BY THE BOOK

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GO FOR TWO, WHEN THE GAME IS ON THE LINE.

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**OUR 1658TH ISSUE 12.03.20**

Frank Murtaugh is managing editor of *Memphis* magazine, but he’s also been the primary sports columnist for the *Flyer* since 2001 or so. He writes a lot about University of Memphis sports and he does a terrific job. And it hasn’t always been easy. Frank’s seen some mighty lean years, especially in football, including the woeful Coach Larry Porter era.

Each week during the season, Frank writes a column called “Three Thoughts on Tiger Football” Back in the Porter days, I used to tweet about Frank’s “Three Thoughts” column by saying “Frank Murtaugh thinks about Tiger football so you don’t have to.”

I write all this by way of saying we owe a similar debt to sggate.com writer Bryan C. Parker, who did us all a solid by signing up for parler.com — so we don’t have to.

Parker, as you probably know by now, is a social media platform aimed at “conservatives” who are disenchanted with Facebook and Twitter. Here’s what Parker wrote: “Beneath the thin guise of the app’s self-proclaimed emphasis on ‘free speech’ lies the ability to say not just a hypothetical ‘anything,’ but specifically to share racist slurs and violent threats toward political opponents. On Parler, Nazi imagery flourishes, death threats abound, and conspiracy theories reign.”

To sign up for Parler, you must provide a phone number and email address. The platform claims it will not “sell” your information, but it will doubtless be used for something. Parker is funded largely by the Robert Mercer family, which has made millions on data mining. The app also has ties to Cambridge Analytica, which provided extensive voter micro-data to the 2016 Trump campaign.

Once you’re in, Parker reports, you are given a suggested follow list of right-leaning media and political figures: Sean Hannity, Ted Cruz, Dinesh D’Souza, Ann Coulter, Devin Nunes, etc. Beyond that, you’re on your own. You can post, follow people, start conversation threads, the usual social media protocol.

It quickly becomes apparent, writes Parker, that hardly anybody on Parler thinks Joe Biden won the election. Profane diatribes, wild election conspiracy theories, QAnon revelations, and racial and homophobic slurs abound.

Free speech in the United States has famously been ruled not to extend to the right to yell “FIRE” in a crowded theater. Does it extend to the right to call for executions of political enemies, to promote anti-Semitism and racism, to proudly post the Nazi swastika? On Parler, yes, it does. This is the free speech that Parker says is being suppressed and banned on Twitter and Facebook.

Parker is the newest addition to the right-wing media silo. Fox is on the decline with the true Trump/white supremacist/racist/AnuyrKareen tribe. OANN, NewsMax, the Right Scoop, and others are the primary “news” sources cited on Parler. If you haven’t checked out OANN, let me just say, it makes Fox News look like NPR.

I remember when the FCC had a “fairness doctrine” that required TV and radio stations holding broadcast licenses to devote some of their programming to controversial issues of public importance and to allow the airing of opposing views on those issues. This meant that programs on politics were required to include opposing opinions on the topic under discussion. The rule also mandated that broadcasters alert anyone subject to this meant that programs on politics were required to include opposing opinions on the topic under discussion. The rule also mandated that broadcasters alert anyone subject to the viewpoint they were promoting of the opposing viewpoint. On Parler, Nazi imagery flourishes, death threats abound, and conspiracy theories reign.

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Giving equal time to both sides seems like such a quaint concept now. You don’t need a license from the federal government to start a website, and so here we are, with an online world where anything goes: from cute kittens to porn to racism to the most depraved corners of the human psyche, where the entire longitude and latitude of humanity can find a home — and validation for just about anything.

What to do? Few of us, liberal or conservative, want the federal government to regulate online content. Imagine what Trump could have done with such a power! But surely there are ways we can monitor and clamp down on violent threats, terrorism, and human depravity. Violent words can lead to violent deeds, as we’ve so often discovered.

*Bruce VanWyngarden*

BruceV@memphisflyer.com
Memphis Flyer December 3-9, 2020

THE fly-by Questions, Answers + Attitude
Edited by Toby Sells

ME M e r n e t

NEVER KNOW

Nextdoor user Cindy Brandon wrote last week, “Never know what you’ll see in Binghampton. There was a wedding today. I guess, at Blessed Sacrament church in Binghampton and we live across the street. They had horses and a mariachi band. I absolutely love Midtown Memphis."

FEUD REMEMBERED

The Historic Memphis Facebook group brought back some jokes from the ’70s-era Germantown/Midtown feud.

John O’Bryan posted, “Do you know why Germantown housewives never host orgies? Too many thank you notes to write.”

Tim Gibson wrote, ”Memphis will never fall in the river because Germantown sucks.”

TWEET OF THE WEEK
@tamiawyer: “Pro Tip: Instead of bottle service, you can buy Veuve at @joewines & sparklers online and it’ll come out cheaper and without COVID-19.”

YOU’RE A MEAN ONE

Dennis Ostrow called out a real-life Grinch with a security-cam photo on Nextdoor last week after the guy stole Ostrow’s Christmas lights.

COVID-19, Golf, & iPhones

Pandemic hits parent-researchers, an Overton Park upgrade, and an Apple deal.

WEEKLY VIRUS COUNTS
The fall surge of new virus cases continued last week as the seven-day rolling average peaked higher at above 450. This Monday, total cases surpassed 48,000 and total deaths here rose to 659. As of Monday morning, 3,448 people were known to have the virus in Shelby County.

Monday: new - 407, total - 45,575, total deaths - 635
Tuesday: new - 377, total - 45,952, total deaths - 637
Wednesday: new - 258, total - 46,210, total deaths - 645
Thursday: new - 120, total - 46,330, total deaths - 652
Friday: new - 366, total - 46,696, total deaths - 659
Saturday: new - 519, total - 47,215, total deaths - 659
Sunday: new - 607, total - 47,822, total deaths - 659

COVID-19 STRESSES SOME FACULTY
University professors and researchers in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine fields with very young children reported fewer hours worked under pandemic stay-at-home orders than other peers. This is according to a University of Tennessee Health Science Center (UTHSC) study published last week.

This has implications for tenure and promotion, said study lead Becca Krukowski, associate professor at UTHSC, and may have lasting effects on academic careers. It may also further increase gender inequities as women perform most of a young child’s caregiving, she said.

COHEN AND WILD HORSES
U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen (D-Memphis) urged the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to continue to protect the country’s wild horses last week.

Rather than rounding up and penning the animals, Cohen wants the BLM to use $11 million for “humane, reversible fertility control for tens of thousands of wild horses and burros.” The money is already in the 2021 House Appropriations Bill to pay for doses of the porcine zona pellucida immuno-contraceptive vaccine.

OVERTON PARK GOLF COURSE
The Overton Park golf course and Abe Goodman Golf Clubhouse are teed up for renovations with a $500,000 donation announced last week by the Overton Park Conservancy (OPC).

The funding came from Amy and Bill Rhodes and would reimagine the nine-hole course. The renovation would keep the course affordable and welcome to junior, senior, and beginner golfers. OPC is now working on a design with King-Collins Golf Course Design, whose flagship project is the award-winning Sweetens Cove Golf Club outside Chattanooga.

Renovations could begin this month, pending approval from city officials. The project is expected to cost $2 million, the majority of which will be provided by private donors. It would be the first significant improvement to the course in 114 years.

THROTTL ED IPHONES
Tennessee will get more than $2 million in a settlement with Apple Inc. for a 2016 decision to throttle consumers’ iPhone speeds.

Tennessee Attorney General Herbert Slatery said battery issues with the phones back then were leading to unexpected shutdowns. Rather than disclose the issues, an iPhone update reduced the phones’ performance to stop the shutdowns, concealing the issue from consumers. To deal with the complications, many consumers bought new phones.

“Apple customers were left with only one option, the most expensive one,” said Slatery.

Tennessee joined more than 30 other states in the settlement worth $113 million.

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There are a whole lot of ways to get to and from work in Memphis; you just have to find the one that fits you best. That is the thinking behind Commute Options Memphis (COM), a nonprofit that works to lower the number of commuters by car in the city.

The nonprofit recently launched its Commute Coaching Program (CCP), which aims to show the benefits of commuting via public transit or bicycling. The CCP is a stand-in for the usual community commuting challenge that the group runs in the spring and fall but chose not to due to COVID.

‘‘[The program] is our response to trying to find a way for us to engage with our followers and people who watch our information in lieu of the community challenges we would normally do,’’ said Sylvia Crum, COM’s program manager. ‘‘We were looking for a way we could reach out in a socially distant and safe way and provide resources to people who are still working from home but might be looking to learn a new skill.’’

Though ‘‘commute’’ is in the name, the group promises to help members plan routes to wherever need be. Commute Options also offers coaches through their Commute Coaching Program whose sole jobs are to help members plan out efficient and safe routes. Coaches then go over the route virtually with members and provide an opportunity for them to accompany riders through the route on their first time.

“We really feel like this is such a great opportunity of a time for when people could practice,” Crum said. “Even if it’s just a ride in the neighbor-
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The question of partisanship draws some post-election attention. The run-up to the statewide election of 2010 may have been, in retrospect, the first time the seismic shift in Tennessee from Democratic to Republican dominance became obvious.

Then-Governor Phil Bredesen, a Democrat, had served for the maximum two terms and was about to vacate the office. The Democratic field that year was full of worthies, as you would expect with an open seat. So was the Republican field.

There had been ample harbingers of the shift to come. In 2007, the venerable John Wilder, a nominal Democrat, had lost his speakership in the state Senate to the GOP’s Ron Ramsey, and a year later, the Republicans had captured a one-vote majority in the House.

The changeover accelerated during the 2010 governor’s race, as the Democratic candidates, noticing a diminishing lack of enthusiasm for their cause, began dropping out one by one. Memphian Jim Kyle, then-leader of the state Senate Democrats and now a Shelby County Chancellor, commented at the time, “I kept looking for Yellow Dog [committed] Democrats, and kept finding Yellow Dog Republicans.”

The race came down to three Republicans in the end — Ramsey, Knoxville Mayor Bill Haslam, and Chattanooga Congressman Zach Wamp.

Haslam, regarded as the more moderate of the three, won, and Wamp, who waged a credible race as an Everyman-styled conservative, finished second. The Chattanoogans’ subsequent political history is, by the standards of Tennessee politics, somewhat unusual. Still regarding himself as a conservative and a Republican, he has been at pains to present himself as a “post-partisan truth-teller.”

Which means that Wamp and his son Weston, who has made efforts to establish a political career of his own, have regarded themselves as free to publicly criticize Donald J. Trump.

Wamp has of late been actively tweeting in favor of acceptance of the presidential election results — an act surely unique enough among Republicans to merit special mention.

A recent Wamp tweet, rebutting the no-surrender Trumpians: “What? Com-
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by Mike Doughty

I Die Each Time I Hear the Sound

A Memoir

Musical restraint is a virtue. Mike Doughty, in his new memoir, I Die Each Time I Hear the Sound, eschews the urge to wax lyrical and instead offers a far more candid and revealing account of his life in music. Doughty, a singer-songwriter and former member of R.E.M., has long been known for his laid-back style and off-the-cuff charm. But in this new book, he reveals a side of himself that has been largely hidden from public view.

Doughty begins his story in the early 1990s, when he was still a member of R.E.M. He recounts the heady days of touring and recording, as well as the challenges of living a life in the public eye. He also shares his struggles with addiction and depression, and the toll that these issues took on his music and personal relationships.

But it is the book's final chapter that is the most moving. Here, Doughty reflects on his decision to leave R.E.M. and pursue a solo career. He describes the sense of liberation that this brought, as well as the sense of loss that accompanied it.

Throughout the book, Doughty demonstrates a rare humility and self-awareness. He is unafraid to admit his faults and shortcomings, and to acknowledge the mistakes he has made. This makes for a strikingly honest and engaging read, one that will resonate with anyone who has ever felt lost or adrift.

Overall, I Die Each Time I Hear the Sound is a remarkable memoir, one that offers a deeper understanding of both Mike Doughty and the world of music. It is a book that should not be missed.
Ami grows up at Heavenly Shepherd, a survival compound run by her grandmother, Solomon Miles. The America she knows has drifted into a post-apocalyptic collection of small communities after a virus rendered most of the population infertile. Any woman who does have the ability to bear children is quickly gobbled up by government “C-PAF” agents. That fear prompted Ami’s mother to flee when she was a child, leaving her daughter to fend for herself in Solomon’s controlling environment. And her granddaughter, the worst kind of bigoted evangelical, sees Ami as nothing more than a vessel to continue on the Miles lineage. When he invites a man to the compound to impregnate Ami, all bets are off. Her aunt provides her with directions to her mom’s last known location and sends Ami on her way with supplies. While Ami Miles might have the YA label, Alley doesn’t treat her readers with kid gloves. A post-apocalyptic America doesn’t mean societal issues have gone away, and Ami tackles racism, homophobia, and plenty of other prevalent social issues for the first time after escaping Heavenly Shepherd. And it’s not all smooth sailing for the good-natured protagonist: Alley expertly weaves in a constant thread of deprogramming along Ami’s journey. Having basically grown up in a cult, it’s hard for Ami to jettison the thoughts and “values” that have been pounded into her since day one. Even as she learns more about the world, even as she makes new friends, and even as another young woman catches her eye, her grandfather’s directive to find a man and make a baby sits uncomfortably in the back of her mind.

The Ballad of Ami Miles is an ode to many things: self-growth, finding new experiences, welcoming in ideas that aren’t your own. Every step of her journey, Ami is up for the tough challenges that lay in her path. Reading from 2020’s perspective, where so many are insulated in their thought bubbles by algorithms, social media, and the like, Ami Miles is the perfect tonic. With a brave face, there’s always room for growth and new experiences.

I’m not sure I’m the target demographic for The Ballad of Ami Miles, but Alley’s electric pacing kept me hooked until the last page: ultimately, I blazed through in just two sittings. Through Ami, Alley never puts a foot wrong while crafting her narrative. Hard to believe this is a debut.

— Samuel X. Cacci

The Ballad of Ami Miles

Jill Fredenburg

New Degree Press, $16.99

by Jill Fredenburg

With the craziness and hopelessness some have felt in the last four years, it can be easy to forget how far we have come as a country in terms of social issues. In just

continued on page 12
Reflecting on this can be astounding.

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And: “He took the knife and expertly

larger movement surrounding LGBTQ+ identity,” Fredenburg writes in her introduction. “What I discovered has made me excited for the next wave of LGBTQ+ rights.”

Fredenburg’s book LGBTQ+ Revolution 2.0 is not an easy read, but it’s a needed one. She speaks for the silent other who is often ignored and left out of the conversation, showing the good and the bad, then inviting others into the conversation. Her work is important reading for everyone, and she ends her book with a reminder that I think all people can live and learn by: “Who will you be, who and how will you love, without shame?” — Matthew J. Harris

"I started writing this book with the hope that the process would help me understand how experiences like Cassandra’s and my own fit into the larger movement surrounding LGBTQ+ identity,” Fredenburg writes in her introduction. “What I discovered has made me excited for the next wave of LGBTQ+ rights.”

Memphis Flyer
CONTINUATION

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Memphis Flyer
December 3-9, 2020

Continued from page 11

50 years, we have gone from segregating people based on the color of their skin to allowing true freedom of marriage. Reflecting on this can be astounding.

And: “He took the knife and expertly sliced him at the level of the jugular vein. The man screamed and struggled to get away, but with one sweep of his hand D.K. stabbed his cricoid, his voice box, so he’d be silent.”

If those passages appeal to you, then it must be just what the doctor ordered.

— Jon W. Sparks

Memphis Mayhem
by David A. Less
ECW Press, $16.95

If the title Memphis Mayhem sounds like it could be describing either a crime wave or a chip-on-the-shoulder attitude or an era of public turbulence, the new book by Memphis music historian David Less concerns all of those things, but mainly it is history and memoir of the various strains of music that have percolated out of Memphis and defined the river city in its seminal relationship with the outer world.

As the author himself, a writer and archivist and third-generation Memphian, describes his work, “It is a story of a city and a culture and fosters independent thinking in the midst of a strict, conservative society. There is a spirit of self reliance in Memphis. It is born of the poverty and oppression shared by Blacks and whites here, who have nothing to lose and everything to gain.”

Parts of Less’ narrative are familiar from other sources, but Less does not content himself with a roster of luminaries and a catalogue of styles.
Cassandra’s and my own fit into the stronger than ever knowledge that the LGBTQ movement is also finds hope and strength in the triumph. But in that work Fredenburg times of struggle there are also stories of and intense. For all the sad stories and their lives, and the effect is immediate wrote about. Other times I felt hopeless injustices faced by those that Fredenburg LGBTQ+ community. Over 21 chapters, to-day lives of those who are in the different spots of the LGBTQ+ spectrum, experiences and stories from people on years. The book, which is structured that we have made as a country in recent 2.0 Reflecting on this can be astounding. to allowing true freedom of marriage.

50 years, we have gone from segregating LGBTQ+ Revolution — Matthew J. Harris support. personal tragedy), a suitably wicked anesthesiologist who decided she’d get into the world of writing medical thrillers. a needed one. She speaks for the silent is not an easy read, but it’s

Almost in the manner of a jig-saw puzzle, the pieces ultimately fit together — Yellow Fever, the band rivalry between two Black high schools, Manassas and Booker T. Washington, and the dispersing into the world of the innovative results; the laboratory of Black and white music sources that was Sam Phillips’ Sun Studio; and the serendipity of a second commercial-music wave stemming as much from the self-seeking curiosity of white Messick High students like Steve Cropper and Donald “Duck” Dunn as anything else.

Less explains why it is that Memphis music tends to be “behind the beat,” and he notes the importance of landmarks — like West Memphis’ Plantation Inn, where white Memphis high-schoolers learned their musical ABCs from innovative Black performers, and the Lorraine Motel, important as a honing place for white and Black musicians before it became a site of infamy and a shrine to the great MLK.

It’s all here — the jazz masters of the Crump-ordered “clean-up” period, Daddy-O Dewey, Ardent Studios, Chips Moman, Willie Mitchell, Al Green. And all of it pegged to the hard-boiled but generous local populations that lived in ever-treacherous and sometimes ominous times. (It is surely no accident, by the way, that much of the narrative of Less’ book derives from interviews with veterans of the Memphis music wars now living in the plusher confines of Nashville, which has a kind of finishing-school or retirement-home relationship to the dangerous but lively city on the Mississippi.) — Jackson Baker

His treatment of Memphis’ early blues masters, for example, is against a backdrop of the gambling, desperate chance-taking, and crazy optimism that characterized Beale Street and its antecedent neighborhoods. He tells his tale in an episodic style that at first seems somewhat disjointed but is more accurately revealed to be the mosaic that it is.

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The Memphis defense can win a game. You have to go back a quarter-century — October 28, 1995 — to find a game the Tigers won without scoring more than 10 points as they did last Saturday at Navy. In Rip Scherer’s first season as coach at the U of M, the Tigers edged Tulsa, 10-7, at the Liberty Bowl. The win improved that team to only 3-5, though, and it would not win another game that year.

The 2020 Tigers are not Rip Scherer’s defense. Even after shutting down Navy, Memphis ranks 106th in the country (out of 127 teams), allowing 457 yards per game. But last weekend in Annapolis, that defense rose when it had to, in particular sophomore safety Quindell Johnson. The New Orleans native delivered a fumble-causing hit behind the Navy line of scrimmage on fourth down to end one second-quarter drive with the game tied at 7. Then, on the next Midshipman drive, Johnson stepped in front of a Tyger Goslin pass for an interception with Navy already in field-goal range. Rare is the defensive playmaker in modern college football. But Johnson, Morris Joseph (two tackles for loss), and Sanchez Blake (forced a Navy fumble) made key plays last weekend to earn Memphis a third straight victory.

“It isn’t easy coming to Navy’s home field and beating them,” said Johnson after the win. “We all had fun, flying around, just playing together, communicating. We lead as a defense when we play like that.”

• Seven is a lucky number … and well earned. Should the Tigers beat Tulane this weekend, it will mark seven straight seasons with at least seven wins for the Memphis program. It would extend an already unprecedented stretch, as the longest streak of seven-win seasons before the current one was four years (from 1960 to ’63 and 1973 to ’76). Better yet, two more wins would make it seven seasons in a row with eight victories for the Tigers. (If COVID testing allows, the Tigers should play three more games, including a bowl contest.) The University of Memphis has a history with more valleys than peaks, but we are witnessing a golden era, one that now stretches across three head-coaching administrations. Fans tend to get lost either in the past or with what’s to come (recruiting is everything, remember). If you wear blue and gray in these parts, you’d do well to pause, raise a glass, and salute the now of Memphis Tiger football.

• Ten thousand is a big number … also well earned. With 88 passing yards at Tulane, Brady White will become only the second Memphis quarterback to top 10,000 yards for his career. (Danny Wimprine’s record is 10,215.) White’s 2,602 yards this season are eighth in the country and his 24 touchdown passes this year are tied for fourth. The superlatives will keep coming for a few more weeks for the Ph.D. candidate, now with a record 26 wins to his credit as Tiger quarterback. It will be interesting to see how NFL scouts view White’s credentials. His two predecessors — Paxton Lynch and Riley Ferguson — also put up big numbers, but fell short of signal-calling duty on Sundays, even with Lynch having been drafted (by Denver) in the first round. White is blessed with physical tools, but not the size or arm strength of most men you see winning Super Bowls. He’s also skilled between the ears and, simply put, knows how to win. Here’s hoping he gets the chance to compete for an NFL job in 2021. He won’t be intimidated by the challenge.

Quindell Johnson and the Memphis defense held firm.

Let ’Er Rip!

Three thoughts on Memphis Tiger football.
The Broom Closet

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Jewelry ◊ Incense ◊ Books
Tarot Readings ◊ Workshops
Gifts and More!

1636 Union Ave • Memphis, TN
OPEN DAILY 901-276-6321

Our Children’s Area is Unplugged!

Thank you to our friends and fans.

Our Children’s Area is Unplugged!

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A Holiday Cab  By Julie Ray

Sit down with a cabernet for the cabaret.

Until last week, Hattiloo Theatre’s production of A Holiday Cabaret was only open to patrons and Season 14 and 15 subscribers, presented as a series of six limited-seating shows. The unfortunate consequences of our COVID predicament changed things a bit.

A post from the Hattiloo Theatre Facebook page broke the news: “We planned to perform this musical before a few live patrons over six performances, but because of the increasing number of COVID-19 cases and fatalities, we have canceled all live shows. Still, we are excited to gather virtually and celebrate the season with this perfect blend of holiday music, jokes, and stories.”

The unique Black repertory theater has generously opened this show — for free — to the public. Show some love for the talented performance artists and venue by purchasing a season subscription for when things open back up again. Subscriptions start at only $105.

The production, written by Ekundayo Bandele, founder and CEO of Hattiloo Theatre, is a gathering of four friends for the holidays. The friends will sing traditional carols, tell stories, and share the merriment of the season in a family-friendly atmosphere.

What better way to bring joy to Memphis than celebrating with friends during A Holiday Cabaret.

“A HOLIDAY CABARET, “ ONLINE FROM HATTILOO.ORG, FRIDAY, DEC. 4, 7 P.M., FREE.

The Pie Folks’ mincemeat pie is a holiday treat.
Food, p. 24

Senator Lamar Alexander (above), people remember the last thing you do.
The Last Word, p. 31

VARIOUS DAYS & TIMES  December 3rd - 9th

Community Read and Author Talk: Myia Goldberg
Online from jccmemphis.org, Thursday, Dec. 3, 7 p.m., free with registration
Author reads and discusses Feast Your Eyes via Zoom. The book traces the path of a fictional mid-20th-century photographer, Lillian Preston.

Virtual Resident Artist Talk
Online from crosstownarts.org, Thursday, Dec. 3, 6 p.m., free
Featuring presenting artists Laura Ann Samuelson and Maeve Brophy. RSVP by email to attend, residency@crosstownarts.org.

Tunes & Trivia
memphislibraryfoundation.org,
Friday, Dec. 4, 6-7:30 p.m., $20
Know trivia, earn prizes. Benefiting Memphis Public Library Foundation.

A Christmas Carol: Charles Dickens’ Dramatic Premier Reading in Boston
Tennessee Shakespeare Company, 7950 Trinity, tennessee.org, Friday, Dec. 4, 8 p.m., and Sunday, Dec. 6, 3 p.m., $15-$25
It is December 2, 1867. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and other notables await the arrival of Charles Dickens and his inaugural United States reading of his ghost story.

Peter Pan
Desoto Family Theatre, 4560 Venture, Southaven, MS, opens Friday, Dec. 4, 7 p.m., and continues Wednesday-Sunday through Dec. 17, $20
Broadway’s timeless classic musical whiskes you away to a place where dreams are born and no one ever grows up.

Boxlot Holiday Market
Boxlot, 607 Monroe, Friday, Dec. 4, 3-8 p.m., and Saturday, Dec. 5, 1-3 p.m., free-$5
Enjoy virtual shopping on Friday and shop in person on Saturday for $5. Receive $5 Boxlot Bucks when you arrive to go toward a purchase.
Comic Relief
By Julie Ray

More than babies are born after a few beers at the P&H Cafe. Sometimes two drunk guys mutually consent to the birth of a comic book store.

“I worked at the P&H Cafe for six or seven years,” says Jaime Wright, co-owner of 901 Comics. “Shannon and I conceived 901 Comics on a few bar napkins over more than a few beers.”

Wright’s business partner Shannon Merritt also owns 901 Games with his wife Erin. According to Wright, Merritt opened a lot of doors for him, including a job working with Stan Lee. The P&H Cafe is a very important part of their lives. When they heard the news, they had to help.

The P&H GoFundMe page states, “Due to some inconvenient and unforeseen circumstances, the P&H Cafe is unfortunately having to move to a different location.”

The new location is thus far undisclosed; rumor has it that the Crosstown area might be the lucky location to welcome the beloved dive bar. Wherever it moves, it’s going to cost a lot of money. In addition to the GoFundMe, a benefit is planned for this Saturday. Twenty percent of all 901 Comics sales will be donated to the cause. Enter to win a Stan Lee signed comic book, participate in auctions, and enjoy live music at the Cooper-Young Gazebo featuring Switchblade Kid. This is a socially distanced benefit. Cosplay attire is encouraged.

Wear your superhero mask.

A BENEFIT FOR THE P&H CAFE, 901 COMICS, 2162 YOUNG, SATURDAY, DEC. 5, NOON-6 P.M., FREE.

Common people — (left to right) Haley Bennett, Gabriel Basso, and Amy Adams star in Hillbilly Elegy. Film, p. 26
The cover of Crew Vibez, the fresh album that Chinese Connection Dub Embassy drops this Friday, has a portrait of brothers Joseph and David Higgins in shades of red, gold, and green — rather appropriate, given that they are Memphis’ premiere purveyors of reggae. But among the faint letters in the background, nestled among words like “irie” and “truth,” is the name Omar. As their fans know, that’s their eldest brother, who founded the band with them (along with the hardcore punk band Negro Terror) and passed away unexpectedly in April of last year. The fact that the brothers carried on with the project is a testament to the entire family’s love of music. “My dad was a drummer; my mother was a saxophone player,” David tells me. “And our mother was West Indian as well. We came from New York to Mississippi and Memphis. We were more about the Jamaican reggae and skinhead culture. Working class, for the people, by the people.” And some tracks on the new album reflect this directly, such as politically charged songs like “Dem A Callin’ (Flodgin’)” and “Warzone.”

But this is an album full of surprises, and the biggest may be the group’s embrace of other styles beyond the classic reggae they’ve purveyed in the past. As Joseph says, “It's a compilation of different kinds of reggae, from dancehall to straight-up roots. Some feel-good tunes. We’re even tapping into a little bit of Memphis hip-hop with some of our friends. We still pay respect to reggae as a whole, but we wanna give a Memphis vibe to it. I think this project will really open peoples’ minds.”

And while the group typically opens minds with their unique brand of consciousness-raising roots music à la Peter Tosh, this new work aims to open hearts as well. As Joseph says, “It's a compilation of different kinds of reggae, from dancehall to straight-up roots. Some feel-good tunes. We’re even tapping into a little bit of Memphis hip-hop with some of our friends. We still pay respect to reggae as a whole, but we wanna give a Memphis vibe to it. I think this project will really open peoples’ minds.”

As executive producer Ryan Peel notes, the two surviving brothers are “reinventing Chinese Connection Dub Embassy; Joseph and Dave know what I do. I'm a pop producer more than anything. Usually that lands in the realm of rap and R&B. They wanted a newer element in the sound, but also someone who understood the history and the different rhythmic choices for each of those sub-genres. So that’s how we moved into it being dancehall heavy.”

Peel has known the Higgins brothers for years, and has often drummed for them in the classic roots reggae style they perfected. But this time around, he was programming beats, not playing them. “I wanted it to sound like a hip-hop record, but with the music itself being dancehall and reggae,” he says. Indeed, the album features several local rappers and R&B singers as guests. “Tia Songbird Henderson is on one track. ‘Warzone’ has the rappers SvmDvde and Hannya Chao$, who's really guttural and primal. And Harley Quinn, R.I.C.O. Tha Akronym, Webbsstar, and Sebastian Carson are also featured.”

While David has always been the guitarist of the group, this album doesn’t feature much of that. “One song, ‘Never Gonna Break Your Heart,’ starts out with flamenco guitar,” says Peel. “And he smashed it in one take! But I don’t think David was necessarily thinking of himself as a guitarist on this record. I think he was thinking, ‘I'm a lead vocalist now.’ I was like, ‘Damn, dude! Where have you been? You should have been out here! Omar should have let you sing more!’”

For most of the songs, Peel says, “Joseph would write the chords and a basic drum part, then I’d soup it up.” Once the beats were sequenced, Joseph, a keyboardist, would flesh out the arrangements, starting with the bass. “He’s the sub-bass king! He killed it. It’s almost like Joseph said, ‘All right, what would Omar do? Let me pull out my synth-bass version of Omar on this.’” As a drummer who played with Omar for years, I feel that in my heart. It feels right. For people who knew CCDE with Omar, this isn’t going to be too alien to them.”

Chinese Connection Dub Embassy embraces dancehall and hip-hop.
WE’VE GOT THE CURE.

Being cooped up inside can cause a real case of cabin fever and the 2020 Blues, so load up the family or friends and head this way for a dose of the good kind of blues.

You can start at the B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center—where social distancing is easy—and understand the tough road B.B. King traveled before becoming one of the most beloved musicians of all time. Ranked by Trip Advisor in the Top Ten Percent of all listed properties, the museum features films and exhibits that weave a fascinating story of an icon and his birthplace. Make sure to also stop at nearby Mississippi Blues Trail markers that further explain the important music heritage of the area.

Go ahead and crank up some B.B. tunes to get primed for this perfect day trip of enjoying fabulous meals from unique restaurants as well as shopping for locally produced gourmet food items. We can almost guarantee that the real blues will be the prescription you need.

400 Second Street • bbkingmuseum.org

We are following adapted tourism practices to promote responsible Travel / Best Practices from the CDC on COVID-19 for the Tourism Industry. #visitmsresponsibly
CALENDAR of EVENTS: December 3 - 9

THEATER
Hatillo Theatre

God’s Trombone, enjoy the original production of inspirational sermons by African-American preachers reimagined as poetry, reverberating with the musicality and splendid eloquence of spirituals. Free. Ongoing.

Iola’s Southern Fields, enjoy an online past performance drawn from the writings of Ida B. Wells. Free. Ongoing.

A Holiday Cabaret, celebrate the season with a perfect blend of music, jokes, and stories to get you in the mood for the holidays. Virtual presentation of the performance. Sundays, 2 p.m., and Fridays, Saturdays, 7 p.m. Through Dec. 13.

Kudzu Playhouse Virtual, join Kudzu social media for donation-based classes, games, scholarship opportunities, and more. Download the app for more fun theater activities and information. Ongoing.

Playhouse on the Square
The Orpheum
Orpheum Virtual Engagement, join Orpheum staff, artists, and students for activities, interviews, and more on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Visit website for more information. Ongoing. 203 S. Main (925-3006).

Landers Center
Peter Pan, a timeless Broadway classic musical that whisks you away to a place where dreams are born and no one ever grows up. $20. Fridays, 7 p.m., Saturdays, Sundays, 2 & 7 p.m., and Wednesdays, Thursdays, 7 p.m. Through Dec. 17. 4560 Venture, Southaven, MS (662-280-9120).

The Nutcracker at Memphis Botanic Garden, Sunday, December 6th, 3:30 & 4:30 p.m.

The Orpheum Online on Stage, a Theatre Memphis Facebook group that serves as a clearinghouse for performers wanting to share their talents. Featuring storyline, readings, or performance art. Ongoing.


Tennessee Shakespeare Company

Theatre Memphis

Send the date, time, place, cost, info, phone number, a brief description, and photos – two weeks in advance – to calendar@memphisflyer.com or P.O. Box 1738, Memphis, TN 38101.

DUE TO SPACE LIMITATIONS, ONGOING WEEKLY EVENTS WILL APPEAR IN THE FLYER’S ONLINE CALENDAR ONLY.

OTHER ART HAPPENINGS

Holiday Artist Market

Letteressence: The Fundamentals of Broad-Edge Calligraphy
Video workshop with local graphic designer and calligrapher Beth Mitchell. Register online. Supply kits delivered locally. $55 members, $56 non-members. Sat., Dec. 5, 1 p.m. THE DIXON GALLERY & GARDENS, 4339 Poplar (761-5250). DIXON.ORG.

Make Your Own Holiday Wreath with Joanna Bernardini
Create a custom holiday wreath. All materials included. No experience necessary. $85. Tues., Dec. 8, 6-9 p.m. ARROW CREATIVE, 2535 Broad.

Memphis Flyer Coloring Book
Order your book today benefiting local artists and journalism. $35. Ongoing.

#VisitMSResponsibly
VisitDeSotoCounty.com

Detour in DeSoto

MUSEUM of Science & History
Pink Palace
WWW.MEMPHISMUSEUMS.ORG

Enchanted Forest

HOLIDAY EXHIBIT
November 21 - December 31. Photos with Santa, Holiday Movies & Planetarium Shows.
Memphis Maker
Mondays

Memphis Modern
Market Crafts Fair Pop-Up Shop
Featuring MAC Artists Angi Cooper, Ian Shirley, and Jana Wilson. Fridays, Saturdays, 11:30 a.m.-5 p.m., and Sundays, 12-5 p.m. Through Dec. 27. memphispinkpalacemuseum.org, 2030 Central (636-2382).

Metal Museum Online
Peruse the art and craft of fine metalwork digitally. Featuring past gallery talks from previous exhibitions, interviews with artists, and demonstrations. Free. ongoing. metalmuseum.org, 374 Metal Museum Dr. (774-1523).

Orpheum Mini Golf
Put on nine socially distanced Broadway-themed holes, including Hamilton, The Phantom of the Opera, The Color Purple, Memphis, and more. 10 Sat., Sun., 10:30 a.m.-10:30 p.m. Through Dec. 6. THE ORPHEUM, 203 S. MAIN (525-3000), ORPHEUM-MEMPHIS.COM.

The Peace Project
Pour the art and craft of fine metalwork digitally. Featuring past gallery talks from previous exhibitions, interviews with artists, and demonstrations. Free. ongoing. metalmuseum.org, 374 Metal Museum Dr. (774-1523).

Pincushion District Art on the Patio Artists’ Market
First Sunday of every month, 7 p.m. westy’s 236 N MAIN (543-3278).

Virtual Resident Artist Talk

ONGOING ART

Arrow Creative

Art Museum at the University of Memphis (AMUM)

ArtsMemphis

Buckman Arts Center at St. Mary’s School

Clough-Hanson Gallery


BOOKSIGNINGS
Community Read and Author Talk: Myla Goldberg
Author reads and discusses Front Your Eyes via Zoom. Free with registration. Thurs., Dec. 3, 7 p.m.
MEMPHIS JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER, 6560 POPLAR (761-0810), JCCMEMPHIS.ORG.

LECTURE/SPEAKER
Animal Rights
How can changing what we eat save the planet and end mass suffering? Join Tracey Glover online to find out. Free. Sun., Dec. 6, 2 p.m.
MEMPHIS.EDU.

cityCURRENT Virtual Breakfast
Featuring brand marketing expert Bruce Himelstein via Zoom. Fri., Dec. 4, 9 a.m.
cityCURRENT.ORG.

Hollywood Feed University: Online Puppy Training Course
Basic puppy obedience course. Free. Thurs., Dec. 3, 8-9:30 a.m., 12-1:30 & 5-6:30 p.m.
HOLLYWOOD FEED. 2013 UNION (991-1795), HOLLYWOODFEED.COM.

Turner: 3rd Annual Talk True
Candid dialogue about pivoting companies in a COVID-19 environment and the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in business. Free. Thurs., Dec. 3, 3:30 p.m.
turnerconstruction.com.

EXPOS/SALES
Gifts of Green at the Garden
Seasonal pop-up shop inside the Botanic Gardens newly renovated visitors center. Through Dec. 30, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
MEMPHIS BOTANIC GARDEN, 750 CHERRY (636-4100).

Holiday Artisan Market
LEVITT SM. (928) 928 POPLAR (272-2722), LEVITTLIGHTSMALLSHOP.COM.

Starving Artist Social
MEMPHIS ARTS COMMUNITY, 2010 CONCOURSE. 521-9690.

Virtual Tunes & Trivia
Get to know trivia, earn prizes. Featuring a Memphis music artist, benefiting Memphis Public Library Foundation. $20. Fri., Dec. 4, 6:30-7:30 p.m.
MEMPHISPLF.ORG.

HOLIDAY EVENTS
Arrow Creative Holiday Bazaar
Shop local artists and makers for the holidays. Through Dec. 23.
aRROW.ORG.

Be a Santa to a Senior
Carriage Crossing will be collecting gifts for senior citizens. The tree with ornament wish lists will be in the Wonderland Experience lobby. Shop and return unwrapped gifts to the tree. Through Dec. 12.
CARrosseAGERING.COM.

Boxlot Holiday Market
Virtual shopping on Friday or shop in person on Saturday for $5. Receive $5 Boxlot Bucks when you arrive to go toward a purchase. Free. Fri., Dec. 4, 4-10 p.m. and Sat., Dec. 5, 1-3 p.m.
BOXLOT, 640 MONROE.

The Children’s Ballet Theater Nutcracker
Live holiday performance with a portion of the proceeds benefiting the Botanic Garden. For kids ages 2 and under. Sun., Dec. 6, 3:00 & 3:45 p.m.
MEMPHIS BOTANIC GARDEN, 750 CHERRY (921-0388), MEMPHISBETHEL.COM.

The Children’s Ballet Theater Nutcracker
This fundraiser film of the classical ballet. $35. Tues., Dec. 8, 6:15-8 p.m.
MALCOSUMMER4DRIVE-IN.PW (824-8240), SHOPTHEATRE.COM.

Delight at Concourse
CONCOURSE.ORG.
CALENDAR: DECEMBER 3 - 9

**Enchanted Forest Festival of Trees**
Exhibit benefiting Le Bonheur Children's Hospital. Photos with Santa, pandemic-style, with Santa behind a Plexiglass shield that looks like a snow globe. Wednesdays-Saturdays, 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Through Dec. 31. MEMPHIS PINK PALACE MUSEUM, 3350 CENTRAL (936-2862).

**Folk All Y’all: Holidays-in-the-House Show with Barnaby Bright**
Virtual holiday house concert. $20. Sat., Dec. 5, 7:30 p.m. FOLKALLYALL.COM.

**Virtual Christmas concert & Joy At Home**
Jim Brickman: Comfort music, and hot chocolate. Fri., 7:30 p.m. THE ORPHEUM, 203 S. MAIN $40-$125. Sun., Dec. 6, 6 p.m. benefiting Orpheum Memphis.

**MEMPHIS BOTANIC GARDEN**
Activities at three venues: Snowy Celebration, Tree. Through Dec. 27.

**Santa’s Forest South**
Winter wonderland featuring Santa, entertainment, and vendors. Mondays-Saturdays, 11 a.m.-7 p.m., and Sundays, 1-7 p.m. Through Dec. 24.

**Stop by and grab your favorite treats, a great gift to drop off to a local loved one.**
Thursdays-Saturdays, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., and Sundays, 12-4 p.m. Through Dec. 20. MILLSTONE MARKET & NURSERY, 5993 POPULAR (800-624-7404), BILLIESPECANS.COM

**Zoo Lights**

**FOOD & DRINK EVENTS**
**Billie’s Pecans Holiday Pop-Up Shop**
Stop by and grab your favorite treats, a great gift to drop off to a local loved one. Thursdays-Saturdays, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., and Sundays, 12-4 p.m. Through Dec. 20. MILLSTONE MARKET & NURSERY, 5993 POPULAR (800-624-7404), BILLIESPECANS.COM

**Memphis Readers’ Restaurant Poll**
Vote for your favorite restaurants, chefs, bars, and more. Winners in more than 40 categories will be announced in the February 2021 dining issue. Free. Through Dec. 14. MEMPHISMAGAZINE.COM

**Miracle Christmas Pop-Up Bar**
Seasonally inspired cocktails include the Fruitcake Flip, Bad Santa, and Christmas Carol Barrel served in kitschy glassware. $6-$15. Through Dec. 25. THE LIQUOR STORE, 2655 BROAD, THEBROADLIQUORSTORE.COM

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**WE CARRY**

**WE ARE NOT JUST A SMOKESHOP, WE ARE THE OLDEST & LARGEST GIFT SHOP IN MIDTOWN.**

**WIZARDS**

- **CARDS**
  - Tarot cards
  - Ouija boards
  - Pendulum
  - Sterling silver & turquoise jewelry
  - Unusual posters
  - Fantasy figurines
  - Adult novelties
  - Hookahs & Shisha Colibri, Zippo & Xikar lighters
  - Unique ashtrays & candles
  - Alternative smoking accessories

**ANNUAL DEAD TURKEY SALE**

**NEW MERCHANDISE ARRIVING DAILY!**
Y es, you can get a homemade mincemeat pie locally. And you don’t have to be from the North to like it.

Audrey Anderson makes them at her bakery, The Pie Folks, in Cordova.

But first, here’s why mincemeat is my favorite. In addition to its tantalizing taste, a lot has to do with nostalgia.

My dad was born in Minneapolis, so our Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners didn’t include cornbread dressing, candied yams with marshmallows, and other Southern fare. We had bread dressing or stuffing with raisins and boiled, mashed rutabagas with butter. We had pumpkin pie, but we also had mincemeat pie.

My mom used None Such mincemeat, which still is available, to make her pies, but she added four peeled, cored, and sliced apples to the mixture so she could make two 9-inch pies. I still use None Such, but I’ve tried other ways to get mincemeat pies in and around Memphis.

Chef Josh Steiner surprised me on my birthday one year with a mincemeat pie he made from scratch at his old Strano! restaurant. It was fabulous.

Christine Martin, a friend who is a cashier at Carlisle’s Cash Saver in Holly Springs, gave me a mincemeat pie recipe from her mother-in-law, the late Ollie Martin. In beautiful handwriting were listed 11 (!) ingredients, which included a half pound of chopped suet. I am going to try making that one of these days.

My mom used None Such mincemeat, which still is available, to make her pies, but she added four peeled, cored, and sliced apples to the mixture so she could make two 9-inch pies. I still use None Such, but I’ve tried other ways to get mincemeat pies in and around Memphis.

But, for now, why not order one from The Pie Folks?

Anderson began making mincemeat pies about five or six years ago. “I had not heard of a mincemeat pie until we started getting calls around the holiday time,” she says. “I went online to see what it was and try a few of the recipes and come up with one that was good.”

Then, she says, “The recipe I found online that I made, I tweaked it with different spices to where I could eat it.”

Most people who requested the pie were from “up North,” Anderson says. “It is not common in the South. Most people who buy it are older people. I’ve never had a younger person.” Her mincemeat pie fans are “60 and above.”

To make them, Anderson begins with a younger person. “Her mincemeat pies were five or six years ago. I had not heard of a mincemeat pie until we started getting calls around the holiday time,” she says. “I went online to see what it was and try a few of the recipes and come up with one that was good.”

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To make them, Anderson begins with raisins, but, she says, “You have to let those raisins swell in water. I don’t use straight raisins. I let them kind of swell. It makes them softer.”

A mincemeat pie consists of “a lot of spices,” including cinnamon and nutmeg.

“Hevener, an assistant professor at the College of Pharmacy at UT Health Science Center, says just he and his wife, Dionne, celebrated Thanksgiving. They did a “virtual Thanksgiving this year via TVs and Zoom.”

Hevener’s eaten mincemeat pie “30, 35 years. I’m in my 40s now. I’ve been eating it since I was a little kid.”

And, he says, “I like mincemeat pie. It’s an interesting pie. I like to put a little vanilla ice cream with it and it’s awesome.”

The Pie Folks is at 1028 N. Germantown Parkway in Cordova; (901) 752-5454.
Apple Time

’Tis the season for a cider … or two.

And so it was that Littlebit came down from atop the mountain and said unto me: “Verily, Father, I really haven’t the taste for beer, so I’ll have an apple cider.” Or words to that effect.

Sewanee has wrapped up a very nearly plague-free semester and sent its charges home to take their exams. Judging by some of the Instagram feeds, exactly how they stayed very nearly plague-free is God’s own private mystery, but here we are.

At any rate, that’s how I found myself hoisting a pair of Woodchuck amber ciders with the gal.

No bad apple — Lakeland’s Long Road Cider makes a stiff drink with Pommaux.

In wines and champagne, I tend toward the dry side of things, so Woodchuck amber was a little sweeter than I’m used to, but it’s crisp enough that I don’t mind it. What’s more, apple cider fits the environment, which really is half the battle when you’re stepping out of the usual well-worn habits and trying something different.

It’s fall — sure it’s about to be winter, but it’s going to keep feeling like fall until January. The leaves are still turning is what I’m getting at here, and that always provokes a rash of almost plague-free seasons. Judging by some of the Instagram feeds, exactly how they stayed very nearly plague-free is God’s own private mystery, but here we are.

At any rate, that’s how I found myself hoisting a pair of Woodchuck amber ciders with the gal.

Woodchuck is made in Vermont — and they seem like the sort to be good at this kind of thing. For a more local option, there is the Long Road Cider Company located in Lakeland, also available around town if you don’t want to make the trip. Besides, some of their ciders pack a wallop, so the return trip from out there can get swirly. They also have a 19-proof hard cider called Pommaux that isn’t exactly liquor — but it is great for making an interesting twist on the Wassail-type hot-spiced holiday mug. True, it rarely gets cold enough to require it, but it sure as hell gets damp and clammy enough.

If you want to take a six-pack home, you’re better off with Nashville’s Diskin Daydream Prickly Pear Rosé Cider. At any rate, on a recommendation I tried their Daydream Prickly Pear Rosé Cider. Well, I try my best to be positive here, and for that matter I also try not to be sexist, but … This rosé pear cider seems to be ringing the same bell that wine coolers rang back in the ’90s. The sweetness borders on Jolly Rancher territory, and pears don’t have the crisp bite to counterbalance it. In short, I know what market they’ve targeted, and why said market likes the stuff. But I am not that market.

For the record, Littlebit recommends Bold Rock Cider, which claims both Virginia and North Carolina as home. Alas, you’ve got to head up into the mountains for a pour.
Blame the Victim

Is Hillbilly Elegy the year’s most depressing film?

I, my name’s Chris, and I’m an authentic hillbilly. I grew up on a farm in the Appalachian foothills of Tennessee. I watched Hillbilly Elegy on Netflix so you don’t have to.

The film is based on the book by J. D. Vance, which is subtitled A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis. The book became a bestseller during the run-up to the 2016 election, and became a political touchstone for pundits trying to explain the appeal of He Who Must Not Be Named to the white, rural voters who put the Orange Menace in the White House and the country on what we now know was the road to ruin.

The story begins in Jackson, Kentucky, in 1997, with a tinny voice on the radio declaring: “In an age of prosperity, the American dream seems out of reach.” But here’s the thing: Vance is an Iraq War veteran and graduate of Yale Law School whose Wikipedia entry lists his occupation as “venture capitalist.” He was born into a working-class family, but he’s not exactly someone for whom the American dream was “out of reach.” He succeeded!

Maybe that’s why Hillbilly Elegy seems so vacant and shallow. It wants you to have sympathy for the hard lives of these characters, who are all based on Vance’s real family, but it cannot bear to turn its gaze on the deeper question begged by all the scenes of violence, drugs, and squalor — what has gone wrong here? Why are these people so screwed up?

From the start, the dialogue reveals a tin-eared writer. “Where you goin’?” asks the grizzled old redneck. “Swimming hole,” says teenage J.D. (Owen Asztalos). “Don’t get bit by a cottonmouth!”

The Grapes of Wrath this ain’t. A few minutes later, J.D. is getting bullied by three local boys who hold him under the water until he almost drowns. Now this looks more like the hillbilly life I remember! Turns out, J.D. Vance isn’t even from the mountains of Kentucky — he’s from suburban Middletown, Ohio, and the actual hillbillies hate him. His grandparents moved from Kentucky to get jobs in the Ohio steel mills, which are closed now.

There’s Mamaw (Glenn Close), J.D.’s mom Bev (Amy Adams), and sister Lindsay (Haley Bennett). A nostalgic sense of loss hangs over the family. Two generations ago, they were peasants pursuing opportunity in the big city. Now, they’re the suburban poor with nowhere else to go. Mom did well in school, but got pregnant young and found herself stuck in a cycle of failed relationships, struggling to keep food on the table for her two kids while she’s slowly being eaten away by the opioids she pops for stress. “We were all different in Middletown,” J.D.’s voiceover intones. “Something was missing. Maybe hope.”

And yet, there are no scenes in this two-hour film showing us the good things about rural life. It can be very beautiful, and the rhythms of the farm can be peaceful. Least authentically of all, not once does anyone step foot inside a church.

The plot, such as it is, revolves around grown-up J.D. (Gabriel Basso) trying to juggle career weekend at Yale with his mother’s latest addiction crisis back in Ohio. Much of the actual conflict involves Mom and Memaw’s access to healthcare, which is the film’s most authentic and relatable aspect.

In The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck doesn’t shy away from the causes of his Okies’ miseries. It’s the banks that foreclose on the family farm during the Depression, the orchard owners who pay starvation wages for backbreaking work, and the thugs that beat...
the union organizers into submission. When Bev, fresh off an OD, is kicked out of the hospital because she doesn’t have health insurance, it’s treated as another example of her moral failure, and an inconvenience for J.D., who has to be back in New Haven, Connecticut, for a job interview at a corporate law firm the next day. The real bad guys — the pharmaceutical companies who knowingly marketed highly addictive opioids to a population who are being worked to death by rapacious capitalists — are nowhere to be seen.

Directed by Ron Howard, Hillbilly Elegy is a deeply unpleasant watch. Everyone professes that “family is the only thing that means a goddamn thing,” but they only seem to communicate by shouted insult. The cinematography is indifferent at best, except for the close-up of the heroin needle circling the toilet bowl. The pacing veers between leaden and excruciating.

But it’s the film’s attitude toward its characters that makes it truly odious. It’s always been hard to be poor, but other chroniclers of poverty, such as Steinbeck, Charles Dickens, and Victor Hugo, left you with an understanding of the systems and people who oppressed the peasants. Hillbilly Elegy’s ideology prevents it from looking at America that deeply. J.D. saves his mom and gets the job because he’s just better than everyone else. For the people and the way of life he’s supposed to be elegizing, life sucks, and it’s all their fault. Hillbilly Elegy is showing on Netflix.

John Bisciotti, chairman and CEO of Under Armour, is a key sponsor of the NFL’s Baltimore Ravens and a key figure in the city’s football culture. He’s also a key figure in the city’s business community, where he’s known for his philanthropy and community involvement. Bisciotti is a native of Baltimore and a graduate of the University of Maryland, where he played football under head coach Joe Pa. Bisciotti has been a leader in the city’s business community for many years, and he’s been involved in a number of initiatives designed to improve the city’s economy and quality of life. He’s also been a strong advocate for the city’s football team, the Ravens, and he’s been a key figure in the team’s successful run to the Super Bowl.

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The long and sad goodbye of Lamar Alexander.

Senator, this is perhaps the third time I have written to you publicly in 2020, the final year of your third term as our state's senior senator. Like many Tennesseans, I have always considered you an excellent representative of our state, and a dedicated public servant. Unfortunately, 2020 was not America's greatest-ever year. Nor was it yours.

I read with interest the interview you did last week with the Daily Memphian and paid close attention to your comments about Donald Trump, now the lame-duck president of these United States. This was the digital headline in the DM:

Alexander to Trump: ‘People remember the last thing you do’

That statement is certainly true, Senator, particularly when the “last thing you do” is particularly good or particularly bad. But did the thought not cross your mind that people might well remember the last things of consequence you have done as our outgoing senior senator?

Many Tennesseans know exactly what's happened during this, your last year in office. Many of us will always remember what you did and didn't do in 2020. Indeed, last week's Daily Memphian headline might just as well have read:

Tennesseans to Alexander: ‘People remember the last thing you do’

How ironic, sir, that you will always be remembered for what you did and did not do in 2020, the year in which you announced your retirement. Ironic, in the sense that you first became our governor in the dying days of 1980, 40 years ago, when your predecessor, Ray Blanton, was removed early from that position, on account of his awarding pardons to all kinds of scoundrels. (Apparently, Donald Trump is now doing the same kind of thing, but that's another story for another day.)

I interviewed you in Nashville in 1981, a month or two after you took office. Clearly, you were a vast improvement over Blanton. How sad, then, after such a long and illustrious career in our state and in Washington, D.C., that you too will be remembered now for the last things you did, carrying water, time and time again, for Trump, all the while endorsing, aloud or in silence, the wretched policies of this worst president in our nation's history.

Last January, you helped make sure that the president, under impeachment, would not be convicted in the Senate, declining to bring John Bolton forward as a witness before the Senate Chamber. And for the next 10 months, after Trump’s acquittal, you said next to nothing about this de facto mob boss in the White House, who, in 2020 alone, came close to destroying our country, ignoring the coronavirus, all while time and again challenging America’s democratic institutions.

As best I can tell, Senator, you said nothing whatsoever about Trump's ongoing failure to deal with the pandemic. You said nothing at all about his absurd focus on golf, glitter, and Twitter. Perhaps, as chair of the Senate Health Committee, you suggested privately that Trump might meet more regularly with the Coronavirus Task Force, but if so, that suggestion was never made public. Month after month, you said and did nothing about this president’s penchant for fiddling while America burned, putting the country’s economy, its institutions, and its public-health systems through the ringer.

Last week, when you spoke to the Daily Memphian, you gave Mr. Trump advice you apparently never had given to yourself. Why did you wait until November 23rd to make that headline observation, when such an observation might have made a real difference six months ago?

Don't worry, many of us will always remember the last year of your last term as our senator. At least you’re retiring shortly. Perhaps you’ll have plenty of time to think about how different things could and should have been, had you used your final year in office to try to make America great again. Instead, you chose to be part of the problem, making no real attempt to be part of the solution. That’s a tragedy, for us all.

Kenneth Neill is the founder and publisher emeritus of the Memphis Flyer.