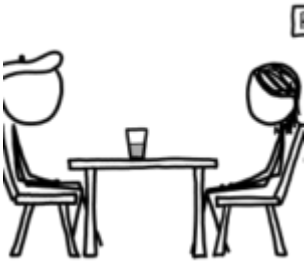
A Half Glass



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.

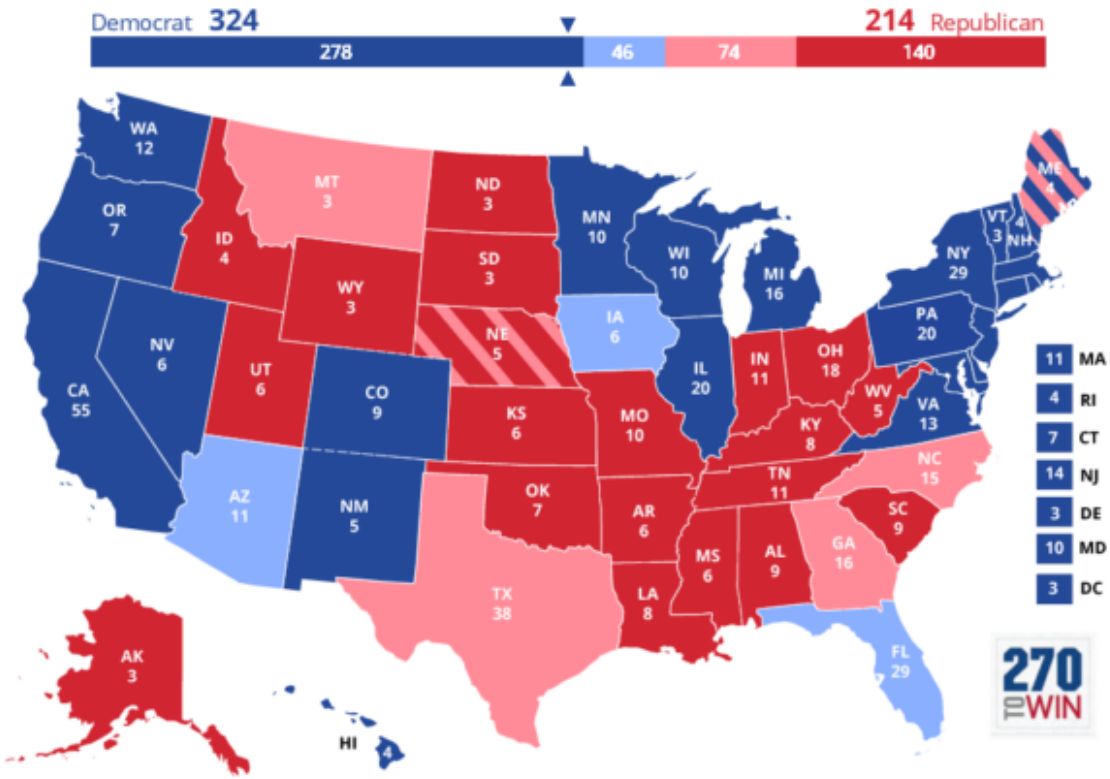
Just as with the almost-but-not-quite Beto O’Rourke in Texas, Gillum is now a bona fide progressive star. He is young and he is no quitter. If some miracle rolls along, he will make a fine governor, and even after two terms would still be only 48 years old, plenty of time for a run at the national stage.

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.

Morning in America



Like so many of my friends and allies these days, I wake up every morning with one thought at the front of my mind:

> *What fresh hell will Trump bring today?*

Maybe it will be careless antagonism of one of our long-standing international allies.

We have always been at war with Australia! Bad hombres!

Maybe it will be careless antagonism of one of our long-standing international rivals. What could possibly go wrong with putting Iran “on notice”? Or warning China to steer clear of the South China Sea? Especially when the Pentagon itself had no advance warning that such red lines would appear.

Maybe we will wake up to the news that the new Supreme Court nominee was in fact the founder of the “Fascism Forever Club” at his “elite Georgetown prep school”.<fn>Remember how the Trump voters were all up in arms about those dalgurned elites from Washington ruining the country? Yeah, me either.</fn> Here’s a fellow who can be counted on to give the god botherers dominion over those pesky lady parts and the ladies who think they belong to them. Strict construction!

<fn>To give you an idea of how OCD Your Narrator can be about these things, when the new nominee was announced I immediately

wondered if he might be related to Reagan-era EPA director and noted Bircher nutjob Anne Gorsuch. He is, in fact, her son, a man nurtured from birth to become an avenging scourge of ladyparts, clean water, and consumer protection. Here's to draining the swamp!</fn>

What other fresh hell? The Muslim ban has generated an astonishing amount of spontaneous street protest. The in-fighting at the White House, and all the leaking that goes along with that – plus the preposterous quibble that it isn't really a ban – is almost comic in scope and content; the knives are out and being sharpened, and if we can avoid getting into WWIII, we will soon be treated to some truly Shakespearean defenestration and ritual disembowelment in the Trump inner circle. Knowing Trump, it will likely be a prime time special event, brought to you by Geico with special guests Amarosa and Scott Baio.

Maybe we will wake up to Trump making a mockery of a sham of the National Prayer Breakfast<fn>Which, truth be told, should be ridiculed into extinction.</fn> with a Trump v Terminator dick measuring, followed by this nearly perfect remark about the Senate Chaplain<fn>Another idea that should be mocked into extinction ffs, but I digress.</fn>:

> *"I don't know, chaplain, whether or not that's an appointed position. Is that an appointed position? I don't even know if you're Democrat or if you're Republican, but I'm appointing you for another year. The hell with it."*

The normally delicate fee fees of the Christianist cult failed to ruffle over this. Of course they did not; Trump promised to get rid of those pesky church-state restrictions that prohibits politicking from the pulpit. He could have said "fuck it" to the chaplain and gotten a pass.

Watching the press secretary slowly lose his mind on a daily basis is another source of pretty swell entertainment. It's

more fun than watching a penis-compensator shoot himself in the foot.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypi9D921yvs

I love this way more than I should.

There are some truly comic elements at play in all this, but it is hard to muster much more than a mordant giggle. Take the tone-deafness of Trump ~~wank fantasy~~ daughter Ivanka posing while the airport protests were at their peak. It would be funny…



$5000 to Look Like a Baked Potato?

..but frankly, I thought this girl wore it better.



I wish this were funny.

I wish this were actually funny. It is not. Darkly comic, yes, and mordant chuckling at (some of) it is damn near necessary to deal with the darkness. But it’s hollow fucking laughter at best.

The pace and severity of the coming fuckery are going to have serious negative consequences for years to come. Consider: if Gorsuch is confirmed, he will still be fucking the world up for my kids for years after I’m dead and buried. Consider: a crack in the Keystone pipeline will foul the Ogallala Aquifer for generations. Consider: people will die needlessly because of cruel decisions on immigration and health care. There’s no reversing that kind of thing.

So what to do? Well, face it: the left has zero power right now beyond the ability to obstruct and raise hell. Senate rules have already been tossed overboard for the sake of expediting the fuckery.<fn>Like Trump, the rest of the ruling GOP sees any agreement or contract (or treaty!) as something to be torn up when it becomes an inconvenience. Why any party would trust this Nation under the current government is a

mystery.</fn> They have the power and they are going to do what they want. Because fuck you.

There are still actions we can – and really must – take if we want to turn this around. I visited the office of our local congresscritter on Monday with a group of fierce women. We have a face-to-face scheduled with the congressman later this month only because we refused to leave until we got a commitment for a meeting. I suspect he will be unmoved by anything we have to say. But we're going to make him listen. Unless he chickens out in the end and cancels the meeting. Any bets?

Tomorrow, I will be visiting the office of The Emptiest Suit in Florida Politics, the diminutive and cowardly Marco Rubio. I doubt we will ever manage a face to face with this little chicken shit, but we can at least make him run and hide.



We marched. We will march again. We have been calling Reps and

Senators daily. We do what we can. But it ain't much.

I suspect that we aren't going to see much more than a few dreaded "moral" victories at least until the mid-term elections. Maybe those tiny steps will add up to something resembling counter-momentum by then. But I feel confident that these tiny gestures can accumulate, that the nearly unprecedented taking-to-the-streets we have seen in these first two weeks<fn>Seriously…only two fucking weeks. It's like time is standing still.</fn> is harbinger of real, sustained resistance.

We are entering a dark a gloomy time. There is no shortcut through the forest. We keep going, one step at a time.

There has to be a clearing out there somewhere.

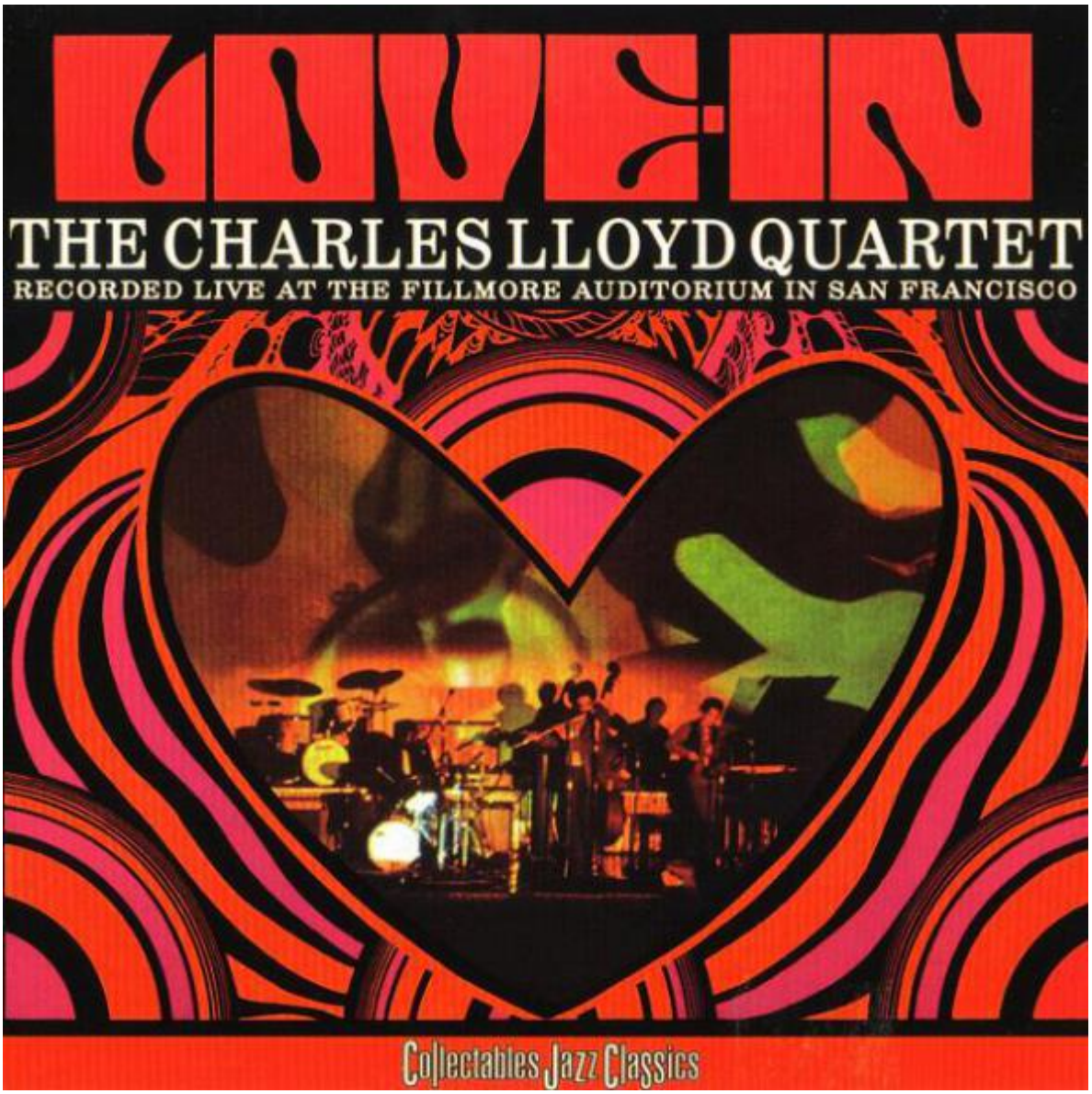
My Favorite World #38



After an outpouring of reader demand, The Writer is back with My Favorite World, a (purportedly) once-weekly feature that highlights some things that make this my favorite world. I had stopped posting MFW after week 37 because it seemed to be not so popular. However, the application of true cash money attached to a request to resume is more than I can deny.

So here: a piece of Terrible Beauty to herald the arrival of Trump.

Charles Lloyd has been on the scene since the 50s. It would be ridiculous to list everybody he's worked with because it's pretty much everybody who counts. His first group as a leader gave big breaks to Keith Jarrett, Jack DeJohnette, and Cecil McBee.<fn>If any of those names is unfamiliar, get to work!</fn> The Quartet was the first jazz group to play the Fillmore, appearing alongside Hendrix, Cream, the Dead, Joplin, Airplane, &c. For many a tripped out hippie, it was the first jazz they ever heard.



What else? One of the first million-selling albums in jazz

history. Toured everywhere, including the Far East and the Soviet bloc nations. Lloyd, born in Memphis with heritage derived from African, Cherokee, Mongolian, and Irish ancestors, was one of the first "world music" explorers. He was, as the kids have it, the shit.

He has a new group – Charles Lloyd and the Marvels – featuring steel guitarist Greg Leisz, drummer Eric Harland, bassist Reuben Rogers, and some kid named Bill Frisell on guitar. He has a new album on Blue Note, *I Long to See You.* It is purely beautiful.

Lloyd has never shied from political expression, so on Inauguration Day<fn>Black Friday</fn>, he released to YouTube a version of Dylan's "Masters of War" by the Marvels with guest vocalist Lucinda Williams. The song is 50+ years old and has never felt dated.

He released this statement with the piece:

> *Nations have been throwing rocks at each other for 1000s of years. We go through spells of light and darkness. In my lifetime I have witnessed periods of peace, protest, and uprising, only to be repeated by peace, protest and more uprising. The fact that Bob Dylan's "Masters of War" was written in the early 1960s and not during the last decade, makes it timeless and timely. It breaks my heart to think that there are current generations of young people all over the world who are growing up without knowing of Peace in their lives. The words Dylan wrote are a laser beam on humanity. This line, in particular, has stuck with me for over 5 decades:*
>
> *"Let me ask you one question*
> *Is your money that good*
> *Will it buy you forgiveness*
> *Do you think that it could*
> *I think you will find*

When your death takes its toll
All the money you made
Will never buy back your soul”

The world is a dog’s curly tail – no matter how many times we straighten it out, it keeps curling back. As artists we aspire to console, uplift and inspire. To unite us through sound across boundaries and borders and dissolve lines of demarcation that separate. The beautiful thing is that as human beings, even under the most adverse conditions, we are capable of kindness, compassion and love. Vision and hope. All life is one. Who knows, maybe one day we’ll succeed. We go forward.

Lucinda. I do love me some Lucinda Williams. When that woman goes for rasp she can sing the chrome off a trailer hitch. Her delivery here is terrifying and borderline ugly, ugly in that beautiful way that calls up and confronts the horror and fear many of us are feeling in these rickety times. It’s a clarion, a beckoning. Hear it.

Now, go plunk down your filthy dollars and buy a copy of this. You won’t be sorry.



Hell, it’s even got Willie Nelson on one track, Norah Jones on another. Whaddya waiting for?

My Favorite World.

This is What Democracy Looks Like



Friday, January 20, 2017, Inauguration Day, was one of the hardest days of my life. I felt, at turns, crushing despair and overwhelming nausea, mingled with a steady stream of red-hot rage at the people who brought us to this sorry pass.

Many friends refused to watch. I would not have missed it for the world.

A long-habituated politics nerd, I watched the proceedings, as I have for every transfer of power since Nixon rode his helicopter into the sunset.<fn>I also watched LBJ take the oath, but missed the incoming Nixon event. </fn> Every time, I have been amazed that this kind of thing happens, that an outgoing President can welcome his successor with grace, courtesy, and dignity, and walk away – voluntarily – to leave the office in the hands of someone eagerly prepared to undo as much of the standing legacy as possible.<fn>The transfer from Reagan to Bush an obvious exception to this dynamic.</fn> Not because it is written into law – it’s not – but because it has

become a symbolic dramatization of the kind of Republic this nation strives to become.

This is what democracy looks like.

Another reason to watch: this could be the last time it ever happens this way.

Try to imagine President Asterisk gracefully welcoming his successor. Go on, I can wait.

Trump and his crowd – and that includes pretty much the entire GOP at this point – has shown themselves more than happy to discard any of the established norms of governance that they find inconvenient. Conflict of interest, naked cronyism, and – very likely – collusion with a foreign government to influence the election outcome<fn>A neat trick invented by Nixon, enhanced by Reagan, and perfected by this gang.</fn>, all of these decisions to violate established norms are a clear declaration: They will not be bound by anything other than a desire to impose their will.

The stonewalling of Merrick Garland, the steamrolling of Tillerson, DeVos, &c. – these are the tactics of a gang that has been given the power to do whatever it wants. And you can bet they are going to use it to the hilt.

This is not what democracy looks like.

But it’s what we got.

For now.

Because as despair-inducing as Friday was, the next day was all bright-sunshine, despite the all-day rain and tornado watches. On Friday, we despaired. On Saturday, we marched, motherfuckers.

I’m a cynic about marches, street protest. Oh, I show up sometimes, and usually end up feeling embarrassed by the

miasma of impotence that attends most such events. My standard experience: a pitifully small cluster of people waving unreadable signs, desperate to gin up enthusiasm by mandating choreographed theatrics and indecipherable slogans.

And despite the occasional horn toots of support, I generally felt like people were laughing at our pathetic gestures. Because if it was the other side doing it, I would be laughing at them, too.

So the day of the Women's March upon us, I was all set to stay home and bury myself in books and music. But Herself was determined to go, hoped I'd join her, gently suggested it would be a good thing to do. I've been to too many of these things, found myself in a bedraggled cluster of a couple dozen earnest people, and gone home more hopeless than I had been before. And the forecast called for terrific thunderstorms all day. I pictured myself standing like a drowned rat with a couple of anarchists in Guy Fawkes masks. I demurred, opposed, argued.

I went. And man, am I glad I did.

We arrived about two hours ahead of the march. There were around a hundred people there, already way past my expectations. Alrighty then.

We ducked into Proof for a fortifying pint. It was nearly empty when we arrived.



The intrepid team

Twenty minutes later, it looked like this.



The pudding is in the Proof

And when we walked outside, we found this.



This is what it looks like

And this.



Let it rain down justice

And it rained. And people chanted, often unintelligibly, but with real fervor. We were not alone.

Beyond a certain size, it’s hard to tell from inside a crowd just how big it is. But when we reached the top of the hill and looked back, our scientific calculations gave us a precise answer:

Fucking huge.



Twitter let us know that it was happening pretty much everywhere. All around the globe, from Australia to Kenya (!) to Paris and London and Dublin. A protest organized on a ship in Antarctica.

And there was New York and Boston, Chicago, LA. Washington, DC.

Smaller towns, too, like Helena, Montana (population 30,000), which turned out 10,000 people. Tiny Mentone, Alabama (!), pop. 360, turned out 50 people.



Mentone, AL. The Bitter South. Hell yes.

And when it was all said and done, lil ole Tallahassee, Florida, population 190,000 or so…how'd we do?

Official estimate: 14,000-plus.

Hot damn. This is what democracy looks like.



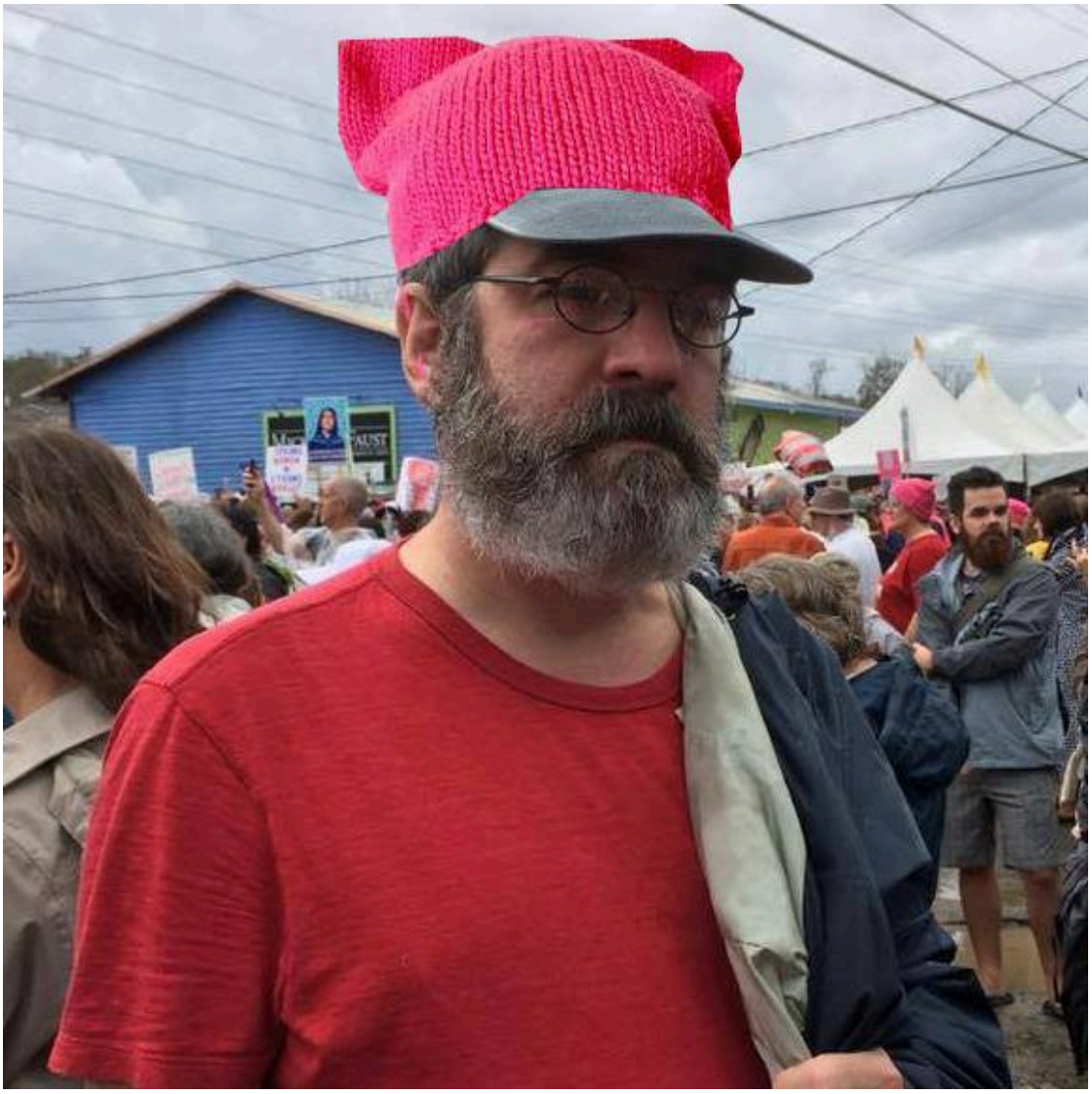
Real America

And it was a rainbow, a real picture of Real America. None of this rural white bubble that voted for Trump, but the Real America, people who stand for all their neighbors, who stand for people who may not look like them. People who stand for equality.

So the day after the end of the world, we find ourselves once again becoming acquainted with hope.

Make no mistake: all the levers of power are arrayed against us. But we are on the right side of history, and the more we keep standing up, organizing, and resisting in ways that effectively push back at the flood of bullshit headed our way, the better our chance of stemming the tide.

Don’t give up. Fight. It’s the Way of the Pussy.



Old Goat as Pussy Warrior