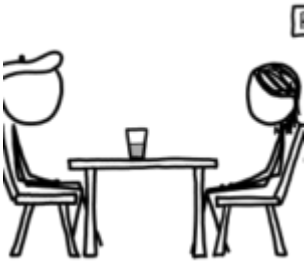
A Half Glass



Let’s give it another go, shall we?

My last missive was, shall we say, a tad down in the mouth. Things could not possibly be so dire. As one critic would have it, it sounded as though my dog had died.

Well, she did, in fact. The day before the election. And there is an enormous Maggie shaped hole in my heart.

Here Lies Maggie: She Had a Wonderful Life

But moving along. The initial results of our national exercise

of the franchise – an exercise that far too many still feel is not worth turning off Duck Kardashian and going to the fucking polls – were not especially comforting to those who favor science, inclusion, education, access to health care, gun control, social justice, &c. You know. Sane people.

And truly, the trend by 10 p.m. Election Night – alongside the punditry's thigh-rubbing enthusiasm for yet another Dems in Disarray narrative – was utterly dispiriting. But despite a desire that results arrive tidy and timely, ballots do not bend to a tidy timeline.

So here's why I'm feeling optimistic on this brisk and sunny Sunday morn.

(ed note: Optimistic? Who are you and what have you done with The Writer? Security!)

What was looking to be a pretty solid denial of the Blue Wave has actually turned out to be a very convincing argument that this is a nation that is tiring of the end game degradation of GOP politics as embodied by the Mar-a-Lago Hapsburgs. Despite the best attempts of GOP apparatchiks to gerrymander and vote suppress their way to victory, the results are clear: The nation is ready for a drastic course correction.

Yes and sure. We remain a starkly divided nation. The middle has not held, and while that may be some cause for worry among the terribly and deeply concerned civility fetishists<fn>I'm looking at you Senators Collins, Flake, Corker, et al</fn>, the middle has been dragged so far right over the past 40 years that it has become damn near synonymous with what used to be called Conservatism.

(There is no middle. Get over it. Consider the "great" centrists of our day; there have been ample opportunities for them to demonstrate independence from Trump, yet their opposition has extended only as far as handwringing twitter agonistes just before they fall in and vote the party line.

One-time pseudo centrists like Graham have become enthusiastic attack dogs for the likes of Kavanaugh.<fn>And spare me, please; John McCain was no fucking better.</fn>)

But let’s take some comfort in the outcomes where we can.

In the House, a place where Dems consistently win the raw national vote total by several millions while still falling prey to the clever gerrymanders of the state-level GOP, the Dems were striving to pick up 23 seats. This was bare minimum to flip control and, most importantly, place subpoena power in the hands of Democrats who would presumably be less quisling in their approach to Trump’s depredations than the current crop of Vichy chairmen.

(And yes, all men they were. In a delightful turn of events, Rep. Maxine Waters will hold the gavel in the House Financial Services Committee, where she has made clear a thorough inquiry into the Trump Family business practices are top priority. Pass the popcorn.)

As of today, the Dem pickup total is 37 seats. This is fairly huge, comparable to Democratic gains during the Watergate midterms. Also huge: the first Native Americans (both women) and first women Muslims have been elected to the House. Also huger: 35 new women House members (bringing the total to 135, still proportionally low, but an alltime high) and 5 new women governors. The number of successful Moms Demand candidates, running almost solely on the need for sensible gun control and the defenestration of the NRA, was another heartening trend.

The battle for the Senate was severely aligned against Democratic gains. Of the 33 seats under contest, 23 were D-held. Dems needed to gain two seats to flip control of the Senate. Flipping an incumbent is never easy. The three GOP retirements were in solid red states: Arizona, Tennessee, Utah. And Dems were defending seats in some fairly red spots: North Dakota, West Virginia, Montana, Missouri, Indiana. And

one of the big hopes lay in unseating Ted Cruz in uber-Red Texas.

By end of election eve, it looked as though the GOP would increase their Senate majority. But wait a few days: by the time all the provisionals and absentee ballots are counted, we may (BIG 'may') see the Republican advantage actually reduced by one. And damn if the Dems didn't flip Arizona.<fn>Maybe. Recount underway, but not even GOPer candidate McSally seems to doubt the outcome at this point.</fn>

But that "may" is big, and it seems to have a Florida shape to it.

The contest between incumbent Bill Nelson (D-Cosmetic Surgery Clinic) and current Governor Rick Scott (R-Sulfuric Pit of Corruption) is in recount territory. Manual recount, to be precise, wherein we may experience the shudder of deja vu of the Bush/Gore nightmare. One key difference: the Dems have learned their lesson about knife fighting. There will be no Gore-esque capitulation in the hopes of bringing our fractured polity together. Nelson's team is fighting for every vote. Naturally, that means the Republicans are calling the recount "illegal" and accusing the Dems of trying to "steal" the election and Nelson of "embracing fraud." No less a genius than our Toddler-in-Chief has taken to the Twitter to declare this so.

Despite the tantrum, the Governor's race is also headed to machine recount. If that recount reduces the margin to less than .25%, it will then undergo manual recount.

GOP outrage is one source of my optimism.<fn>Hit dog gonna holler.</fn> The gap in both races has diminished steadily as final ballots are counted. As of this morning, Nelson is down by 12,500 out of 8 million votes cast. Gillum is down by around 33,000. And in the Agriculture Commissioner's race, the outcome flipped since Tuesday with Nikki Fried set to become

the first Democratic cabinet official in nearly ten years. Her thin lead of around 4000 votes could very well survive the recount.

But let’s get real.

Rick Scott is still odds-on likely to become a U.S. Senator. And the odious Ron DeSantis is almost certainly going to be our Governor. The raw numbers are not promising. If these outcomes persist, it will represent a crushing disappointment for those yearning for a self-enlightened electorate in Florida. But.

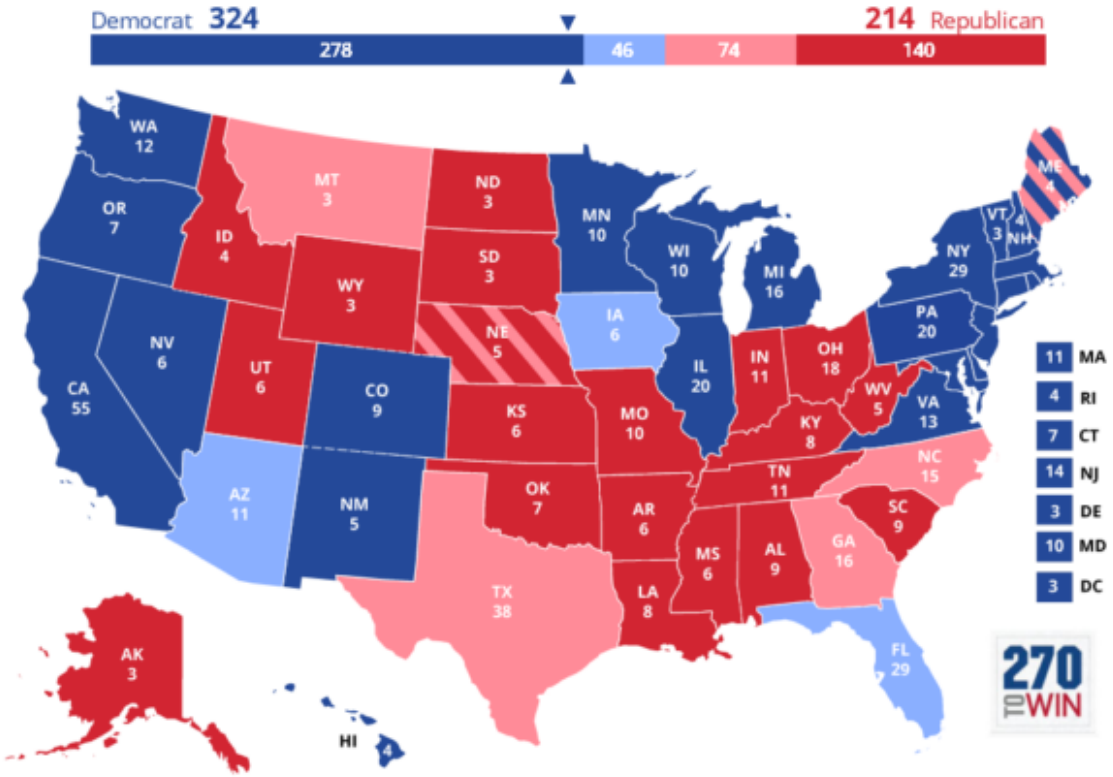
Just as with the almost-but-not-quite Beto O’Rourke in Texas, Gillum is now a bona fide progressive star. He is young and he is no quitter. If some miracle rolls along, he will make a fine governor, and even after two terms would still be only 48 years old, plenty of time for a run at the national stage.

And if he falls short, there is a big, fat Empty Suit of a target looming in Marco Rubio for the 2022 Senate race. He would also be an attractive running mate for the 2020 challenger to Trump. We have not seen the last of Andrew Gillum.

Other bright lights. The national percentage of Democratic votes for Senate was just north of 57%. In House races, it came to around 52%. Combined gubernatorial numbers point to a full percent advantage for Dems. On the one hand, these numbers are meaningless in terms of outcomes. On the other, they are a fair indicator of national sentiment towards GOP governance. It remains to be seen if Democrats can maintain their energy and convert this into an electoral college triumph in 2020 (a big if given the disproportionate advantage the EC provides rural states).

This morning, Nate Silver at 538 released an analysis that overlays the 2018 House vote on the Electoral college map. Just counting Dem victories of 5% or greater, it would amount

to 278 EC votes for the Dems. The number jumps to 324 by including margins of less than 5%.



Nate Silver's House Vote / Electoral College overlay

So yes indeed, I am brimming with optimism, a shiny happy people happy happy.

(ed note: The authorities have been notified.)

Poet Ilya Kaminsky posted this on Twitter this morning, a fine thought from historian Howard Zinn to carry us through the coming week, month, years…

> *To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It's based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.*

I'm gonna go dance among the daffodils now.

Letter from Tallahassee: Election Day Hangover

I woke up today feeling wretched and I didn't even bother to drink too much last night.

For the first time since 1972, I went to bed early on Election Night. The statewide results in Florida were too painful to bear, and the chirpy happy talk from the MSNBC/CNN yapping heads was doing nothing to make it go down easier. Yeah, flip the house, lots of ponies in that stable full of dung, but dammit, if I go to sleep and never wake up, I will never have to face a world in which the idea of Senator Rick Scott and Governor Ron DeSantis is a real thing.

Alas, I woke up, and it's all I can do not to go back to bed and stay there.

Florida is, in a word, fucked. Our governor elect is a man of few ideas beyond sycophantic devotion to Trump and simmering resentment at liberals who, evidently, wish to turn Florida into Venezuela. Naturally, he makes no sense beyond the fevered imaginations of Fox News inmates, which is DeSantis' prime and only true base. He is a pure bred Fox hothouse flower, anointed by Trump and carried to victory by his partisans. He ran a terrible, inept campaign. He appealed to the ingrained racism and resentment that may be this state's

number one cash crop, painting a decent and good man as a crazed, soft on crime socialist who wants to destroy “our” jobs and economy. You know, the black guy, nudge wink say no more amirite?

And he won.

The man DeSantis will replace is widely known for shady ethics, crony favoritism, a “blind trust” with surprisingly good eyesight, and a multi-billion dollar Medicare swindle. Rick Scott plunked down $51M of his own money to buy a U.S. Senate seat, much as he bought the Governor’s office. Keep in mind that he walked away from the Medicare scam with around $350M in severance. That means that Rick Scott has bought his political career with your money. Nice work if you can get it.

Scott will represent Florida alongside the Emptiest Suit in Florida Politics, Marco Rubio, a man notable for his earnest conversion from Trump critic to Trump taint licker. Scott’s addition to the absurdly labeled “world’s greatest deliberative body” provides him a broad range of platforms upon which to ply his habitual grift and graft.

Other depressing news? The Agriculture Commissioner, Chief Financial Officer, and Attorney General are all dyed in the wool Trump-fondlers. The A.G. outcome is especially dispiriting, her campaign largely financed by outfits like GEO and Core Civic, private prison corporations who make money hand over fist based on the policies of people like AG-elect Ashley Moody. Anyone hoping for a glimmer of criminal justice reform in this aggressively carceral state has got another thing coming.

The Florida electorate also engaged in an orgy of Constitutional amendment passage. Among the bright spots: the gradual elimination of Greyhound racing in the state, a barbaric holdover from yesteryear. Amendment 9, which bans offshore drilling in state waters, also bans vaping in most

workplaces. It’s a bizarre conflation of unrelated issues.

Among the lesser lights: passage of several measures that require super-majorities to raise taxes and educational fees, exactly the kinds of policies that all but crippled California in the decades following Proposition 13. Along with a couple of mandated caps on property tax valuations, these GOP-pushed policies are designed to ensure that funding levels for government programs, specifically education, continue to wither. As Grover Norquist has longed advocated, the GOP is intent on shrinking government to the size where they can “drown it in the bathtub.”

Then there is passage of Amendment 6, aka Marsy’s Law. This pander-heavy “victim’s rights” measure received massive national backing from law and order groups. In short, it attempts to circumvent defendant rights in favor of emotional appeals to stricter “justice” for victims. It remains unclear how this might differ from good old fashioned vengeance aside from the fact that victims will not be allowed to administer corporal or capital punishments themselves. For now.

Expect this one to face legal challenges for its overreach, though hopes for winning those challenges is diminished by the ongoing right wing takeover of the Federal and State judiciary under Trump and DeSantis, whose first official action will be appointment of three State Supreme Court Justices on his first day in office. This is in fact the one and only specific policy DeSantis articulated during the campaign. One wonders what he will do to occupy himself for the remaining 3 years and 364 days.

The brightest spot on the statewide ballot was the overwhelming approval for Amendment 4, which restores voting rights to most formerly incarcerated felons who have served their sentences, roughly a million voters, predominantly minorities. This is a huge progressive win, though anybody who thinks a DeSantis administration will not go out of its way to

undermine this initiative has not been paying attention to the GOP's near-religious devotion to voter disenfranchisement over the past four decades.

But here's a real puzzler. Amendment 4 took about 64% of the vote. DeSantis and Scott each took closer to 50%. Who are the 13-14% who voted yes on reinstating the vote for returning felons while simultaneously voting for two guys (and their party) who are staunchly opposed to that outcome?

Bright spots? Sure, there are a few. Democrats managed to flip a couple of U.S. House seats and a handful of state house slots. But despite its popular image as a purple or swing state, the political leverage in Florida remains firmly in the hands of the Tea Party GOP. The vote margins might be thin, but their grip on power is decidedly strong.

The next four years are not going to be pretty for progressives in Florida. The enthusiasm behind Andrew Gillum's race has been huge, especially among the traditionally underserved communities across the state. Can that energy form the basis for an ongoing progressive movement in Florida? Can Beto's almost victory in Texas do the same there? These are two superb and charismatic campaigners. How might their personal appeal translate to support for a progressive movement writ large? Is it dependent upon a savior figure? Or will scores of first-time political enthusiasts now sink back into their non-participatory torpor, proven right once again that political engagement just isn't worth the candle?

It's a tough call. The Trump base craves a movement that feeds its sense of resentment, and in that they are more than served by the current regime. Their prevailing desire is to somehow "stick it to the libs", even if that means undermining their own interests. The progressive base craves policy change, an often dull and incremental process that is far less emotionally satisfying than laser-focused rage.

But not even I can miss the bright spots. The fact that Gillum and O'Rourke came as close as they did in traditional hotbeds of reactionary and racist attitudes is indeed a sign of hope. The slim reed of Stacy Abrams's campaign in Georgia, still alive as of this writing, is another enormously encouraging sign of a populace (perhaps) awakening from complacency.

Victories and activism by dozens of progressive women, people of color, and LBGTQ figures were essential to the Democrats taking control of the U.S. House and a big handful of governor's races. We are rid of such perennially toxic figures as Scott Walker and Dana Rohrbacher. (Alas, Tennessee has delivered upon us the latest version of Michele Bachmann in the guise of Senator Blackburn, yet another in a tragically long line of "godly" Stepford candidates who reliably view the world through an "I got mine" lens.)

The brightest spot? A Democratic majority in Congress poses a legitimate barrier to Trump's rampaging authoritarianism and violation of law. A number of superbly qualified Democrats will take up the gavel across the House committees, bodies that will be empowered to investigate and subpoena the Trump administration in ways that quisling toadies like Devin Nunes and Jim "Gym" Jordan would never allow. This is a huge improvement over the current condition, no question.

Nancy Pelosi will once again be Speaker of the House. I have little patience with the 'dump Pelosi' faction among the Dems. She has been the most effective legislative leader over the past 30-40 years. Granted, I also have little patience with some of her statements, such as this one in the hours after last night's results became known.

> *"We will have accountability and strive for bipartisanship. We must try. We have a bipartisan marketplace of ideas that makes our democracy strong. We have all had enough with division."*

Well excuse me and all, but, fuck, no. There is no hope for bipartisanship in this political moment. The GOP leadership has made that clear since Obama nominated Merrick Garland for the Supreme Court. I can only hope that Pelosi is playing the formal game here and that she has no intention of looking for points of compromise in the coming fight.

And make no mistake. This is the fight of our political lives. Two years of Trump, and the GOP's slavish submission to his toddler whims, have degraded our civic society to a low level not seen in 160 years. The sick irony is that it is fueled by the same questions of power and racial animus that powered the drive to secession.

What would civil war look like in America today? There is no neat geographic division between North and South to demarcate who would remove themselves from the larger whole, to delineate where hostilities might be generally contained. Civil war would be more a Beirut or Belfast model, bitter foes living next door to one another with the norm looking like recent spasms of violence in Kentucky or Pittsburgh or Charleston, or even the recent yoga studio shooting here in Tallahassee.

We may have already arrived. Did Fort Sumter happen and we just didn't notice?

For now, the civil war is asymmetric, one side predominant in the hostilities. There remains a hope that our fabled democratic norms and institutions will offer a path away from complete social disintegration. It is my hope, and the reason I will continue to pursue – and even believe in – the imperfect ideal of creating an enlightened self-governing republic. I admit that I find the prospect bleak.

And yet, we persist. To do otherwise is even bleaker.

Funkentelechy in the Panhandle

Hey kids. Only 5 months since the last post. Mea culpa.

I been busy with many things, not the least of them being a novel that is currently at around 50,000 words and may in fact be an unprecedented work of confounding genius. Or maybe a load of shite. YMMV

Also, too, I got to spend a long afternoon with the one true Dr. Funkenstein, George Clinton, for a feature article in ‘s Arts and Culture issue.<fn>On newsstands now!</fn> Don’t believe me? Ha! I got evidence.

Funk Feast (Photo: Mark Wallheiser)

That steak was big as your face.

As you might imagine, several hours in the Mothership orbit is pretty heady business. The man can tell stories.

I submitted my first draft, full of piss and vinegar and with dreams of Pulitzer dancing in my head. Three days later, an email arrived from the Editor to the effect that my article was “wildly creative” and “very conceptual.”

This is the editorial equivalent of “Bless your heart.”

So I rewrote. And in the end, I think the turned out great, especially after the editor asked for more detail about George’s kind of fiercely incredible wife, Carlon. All’s well &c.

Tonight, I was part of a Flamingo Magazine panel at our most excellent local bookstore, Midtown Reader. I was asked to read something. So I went back and re-read my first draft and found some things I still really like about it. So for my reading, I

read the parts that were “wildly creative” and so forth. And I promised the crowd (SRO, packed to the rafters, riots on par with Sacre du Printemps) that I would post the full first draft here.

Compare and contrast the warty version with the published piece (which, I must say, looks better in print, due in large part to the fine photography of Mark Wallheiser). Bonus points for your exegesis of the transformative effects of the writer/editor grapplings.

Funkentelechy & the Trickster Principle

By Rob Rushin

Every culture across (inter)planetary time and space recognizes The Trickster. This mischievous demigod roams the world in many guises, joking, provoking – maybe even smoking – mere mortals into confusion and creative discord. Dynamos of misdirection and sleight of hand trickeration, they may appear as different entities simultaneously, your perception/reaction crosswise with your neighbor. Did you find a glide in your step and a dip in your hip, or do you remain utterly devoid of funk? Do you see the Star Child or Sir Nose, or do you only have eyes for Dr. Funkenstein?

Costumes, personae, masks, altered voices: The Trickster’s repertoire of contrivance is deep and wide, wielded to disrupt habitual thinking and lead you to synthesis, amalgamation, and integration. To freedom. To the Mothership.

When the disruptive paradigm shakers of the trans-Atlantic slave trade chained their cargo in the bowels of their Middle Passage transports, they shipped more than saleable human capital. The myths of Africa – especially from the Slave Coast

– came with them. In the 20th Century, the Trickster lineage from Eshu through Br'er Rabbit and Signifyin(g) Monkey found outlet in the bodies of such characters as Little Richard, Sun Ra, Richard Pryor, and, of course, our illuminatorial visitating interlocutor of the moment, George Edward Clinton.

Born July 22, 1941, in Kannapolis, North Carolina, Clinton was raised on the doo wop streets of Plainfield, New Jersey. Variously resident of Philadelphia, Detroit, Toronto, and Los Angeles, the one true Doctor Funkenstein – shape shifting Trickster Supreme – has for 20 years worn the mask of Florida Man. A living bridge across seven decades – from Jersey corner singer to staff writer for the pop music machines of the Brill Building to Godfather of funk and hip hop – he remains among the most influential figures in American popular music. In 1997, the Parliament Funkadelic gang was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In 2014, a replica of the Mothership, central to funkentelechal performance and cosmology, went on display at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, bearing the label "A Gift of Love to the Planet."

Clinton, age 77, remains a vital force, his imprint on rock, funk, soul, hip hop, and certain gauzy corners of jazz as extensive as any musician of his time. Aside from being the most sampled musician on the planet – hip hop and its variants are literally unimaginable without Clinton's influence – the P Funk mélange spawned a cosmology that more or less established the recognizable tenets of Afrofuturism and a philosophical ethos that boils down to a bold declaration of psycho-physical liberation: "Free your mind, and your ass will follow."

Last Spring, Clinton announced a global farewell tour ahead of a 2019 retirement. Then he set the internet on fire with the surprise release of *Medicaid Fraud Dogg*, the first Parliament album in 38 years. He might be retiring, but the old Atomic Dog can still bark. And bite.

There’s nothing that the proper attitude won’t render…funkable

Do you promise the funk, the whole funk,
and nothin’ but the funk?

How the founding father of *One Nation Under a Groove* came to live under the oak trees in a remote and superficially unfunky outpost in the Florida Panhandle is a rags-to-riches-to-rags-to-redemption tale. Clinton tells all in his 2014 memoir, *Brothas Be, Yo Like George, Ain’t That Funkin’ Kinda Hard On You?*, a raucous fable of grittier detail than we can manage in a family-style magazine. Suffice to say that customary depredations of devious management, drug use, and a somewhat devil-may-care lifestyle had left George with limited options when he arrived for a 1996 date at The Moon in Tallahassee.

“It was a mess, but I’m not gonna boo hoo about it because nobody wants to hear that shit.”

Clinton set up shop in Tallahassee in 1997, finally settling five years ago on an 8-acre countryside spread a few miles from his private recording studio.

“I used to think I had to be up and out, all the time,” Clinton mused beneath his personal oak tree canopy. “But when I got here, I realized I could just sit down and be. I used to stay up til dawn. Now I like to go to bed at 8 o’clock and get up at dawn to listen to the birds singing.”

Clinton has countless children and grandchildren, many of them hard at work in the P-Funk empire – some playing and singing, some running media relations and office functions, some keeping a steady stream of treats coming off the grill. The situation clearly suits him.

In 2014, he dropped the first Funkadelic album in 33 years, the 33-song *first ya gotta SHAKE THE GATE.* This year brought

Medicaid Fraud Dogg, a 23-song epic about the disastrous state of health care in an over-prescribed society. This fall, Clinton promises another couple dozen tracks under the P Funk All-Stars banner, tentatively titled *One Nation Under Sedation*. All this while taking a planetary victory lap. The well has not run dry.

Tallahassee also gives Clinton access to talent from the local universities. Florida State University ethnomusicology Professor Michael Bakan got to know Clinton after featuring him as guest artist at FSU's annual Rainbow Concert showcasing the school's world music program. That collaboration – peaking with a wild version of "Atomic Dog" arranged for Gamelan ensemble – led to Bakan cutting tracks for *Fraud Dogg*. It was a session to remember.

"It seemed like he wasn't really paying attention, so I figured I'll just try some things out. It was like he's looking off in space, or doesn't seem like he knows I'm doing anything, and suddenly he says, '*That*.' So I started again and he says, 'No, no, no. Wait. Now. Now stop. Now keep going. Stop.' As the day unfolded, I realized that essentially when you're in the studio with George, you're his hands. He's not a percussionist so he doesn't have the chops, but he knows exactly what he wants. Once he hears the sound, it's like he immediately has an entire roadmap of where that sound is going to be."

Bakan laughs and says, "I've worked with John Cage, and the strange thing is that you would think there couldn't be two more different kinds of musical artists than John Cage and George Clinton. But that's the closest I've ever experienced."

Along with the local talent, Clinton holds long-term P Funk family close, guys like bassist Lige Curry and Dewayne "Blackbyrd" McKnight – a genuine guitar hero in the mold of predecessor legends Eddie Hazel and Michael Hampton – who keep the original Mothership Connection alive and vital. Drummer

Benzel Cowan, son of original and current P Funk trumpeter Bennie Cowan, was dandled on the knee of Bootsy Collins as an infant; the man was born to funk. People who come into George's orbit tend to stay there.

Case in point: As we wandered the property surveying the garden and dozens of birdhouses, George pointed at the house.

"See that apartment there? Overton lives there. He's still living with us."

Overton Loyd created the comic book insert for the *Funkentelechy vs. the Placebo Syndrome* album. It depicts the epic battle between Sir Nose D'Voidoffunk and Starchild. (If you find an original copy for sale, you can't afford it.) He also designed the cover for the *Motor Booty Affair* album, the *Atomic Dog* video, and the artwork for *Fraud Dogg*.

"P Funk is a family thing," Clinton says, not for the first or last time during our afternoon together.

Clinton's recent collaborations with Sly Stone and his ongoing association with ex-James Brown horn players Maceo Parker, Fred Wesley, and Pee Wee Ellis connect current P Funk to its deeper historic roots. Common wisdom holds that James Brown, Sly Stone, and George Clinton deserve credit as the creators of modern funk. Too simple to be the whole story, sure. But also: inarguably true.

Combine all this history with grandchildren keeping George attuned to a new generation's eyes and ears and you have a recipe for authentic multigenerational *funkentelechy*, a concept derivative of Aristotle's *entelechy* that means, roughly, the ongoing actualization of the true funk.

Then there is Camp Clinton's secret weapon, George's wife Carlon, a savvy administrator, promoter, and self-taught legal eagle who hovers above the overall organization. She also manages the endless requests for interviews and favors that

stalk Clinton like Atomic Dog chasing the cat.

Today, that dog was me. All for you, dear reader. All for you.

"…I'm still hard as steel."

Friends, inquisitive friends
Are asking what's come over me

The opening lines from The Parliaments first hit, 1968's "(I Wanna) Testify", about a man transformed by love, resonate in George Clinton, c. 2018. For all the wild stage antics and ferocious mountains of sound he has delivered, the man we visited is at peace with himself and his legacy, surrounded by family and proudly unburdened by any medication beyond doctor-prescribed marijuana. Even as Clinton prepares to leave touring to the younger P Funk generation – "I am setting it up for the kids to take it over." – he still plans to work the studio "hard as steel. Started hard as steel and I'm still hard as steel."

And still sharp as a razor. He is a mesmerizing storyteller with an astonishing recall of detail, though with the Trickster one never knows where the line between factoration and trickeration falls. For example: shortly after "Testify" hit the charts, it became clear that the music world – hell, the whole damned world – was changing. George knew he needed to change with it. But how?

"I'm just thinking about this today. I went and saw *Fantasia* and *2001* on the same show. 1968. You know, you're talking about Disney's animated visual concepts showing primordial ooze with classical music, and then you got *2001*, Arthur C Clarke you know, past the primordial and out the other end into that star baby."

So that's where Star Child comes from?

"I got a whole bunch of stuff too, you know, I must have just

got loaded with all the information to whatever was going on through that period of time."

Clinton has always been a cultural omnivore. Our conversation covered Smokey Robinson, Hendrix, Iron Butterfly, *Blade Runner* and *Chariot of the Gods*, King Crimson, Zappa, and the Art Ensemble of Chicago, who he calls "the P Funk of jazz."

Even Kanye West. Asked whether Kanye might be turning into Sir Nose, Clinton laughs, a beautiful deep chortle up from the belly.

"That's the best way to say it. Sir Nose, yeah. His nose is definitely kind of growing. He gonna have to watch his nose, gonna have to check his nose out."

We talked about Clinton's fellow astral traveler Sun Ra, legendary leader of the Solar Myth Arkestra. When they met in the 80s, Clinton realized they were basically up to the same thing.

"They were doing what we do – the costumes, the space travel – just doing it in jazz. It's beautiful."

Reminded of their shared background in doo wop, Clinton demonstrates the encyclopedic mind that informs his musical imagination.

"Yeah, he was in Chicago then. Those harmonies he was after were deep, that five-part shit. Nobody was doing that kind of thing except maybe Smokey. We were all singing unisons and octaves, nothing like that."

Younger Clintons keep him hip to new trends and talent, leading him to collaborations with the likes of Scarface, Thundercat, and recently-minted Pulitzer winner Kendrick Lamar.

"I was telling Kendrick jazz was going to be the next thing in hip hop, not knowing that his record was all in that. I don't

know if he already had it like that, but there's lots of jazz in his ammo. I use a lot of that flavor on this *Medicaid Fraud Dogg*."

"You know that kind of music gives it an elevation. It's still hip hop, still storytelling, but he actually had some arrangement. You can't just call it making beats, you know, just making a beat on the computer. That shit had to be written. Somebody went to school for a lot of that stuff he's putting down. You didn't get that from no Casio."

Other talent on his radar includes Cardi B, Flying Lotus, and Childish Gambino.

"Gambino, he's really got it. Lots of information, and clever. That video? Man, that's some shit!"

It was time for a photo shoot. Carlon live-streamed the proceedings on Periscope, so you can verify: Clinton styling a stunning, gold sequin ensemble while singing along with Sinatra.

That's the beginning, just one of the clues
You've had your first lesson, in learnin' the blues.

Funky Ba Da Bing, sweetheart.

Dropping Beats, Dropping Knowledge

Music is designed to free your funky mind
We have come to help you cope

Clinton agrees he fits the Trickster mold, but insists he does not really think about it all that much.

"See, I got so much history, so many things I know, that I just go ahead and do it. I'm responding to things around me, things that are happening. That's why *Medicaid Fraud Dogg* gets to what it's about. It's the thing happening now."

Thus does Florida Man concoct *Medicaid Fraud Dogg* with no consideration of the fact that our sitting governor was CEO of a company dinged for the largest Medicare fraud penalty in history. Informed that Spotify was running ads for the governor's U.S. Senate campaign during the *Fraud Dogg* stream, he rumbled that deep laugh while denying any funkentelechal trickeration.

"Ain't that some shit? Somebody having some fun."

A happy accident? Maybe so, but hearing "I'm Rick Scott, and I approve this message" hard on the heels of "Medicated Creep" or "I'm Gon Make U Sick O'me" will never be anything but comedy gold.

I'm gon make u sick
I'm gon make u sick o'me
Then I'm gonna give you the antidote
Somethin' to make ya feel better

For all the humor, Clinton is dead serious about the themes behind the new album. Looking at addiction through the lens of someone who has been there, he compares Big Pharma to street dealers.

"Drugs are really more dangerous now. I quit, but I can still see all the people my age walking around, you know, that same dazed look like it was street drugs. And most of them got prescriptions. Now it's legal. So the pharmaceutical companies, same as though it was still street drugs, they get people hooked on stuff, but now they got a legal way of doing it with prescriptions and stuff, people don't have a chance. If you stop taking them, you're in trouble. So they get a captive audience and they can advertise that shit on the radio and TV and internet. They give you the cure for the pill they gave you for something else and that happens three or four times before you realize you taking meds for other meds."

No need to read the label warning

Just take two of me

"I'm glad when I got out of it I still had enough energy and inspiration to write all this. That was my energy for fighting harder again, along with my life, you know, family and everything. It was fun just building up the energy to get going again."

It's George doing what he has done for 60 years: absorbing the culture around him and refracting it through his unique sensibility.

Is There Life After Funk?

Once upon a time called Now
Somebody say, "Is there funk after death?"

The indisputable creative peak for Parliament Funkadelic remains their string of 70s masterpieces, but the new music coming out of Camp Clinton is lighting up a new, international generation of listeners. Just as important, the organization is healthier than ever. With extended family handling both creative and administrative duties, this framework can keep funking after George is gone, much like the Ellington, Basie, and Sun Ra organizations have kept those torches burning. If we – and they – are lucky, our kid's grandkids will be shouting "Make my funk the P Funk" while fourth- and fifth-generation Clintons navigate the Mothership.

Then again: King Lear had only three daughters, and we know how that turned out. Over 60 years, George Clinton emerged as Keeper of the Funk and one of the most recognizable front men in pop music. So what about succession? Who will fill the Dr. Funkenstein shoes?

"They all know they're doing it as a group and the group has been set up to function as a *group*. They'll find the focal point. They can figure out how they want to keep it going

forward because the group is the group. Long as they don't get it twisted and think it is them individually, don't let those trivial things that usually get in the way of groups…some of those excuses be good as hell, but you ain't really thinking about the big picture."

Clinton passes the baton with a clear mandate to keep eyes on the prize: Maintain the funk, the whole funk, and nothing but the funk. It's an awesome task with and immense payoff.

"Ain't nothing better than when that music is coming together on stage. There is comradery you developed, whether you know it or not. Despite the bullshit, that tightness you got supersedes everything."

But what will George do when he hangs up his road shoes?

"Man, I'ma go fishing, like every day. And I'm gonna write another book. I'm thinking about calling it *Stupid Shit I Did On Drugs*. I'll get all my friends to tell me about all the stupid stuff we did and collect it all in a book."

He laughs again, that same up-from-the-roots-of-his-soul laugh we have been digging all afternoon. He might be serious. Maybe. With this Trickster, you never know until the funk comes down.

Fantasy is reality in the world today
I'll keep hanging in there
That's the only way

De mortuis nil nisi bonum Does Not Rhyme With Rich

I posted this on the Twitter machine last night and took a little bit of grief for it. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* goes the ancient admonition – Of the dead, speak nothing but good – and it was suggested that my comment was disrespectful and in poor taste.

On the other hand, I also got a ton of likes and retweets, with several commenters taking things farther and offering some truly savage comments about the late Mrs. Bush.<fn>Though none as toxic as the that offered by the odious Roger Stone. You'll have to search for it if you're interested.He gets no link from this bloggy vineyard.</fn> <fn>I also received numerous requests to define the word *encomia*, the plural of *encomium,* with one wag suggesting that I must keep a Word of the Day calendar on my desk. Peccant whereas criminated.</fn>

Respectfully, both reactions miss the point. I come neither to praise or bury Barbara Bush. In many ways, her passing is but a blip in the larger landscape of our rippling human drama. To her family and friends, certainly, this is a sad moment, a time for reflection and remembrance and mutual support. They deserve the space and respect to handle this however they see fit *within their own circle.*

But the lionization of Barbara Bush, a woman who is, at best, a footnote in history, does nobody any good. All the misty-

eyed reminiscences have thoroughly ignored the complexity of this flesh and blood creature. It doesn't take much googling to discover that Barbara Bush was prone to say things that were, if not downright nasty and cruel, at the very least oblivious and callous towards real human suffering.

Her thoughts after her wastrel son launched an unnecessary and illegal war in Iraq:

> *But why should we hear about body bags, and deaths, and how many, what day it's going to happen, and how many this and what do you suppose? Or, I mean, it's, it's not relevant. So why should I waste my beautiful mind on something like that?*

And here, in the wake of Dubya's incompetent response to Katrina:

> *What I'm hearing, which is sort of scary, is they all want to stay in Texas. Everyone is so overwhelmed by the hospitality. And so many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this is working very well for them.*

Oh, those lucky poors. They never had it so good.

Again, not to pick on Babs: we are all of us, at times, oblivious and cruel, some of us more than others, some of us more intentionally than inadvertent. On this score we are all certainly guilty to one extent or another.

But our society's penchant for painting rosy pictures of the dead is part and parcel of our unwillingness to face squarely the prevailing assumptions and privileges that are hurtling our nation headlong into third world debasement. Nobody wants to point out the Snicker bar floating in the swimming pool might not actually be a piece of candy. Nobody wants to be thought callous or unkind at someone's passing.

But we are a nation asleep, and telling comforting bedtime stories about a person, living or dead, does nothing to rouse our dulled sense of engagement. At my passing, I hope to be remembered fondly for things I have done that are worthy of endearment. I also hope that I can count on my closest friends to speak some hard truths about what went along with that. The story only partially told does the listener – and the storyteller – a grave disservice. I have some exceptional warts that are well worth the telling.

A few weeks back, writing about the JC Superstar production, I noted that depictions of the Christ as a flawed, deeply human character "do more to imbue the myth with the kind of layered meanings that encourage considered reflection and exploration than do the Sunday school bromides of my youth." I admit that the Barbara Bush story has some elements to it that are pretty admirable, amazing even. But presenting her as just this side of saintly only sets up the inevitable tension between discovering the heel of clay or turning ourselves inside out to maintain illusion. The first encourages cynicism; the latter, dishonesty. Both are corrosive.

The full Didion quote I reference in the tweet is "We tell ourselves stories in order to live." It's the opening line in her legendary essay *The White Album*. It is one of my favorite lines in all of literature: When I feel like not writing, I think of that quote. It emphasizes our need to craft a narrative, to strive to make sense of our world and ourselves. It is – like the first line in this blog's manifesto – a continual source of inspiration and strength for me. But it's worth noting that as *The White Album* essay unfolds we discover that Didion is exploring whether the utility we find in telling ourselves stories may be more to do with our ability to fool ourselves about what is really going on.

The Didion of *The White Album* is in serious psychic distress about a society that was every bit as fractious and self-destructive as is our current civis. In the final sentence,

she laments that “writing has not yet helped me to see what it means”. Perhaps as 40 years have passed, as she has grappled with telling herself (and us) these stories, grappled with – and wherever possible, resisted – the temptation to sugar coat the harder truths, she has glimpsed more accurately “what it means”. I like to think so, but that may be just another comforting bedtime tale. Only she knows for sure.

Didion’s is an exemplary path, a hard path. Her striving to understand “what it means” is a beacon for me. At the same time, I would be a fool to ignore the aspects of Didion that are less than admirable.<fn>I’ve got my own little list. You make your own.</fn> Ignoring the blemishes of our heroes – and ignoring the positive attributes of our nemeses – constitutes an error certain to keep my own “what it means” epiphany well out of reach. That epiphany is a destination that, for both the individual and the collective, is ill served by putting a false face on whom/whatever we choose as the subject of our stories.

So enough with the fairy tales about Barbara Bush. She was by all accounts a tough cookie. She can stand the harsh light of decent honesty.