

The background features a complex arrangement of overlapping, rounded rectangular and circular shapes in three colors: red, blue, and dark grey. The shapes are layered, creating a sense of depth and movement. The dark grey shapes are primarily horizontal bands, while the red and blue shapes are more varied in orientation and placement, some appearing as semi-circles or partial shapes at the edges.

# DARK 'N' STORMY

Francis J. Gavin

In his introduction to Volume 6, Issue 4, the chair of our editorial board, Frank Gavin, writes about why so many people feel such doom and gloom when we are living in a time of unprecedented prosperity, why his faith has been shaken, and how he's finding solace and hope in the classroom.

**T**his past summer, I visited the home of my ancestors — Ireland — for the first time. I was left with two surprising impressions. My first reaction was similar to the way I felt after visiting Israel: How could such a tiny place with a relatively small population generate so much trouble and attention? My drama-prone family, which holds grudges like no other, now made much more sense to me. Second, it struck me that we may not give Francis Fukuyama enough credit.<sup>1</sup> The island is no longer anything like the poor, rebellious, rosary-praying, sexually conservative, Guinness-drinking food desert populated by poets and musicians I had heard about from relatives when I was growing up. Dublin is a high-tech mecca, with expensive housing, Michelin star restaurants, Pride flags, and empty churches. Even Belfast, the location of the Troubles that pitted Catholics against Protestants and the United Kingdom, was different than I expected. We took a “black taxi” tour of Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods, guided by a former Irish Republican Army member, who did his best to capture the tension and tragedy that gripped the city decades ago. But he could not hide his disgust that the leading tourist attraction in the city was a fancy glass and steel museum devoted to the Titanic, built to exploit the worldwide popularity of the James Cameron movie. The locals were more interested in discussing the sites where “Game of Thrones” was filmed than any current or past political drama.

History may not have completely ended in Ireland, but it appears to have been stylized and serialized to stream on Netflix.

Shouldn't these “end of history” trends please us? Writ large, the new wealth, the ubiquity of cutting-edge technology, and the dramatic decrease in violence and strife in places like Ireland reflect quite positive changes. It is a reminder that the world is wealthier and safer than it was 25 years ago, when the Good Friday Agreement was signed, and that the international system in 1998 was far wealthier and safer than it had been 25 years before that, which was safer and wealthier than 25 years

before that, and so on and so forth.<sup>2</sup> Despite what seems to be great material progress, however, it is hard to find people who actually believe things feel better than in the past.

Over the years, many close friends and colleagues have pushed back against what they see as my unconvincing “Panglossian” view of historical progress. How can I be optimistic when all around us, there are signs of danger? Democracy in collapse, authoritarian states aggressively bullying neighbors, inequality spiking, the planet vexed by violent weather and overheating from our own over-production. For them — and I suspect, for most people — the world is not sunny and calm; it is instead dark and stormy.

I try to respond with numbers. By almost any meaningful measure, the world has never had it so good. The amount of wealth the world generates — and how it is created — is historically unprecedented. Global GDP per capita in 1960 was merely \$459. In 2021, it was \$12,235. This wealth allows for dramatic improvements in security, stability, and quality of life, and not only in the developed world. Other indices of human development have dramatically increased.

The historian in me reminds people to think about what the world was like, not that long ago. Human life before our recent age was often marked by misery, violence, and uncertainty. The average life expectancy in Europe in 1770 was 34 years. Even by 1900, after decades of industrialization, it was only 42.7, while for the world as a whole, it was only 32 years, rising to just 46.5 by 1950. Today, a European can expect to live to nearly 80, a remarkable change, while for the rest of the world it has reached 71. In 1750, global literacy was estimated to be 12 percent, whereas today it approaches 90 percent. Per capita caloric consumption is a third higher today on average than in the mid-18th century, and the variety, quality, and reliability of food have increased enormously. To give just one of many examples of the kind of disasters that were regularly visited upon the world, in the last 25 years of the 19th century, between 30 and 60 million peo-

1 Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, no. 16 (Summer 1989): 3–18, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24027184>.

2 For an excellent assessment of the Good Friday Agreement, which we published, see James B. Steinberg, “The Good Friday Agreement: Ending War and Conflict in Northern Ireland,” *Texas National Security Review* 2, no. 3 (May 2019): 78–102, <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/2926>.



ple in Brazil, China, and India died of famine.<sup>3</sup> In the last century, India's famine during World War II took 3 million lives, and anywhere from 17 to 45 million died during the Great Leap Forward in China between 1959 and 1961. World War I and the ensuing revolutions and influenza killed tens of millions, before the even bloodier World War II killed off 3 percent of the world's population. One of the wealthiest cities in the world, London, still had an infant mortality rate of 16 percent as the 20th century began.<sup>4</sup> The murder rate in Puritan and Quaker early America was at least four times higher than it is today, and one out of every 10 Americans suffered from syphilis in the 1930s, with devastating consequences.<sup>5</sup> There are countless other measures and stories that detail how much more precarious life was in the periods before ours.

These statistics, stark as they are, cannot capture the deep sense of instability and unpredictability of life for most people, most of the time, until quite recently. Crop failures, famine and disease, fires and floods, financial panics, riots, mass killings and pogroms, slumps, and depressions, and a general lack of information about the larger world haunted humanity. While these disasters have not completely disappeared, they are certainly far less frequent than in the past. Intolerance was once the norm, not the exception, and how, where, and with whom one lived was determined by what community you were born in. Government was, for many people throughout the world, unresponsive, exploitative, and even malign. Personal and communal violence were far more persistent, criminal justice rare, and war and the threat of war and its consequences constant. As the great historian William McNeil once pointed out, before our recent era, "A human life unaffected by famine, pestilence, and war was rare indeed."<sup>6</sup>

In other words, while by no means without deep problems, by any material measure, life today is much, much better than in the past. This supposed improvement raises an important question: If things are so much better now, why does everyone appear miserable? I often blame what I call *historical anamnesis*, or the inability of people to properly recognize and accept when circumstances are im-

proving. As individuals and societies, we are hard wired to complain, to see the worst, not to update our expectations, only wanting more. That said, I am not sure I think this fully solves the puzzle. And despite my best efforts, the term "anamnesis," like "fetch," does not look like it's going to happen.<sup>7</sup>

Truth be told, my own faith has been shaken. The last few years have not been kind to glass-half-full types like me. China's ruthless suppression of Hong Kong and Russia's barbaric invasion of Ukraine, in addition to murderous conflicts and coups in countries ranging from Niger to Yemen, remind us that history has not quite ended. The storming of the Capitol in January 2021, combined with America's inept handling of the COVID-19 crisis across two presidential administrations, has put a significant dent in my sense of my country's exceptionalism. The feeling of dark foreboding is even seen in our popular music, which is supposed to lift our spirits. A recent study analyzed top hits on Billboard 100 since the 1950s and revealed that in recent years, "anger, disgust, fear, sadness, and conscientiousness have increased significantly, while joy, confidence, and openness expressed in pop song lyrics have declined."<sup>8</sup> Where once people enjoyed the mental escape provided by frothy, lighthearted fare such as "Melrose Place" or "The O.C.," today's most talked about television shows focus on dystopian hellscape seen in "The Silo" or "The Last of Us."

This latest issue of the *Texas National Security Review* — "The Shape of Strategy" — reminds us that conflict and tragedy are still with us. Jaehan Park highlights the continued importance of geopolitics in international relations. Lin Le chronicles how Xi Jinping went from a hoped-for reformer to the authoritarian strongman he is today. Mark Berlin and Stephen Rangazas explain how insurgent groups make strategic decisions about employing and, more interestingly, withholding violence during civil wars. John J. Chin, Kiron Skinner, and Clay Yoo analyze the changes and continuities of national security challenges over time. Collectively, the issue reveals that smart, rigorous research and scholarship on the questions of international relations and strategy remain as important as ever.

3 Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001), 7.

4 Naomi Williams and Graham Mooney, "Infant Mortality in an 'Age of Great Cities': London and the English Provincial Cities Compared, c. 1840–1910," *Continuity and Change* 9, no. 2 (August 1994): 185–212, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0268416000002265>.

5 Claude Fischer, "A Crime Puzzle: Violent Crime Declines in America," *Berkeley News*, June 16, 2010, <https://news.berkeley.edu/2010/06/16/a-crime-puzzle-violent-crime-declines-in-america/>; and Kristin Englund, "Syphilis 100 Years Later," *Cleveland Clinic*, November 2017, <https://consultqd.clevelandclinic.org/syphilis-100-years-later/>.

6 William H. McNeil, *Population and Politics since 1750* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990), 1.

7 "Mean Girls – Stop Trying to Make Fetch Happen," YouTube, accessed Sept. 15, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pubd-spHN-0>.

8 Kathleen Napier and Lior Shamir, "Quantitative Sentiment Analysis of Lyrics in Popular Music," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 30, no. 4 (2018): 161–76, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jpms.2018.300411>.

Does this mean I have completely abandoned my embarrassingly Whiggish belief in progress? There is, in fact, one source where I find not only solace, but even hope: my students. I have little patience for people who claim that the so-called Generation Z and millennial generations are uninterested in the world around them, overly woke, their brains and reasoning addled by addictions to social media, and their papers written by ChatGPT. In my experience, today's students are far smarter and more curious, more interesting, more tolerant and broad-minded, more open to new ideas, than those of my generation.

This came through clearly in a recent discussion during my American Foreign Policy class at the School of Advanced International Studies. With great worry and trepidation, I broke the students up into groups to discuss, argue, build a consensus around, and present their ideas on both how we should teach the contested life, presidency, and impact of Woodrow Wilson, as well as the ideas that inform the concept of Wilsonianism. As we all know, the questions around Wilson as a person and leader are serious, sensitive, and controversial.<sup>9</sup> My students — who come from every part of the globe with a wide range of backgrounds — delivered, to my great surprise, excitement, and relief, presentations marked by impressive nuance, balance, insight, and even humor. I didn't think there was much more I could learn about Wilson after three decades of teaching, but, as I often do, I came away from the discussion much smarter than before.

And it is not simply the wonderful students I teach at my home institution. I am fortunate to be involved in the Ax:son Johnson Institute for Statecraft and Diplomacy,<sup>10</sup> which, among other great initiatives, supports an applied history course at the Stockholm School of Economics for which I guest lecture every year.<sup>11</sup> The students are bright and sophisticated, enthusiastically engaging the classics, and wrestling with complex historical questions before they go on to work at McKinsey and Goldman Sachs, or even as CEOs.<sup>12</sup> They are also ambitious. The students joke about their parents and grandparents remind-

ing them of the importance of *janteloven*, or the old Swedish idea that it is unbecoming to celebrate success or strive for great accomplishment, a concept they find amusing and quaint.

This highlights that Sweden, like Ireland, over the same period, has changed dramatically, if more quietly. It is no longer the brooding, socialist, neutral, libertine nation one encountered through Ingmar Bergman or ABBA. It is a serious, thoughtful, and forward-moving country that, like Ireland, is performing impressively. Without abandoning its long-term commitment to equality and generous development aid, or its admirable leadership on global challenges like climate action, Sweden's entry into NATO reveals how seriously it takes the hard security and military issues that mark our current era. It might shock Americans to realize that not only is Sweden a high-tech nexus and finance innovator, but it also scores higher than the United States on measures of civil and criminal justice, order and security, fundamental rights, lack of corruption, and openness.<sup>13</sup> Which is a reminder, as the prospect of a second Trump presidency looms, that there are impressive cohorts of next-generation leaders emerging, not just in Dublin and Stockholm, but in every part of the globe, from Buenos Aires to Seoul to Jakarta to Gaborone. In my experience, these smart young people are realistic, not cynical, worried but not without the capacity for joy and laughter, and committed to fixing the terrible global problems we have left for them. It is also a great sign for the planet. The United States may not be as essential to fixing a broken world as Americans (including myself) often imagine.

Celebrating their hard work, one of the students introduced me to a drink which I had never had before but is now my favorite: the Dark 'N' Stormy. On the one hand, being rum-based, it has an island feel, which generates feelings of fun and frivolity. On the other, it was invented in the shipwreck capital of the world, Bermuda. Legend has it that a British sailor, after World War I, took one look at the drink and said it was "the color of a cloud only a fool or a dead man would sail under," like a "cloud

9 "Eight Different Editorials About Princeton's Woodrow Wilson Controversy," National Constitution Center, Nov. 20, 2015, <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/eight-different-editorials-about-princetons-woodrow-wilson-controversy>.

10 "Homepage," Ax:son Johnson Institute for Statecraft and Diplomacy, accessed Sept. 15, 2023, <https://axsonjohnsoninstitute.org>.

11 Stockholm School of Economics, "Applied History in Three Minutes," YouTube, 3:22, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBev9iGfyi8>.

12 "CEO for One Month," Adecco Group, accessed Sept. 15, 2023, <https://www.adeccogroup.com/ceoforonemonth/meet-our-ceos/>

13 Niall Ferguson, "Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy Revisited," Engelsberg Ideas, Sept. 8, 2023, <https://engelsbergideas.com/essays/capitalism-socialism-and-democracy-revisited/>.



nobody could hope to sail underneath and come out alive.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, it is the perfect drink for our times. There are deep, grave, and, yes, dark and stormy challenges ahead, which we must take seriously. But there is no reason we can’t smile, be generous and joyful, and try to have fun while doing it. 🍹

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14 "How to Make a Dark 'N' Stormy: Dark 'N' Stormy Cocktail Recipe," Master Class, June 8, 2023, [https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-make-a-dark-n-stormy-cocktail#:~:text=Chetiyawardana%20Teach%20Mixology-,History%20of%20the%20Dark%20%27N%27%20Stormy,the%20local%20Barritt%27s%20ginger%20beer](https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-make-a-dark-n-stormy-cocktail#:~:text=Chetiyawardana%20Teach%20Mixology-,History%20of%20the%20Dark%20%27N%27%20Stormy,the%20local%20Barritt%27s%20ginger%20beer;); and "The History of the Dark 'N' Stormy Cocktail," Make Me a Cocktail, June 21, 2021. <https://makemeacocktail.com/blog/the-history-of-the-dark-n-stormy-cocktail/#:~:text=The%20rum%20became%20very%20popular,made%20for%20a%20delicious%20treat.>

