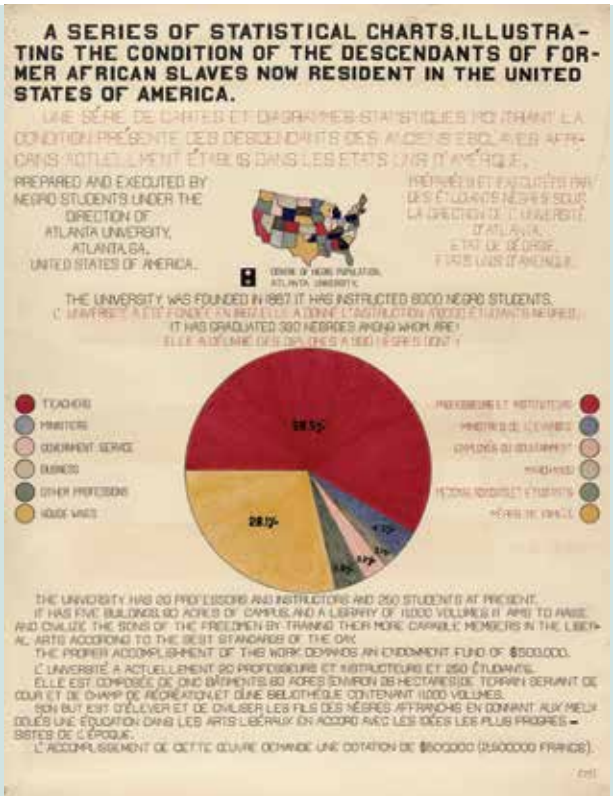
Hollywood Math and Aftermath (Bloomsbury Academic, \$116.99) is a wonkish tour of the recent history of showbiz. "Money is Hollywood's great theme—but money laundered into something else, something more," argues J.D. Connor '92, an associate professor in the division of cinema and media studies at the University of Southern California. Close-reading the films and the industries that created them,

he shows how the financial crisis shocked moviemaking in the Obama era, and why it's central to understanding work as various as *The Incredible Hulk* and *Upstream Color*.

Most know W.E.B. Du Bois, A.B. 1890, Ph.D. '95, through his writing; now comes a chance to page through his eye-popping infographics. For an exhibition in Paris in 1900, Du Bois and his students at Atlanta University hand-drew charts that inventively displayed migration patterns, property ownership, and other facets of African-American life.

W.E.B. Du Bois's Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America (Princeton Architectural Press, \$29.95), edited by Whitney Battle-Baptiste and Britt Rusert, collects them in full color.

For some light back-to-school reading, two thrillers dripping *Crimson*. Paul Collins's **Blood and Ivy** (W.W. Norton, \$26.95) is true crime told like a novel, about an 1849 murder at Harvard Medical School. **The**



Du Bois and his students inked and watercolored some 60 charts for display at the 1900 World's Fair.

Ancient Nine (St. Martin's Press, \$27.99), is a novel prefaced, coyly, by author Ian Smith '91: "Based on real events." It follows an undergraduate from Chicago's South Side through the harrowing pledge process for the Delphic Club.

cause not all men were equal, not all persons could be citizens, and not all citizens were afforded equal rights. The country's commitment to its self-evident truths was wavering at best, and the decades after Reconstruction are some of the darkest in Lepore's doorstopper of a book. These are the chapters where the very populism that tweets all day every day these days first appeared in the form of William Jennings Bryan, and the muckraking journalism of Nellie Bly, Ida B. Wells, and Ambrose Bierce was met by the yellowing prose of publishers like Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, class of 1885. In these years, America Firsters first appeared, and African-American soldiers fighting for freedom around the globe asked when they would find it on the home front, only to learn that Japanese Americans there were being forced into internment camps.

Whatever their enemies abroad, Americans were also fighting a domestic war between the forces of corruption, demagogu-

In these times, many will read *These Truths* like a dying man reading a first-aid manual, but history is not self-help.

the 1850s, political squabbles in the years after World War II started to seem more intractable.

TECHNOLOGY HAD always fostered partisan divisions: printing presses arrived not long after the colonists did, and after that it was cheaper paper that divided opinion, then the telegraph and the radio. But Lepore argues that "Hiroshima marked the beginning of a new and differently unstable political era, in which technological change wildly outpaced the human capacity for moral reckoning." The computers that broke German ciphers and calculated the trajectories of Japanese bombs were soon taking inventory, managing payroll, and sorting voters. It had taken a lot of shoe

Televisions went into almost every parlor, and smartphones, in time, into almost every pocket. In between, conservative intellectual Richard M. Weaver argued in his 1948 book, *Ideas Have Consequences*, that a commitment to deep truths had been replaced by a shallow concern for facts, and Cold War diplomat George Kennan worried that the paranoid distortions of McCarthyism were not a fluke but a feature of modern politics. Although politicians have always used history in selective and self-serving ways, both Democrats and Republicans began to see it as a palliative discipline: the party of the past peddling a fairy-tale version of a homogenous, prosperous nation that never was; the party of progress insisting on a narrative of advancement that has only occasionally been true, and never for everyone.

Both parties were selling these stories as network television and daily newspapers declined and the balanced-coverage regulations that once governed the airwaves were repealed. Collective truths and collaborative discernment were even more imperiled by Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, where partisans could post without meaningful rebuttal or rebuke. Tea Party types can put on Patrick Henry costumes without ever reckoning with Gabriel's Rebellion, the slave uprising that took place just down the street from the site of his most famous speech in Richmond, and Democratic Socialists can hum *Hamilton* lyrics without ever walking

from Trinity Church to the African Burial Ground in Manhattan. More insidiously, whole swaths of the country can like, favorite, and scroll until their thumbs fall off without ever knowing basic facts about their democracy, including election days.



ery, prejudice, and propaganda and those of reason, reflection, and truth. Although the country had survived earlier periods of extreme partisanship, like the fights between Federalists and Democratic-Republicans in the 1790s, and Whigs and Democrats in

leather, postage stamps, and newspaper ink for the first consulting firm—Campaigns, Inc.—to torpedo President Harry Truman's plan for universal health insurance. Now public opinion could be manipulated via mass marketing.

Perhaps instead of the next U2 album, Apple could make a copy of *These Truths* appear on every iPhone—not only because it offers the basic civics education that every American needs, but because it is a welcome corrective to the corrosive histories peddled by partisans. In these times, many will read *These Truths* like a dying man reading a first-aid manual, but history is not self-help. Jill Lepore is at her best when she is describing what has happened, not prescribing what

should; the book's weakest pages are the final ones, where she lapses into prediction, and gets lost in a strained metaphor about the ship of state righting itself.

But the first step in self-help is to know thyself, and Lepore can certainly help with that. She has assembled evidence of an America that was better than some thought, worse than almost anyone imagined, and weirder than most serious history books ever convey. Armed with the facts of what

happened before, we are better able to approach our collective task of figuring out what should happen now.

Casey N. Cep '07, a former Berta Greenwald Ledecy Fellow at this magazine, has written for *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, and *The New York Times*. Her first book, *Furious Hours: Harper Lee and an Unfinished Story of Race, Religion, and Murder in the Deep South*, is forthcoming from Knopf.

ALUMNI

Rebel Lawyer

Gerald López's radical theory—and practice

by LYDIALYLE GIBSON

WITH THE SUN finally fading on a blazing spring afternoon in Los Angeles, Gerald López, J.D. '74, was sitting down to a simple dinner—salad, bread, Prosecco—at a restaurant a few blocks from the UCLA campus, where he teaches law. He has spent most of his life in this city, first as the child of Mexican immigrants, and later as a “wild-ass radical lawyer” for the poor and marginalized—and an equally wild and radical professor. Now he was trying to explain why he'd chosen public-interest law in the first place. Actually, the question didn't make sense to him. What else would he have done? “I always thought the idea was, you go back to some neighborhood with a bunch of poor people and fight like shit,” he says. “Otherwise, why be a lawyer?”

That was the bedrock. On top of it, López built a legal philosophy that has powerfully influenced the practice of civil-rights and poverty law. In 1992, he published a contro-

Gerald López on a pedestrian bridge two blocks from his childhood home in East Los Angeles. For him, rebellious lawyering is not just a legal theory, but a way of being.

versial book that altered the way a generation of lawyers conceptualized their work: *Rebellious Lawyering: One Chicano's Vision of Progressive Law Practice*. Countless spin-off publications have appeared in legal journals over the years, applying López's lessons to the specifics of

immigration law, racial discrimination, mass incarceration, environmental justice, education reform. The student-run *Rebellious Lawyering Conference*, launched in 1994 at Yale Law School, held its twenty-fifth annual gathering this past February, drawing more than 1,000 participants. The book “stands among the transformative canons of clinical theory and practice,” wrote University of Miami legal scholar Anthony Alfieri in a 2016 issue of *Clinical Law Review* dedicated to *Rebellious Lawyering* “Groundbreaking” and “radicalizing,” was how another author described it.

For all its influence and notoriety, *Rebellious Lawyering* has been out of print since 1995, when its small publisher was acquired by a larger company. For years, López fought to win back the publishing rights, as copies

