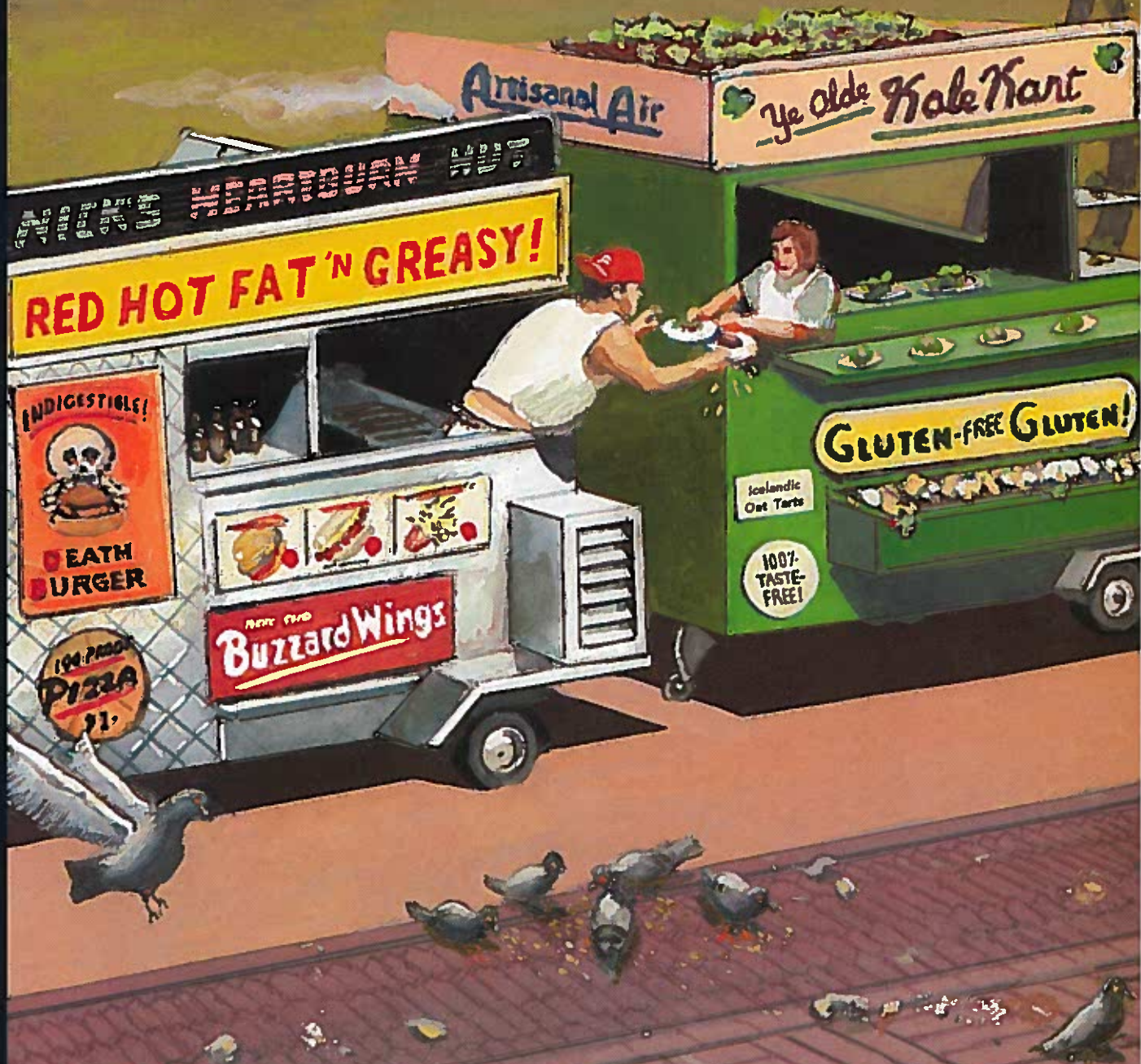


PRICE \$8.99

APRIL 9, 2018

THE NEW YORKER



Bruce McCall

mythologized him and obscured the difficulties of his final years. His opposition to the Vietnam War damaged his standing with the Johnson Administration. His campaign for housing and economic redistribution in the North met with ugly resistance. Younger activists criticized him for being more moderate than the times demanded. According to a 1966 Gallup poll, two-thirds of Americans viewed him unfavorably.

King did make a prediction, a year later, in his last book, "Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?," about a backlash against the movement. It would be "nothing new" but, rather, a "surfacing of old prejudices, hostilities and ambivalences that have always been there." He did not live to see the most fervid stretches of the Wallace campaign, or the success of Nixon's law-and-order platform, but neither would have surprised him. He understood both the moment he was in and the many moments

that had informed it, as the Kerner Report had chronicled.

Many things that King may never have envisioned—the celebration of his birth as a national holiday, the explosive growth in black political representation, particularly the election of Barack Obama—have come to pass. But King and the authors of the Kerner Report would have recognized the ongoing concerns of poverty, the travails of American cities, and the plague of gun violence. The shooting death of the nation's foremost proponent of nonviolence helped spur Congress to pass the Gun Control Act of 1968. A more moderate incarnation of the National Rifle Association tolerated a portion of the bill, which curtailed mail-order gun sales, but defeated a proposed national firearms registry. It is either damning irony or inspiring continuity—or, possibly, both—that the fiftieth anniversary of King's death falls amid the largest anti-

gun-violence mobilization that we have seen since he departed.

The Kerner Commission feared that the United States would become two distinct societies, yet among the most striking aspects of the #NeverAgain movement is its young members' ability to see a common predicament despite their different backgrounds—to acknowledge what King called the "inescapable web of mutuality." Speaking at the March for Our Lives, in Washington, D.C., Jaclyn Corin, a student who survived the Parkland shooting, allowed that the incident had received so much attention due to the community's affluence. "Because of that," she added, "we share the stage today, and forever, with those who have always stared down the barrel of a gun." She was then joined by a nine-year-old girl named Yolanda Renee, the granddaughter of Martin Luther King, Jr.

—Jelani Cobb

SOCIAL STUDIES CHAT ROOM



In 1727, when Benjamin Franklin was twenty-one, he and a few friends—among them a scrivener, a joiner, and two cobblers—formed a conversation club called the Junto. They met on Friday evenings at a Philadelphia alehouse. "The rules that I drew up required that every member, in his turn, should produce one or more queries on any point of Morals, Politics, or Natural Philosophy, to be discuss'd by the company," Franklin wrote in his autobiography. The United States was not yet the United States, but already he sensed a civility problem. His solution: structured, secular chitchat, "conducted in the sincere spirit of inquiry after truth, without fondness for dispute, or desire of victory."

Those were the days. "I don't think anyone, anywhere on the political spectrum, thinks our civic discourse is in good shape right now," Asha Curran said recently, around the time that a sitting President and a former Vice-President were publicly threatening to beat

each other up. Curran is the chief innovation officer at the 92nd Street Y, which is both a building on the Upper East Side and a nonprofit encouraging "American pluralism" and "participation in civic life." She and her boss, who had recently read Franklin's autobiography, started discussing discussion clubs. "We asked, 'What does the modern version of a Junto look like?'" Curran said. It ended up looking like BenFranklinCircles.org, a Web site that offers a few printable conversation prompts and a video trailer. ("The concept is simple: you gather a small group to talk about big ideas.") There are now about a hundred and fifty Ben Franklin Circles around the country—one at a homeless shelter in Detroit, one at the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture.

A local citizen, seeking communion within a reasonable commute radius, joined a Circle on the Upper West Side. It was a Wednesday night, not a Friday, but the group continued the tradition of meeting at an alehouse. (Well, a "modern Mediterranean tavern," with meze and eight-dollar I.P.A.s.) Convening the Circle—which was actually more of a Thin Parallelogram, owing to the restaurant's long tables—was Klay Williams, of the Bronx, who wore a dark sports coat, an orange T-shirt, and a diamond

stud in each ear. He calls himself a "holistic lifestyle expert specializing in personal and professional development"—half life coach, half makeover consultant.

Each Circle discussion centers on one of Franklin's thirteen virtues—a list of personal attributes worth striving for, one of Franklin's many attempts at life coaching. The night's theme was the second virtue: silence. "Is there any way you could turn the music down just a bit?" Williams asked the manager. A techno remix of Sade's "Smooth Operator" throbbed in the background—or, really, the foreground. "I was planning to start off with a silent meditation," Williams said. "But instead I think I'll spark a discussion around 'How can you get to a silent place when you're surrounded by distraction?'"

The participants arrived: a freelance editor in her fifties; an opera singer, a university administrator, and a church fundraiser, all in their forties; a woman who was about to leave management consulting to become a midwife; and Williams's boyfriend, a middle-school science teacher.

"We're in a noisy spot, clearly, but just close your eyes quickly and ask yourself what silence means to you," Williams said.

The administrator began, "I hate to start out negative—"

"Live your best life," Williams said.

"Well, we're in this moment of #MeToo, where it's all about exercising freedom of speech and exorcising demons, so when I thought of silence it brought up negative connotations."

"I had the opposite thought," the editor said. "I went to introspection, peace, pausing to hear the world around me."

"There's a yin and yang," the opera singer said.

"A what?" the editor said.

"A yin and a yang," the singer shouted.

The women discussed the #MeToo movement, and the men at the table remained silent. When the manager passed by, Williams asked her, again, to turn down the music. "Already did, sweetie," she said. (Presumably, she had not been briefed on Franklin's seventh virtue, sincerity.)

The group ordered dinner. The consultant, who is Haitian-American, the administrator, who is Chinese-American, and the fund-raiser, who is African-American, debated whether Bruno Mars's music was a form of cultural appropriation. "Let's pivot back to our lived experience," Williams said. "In what ways have you felt silenced?"

"Silent?" the singer asked.

"Silenced," Williams said. "E-D."

"What scared me, after the 2016 election, was how many people—silently—supported this dude," the fund-raiser said. "Just, like, 'Yeah, I'm not gonna say a word about it, but I agree with him.' That made me reconsider a lot of things."

"So true," Williams said. He turned to his boyfriend and asked, "Can you expand on that?"

He couldn't—his mouth was full of Brussels sprouts.

"O.K.," Williams said, laughing. "You have the right to remain silent."

—Andrew Marantz

THE PICTURES TWO SISTERS



What connects Captain America and E. M. Forster? They seem unlikely bedfellows: the shield-toting defender of civilization, who is scared of nothing, and the donnish author of

"Where Angels Fear to Tread." Thanks to the actress Hayley Atwell, however, the link has been smartly forged. Having joined the Marvel Cinematic Universe as Peggy Carter, in "Captain America: The First Avenger" and then in two seasons of ABC's "Agent Carter," Atwell has now leaped back in time, from America in the wake of the Second World War to London in the years preceding the First. That is the setting for "Howards End," Forster's famous novel about culture, property, gaping class distinctions, and the narrative importance of umbrellas.

A four-part dramatization of the book will air on Starz, beginning on April 8th. The hub of the tale is the home of the two Schlegel sisters—parentless, dauntless, and brimming with a taste for experience. "There's a lack of judgment, and a lack of snobbery in them," Atwell said. She was in London, dressed in black and armed with a Forsterian cup of tea. "They're genuinely original thinkers. They don't seem to be mentally imprisoned by the limitations of that time, and they're not aggressive about their lack of opportunities."

She recalled how the director of the series, Hettie Macdonald, came across Schlegel-like figures in photographs from the Edwardian period. "They're blurred, because they're action shots," Atwell said. "You see these striding skirts, women smoking cigarettes, heads back, laughing." She plays Margaret, the older sister, who has been a de-facto mother to the younger one, the headlong Helen, played by the Australian actress Philippa Coulthard, and to their brother, Tibby (Alex Lawther). According to Atwell, "Margaret's slightly more realistic, and that's reflected in her ability to manage her emotions."

Those management skills are tested as the world of the Schlegels enters the orbits of two other families—the lowly Basts and the wealthier Wilcox clan, notionally headed by Henry (Matthew Macfadyen), the briskest of businessmen, but actually ruled by his indecipherable wife (Julia Ormond). Margaret is entranced. "She's a proper adult. She finds the differences between her and Mrs. Wilcox fascinating, and something to be explored and embraced," Atwell said, adding, "That, for me, was a wonderful experience—to know that our belief sys-

tems don't have to be rigid. I felt a lot more comfortable in the possibility that I was wrong. If I say something and someone challenges it, I'm very excited."

The same is true of Helen, who visits Howards End, the Wilcoxes' enviable house, deep in the countryside, and finds her modern ideas of progress and equality being torn to bits by Henry, over lunch. Far from being wounded, she relishes the thrill of the dispute. "It was lovely," she reports in a letter. Margaret goes fur-



Hayley Atwell

ther still, shockingly so, in bridging the gulf between Henry's male capitalist zeal and the early-model feminism of the Schlegels. She even takes him to a health-food restaurant. Her whole story, in fact, interrogates the norms of now: our proud divisiveness, the allergic reaction to offense. Atwell describes "Howards End" as "antisocial media."

The book was filmed for the cinema in 1992, with Emma Thompson as Margaret and Anthony Hopkins as Henry. Atwell, faced with a difficult scene in which, for once, Margaret's composure dissolves, sought advice. "I spoke to Emma Thompson about it. She has a rule that goes 'Only cry once in a film, for maximum impact. Decide where it's going to be. One weep, maybe two, but you have to be very clear about why you're doing it.' When I was younger, I was, like, 'Isn't acting just about how good I am at crying?'"

The TV series has two distinct advantages over the movie. One is the contribution of Kenneth Lonergan, whose screenplay for "Manchester by the Sea" earned him an Academy Award, and who