Off the Shelf
Recent books with Harvard connections

**Without Precedent: Chief Justice John Marshall and His Times**, by Joel Richard Paul, J.D. ’81 (Riverhead, $30), offers an accessible portrait of a giant from the third branch of government. The author, of the University of California Hastings Law School, in San Francisco, observes of his subject that no founder “had a greater impact on the American Constitution,” and “no one did more than Marshall to preserve the delicate unity of the fledgling republic.” More like him, please!

**Can It Happen Here? Authoritarianism in America**, edited by Cass R. Sunstein, Walmsley University Professor (Dey St./Morrow, $17.99, paper). The indefatigable Sunstein (profiled in “The Legal Olympian,” January-February 2015, page 43, and last heard from in Impeachment: A Citizen’s Guide, published in October), imagines a post-terrorist-attack, President Trump-led America, and then gathers perspectives in essays by legal and other scholars from Chicago, Harvard, Yale, and elsewhere (among them, Martha Minow on the Japanese internment in World War II as a precedent for mass detentions). In the same vein, **How Democracies Die**, by Steven Levitsky, Rockefeller professor of Latin American studies, and Daniel Ziblatt, professor of government (Crown, $26), scans experiences in Europe and Latin America to explore the fateful question, “Are we living through the decline and fall of one of the world’s oldest and most successful democracies?”—and if so, what to do about it.

**The People vs. Democracy**, by Yascha Mounk, associate of the department of government (Harvard, $29.95). In a populist era, Mounk finds, popular will and individual rights collide. Monied campaign contributors advance without democracy, and populists, in effect, advance democracy without rights—collectively endangering the liberal democratic order, from India and Europe to the United States.

Of related interest, in legal and historical perspective: **Habeas Corpus in Wartime**, by Amanda L. Tyler, J.D. ’98 (Oxford, $85), is a Berkeley law professor’s comprehensive analysis—“from the Tower of London to Guantánamo Bay,” as the subtitle puts it—of a subject of current relevance in an era of terrorism and the political responses to it. **Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics**, by R. Marie Griffith, Ph.D. ’95 (Basic, $32), examines a century of Christian debate about sexual morality and gender roles, and its political consequences. The author directs the Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University.

**Bioinspired Devices**, by Eugene C. Goldfield, associate professor of psychology in the department of psychiatry (Harvard, $45), is a demanding overview of the work pursued at the Wyss Institute for Biologically Inspired Engineering, where the author is a faculty associate working on a modular robotic system for toddlers at risk for cerebral palsy. Lay readers may find that skimming the work helps bring into focus the applied science being derived from nature’s systems of assembly and repair.

**The Biological Mind**, by Alan Jasanoff ’92, Ph.D. ’98 (Basic, $30). The author (who is professor not only of biological engineering, but also of brain and cognitive sciences and nuclear science and engineering at MIT), looks beyond tissue to explore “how brain, body, and environment collaborate to make us who we are” (the subtitle). His formidable credentials aside, he is accessible and inviting, beginning, “What makes you you? Wherever you come from and whatever you believe about yourself, chances are that…you know your brain is the heart of the matter.”

The China scholars have been busy, adding to readers’ understanding of the roots of the modern nation with which the United States now has its most consequential, if muddled, relationship. **The Art of Being Governed: Everyday Politics in Late Imperial China**, by Michael Szonyi, professor of Chinese history (Princeton, $35), vividly explores families’ relationship to the state in fulfillment of their obligation to man the army. The director of the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies brings the Ming
vocal cords. Green, who calls the piece “a film as a conversation,” says, “I wanted it to be blurry.”

She and Farocki exhibited together until his unexpected death in 2014. He wanted to be a writer, and so she sought out his personal writings as source material for the script. “When a person is dead you can imagine what you like,” says the narrator of ED/HF. “You can also review what they left, if you can find it.” The process of writing the script seems like a kind of verbal knitting: she wove his voice into her own.

“Both ED/HF and Begin Again, Begin Again are about considering a lifespan,” she says. Modernist buildings like the Carpenter Center, she notes, were not built to last longer than 100 years—not that much longer than a human life. She’s fascinated with what will happen if they last longer.

Green’s creations are sensitive not only to longevity, but also to how quickly “right now” becomes “just a moment ago.” Her work articulates a desire to be attentive to the passage of time. She’s titled her residency “Pacing,” suggesting how the work of these two years has been cumulative. Each project overlaps its predecessor, and all of them address the Carpenter Center: “I can do [the work of the residency] over time in different ways, minimal, maximal, whatever, in between.”

As for the shadow of Le Corbusier himself, Green is unfazed. She’s very aware of his glossy notoriety: “He was very engaged with creating his archive, and having some kind of trace of everything he ever did,” she says. At the same time, she adds, he had failures and false starts and a list of projects he didn’t get to. She’s interested in the architect—as with Farocki and Schindler—as a human being.