



**WASHINGTON** is one of the only places in America where an election transforms the city's social life. Plenty of people live here with no regard for who occupies the White House, but a lot of social networks get rewired when a new president comes to town and brings along thousands of ideological kin. In the Kennedy

and Johnson eras, official Washington took its cues from the White House: Glamorous dinner parties were in vogue under JFK, followed by more down-home barbecues under LBJ. No matter the president, though, guest lists tended to span both parties, and the fraternizing helped keep the government's gears and levers well-enough oiled.

But in the Reagan-Bush eighties, social life in D. C., just as in the rest of the country, began to polarize, with the newly empowered conservatives who arrived with Ronald Reagan making a show of shunning D. C.'s establishment (though Nancy still loved entertaining her Hollywood friends at the White House). A pattern set in: Democratic presidents and their aides were quick to mingle with the city's mostly liberal establishment, and Republicans were isolated from it. But even though George W. Bush was in bed before 10:00 P.M., and despite the culture clash experienced by his Texas clan, members of his administration were not pariahs. He and Nancy Pelosi, who became Speaker of the House during his second term, had a surprisingly good relationship, one nourished by White House social events that helped prevent a total breakdown in governing. It was an echo of the now-legendary comity between Reagan and Tip O'Neill, who sometimes hashed out legislative differences over whiskey.

The Trump era is different. Washington feels more like occupied territory, and every social interaction is fraught with ideological and even moral questions about whether it is appropriate to mingle with people who defend the indefensible: lying, attacking reporters as enemies of the people, putting children in cages, assisting in the cover-up of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. Take Juleanna Glover, one of the city's most well-known hostesses. Her home has become a sort of oasis where the list is scrupulously scrubbed of Trump guests. And Glover is no left-winger; she worked for John Ashcroft and Dick Cheney. Indeed, her parties these days are often the center of D. C.'s #NeverTrump conservative resistance, as was the case at a book party she threw for Rick Wilson, the Republican consultant who recently published the best seller *Everything Trump Touches Dies*. "We can call them the uncontaminated," Glover joked. "Pulling together the like-minded makes people hopeful. You're aggregating the intellectually disciplined and principled. But it's also deeply siloing."

Sally Quinn, the author and *Washington Post* journalist who is still the city's most famous dinner-party hostess and a historian of D. C.'s elite social life, is another who has taken a stand. "Someone asked me, 'Would

you ever invite the Trumps to your house?' The fact is I couldn't," she said. "It would be embracing everything I'm against. And I haven't been to an actual dinner party in two years where any of the Trump officials are. Trump doesn't need to build a wall; he's built one here."

When other prominent hosts have welcomed senior Trump officials to their table, there has sometimes been a backlash. David Bradley, chairman of Atlantic Media, which co-owns *The Atlantic*, hosts a steady stream of D. C. soirees for the powerful. He was met with criticism when Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump showed up at a dinner he was hosting during the White House Correspondents' Association weekend last spring. Bradley believes introducing journalists to politicians and officials is an important part of his job but concedes there is a "moral dimension" when including "controversial, even offensive" guests. "There is a wide spectrum of views in Washington on this issue, especially in this hour," he told me. "I am sympathetic to the reasoning on both sides—the purist and the accommodationist. In general, I think humanity would fare better with a larger mix of humility and a sparer dose of righteousness. I think that's still true in today's Washington, but it's a closer call."

Not everyone associated with the administration is unwelcome. D. C. hosts have developed a sliding scale of tolerance. One hostess put it this way: "My benchmark is, Are they credentialed? Would they be a candidate for a senior position in any other White House?" (The former secretary of defense Jim Mattis, a retired Marine Corps general, is a prominent example of someone in that category.) But this hostess also noted that some officials who initially pass that test might also come to be seen as toxic. "John Kelly's hall pass back into acceptable society was revoked when he promoted the idea of separating kids from their families," she said. "He is the godfather of that policy, and everyone knows it."

Meanwhile, the widely attended major events that once lubricated relations between various strata of official D. C.—Congress, the press, the White House, the ambassadorial class,

the lobbying world—have been blown up by the Trumps. Two of the biggest annual nights in Washington, the White House Correspondents' dinner and the Kennedy Center Honors, revolve around the president's participation. In 2017, several reporters (I was one of them) publicly suggested that it wasn't appropriate to toast a president who was vilifying us. Trump preemptively responded to the nascent revolt by announcing he wouldn't come anyway. The same year, when some Kennedy honorees said they would boycott a White House reception, Trump canceled the event and refused to attend the gala at the Kennedy Center. Both weekends are now much more low-key affairs. In December, Trump called off the annual White House holiday party for the press. Fox News, which broke the story, pointed out that even Bill Clinton had hosted the event and posed for endless pictures just days after he was impeached in 1998.

# A SWAMP DIVIDED

**PARTISANS IN WASHINGTON USED TO SET ASIDE THEIR 9-TO-5 DIFFERENCES OVER COCKTAILS AT CAPITOL HILL BARS AND OFF-THE-RECORD DINNERS IN GEORGETOWN SALONS. IT'S HOW A LOT OF THE WORK OF GOVERNING GOT DONE. BUT TRUMP'S WHITE HOUSE HAS LAID WASTE TO ANY REMAINING CIVILITY—EVEN IN THE VIEW OF MANY REPUBLICANS. RYAN LIZZA MAPS THE CAPITAL'S STARK NEW SOCIAL DIVIDES AND CROSSES ENEMY LINES TO EXPLORE TRUMPWORLD'S FEW PUBLIC SAFE SPACES.**



**BANISHED BY THE** traditional elites of D. C., Trump officials have had to find social spaces that are more welcoming. Their dilemma has been compounded by the way they are shunned not just by the city's traditional hosts and hostesses but also by an activist public. "You pour a few drinks into an impassioned American citizen and most of the time they will end up screaming at a Trump staffer," one hostess said. "People get mad at themselves if they leave a room and haven't confronted someone who they believe has done damage to democracy."

Throughout 2018, Trump officials and their most prominent defenders were targeted by activists while trying to dine in popular D. C. spots. In June, Kirstjen Nielsen, the secretary of homeland security, was eating at MXDC, one of the few decent Mexican restaurants in Washington—perhaps a slightly surprising choice for the woman leading Trump's effort to build a southern border wall—when a small group gathered around her and shouted, "Abolish ICE!" Videos of a nervous Nielsen eating her salad ricocheted around social media, prompting a debate about civility and whether such impromptu confrontations were appropriate. In September, protesters chased Ted Cruz and his wife, Heidi, from one of the best Italian restaurants in the city, Fiola, which is situated between the White House and Capitol Hill and is a favorite spot for officials from both places. (There is a bipartisan consensus that Fiola's lobster ravioli is excellent.) "We're not trained to deal with this," Maria Trabocchi, a co-owner of Fiola and several sister restaurants, told *The Washington Post*. "It's crazy times."

Sarah Sanders was asked to leave a restaurant in Virginia. Kellyanne Conway was heckled at the supermarket. Stephen Miller, Trump's top policy advisor, was given the finger by his local bartender, and WANTED posters with his face were hung near his home in Washington's CityCenter, an apartment complex and upscale outdoor mall (Gucci, Hermès, Dior) that has served as a first address for several Trump officials, including Hope Hicks and Conway.

The hunting of Trump defenders escalated in the fall, when, on the evening after the midterm elections, protesters showed up not at a public restaurant but at Fox News host Tucker Carlson's house in Northwest Washington and chanted, "Tucker Carlson, we will fight! We know where you sleep at night!"

"It was bewildering to be told to leave a city I've spent my life in by rich kids in black bandannas who just moved here from Kansas City," Carlson told me in mid-December, on a day when he was battling an advertiser boycott after saying on air that immigrants create a "dirtier" America. "But mostly it was depressing. Washington has never been like that, not in the thirty-five years I've been here. Political disputes were never personal after-hours. Even at the height of the Clinton impeachment drama, people didn't yell at each other at dinner parties. You didn't choose your friends by partisan affiliation. Now you do. It's awful."

All of this public humiliation has predictably pushed Trump officials and Republicans into seeking out private spaces in which to socialize. The most well-heeled of them retreat to safe havens in mansions in Northwest D. C.'s adjoining Kalorama and Woodland Normanstone

neighborhoods, which together are the new Georgetown. "It's a more palatial atmosphere in Kalorama compared to Georgetown," said Quinn. "Bigger, newer houses. I have not heard of any of the Trump people living in Georgetown."

Conway and her husband, George, purchased an \$8 million home in Woodland Normanstone when she left her apartment in CityCenter. Their neighbors include Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and his wife, Hilary Geary; Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin and his wife, Louise Linton; and Bill and Hillary Clinton. Jared and Ivanka live in a \$6 million Kalorama home—they're reportedly renting it—around the corner from Barack and Michelle Obama, who recently bought the place they were previously renting. ("They figured they might as well buy it because after they've lived there, the value would go way up, so they might as well take advantage of that," said one prominent D. C. hostess.) Nearby is the Washington residence of Jeff Bezos, who owns *The Washington Post* and is moving some of Amazon's operations to the D. C. area. (Bezos's place, a former textile museum, is the largest residential home in Washington.)

The mix of controversial Trump officials, high-profile Secret Service protectees, and the superrich has given sleepy Kalorama and Woodland Normanstone—which are dotted with embassies and ambassadorial homes and, on the quieter edge of the area, nestled in Rock Creek Park—an occasionally riotous side. Secret Service and D. C. police are on constant patrol. Depending on the issue dominating the headlines, protesters and paparazzi sometimes compete for sidewalk space outside Jared and Ivanka's corner residence. (Photographers for the *Daily Mail*, the conservative British tabloid that treats the First Family and some of Trump's more glamorous aides as D. C.'s version of the Kardashians, recently stalked Conway as well.)

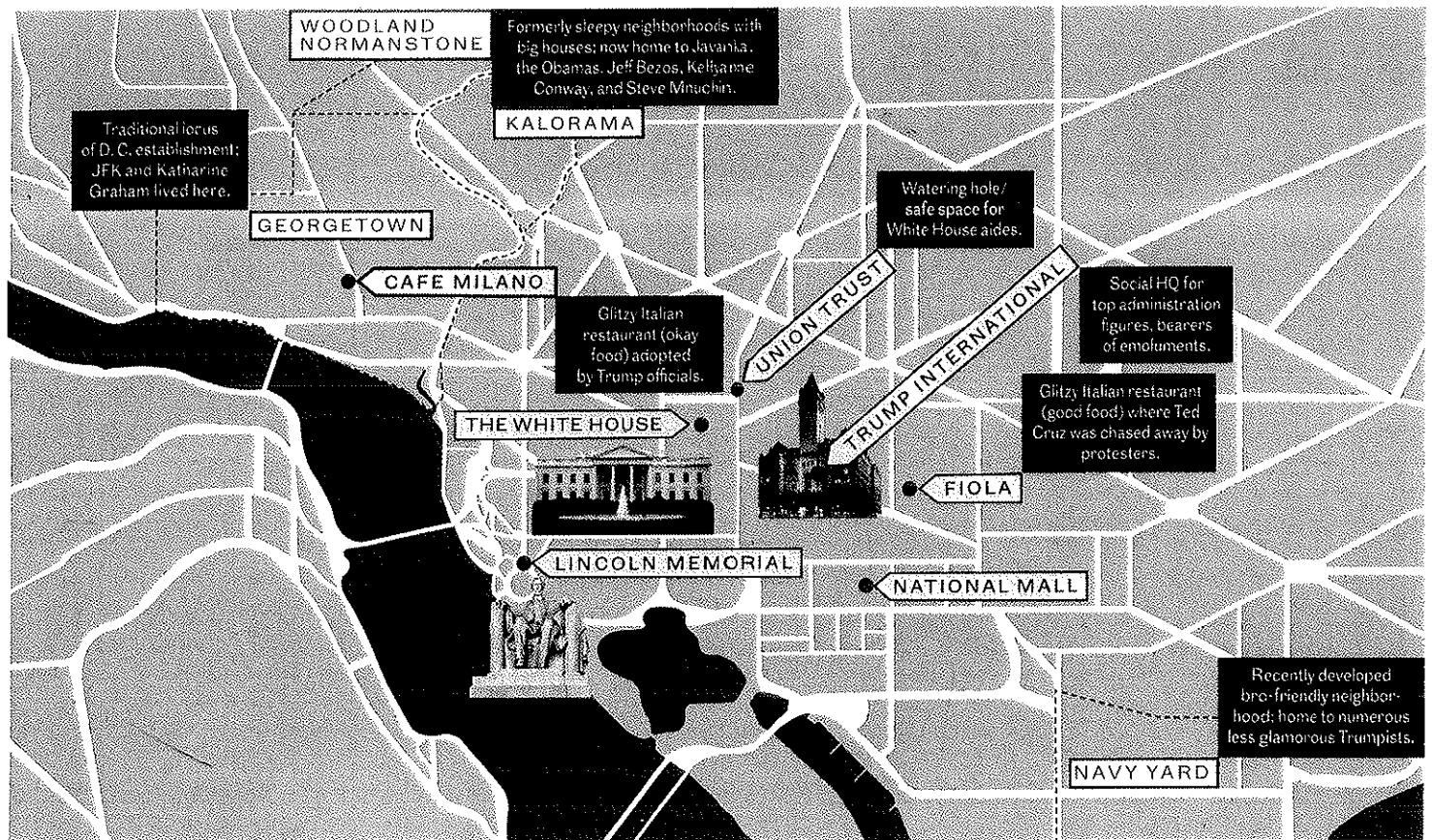
With the bad blood between permanent Washington and the Trumps forcing more and more of D. C.'s elite social life into private residences, the Kalorama dinner party has become a crucial social institution. Jared and Ivanka are particularly well-known for using their home to entertain strategically. Last April, according to Daniel Lippman, a coauthor of Politico's *Playbook* and a sort of social historian of the Trump era, Jared and Ivanka hosted a group of senators and CEOs to discuss education policy, and even a couple Democrats—Heidi Heitkamp and Amy Klobuchar—made the guest list. (Subsequent legislation didn't go anywhere.)

**THERE ARE A FEW** public bars and restaurants that Trump swamp-ists can call their own. According to one White House official, many younger Trump staffers have discovered these safe spaces: the Line, a hip new hotel in Adams Morgan; Union Trust, a bar in a former bank near the White House that for Trumpsters has replaced traditional area spots like the Hay-Adams; and the Salt Line and Mission, two bars in Navy Yard, a newly developed Southeast D. C. neighborhood abutting the Anacostia River that has attracted many out-of-town Trump aides and is often looked down upon by old-timers as D. C.'s version of Manhattan's frat-boy-friendly Murray Hill.

But the heart of MAGA in Washington is the Trump International Hotel. I spent a weekend there in the fall (on Esquire's dime at \$400 a night), and if the place weren't branded—some might say tainted—with the Trump name, it would rank as the finest hotel in Washington. The landmark 1899 granite building, once the city's main post office, resembles a castle and feels like a fortress protecting its patrons from the hostility of greater D. C. It's often ringed by security vehicles and barriers to keep the regular protesters at bay and is surrounded by an alphabet soup of government

**"She's not the person we thought she was," said one offended hostess of a rival who has cozied up to the Trumps.**

## Mapping D.C.'s Fault Lines



enemies that Trump attacks on Twitter: the IRS, FBI, EPA, and DOJ.

When I checked in after 4:00 P.M., a gentleman from guest services escorted me upstairs. He said he was from Afghanistan. He was a translator there working for the Americans and took advantage of a special visa program that brought him to the U.S. because his work for allied forces threatened his life. I didn't ask him how he felt about the fact that under Trump the program's future is uncertain.

The age of the building gives the hallways a spooky *Shining*-like vibe when nobody is around. The rooms are as Trumpian as you would expect: gold-accented furniture and bath fixtures, electric curtains, a Cartier jewelry catalog on the table, Trump milk-chocolate gold bullion in the minibar. The Trump Kids program turns your tyke into Richie Rich and includes personalized business cards. You can get a "citrus drench"—I never asked—at the Spa by Ivanka Trump. The downstairs bar is Cheers for White House staffers, hangers-on, and Trump fans looking to catch a glimpse of administration celebrities. The signature cocktails range from \$15 to \$169. I ordered an absurd \$45 drink called Smoke & Moss that is meant to receive a mist of Ardbeg Ten whiskey over the top of the glass. The waiter accidentally sprayed my hand instead, so I smelled like a peaty single malt for the rest of the day.

MAGA tourists abound. I ran into Ivan Raiklin, a failed Senate candidate from Virginia who said he likes to plant himself in the lobby to meet Trump officials—or at least Trump-adjacent officials—with whom he can network. "Every single night, deals happen here," Raiklin told me. "It's literally America's living room! On a random night you're going to get Eric Bolling, Don Jr., Kimberly Guilfoyle." According to Instagram—Trump Hotel bar selfies are seemingly a rite of passage for all MAGA visitors—Katrina Pierson, who's a senior

advisor for Trump's reelection campaign, and a reporter for Breitbart were sitting nearby.

The Trump Hotel lobby is a cavernous atrium with skylights nine floors above. The main bar, Benjamin, is on one side, and a steakhouse is on the other. A small, glass-walled "experience salon" offers "bespoke tastings" in case you want to indulge in an evening of rare spirits from Pappy Van Winkle or Louis XIII, while a boutique by Brioni—the president's preferred outfitter—sells custom-made suits and (extra-long) ties. Around the perimeter of the lobby are private rooms that on any given night may be hosting book parties for Trump sycophants or events for Middle Eastern embassies, which have been the most eager to spend enormous sums of money at the Trump Hotel to curry favor with the president. (According to *The Washington Post*, Saudi lobbyists booked around five hundred nights there over three months after the 2016 election.) After two years of heavy usage, the lounge in the middle area is a little gritty, and some of the lobby's velour couches are stained and worn. "I'm getting chlamydia sitting on this couch," a friend joked.

**THE ONLY OTHER** major restaurant and bar that competes with the Trump Hotel for A-list (such as it is) White House patrons is Cafe Milano, a Georgetown institution almost since it opened on Election Day in 1992, which older Trump officials have colonized. "I call it Rick's Café," said Quinn, a longtime Milano frequenter, referring to the restaurant from *Casablanca*. "When I go there, I half expect the patrons to all stand up and sing 'La Marseillaise.'"

She recalled being at Milano one evening six (continued on page 132)



a gray suit and a bright orange tie. Weinstein, in a dark blue suit, limps in behind him. He's put on weight since his court appearance last May, and his neck is blanketed with scruff the color of day-old snow. His left hand remains clenched. He looks confused. After making his way to the front of the room, he sits and stares straight ahead. The judge calls Brafman and the prosecutors up to the bench to confer privately, while the rest of the room remains silent, their breath bated. Five minutes pass, and it's impossible to decipher what's being said. But as Brafman returns to his seat, he eyes the crowd, and his tortured expression says it all: His Hail Mary motion to dismiss the five remaining charges was unsuccessful. The case will be going to trial. The judge sets the next hearing for March 7, and court is adjourned.

Outside, Weinstein climbs into a black SUV and speeds off. Brafman steps in front of a gaggle of cameras and microphones and gives a few remarks about how he's disappointed with the judge's decision, but that his client will ultimately prevail. He walks to the curb, where his Lincoln awaits, and then he, too, is gone.

**The morning after** the hearing, Brafman calls me. "I guess your article will be delayed because nothing happened," he says. Before that week, he'd had a glimmer of hope that the case would be tossed. But that's no longer on the table.

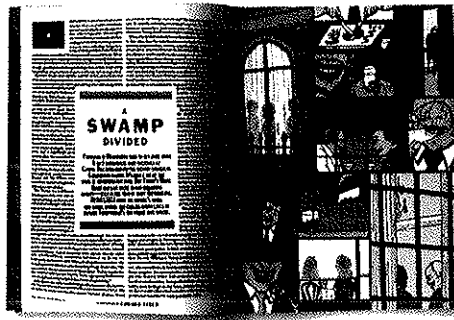
Brafman will almost certainly return his strategy to undermining the accusers' credibility—not just of the two who remain in the case but of every woman who's come forward with allegations. He speaks ominously of the thousands of emails at his disposal that he says he'll continue to roll out on an as-needed basis. Yet he may well find that the strategy fails him. When he said that Weinstein didn't invent the casting couch, he was evoking a bygone era, when behavior now considered reprehensible was the status quo. But that time has passed, as Brafman himself once admitted to me when I asked him about the comment. "It's a different world," he said then. As he now tells me on the phone, the case "will be messy. It will be controversial. It will be all-out combat."

With the trial tentatively set to begin in early May, Brafman now faces months of battle with the D. A.'s office—and months of Weinstein's emails, voice mails, impromptu office visits, and second-guessing. "This puts a lot on my plate I was hoping to avoid," he says.

Benjamin Brafman has spent forty years climbing to the top of his profession, along the way becoming a wealthy and charitable man—with sixteen grandchildren he adores—and this is his reward: several months, maybe more, in the trenches with Harvey Weinstein. ■

## A SWAMP DIVIDED

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months into the Trump administration and seeing Rex Tillerson and Wilbur Ross. "They were sprinkled all over," she said. "You could just see the people seething. Someone said to me, 'It's our place, it's not their place!'"

The Mnuchins and Jared and Ivanka are regularly spotted there. The president's daughter and son-in-law favor two tables, considered the best in the main dining room, with backs to the windows and facing the area where patrons walk in. "Whenever Javanka is there, Yousef Al Otaiba"—the ambassador to the U. S. from the United Arab Emirates—"is at the next table," said a person deeply familiar with D. C.'s social scene. "I think he's getting tipped off."

What explains Milano's staying power as one of the few spots that have attracted senior officials of both the Obama and Trump administrations is owner Franco Nuschese's strict nonpartisanship and attentiveness to VIPs, treating them with the discretion—or exposure—they desire. Officials who want privacy will be ushered into the Domingo Room, just to the left as one enters the restaurant. Those who want their presence, as well as that of their dining companions, to appear in *Playbook* the following day can be dramatically escorted through the main dining room to a front window table. The maître d' is used to dealing with entourages and Secret Service details. "There are no safe spaces, but they can rely on Milano to be a place of some civility, because the staff is trained for that," said Glover.

Another reason Milano has survived as a power spot even in the era of Trump is that many of the best restaurants in D. C. are relatively new, and many of them exist in funkier, gentrifying neighborhoods that would be intimidating and perhaps even hostile to recognizable Trump officials. Georgetown is a relatively safe zone, but it happens to be a restaurant desert. Milano seems familiar. "They've all heard that that's where a lot of people go," Quinn said of the Trumpists. "But it also feels like a New York restaurant."

Nuschese said he didn't quite know why his restaurant, where Barack Obama hosted

parties for Michelle's forty-ninth birthday and his daughter Malia's high school graduation, had made such a seamless transition into the Trump era. "We haven't done anything to attract them. They come on their own," he told me. "You can't refuse them. Of course we realize that for some people it makes them uncomfortable."

After twenty years of living in D. C. without stepping inside the place, I ate at Milano twice recently for this perilous assignment. The food is good but not the best Italian in D. C.—Trabocchi's restaurants clear that low bar—especially given the high prices. The whole roasted sea bass, which set me back forty-eight dollars, was boring, though the cassata di ricotta, a kind of Sicilian cheesecake, was very good. And any menu, like Milano's, that lists "Wagyu meatballs" under "classic Italian-American traditions" deserves some skepticism. (Italian immigrants were mostly poor, and Italian-American food is distinguished by its cheaper alternatives, like using chicken instead of beef for meatballs, as my grandmother did, not boutique Japanese cows.) The most conspicuous part of the experience is the enormous waitstaff that hovers like an army over the floor. Despite their numbers, one evening it was nearly impossible to get anyone's attention. On a subsequent night, they were so overly attentive I was swatting them away like flies.

I didn't spot any interesting Trump officials. Nuschese told me that Trump himself, unlike Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, hasn't yet dined there. "I don't think he goes anywhere," the owner said.

**Ambassadors**, who generally live in the finest homes in the city, are paid to throw parties and socialize, and they play a crucial role in the nightlife of official Washington. Al Otaiba, the UAE ambassador, is famous for hosting dinners with journalists, congresspeople, and government officials, catered by a rotating cast of celebrity chefs, such as Wolfgang Puck, whom he flies in for the occasions. Unlike Glover and Quinn, Al Otaiba has transitioned to hosting Trump officials with no moral qualms. Ambassadors see this administration strictly through a transactional lens, and ambassadors' homes, especially of those from the Middle East, have become some of the safe spaces for Trump officials.

Rima Al-Sabah, the wife of Kuwaiti ambassador Salem Al-Sabah, is credited with being among the most aggressive and agile party throwers in smoothly segueing from the Obama to the Trump administration. Rima hosts an annual gala on behalf of the Kuwait-America Foundation, which promotes ties between the two countries, and in the Obama years it attracted members of the administration. After the election, the ambassador's annual Kuwait Day event moved to the Trump

International Hotel, and the Trumps attended. (In 2017, Melania was—without irony—awarded the Kuwait-America Foundation's Humanitarian Award.) In the catty world of D. C. hostesses, the changeover has come with some cost. "Now she hangs with Ivanka and Kellyanne and Jared," said the prominent D.C. hostess. "I think she thought she was enhancing her reputation. And instead everyone thought she's not the person we thought she was."

The embassies of Western allies that Trump has shunned and that were the most unprepared for his victory have often struggled to play this game. "You would start having a relationship with someone" in the administration, "and then they'd get fired," said the person deeply familiar with Washington's social scene. "So a lot of people honed in on Javanka, because they are not going to get canned."

Given the sharp ideological and personal divides that Trump has intensified in D. C., a market has opened for social spaces where government officials can mix with their adversaries. Jamie Weinstein and Michelle Fields, married right-of-center political commentators (he hosts a *National Review* podcast, and she is a former reporter for Breitbart and the Daily Caller), have created one of the few such salons. Known as the Churchill Tommy Gun Society, after a large portrait hanging in their dining room of the former prime minister holding that weapon, the parties bring together a group of around ten journalists, who are usually on the younger side, and a special guest for off-the-record drinks and steaks at the couple's Ritz-Carlton penthouse in the West End, on the edge of Georgetown. A recent Churchill dinner that I attended was so secret that even the name of the special guest was off the record. The atmosphere was cordial, but the questioning was intense and personal. Nielsen, Carlson, Mark Cuban, Obama advisor Valerie Jarrett, and Arkansas senator Tom Cotton have all been featured guests. "The social scene has gone underground in D. C. because of all the protests," Weinstein noted. "We may be the one place in town where people from all over the ideological spectrum come dine together."

For now, that is a rarity in Washington. In the meantime, many hosts are waiting for the occupation to end. The midterms brought some relief. "Nancy Pelosi will be queen—the most powerful person in Washington, including the president," Quinn said when asked how the Democratic takeover of the House will affect the social climate. "She goes out a lot anyway, but she'll be even more visible."

"My attitude about Washington is they come and they go," Quinn continued. "At some point the Trump people will be gone and things will be back to normal." ■

## WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

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the one in the tight jeans, was saying in a nasty voice, "Why don't you go ahead of us, then," and in the next moment he was edging past them without a word and telling the guy behind the sneeze guard what he wanted on his burrito and trying to act as if nothing had happened when in fact his heart was beating in his ears like a tom-tom and then he paid and went to the soft-drink machine to dig out a scoopful of ice in his extra-large plastic cup he always brought with him and happened to glance up and see the couple going at it as if they didn't have grease on their lips and a platter of half-eaten nachos glistening like somebody's vomit on the table at their elbows, like *his* vomit, and what he did next wasn't explicable on any rational level except that he'd really just had it, had it up to here, and he filled the cup to the brim with Coke, real Coke, and the minute he stepped out the door he suddenly jerked around—*blitzkrieg!*—and dumped half of it on the girl's head and half on the guy's before tucking the burrito under his arm like a football and bolting up the street and down the first alley he came to, wondering if they were going to call the cops and charge him with assault or something, exhilarated and terrified all at once, and running, running until he couldn't remember where he was going or even why he was running.

I'd finished my breakfast at this point, though Eric had barely touched his, so wrapped up in what he was saying he seemed to have forgotten all about it. I pictured him taking the bagel back to his seat after I left the table and feeding it crumb by crumb into his mouth, alone, while the bleak hills and dun plains ran by the window in a continuous loop and the shadows flickered and flickered again. When the waiter came to refill my cup, I put a hand over it. I was thinking of my compartment now, my bed, the novel concept that I could take a nap if I wanted—anytime I wanted—and no schedule to keep or anyone to say different.

The waiter's appearance had interrupted us and we both turned a moment to watch him work his way back down the aisle. The car rocked. The shadows flickered.

"How do you know all this?" I asked.

"I told you—I knew him."

"But you didn't know he was going to—?" I waved my hand, as if a gesture could begin to encapsulate the horror of the act that had left six dead and fourteen wounded.

"Not really."

"What do you mean, 'not really'? Either you did or you didn't."

He gave me a tight smile. His face had completely changed. He was homely still, nothing could obviate that (the expression "ill-favored" came to mind), but the openness I'd seen there earlier was gone.

"Don't tell me you actually sympathize with this, this...person?"

"He had a soul. A great soul."

I could feel everything slipping away from me then, the car rocking, the rails beating like a pulse beneath us, and all at once I was thinking of my daughter, who could have been one of his victims but for the luck of the draw. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "He had a soul? What about the souls of the people he killed, the girls and boys he shot and stabbed? Children. They were just children." I stood and pushed my way out into the aisle, furious and confused at the same time. "Children," I repeated. "Like you."

**wound up skipping** lunch—the nap had made me groggy—and stayed in my compartment, reading and dozing and watching the scenery pass me by, till early evening, when I made my way down to the dining car for the first serving. This time I was seated with a young couple, Steve and Lila, who hated flying because they'd once been in a jetliner that was struck by lightning, and though they'd landed safely, they never wanted to go through that sort of scare again. "Give me this anytime," Steve said, nodding at the window. "Terra firma."

"Or at least floor a firma," Lila said, grinning.

"Right," he said, "that's what I mean. This thing breaks down, we get out and walk."

I don't know why—maybe it was the residue of my talk with Eric, which had disturbed me more than I wanted to admit—but I had an urge to contradict them, shake them out of their complacency. Trains derailed, cars crashed, bicyclists were run down in the street every minute of every day—nobody was safe, anywhere, ever, and they must have known that. But why get into it? Why ruin the mood? Wasn't I enjoying myself—wasn't that the whole point of this? I said, "I usually fly, but this is so incredibly relaxing."

Lila (early thirties, flawless skin, auburn hair, bangs) held up the margarita she was drinking and said, "Hard on the liver, though."

"But great for the sex life." Steve was having a margarita too and he clinked glasses with her. "Right, babe?"

"Oh, yeah," she murmured, looking at me now. "It's like what else is there to do?"

Our meals came and I ordered a drink too—a