LIBIDINAL POLITICS

By Katrina Forrester

The history of feminism is filled with backlashes, but this one looks to be especially bad. Abortion rights are under threat from the federal government. The promised repeal of the Affordable Care Act would strip many women of health insurance and could severely restrict access to affordable contraception. Social services that help low-income women (disproportionately immigrants and women of color) will likely be cut. It's hard to imagine that the gender wage gap will improve under a Trump Administration, and easy to imagine both a rise in sexual assault and a drop in the number of assaults reported. That glass ceiling now feels like the concern of better days. Trump has licensed and unleashed a breed of misogyny that goes far beyond the soft conservatism we are used to, with its rhetoric of mothers, wives, and daughters, of women as the property of men.

A backlash signals a new reality, but of course that reality already existed. In the past decade, Republican-controlled state legislatures have forced abortion clinics across the country to close. Women have become the fastest-growing segment of the prison population, and deportations have increased—upending the lives and livelihoods of the immigrant and undocumented women deported, as well as the many left behind. The working-class women of color who constitute nearly half the low-wage female labor force have suffered because of the coverage gap created by states that decided not to expand Medicaid. The extent of the backlash depends on where you begin.

The Trump Administration will require sustained opposition at all levels. Organizations for women's rights excel at the politics of safety, and work is already being done by hundreds of them. The National Network of Abortion Funds, Women with a Vision, the Immigrant Solidarity Network, and INCITE! Women, Gender Non-Conforming, and Trans People of Color Against Violence are among the many that provide crucial services—whether it's patient escorts at abortion clinics or legal advice and sanctuary for those at risk of deportation or violence. They need your money and your time.

Yet feminist and progressive politics can't survive on defensive strategies alone. Focusing only on safety sets our sights too low, and also risks handing Trump an easy victory: if he controls the violence that his campaign stirred up, by that measure at least he can claim success. A vision of a better life matters just as much. The coming years will see a new wave of local legislative and political battles—for sick pay, child care, and minimum-wage laws, and against housing and employment discrimination. All are feminist issues that should be fought for, through unions or groups like the Working Families Party. These fights will take place in an ever-harsher climate, but they are vital. They are also a crucial part of any strategy for winning over the women whom feminists can tend to ignore—from the working-class women of color whose votes the Democrats take for granted to the majority of white women who stuck with the G.O.P. Maybe they were used to Trump's type of vulgarity, thought they could tame it, or liked it. Maybe they believed that other issues were more important.

The return of class concerns to national politics in the United States and Europe has thus far worked to the right's advantage. But local progressive groups are already organizing successfully across class and identity lines: it is up to us to listen to them. They know it is harder to get an abortion if you are poor, and that the working class is not composed solely of white men in old factory towns but also includes black and brown and indigenous and white women in the care sector—the fastest-growing sector of the economy. To take the fight to the new administration and limit the damage it can do, feminists must be relentless in showing that there is no contradiction between protecting women's rights and providing an alternative economic vision for America.

The potential victims of Trumpism will need to be defended at every stage, but in a way that does not overstate his power or enhance his appeal. The challenge is how to accomplish this amid a backlash in which the idea of feminism itself has suffered lasting harm. Was Clinton's pantsuit feminism to blame, or was she simply the most recent in a long line of women who asked for too much? The D.N.C. must bear some responsibility: it weaponized representational politics but made little long-term commitment to tackling inequality, a divorce of feminism from material concerns that has done it no favors.

The pressing question now is how to confront the new politics of vengeance. Trump has tapped into a visceral, libidinal politics that centers on the identity of those who feel themselves to have been wronged. He promises redress, to return to his supporters what was stolen from them, to give back what they are owed. Such politics does not bode well for whoever is blamed, especially when Trump's outlandish promises are inevitably broken and his supporters betrayed. Where redress fails, retribution is often the next step: the idea, put forward by Trump last March, that women who have abortions might be punished signals the possibility that it may be violent.

Threats like these make resistance hard, but the immediate difficulties lie elsewhere. To protect the rights of women, and everyone else, we must strike a delicate balance. On the one hand, we should refuse to normalize white supremacy and racism, or to al-

low the memes of the right—like its critique of identity politics—to seep into progressivism in a way that marginalizes feminism and antiracism. On the other, we have to find a way to do this alongside the new libidinal politics. That politics—a product both of the crisis of masculinity that has accompanied economic decline and of the white-nationalist alt-right that drives the backlash—is complex, and it takes every expression of liberal outrage as an opportunity. Here lies the difficulty for those

committed to resisting it. Outrage—at sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, take your pick—energizes Trump's core supporters, just as Clinton's feminism alienated the women who voted for him. Both Trump and the G.O.P. will make use of this energy, for an excited base is also a distracted one. A certain kind of indignation is precisely what will keep him from having to acknowledge his larger betrayals.

Too little attention to this new politics would allow it to permeate the culture. Too much would distract us; we risk overestimating the strength of Trump's base—or ignoring those within it who can be convinced that there are better alternatives. Meanwhile, the agenda to roll back not only reproductive and minority rights but also the welfarist, regulatory, and economic capacities of the state would go unchallenged. If the fight against this particular backlash is to be successful, we will need to aim high.

HYMN TO HARM CITY

By Lawrence Jackson

Around the time that Ronald Reagan was elected president, my dad lost his job as the branch director of a manpower center in Baltimore. Reagan ended urban public-employment programs, accelerated mass incarceration, prompted massive disinvestment in black and Latino regions of the country, renewed the government's friendly relations with South Africa's apartheid regime, and covertly sponsored wars in Central America. His domestic war—the war on drugs—produced a new and magnificently exculpatory idea for the rest of the nation: "black-on-black violence." I was in eighth grade then, and I remember finding it odd that my public school was now considering ketchup a nutrient-rich vegetable. (The actual color of the ketchup also changed, from bright red to a kind of maroon, and the packages went from foil to plastic.)

Reagan came to office on the promise of returning America to the era of Generals Patton and MacArthur, which is to say around 1944, the year World War II turned in favor of the Allies. That alliance—or at least its North Atlantic members—is what people mean when they say "the West": the United States, the U.K., and France. The most arrogant inhabitants of these nations (sadly, often those who were leading) understood themselves to be the ordained directors of human beings across the globe, across space and time. They were committed to civilization by the sword. Yet not even Reagan was mighty enough to reinstall the American militants who ached to battle the Russians and the Chinese.

Reagan took to politics for what he couldn't achieve in his original profession, acting. He stood in the shadow of John Wayne, a cultural hero who embodied American ethical values and social mores and whose work in front of the camera had deep political impact. In 1972, in an interview with *Life* magazine, Wayne declared that the problem wasn't that the Vietnam War was folly, it was that the values of white rule weren't being exported vigorously enough. Wayne's films gave audiences a steady dose of what the historian Richard Slotkin calls "regeneration through violence." Both civilization and capitalist bonanza depend on violent encounters and imperial expansion. If the country is to be healthy, it needs some frontier populated by some brand of enemy.

Donald Trump ably splits the difference between the Duke and the Gipper. He admires the strongman and instinctively maneuvers the world of the camera and the tweet. In a way that makes genuine elites cringe, Trump is known for his garish splendor, which acknowledges no possibility of excess—no volume too high, no light too bright, no gilding ever enough.

Trump's politics first became plain in 1973, when the Department of Justice sued him and his father for systematically preventing black people from renting units in their buildings. In 1989, shortly after a jogger in Manhattan's Central Park was reported to have been raped by black and Latino teenagers, Trump bought a full-page advertisement calling for the return of the death penalty. The convicted rapists were later proved to have been bullied by the police into giving false confessions; perhaps they were also victims of salivating advertisements. Trump's apparent enthusiasm for extraordinary state force and his suggestion that the nation's legal structure needs vigorous goading to carry out deadly business is what endears him to some and makes him so terrifying to others.