

THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2014

NEW EDITED BY R. EMMETT TYRRELL, JR.

Rick Perry's Second Act

Can this man win in 2016?

By Jon Cassidy

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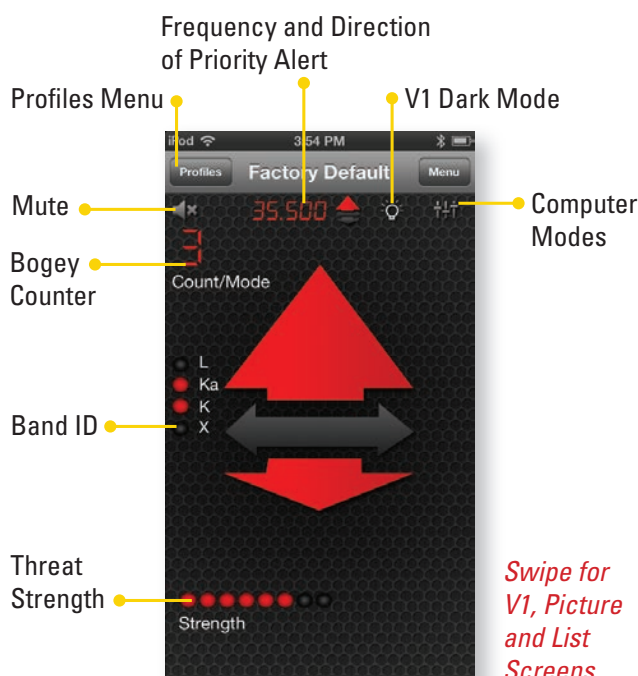
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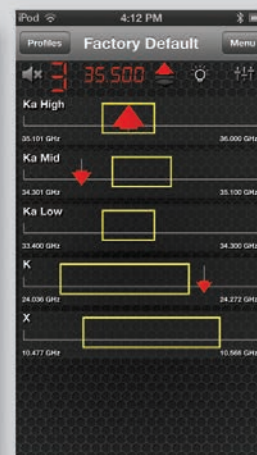
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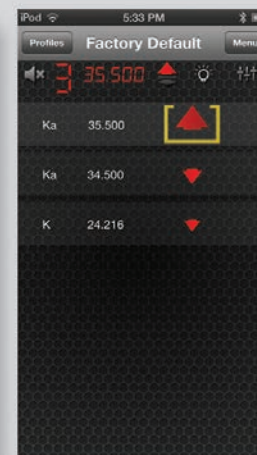
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about this MONTH



by WLADY PLESZCZYNSKI

The Defiant Ones

WE THOUGHT we had some breaking news. Shortly after the calamitous November 4 elections, the *Washington Post* quoted a top aide as telling a key Washington-based leader, “I said you need to accept blame. You need to be accountable for your actions. You need to be responsible. And he said, ‘You know what, I understand those things, I want to do those things, and that’s what I’ll work on doing.’”

Except, it turns out, the blame acceptor wasn’t our nation’s president. He was the Washington Redskins’ beleaguered quarterback, Mr. RGIII. He takes a beating every Sunday of the sort our president experienced on Election Day. For the record, that’s two midterms in a row our man has failed. Once again we see why he has never released his college records.

We’ve learned a few more things about him in the wake of Shellacking II. Unlike the friendly Mr. RGIII, he’s the sorest of losers. No post-game whirlpools for him. Instead of the quicky domestic political tour on the day after, he fled Washington as soon as possible, ending up in Beijing, dressing in Red Guard threads, gingerly tiptoeing around Mr. Putin, and chewing gum much to his hosts’ disgust. There’s nothing left for him now except to remain the Defiant One, churlish and small, eager to hoist himself atop his own petard of executive orders. One small consolation might have been the District of Columbia’s passage of marijuana legalization. He’ll enjoy living in Choom Gang country again. And this time it’ll be legal.

It won’t be any consolation to him, but we have some problems of our own. This is the first time I’ve written an introduction to an issue that was ready for release well

over a month ago but for reasons affecting many a print publication these days couldn’t be published on actual pages and after considerable delay is now being released in digital form only. There’s no substitute for print, even though our website remains ever vibrant and vitally important. Let me note nonetheless that three of my favorite pieces in this issue remain timely. Grover Norquist filed his story in late August, explaining why Scott Walker and Sam Brownback had to win re-election. Reading it today (p. 49) one marvels not only at Grover’s prescience but at how he undresses the dominant media narrative about the two governors’ chances. Grover knows how to win—which is something conservatives and Republicans could improve on. As Steve Moore notes (p. 43), internal divisions may be the main problem the right currently faces. To many true believers, one cannot be right-wing enough, and woe to him who isn’t. Many a good Republican these days has for all intents been decertified as a conservative. How can such a not-conservative-enough-for-me function if he’s having to spend half his time looking over his right shoulder? Plus it poisons our politics and decivilizes our activity. It’s not a game if according to newly imposed rules it’s one strike and you’re out. Which, incidentally, doesn’t let snooty moderates off the hook at all. If they’re so superior, shouldn’t they be above snobbery?

Luckily it’s still America, the land of the second chance. Will Rick Perry get his? In the hands of the excellent (and rising) young writer Jon Cassidy (p. 22), he’s a subject well worth pondering, warts and all. Four years ago there was a certain inevitability to a Perry presidency. Because, as we know, history doesn’t repeat itself, this time around his chances might actually look better. 🐢

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the CONTINUING CRISIS



by R. EMMETT TYRRELL, JR.

He is eating pizza far from the White House. He is downing Starbucks, slurping ice cream, and munching on burgers across America. Yet he is infrequently in the executive mansion and when he is, he is apparently asleep. He rarely addresses affairs of state. Actually President Barack H. Obama has almost given up on statecraft and returned to doing what he does best, namely, campaigning. In that he is like another of America's political prodigies, former President Bill Clinton. As a species they have been denoted as Chronic Campaigners, and whether in retirement or in full presidential plumage they shake hands, josh it up with the crowd, or simply raise money. They raise a lot of it, Mr. Clinton for his various charities, the president for the Democratic Party and very soon for the Barack H. Obama Presidential Library and Golf Club. Yet before he enters upon that particular fundraising drive there is August to contemplate with a swell fifteen-day vacation in Martha's Vineyard—fifteen days of glorious repose while our southern border is a chaos, Gaza is a heap, and Ukraine vacillates between civil war and war with Russia. On the hundredth anniversary of the Great War, who knows where that last item might go?

But before our president could fly off to Martha's Vineyard he hosted at the White House the largest gathering of crooks and tyrants ever summoned to the United States, the first U.S.-African Leaders Summit! Call it another Obama first, as with his Nobel Prize at the beginning of his presidency not the end. Would the prize be awarded to him now? Given the fact that this White House gathering took place as an Ebola epidemic of gigantic proportions raged on in Africa, who was indelicate enough to screen the guests? Did that inveterate health enthusiast, Mrs. Michelle Obama, suggest it? The guest list included Cameroon's President

Paul Biya, who in 2006 ranked nineteenth among the world's most hideous dictators, Gambia's President Yahya Jammeh, who is so fervently anti-gay that he has threatened to "cut off the head" of any homosexual he encounters (presumably within the jurisdictions of Gambia), and Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who has killed or jailed all his closest political opponents and who often accidentally misspells his own last name! During a press conference at the Summit, President Obama said, "The American people don't want me just standing around..." But we do, Mr. President. We want you playing golf, smoking cigarettes, and trying your hand at croquet or pinochle or any other divertissement that does not endanger the American people and add to the national debt, which has already gone up \$7 trillion since you strutted into the White House.

There is news from the Environmental Protection Agency! The agency established to keep our environment spotless has had to issue a directive to its Region Eight staff in Denver, Colorado, ordering its members

to desist from defecating in the hallways and participating in other unsanitary practices that are not in keeping with the EPA's sacred mission. Next the EPA will be tackling up signs reading "Do Not Void Where

Prohibited." This has to stop. By the way, 42 percent of millennials polled by *Reason* magazine said that they preferred socialism as an organizing principle for society, though only 16 percent could define the term. In San Marino, California, a rising political career has suffered a devastating setback. There the JFK of California politics, Mayor Dennis Kneier (pronounced kuh—NEER'), has been forced to resign his glamorous post because Mr. Philip Lao, an opponent known for his treachery, surreptitiously filmed

Mr. Kneier throwing a bag containing some sort of fecal matter on Mr. Lao's walkway. Mr. Kneier resigned his mayoral position in disgrace, but remains on the City Council where it is anyone's guess what his next desperate expedient will be.

They have done it again. The Israeli Defense Forces, relying on a tactic very similar to one enunciated in my 2010 classic, *After The Hangover: The Conservatives Road*



Golf and aerobics together? Michelle would be proud.

to *Recovery*, responded to Hamas's rocket attacks on Israel by going into Gaza and "busting the joint up." Then the Israelis left in an exemplary demonstration of "The Tyrrell Doctrine." Just bust the place up and vamoose. Had the U.S. Army done that in Iraq the Iraqis would still be busily rebuilding their country and they would have no time to slaughter each other. Now the Palestinians are presented with this splendid opportunity to rebuild, and if they are obdurate enough to keep Hamas in power after Hamas has used Palestinians as human shields and Palestinian homes and mosques as cover for their rockets and tunnels, Gaza will be leveled again in five or ten years. Frankly, I think it is high time the Palestinians caught on.

Meanwhile, Sunni jihadists from the newly confected Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) swarmed into Iraq and greater Syria eventually bringing what we might call their sacred sacraments to the Yazidis, a small pre-Muslim sect, and to Iraqi Christians who have lived in the region for 2,000 years—those sacraments being death by the sword and expropriation. ISIS is even holier than Al Qaeda. And speaking of Al Qaeda, there is another job opening at the top of that pious organization. Mr. Ahmed Abu Khattala, the mastermind of the raid on our CIA outpost in Benghazi, was sleeping comfortably with his donkey south of Benghazi when around midnight about 30 ruffians from the U.S. Seals, Delta Force, and the FBI swooped down on his hammock and carried him away to the USS New York in the Mediterranean where they persisted in asking him confusing questions, and he could not get back to sleep. Nor for that matter could an unidentified man in San Francisco who was attempting to get a little shut-eye on a pile of cardboard refuse at the corner of 16th and Irving streets when some eager-beaver behind the wheel of a city recycling truck picked the cardboard up and deposited it and the recumbent gentleman in the truck's dumpster. It took the local fire department to extricate the man and then they called the impetuous driver "a hero!" The sleepless man never did recover his wine bottle!

A wave of public nudity is sweeping the country or at least its Blue States, and it is apparently led by none other than Vice President Joe Biden, or gaffable Joe as he is known in pubs through-



"Yeah, I know you're picturing it..."

out the Republic. In a tell-all book, *The First Family Detail*, which relies heavily on the testimony of Secret Service agents, its author, Mr. Ronald Kessler, writes that "Agents say that, whether at the vice president's residence or at his home in Delaware, Biden has a habit of swimming in his pool nude....Female Secret Services agents find that offensive." Well, how about the male agents and those of the LGBT persuasion? In Massachusetts, Mr. Richard Capra, 69, was arrested for "open and gross lewdness" as he was nabbed using a leaf blower on his front yard while buck naked. Then in Arlington, Virginia, Mr. Charles Mack was pulled over by the constabulary for driving in the nude without even having a driver's license on his person. But the extent of the American progressives' nudism campaign became apparent in New York City. There, as our Mr. Daniel Flynn reported on *Spectator.org*, a completely naked Mr. George Davis was found campaigning for, of all things, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Whether he recognized that he was 2,563 miles off target is unknown but he was completely in the buff—not even a wedding ring! The Crisis continues with no end in sight.

—RET



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Tough Crowd

WE ARE DISTURBED by the slurs on American Indians in Ira Stoll's article "Teepee Populism" (*TAS*, July/August 2014) about Elizabeth Warren—starting with the cover of the issue, with its caricature of Warren as a goofy Indian sprouting head feathers in front of a teepee. If you wanted to criticize her for being less than ingenuous about various aspects of her past, surely you could have done so without trotting out tired stereotypes of the Native people of this continent.

The article brings up many other areas in which you think Warren gives cause for concern as a possible presidential candidate besides the matter of her alleged Native ancestry. You could easily have discussed these without resorting to offensive stereotypes. The cover graphic—along with the article's title, the sick joke about the Cherokee jeep, the reference to war path, etc.—perpetuates racist attitudes, which are echoed in some of the online comments. Why not cut the facile slickness and show a little respect?

DORIAN BROOKS & ANNA WATSON
SOLIDARITY WITH AMERICAN INDIANS

GIVEN TO ME by a friend, I have just finished reading the May edition of *The American Spectator*. Yes, the writing is of a commendable standard with many interesting topics, but some authors, hastening to be funny or learned, left me confused. In numerous articles, I was unsure of the author's point of view. Further, less smart-aleck comments and phrases, less obscure references, and smaller words where appropriate would render points clearer, and no doubt increase readership.

ANDREW U. ROSE DIANELLA
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Send correspondence to editor@spectator.org with the subject line "Letter to the Editor."

THE ANTI-GUN ARGUMENTS exposed by two of your authors in the July/August issue conflict. The argument in the court cases cited by Josh Blackman ("Our Gun-Shy Justices") is that the Second Amendment doesn't apply outside the home. Whereas, the book by Michael Waldman, cited by Seth Lipsky ("Tub to the Whale?"), argues that the amendment only applies when serving in the militia. OK. I guess it's possible that the only way a Colonial American could serve in the militia was to refuse to come out of the house, and that "Minuteman" referred to the time it took to bolt the front door and barricade oneself in the bedroom. But I doubt it.

What's more, neither argument can stand alone. The first falls on "...to keep and bear arms." I don't think "to bear" was colonial code for "render inoperable and lock in a safe." I suspect it meant the same then as it does now, "to carry."

The second argument is even dumber. There were debates at the time of our founding over the effectiveness of a militia and the dangers of a standing army. But nobody argued for a militia of the unarmed. Of what possible use would that be? Some argue the right only applies to those on active military duty. By that logic, if a general orders a private to turn his weapon in to the armory while on base, does the private have a constitutional right to tell the general to "go sit on it"?

The U.S. Constitution does not give the federal government any power to conscript private citizens into government service (in fact, the Thirteenth Amendment expressly forbids it). It does give Congress the power to call forth the militia, reorganize it, and place it under the Commander in Chief. I don't want to get into a long metaphysical

discussion here, but in the universe I inhabit time flows one way. The prerequisites have to come first. For Congress to call forth the militia the militia must already exist and the individuals being called forth must already be members of it. Otherwise the military draft is unconstitutional.

PAUL KELLY
DELTA, CO

THE STARK PHOTO of Hofdi House in Ken Adelman's *Reagan at Reykjavik* ("When the Cold War Cooled Down," *TAS*, June 2014) reminds me of a suggestion a few years back to the Reagan Library that a play be commissioned on that truly historic summit. Along the lines of the Dore Schary FDR biopic *Sunrise at Campobello*, it could be *High Noon at Reykjavik*—the lone aging Gary Cooper meets the evil Bolshies on the volcanic plains of Iceland.

The cast would include those pushing Reagan to abandon his maligned "Star Wars" for Soviet missile removals, including Gorbachev, Shultz, and even Dame Thatcher. The old cowboy Dutch Reagan stood truly alone, with an exasperated media vowing to skewer his resolve. "You could've said 'Yes.'"

And then, dejected on the return flight, he rose above all, penned a national address that swept America in polls even the press couldn't defy. Within a year the Soviets would capitulate on Reagan's terms and his forty-year quest would grace the planet. What is required is collaboration between an insightful witness and the dramatic renderings of a playwright. Half the collaboration is revealed. Calling Hollywood?

TIMOTHY P. O'NEILL
POMPAÑO BEACH, FL

CONGRATULATIONS on a most interesting June issue. R. Emmett Tyrrell's "The Press Never Calls" reminded me of a conversation I had in the 1990s with an Irish priest, who asked me what I thought of the Clintons. When I replied, "Not much," he gave a great snort. "Tinkers!" he said. "That's what they are: tinkers!" For an Irishman, that's a serious insult, so—to protect him from being added to Hillary's enemies list—I won't reveal his name.

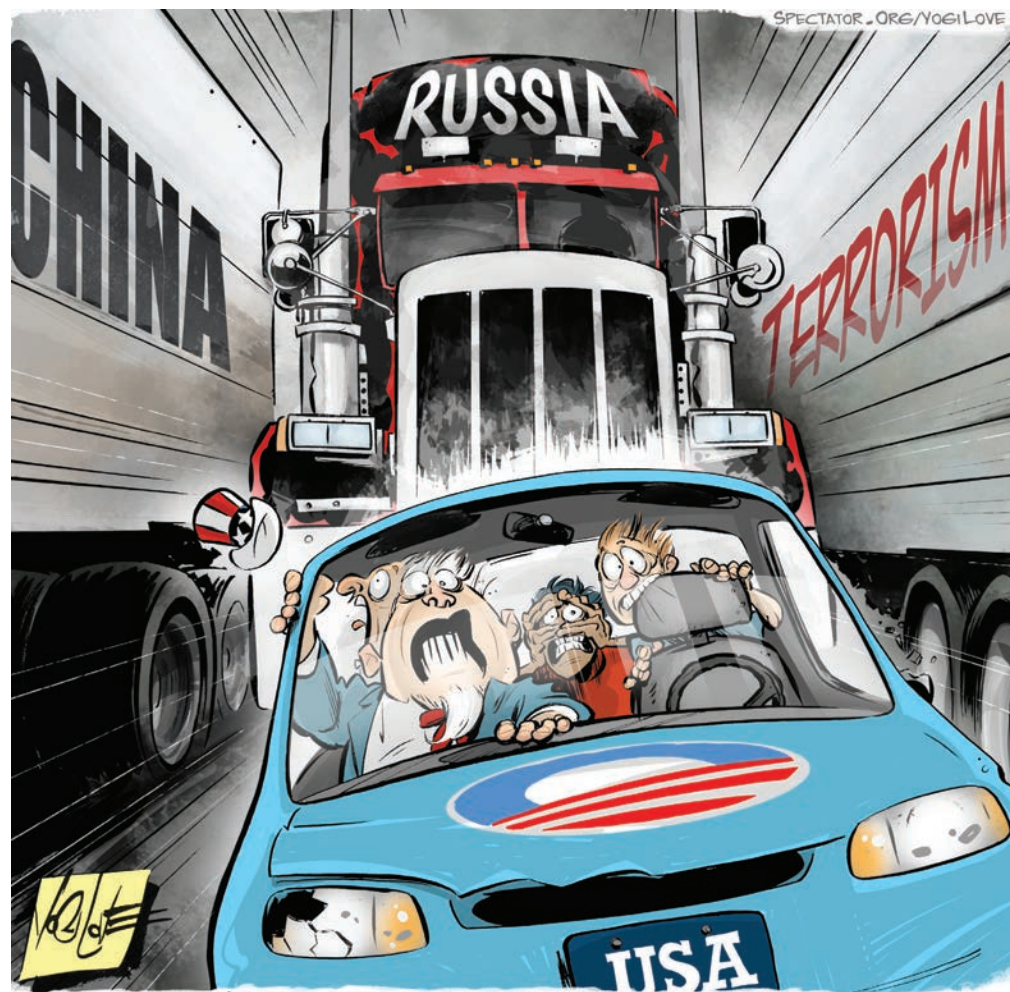
"The Ad Man Goes to War," by James Lileks, brought back memories of leafing through old *Time* magazines in my college library's stacks, and being amazed at how, after December 7, 1941, absolutely everything was somehow related to the war. Some ads were direct; I especially remember the caption of a very dramatic drawing of soldiers in combat, with shells exploding everywhere, proclaiming that Reynolds Aluminum was making the best weapons and ammo for our troops.

Joseph A. Harriss ("The Shocking Monsieur Shakespeare") never fails to entertain me with his acutely perceptive articles on all things French. My father was born in France, so I spent a year over there after college, visiting relatives and trying (with mixed results) to improve my language skills. Like him, I found France to be a strangely wonderful place. In 1971, I was able to attend the dress rehearsal of a Paris production of *Hamlet*, because my landlady's niece, Bulle Ogier, was playing Ophelia (she had, as I recall, a splendidly wanton mad scene). Jean-Louis Trintignant was a very intense and physical Hamlet, actually wrestling Ophelia to the ground during their post-soliloquy encounter. He pulled it off—but Laertes, apparently trying to emulate the star, overdid things by screaming and flopping on the floor at the news of Ophelia's death, making the audience giggle and leading me to hope that that bit would be gone by opening night.

The translation impressed me as being true to the original, and not at all bowdlerized. "Lady, shall I lie in your lap?... I mean, my head upon your lap," became, "*Madame, puis-je m'étendre sur vous?... Je veux dire, ma tête sur vos genoux.*" Of course, it was a very French touch to make the lines rhyme—but I think Monsieur Shakespeare would have approved.

ANNE G. BURNS
COS COB, CT

P.S. Several years ago Mr. Harriss wrote about the Algerian war. My grandmother's cousin, Gerard d'Ortho, who recently died at age 107, had a farm there, and wrote wonderful letters about his experiences. I would be glad to share them if he is interested.



AMERICA TESTS the "DRIVERLESS CAR" PROTOTYPE.

THE GUYS Grover Norquist and his critics debate ("Pygmies and Giants," *TAS*, March 2014; "Odds & Ends," *TAS*, June 2014) are all great Americans and quality candidates. Perry, Jindal, Walker, Cruz, Paul, or Christie would restore integrity and competence in the White House and perhaps more importantly carry out the urgent task of bringing about Hillary Clinton's retirement.

The problem not addressed by Norquist or his article's critics? They probably cannot win. The guy who can win holds neither a Senate seat nor sits in a statehouse: Ben Carson. The GOP's nominee will face in 2016 what McCain and Romney did in 2008 and 2012: demographics. The Democrats enjoy a big head start in the electoral college, which puts them a win in Florida away from the White House. (Or, they could capture Ohio—as they did in '08 and '12—along with Iowa.)

Saying his party and country need Dr. Carson because he's black sounds somewhat dismissive of his obvious qualifications. Nonetheless, if Dr. Carson could garner enough African-American votes to steal one or two of these otherwise unwinnable states

(read: by Paul, Cruz, or the others), a GOP victory is plausible. Winning only 30 or 35 percent of the black vote in, say, Pennsylvania, could steer the Keystone State's 20 electoral votes to the Good Guys. Such a victory would mean that losing Ohio or Virginia would not necessarily be fatal. The Republicans need the breathing room Dr. Carson could provide.

Dr. Carson's skin color aside, he would make a great candidate—maybe the best since Ronald Reagan. Assuming Hillary is the Dems' standard-bearer, she'd be sliced and diced in a debate with him. (Just imagine Carson vs. Joe Biden.) Dr. Carson brings a healthy narrative needed by this country in general and the Republican Party in particular. His common sense (conservative) and relaxed but sharply focused approach to issues would unite the RINOs and Tea Partiers and perhaps even attract some Democrats.

Norquist and his piece's critics badly missed the boat by omitting the one guy who would have the chance to return adults to the White House. Run, Ben, run!

FRANK FISHER
CHICAGO, IL

Flashback

*Editor's note: Forty years after Richard Nixon left public office, he remains in college journalism textbooks merely a stage prop used to set the scene for the heroics of the intrepid Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. But as our own Ben Stein noted in this 1974 review of *All the President's Men*, a book-length treatment of the Watergate investigation, the duo's greatest talent is perhaps not reporting but self-promotion. They have, after all, convinced a generation of moviegoers that they singlehandedly—well, perhaps doublehandedly—felled a United States president.*

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AT ONE POINT in the story of how two reporters for the *Washington Post* covered the Watergate story and broke much new ground in it, the following lines occur: “They had not broken the law...that much seemed certain. But they had sailed around it and exposed others to danger. They had chosen expediency over principle and, caught in their act, their role had been covered up. They had dodged, evaded, misrepresented, suggested, and intimidated, even if they had not lied outright.”

Those sentences do not refer to Richard Nixon or Ron Ziegler. Bernstein and Woodward are referring to themselves. And in those words, and in one additional word, is the secret of their phenomenal success—chutzpah is the additional word.

Chutzpah is defined as that quality which allows a person who has just killed his parents to throw himself on the mercy of the court and ask for leniency as an orphan.

Bernstein and Woodward had it in spades.

By one of those ironic twists of fate, when the Watergate story first broke on June 17, 1972, the *Washington Post's* editors gave it to two of the most nifty reporters that have ever lived—Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward. They combined almost limitless energy with limitless chutzpah, strained the result through an almost incomprehensible writing style, and brought

out some of the most interesting facts about the Watergate case.

It was Bernstein and Woodward who first made public the Mexican connection through which money from the Committee to Re-elect the President had reached the Watergate burglars. They did not find this out by their own investigations, but by getting Federal and local investigators to spill their guts.

Bernstein and Woodward also first broke the story about Donald Segretti and his dirty tricksters. They got the leads on this too from their sources within the government.

It was the golden boys who also got the first stories out about Haldeman's involvement with a secret fund used to pay the Watergate burglars. In this they were clearly wrong, at least in large part, and Haldeman himself denies the involvement to this day. But again, Bernstein and Woodward got what they wrote from sources, not from original research.

Nevertheless in their work, and in reading their book, there is a lesson for all students of government, reporting, communications, and human nature, which far transcends the reportage on Watergate.

The lesson is that in modern life, people who work in large organizations accumulate a lot of grievances. One of those grievances is that they are anonymous, faceless cogs in a machine. They can dispel some of the feelings of their own unimportance by telling secrets to the press. They can beat the system, in a word, by leaking.

They can “get back” at their bosses—the ones who do have known faces and personalities. They can become the center of attention—searched for both inside and outside their organizations.

Bernstein and Woodward found such people in the White House, in the Justice Department, in the FBI, in the CRP, and even in competing news-gathering organizations.

The people were rare and hard to find, but Bernstein and Woodward found that if they pushed against enough doors, eventually one would open.

The Bernstein and Woodward account of how they put their talents to work of the Watergate story is glowingly spelled out

in *All the President's Men*. But the authors' title is as misleading as many of their newspaper stories, and indeed as misleading as large parts of the book. The title is supposed to imply that all of the President's men were involved in Watergate. In fact, of course, only a relative handful of the top officials of the government, of the White House, or even of the CRP have even been accused of wrongdoing.

In fact, Dita Beard swore under oath that she did not write the memo attributed to her and that it was a forgery. The memo did not “show” anything. It implied a certain tenuous connection. The ITT pledge of money was to the San Diego Convention Bureau, not the Republicans, and the anti-trust settlement was not favorable to ITT. Instead it was the most stringent antitrust settlement in history, and even Archibald Cox praised it. Finally, Special Prosecutor Jaworski found no wrongdoing in the transaction. But the impression Bernstein and Woodward leave is very different.

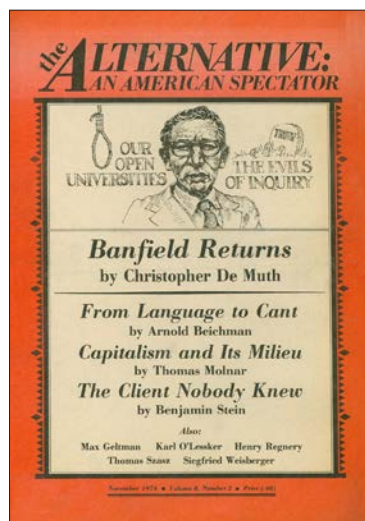
Another example is even more typical of the kind of false image the book tried to give to all the activities of the White House. Repeatedly throughout the book Woodward refers to a source so secret he did not even reveal it to Bernstein. The source was nicknamed “Deep Throat.” At one point, “Deep Throat” says that the Administration was bugging throughout its tenure, and that the bugging of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate was “only natural.” “The arrests in the Watergate sent everybody off the edge because the break-in could uncover the whole program.”

At many other times the authors say that such and such a source said Watergate and Segretti were just “the tip of the iceberg.”

In fact, no responsible authority has even hinted that the instigation of the activities of the “plumbers” was the same as that of the Watergate bugging.

Far more important, at least so far, no responsible person has suggested that there was an iceberg under that tip. There was no massive nationwide wiretapping operation, no wholesale campaign disruption, no emerging police state. There were just a few dirty tricks and the Watergate break-in and coverup. But Bernstein and Woodward repeatedly seek to leave the impression that had it not been for their intervention, Nixon would have been inaugurated in 1976 to the singing of the Horst Wessel Song....

READ THE REST ONLINE AT
www.spectator.org/woodstein



Review: *All The President's Men*

BY BEN STEIN

November 1974



Dr. George Washington Plunkitt, our prize-winning political analyst, has recently retired from a staff position with the House Ethics Committee and is working on volume seventeen of his memoirs, tentatively titled A Child Called "Sue": One Country Singer's Courage to Survive. But he has graciously consented to once again advise American statespersons in these times of trouble. Address all correspondence to The Bootblack Stand, c/o plunkitt@spectator.org.

Mr. Plunkitt—

IN EXPECTATION of runnin' for president, I've been workin' with a language coach. But I still keep gettin' tripped up. The other day I was at a nice Dallas café, and I ordered two Buds Lite and the chef's special paninus. The waiter looked at me funny and then asked me to meet him in the alley. I never even got my sandwich! How do I make myself seem smart without coming across as a faker?

RICK PERRY
GOVERNOR OF TEXAS

Governor—

WHAT MAKES you so sure the American people *want* a member of the intelligentsia in the White House? After all, they did elect that dolt Zachary Taylor. No, what Americans want is a man with true grit. A man who wears sandpaper boxer shorts. One who's willing to eat the larva at the bottom of the tequila bottle, or to lick an electric fence, just to taste the voltage. A man who's not afraid to make love to his first and only wife under the twinkling stars, after breaking into the local planetarium.

Might you be such a man? —GWP

Mr. Plunkitt—

THIS MONTH has been a fundraising bonanza. 1) We send out direct mail about the Plutocrat Republicans' imminent plan to *impeach* Barack Obama. 2) I fluff up my hair, go on MSNBC, and say that John Boehner may hold the gavel in the House, but that Ted Cruz holds the leash on a pack of rabid, bloodthirsty social Darwinists. 3) Money rolls into the Democratic National Committee headquarters in gooey gobs. We had to hire six more unpaid interns just to cart the checks up the street to the bank.

But what next? Won't donors be upset when the impeachment doomsday scenario we've painted fails to materialize?

DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ
DNC CHAIRWOMAN

DWS (if I may)—

THERE'S ALWAYS the next crisis. Since the plight of the underprivileged seems to be the time-worn Democratic line, try this little diddy on for size:

Dear Supporter:

Did you know that more than one out of every eighteen homeless drifters suffers from Restless Legs Syndrome? But those fat-cat Republicans don't want the federal government to do anything about it! Easy for them to say, sitting at home in their silk pajamas, their limbs totally stationary...

You can probably vamp from there. —GWP

Mr. Plunkitt—

I KEEP BEING tarred with that dang I-word: isolationist. Am not! The right term is noninterventionist. I just think that the United States needs some "me" time. Instead of sending our tax dollars overseas, we should focus on calming our own inner demons. Uncle Sam should turn down the lights, put on that Burt Bacharach album, get into a warm bubble bath, and stretch out those aching muscles. Just remember: no battleships in the tub. Only peaceful duckies.

RAND PAUL
UPWARDLY MOBILE U.S. SENATOR

Senator—

POTATO, POTATO / tomato, tomato...uh, maybe that doesn't translate well into print. I think the problem is this term, noninter-

ventionist. It sounds like that magic kind of surgery where they operate on your spleen by threading the scalpel up through your veins, starting in your big toe. You should coin a term with fewer syllables and definitely no more than two vowels. Rand Paul: foreign policy Stoic? —GWP

Mr. Plunkitt—

THERE ARE MILLIONS of unauthorized aliens living in our midst. And they keep coming. For decades I have been silent, but my conscience compels me to speak up.

I *did* see a spacecraft that cool night in 1969. It hovered above the pine ridge, and I watched as three glowing, gelatinous objects floated down to the ground and assumed human form. They flickered slightly as they dispersed, but it was the type of thing that would be imperceptible to those not on the lookout for it. I held my tongue, thinking it a mere scout team, an exploration party. Well, I have been seeing that telltale flicker more and more lately—most alarmingly on C-Span broadcasts of Congressional hearings. I believe the United States—Earth—is under full-scale infiltration by an invidious extraterrestrial force. But I am 90 years old, and no one will believe me. Help!

JIMMY CARTER

Mr. President—

ONLY ONE MAN has the expertise to deal with gelatinous monsters, but Bill Cosby is unfortunately indisposed. That said, are you sure they mean us harm? Perhaps they simply believe, as Milton Friedman did, in the interstellar free movement of labor. Perhaps they just want their offspring to have a brighter future than their own, the opportunity to start a spore cluster under a warm yellow sun. So long as they stay in Congress, they're doing jobs that normal Americans don't want. —GWP



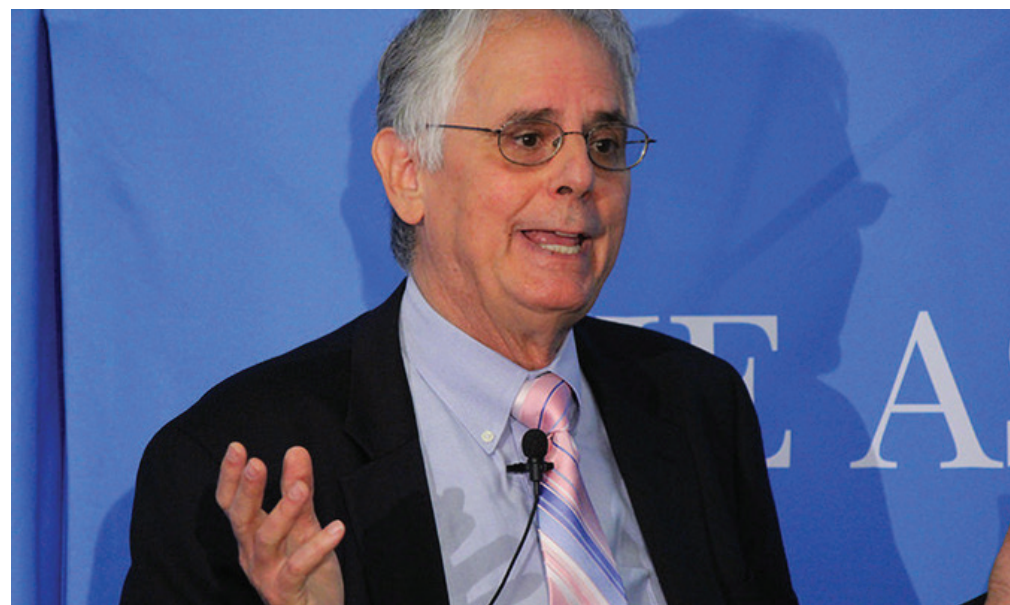
Obamacare Architect: Let's All Die at 75

by DAVID CATRON

IF GEORGE WASHINGTON was the father of our country, Benjamin Franklin was its grandfather. While the former was fighting the British at home, the latter was on the other side of the Atlantic securing the money and arms that kept the revolution alive. It is no exaggeration to say that, without Franklin's indefatigable diplomatic efforts in Europe, the American Revolution would have failed. What has this to do with Obamacare? When that conflict was officially ended by the Treaty of Paris, Franklin was 77 — well past the age when key ACA architect Ezekiel Emanuel says we should all embrace death.

Last week the Atlantic published an essay by Emanuel titled, "Why I Hope to Die at 75," wherein he avers that "families — and you — will be better off if nature takes its course swiftly and promptly." Note the words "you" and "families." Its title notwithstanding, Emanuel's article isn't really about himself. It is actually a none-too-subtle attempt to make us feel guilty for burdening our families, and society in general, by clinging to life past what he considers the optimum age to die. In other words, it is you whom he hopes will go gentle into that good night after three-quarters of a century.

Emanuel is a notorious proponent of medical rationing, and has long advocated denying care to the elderly. In fact, just prior to his 2009 appointment to President Obama's Coordinating Council on Comparative Effectiveness Research, he co-authored an article in the Lancet which promotes allocation of health care resources according to the age of the patient. In its introduction, he and his co-authors



recommend a rationing system that would prioritize "people who have not yet lived a complete life" yet go on to claim, "Unlike allocation by sex or race, allocation by age is not invidious discrimination."

Good luck selling that to Granny, who may have her own ideas about the optimum point at which to shuffle off her mortal coil. But, like all progressives, Emanuel is less concerned about the needs of individuals than those of the collective. His Lancet piece is obviously a set of socialist shibboleths, and it is by no means the only such manifesto he has written. In this 2013 article for the Journal of the American Medical Association, he bemoans the hidebound attitude of a physician community that still insists on put-

ting the health of individual patients before what he perceives to be the good of society.

And, somehow, the good of society always involves stiffing seniors. Why does he

pick on older people? For the same reason Willy Sutton is (inaccurately) said to have given when asked why he robbed banks. That's where the money is. About 25 percent of Medicare's annual budget, for example, is consumed by elderly patients during the last year of their lives. Emanuel and other advocates of rationing, including one who chastised me in the New York Times for asking

if Americans deserve a health care system run by soulless bureaucrats, believe that the only way to solve the problem is to deny Granny care.

**Is life after 75
not worth living?
Reagan was 76
when he stood
before the Brand-
enburg Gate
and said, "Mr.
Gorbachev, tear
down this wall."**

But this has never played well with the voters. The more they learn about Obamacare's Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB) and the "end-of-life counseling" that has once again reared its ugly head, the less they like the "reform" law that Emanuel helped design. So, in his Atlantic piece, he attempts to convince us that he is willing to make the same sacrifice that he advocates for the rest of us. Oddly enough, though, Emanuel concludes his article with the following caveat: "I retain the right to change my mind." When rationing begins, however, few seniors will have that choice.

Like most policy experts who support rationing, Dr. Emanuel is a man of independent means. If, at age 75, he is diagnosed with some serious disease whose treatment isn't paid for by his government coverage, he can simply write a check. Most of America's seniors are not quite so affluent. They are predominantly retired working people whose earnings were skimmed every pay-day in order to keep Medicare solvent. This is why the public overwhelmingly rejects rationing. They have spent a lifetime paying into the mythical Medicare Trust fund, and they expect coverage when they need it.

Tragically, that's what Great Britain's seniors also expected after enduring decades of ever-increasing taxes paid to keep the National Health Service afloat. Now, however, they discover that the NHS is writing them off if they require cancer treatment after reaching age 75. The people who run the NHS, like Dr. Emanuel and the other architects of Obamacare, are always ready to sacrifice seniors to the cause. And, regardless of the rhetoric, that's where Obamacare is going. It's the purpose of Comparative Effectiveness Research, the Independent Payment Advisory Board, and end-of-life counseling.

But Dr. Emanuel says that life after 75 isn't worth living anyway. Really? Ronald Reagan was 76 when he stood before the Brandenburg Gate and said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." Mahatma Gandhi was 77 when he saw his dream of Indian Independence come true. Nelson Mandela became President of South Africa at 76. And Benjamin Franklin attended the Constitutional Convention at age 81. What would the latter have said about Dr. Emanuel's wisdom concerning the optimum age to die? As Franklin put it in his autobiography, "Life's tragedy is that we get old too soon and wise too late." ❧

The Movies You Watch Aren't Gay Enough, Say Activists

by BILL ZEISER

GAY AND TRANSGENDER characters don't feature often enough in major Hollywood films, according to a bizarre claim from the activist organization GLAAD. I say that the claim is bizarre because their gripe is that "only" 17 out of 102 big studio films from 2013 featured gay characters. GLAAD regularly bean counts the number of homosexuals in film in their Studio Responsibility Index. "Only" seems a bit of an odd choice of words, though, when 3.8% of Americans identify as LGBT. If anything, gays are disproportionately represented in movies. This should hardly be surprising, given the distinctly liberal complexion of the entertainment industry.

The 3.8% figure, by the way, comes not from some arch-conservative organization undershooting the numbers. It's from the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, a think tank which studies—and is sympathetic to—the gay rights agenda. A sensible reader might be asking just what GLAAD's problem is at this point. After all, our liberal friends always say they want an (insert noun here) that "looks like America." A faculty that looks like America. A ladies' garden club that looks like America. A film industry that looks like America. In fact, films are now skewed in their representation of homosexuality. Hollywood's America is now, well, gayer than the America which exists in the real world. Shouldn't GLAAD declare victory in their self-interested crusade for token diversity?

Of course, anyone who follows the narrow special interest groups which have sprung up in our identity politics driven world knows that they'd never do any such thing. According to Erich Schwartzel writing over at the *Wall Street Journal's* Speakeasy blog,

GLAAD's dander is up because the gay characters didn't get enough screen time, didn't feature prominently in the plots, or were deemed to be offensively stereotypical. Their solution, not surprisingly, is to place pressure on studio heads. Per Schwartzel:

GLAAD is asking studios to give their movies a "Vito Russo Test. It's modeled after the "Bechdel Test," a concept popularized by "Fun Home" memoirist Alison Bechdel that asks if a work of fiction has two women in it who at some point talk to one another about a topic other than a man. (Some movies said to pass: "Die Hard," "Little Miss Sunshine," "Gone With the Wind.")

To pass GLAAD's version of the test, a movie must have an LGBT character who is not "solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity" and who "must be tied into the plot in such a way that their removal would have a significant effect." It's named for Vito Russo, the author of "The Celluloid Closet," considered a classic text in LGBT entertainment analysis.

This is remarkable for two reasons. First, a classic text in LGBT entertainment analysis? How many texts are there in that field? No, wait. I don't want to know. Second, GLAAD

is calling for the fulfilment of a mind-blowing paradox. At once, movies must prominently feature gay people, but they cannot be defined by their sexuality. Here, for once, I agree with GLAAD on something. Movie characters shouldn't be defined by their sexuality unless it's crucial to the plot. But if these gay characters, seemingly included to satisfy GLAAD's demands, aren't defined by their sexuality, what's the

point in the first place? After all, there are lots of details that make up an average person's life, but not all of them would move the plot of a movie forward. If they ever produce my epic screenplay "Bill Zeiser: Action Hero" (tagline: he may be alphabetically last, but he always comes in first), they likely wouldn't include the fact that I am a Yankees fan, since it wouldn't be germane to the plot.

Should silver screen heroes declare their homosexuality for no reason other than

I agree with GLAAD on at least one thing. Movie characters shouldn't be defined by their sexuality unless it's crucial to the plot.

GLAAD's insistence? Because that would make for some stilted and awkward scenes. "Are you feeling lucky, punk? By the way, the teachings of the social justice movement dictate that although it has no bearing on how many rounds are left in my .357 Magnum, I must inform you that I am an openly homosexual detective. Dirty Harry was a name I was given in San Francisco's leather subculture. Now please do not dwell on my sexuality."

One wonders if author J.K. Rowling's ridiculous decision to retroactively declare Harry Potter character Dumbledore gay would satisfy GLAAD's "Vito Russo Test." After all, he was central to the plot of the books, ergo the movie franchise, and his sexuality was so inessential that it wasn't even mentioned. The logical extreme of GLAAD's request is to push gay characters back into the ol' celluloid closet. ❧

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A Romney Redux Is the Last Thing the GOP Needs

by SCOTT MCKAY

THE NETFLIX DOCUMENTARY *Mitt* ought to be required viewing for American voters, and particularly the low-information types who cast their ballots for Barack Obama's 2012 re-election. *Mitt* chronicles the 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns of former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, and in it one can see the effects a long and grueling presidential campaign can have on a candidate and his family.

One can also see the chasm between who a man really is and what he's portrayed to be by his political opponents and the media. The Romney in *Mitt* is a man America would happily choose as its president: successful in business, faithful to God, blessed with family, easygoing with friends, and possessed of the intelligence and skill to serve in a high executive role. He's funny and down to earth. The Romney clan is straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting.

He's a man you can root for.

Why, then, was Romney also the out-of-touch plutocrat who found a way to lose what many on the right thought was an unloseable election? That's the question which must be answered by those who are now pinning for a third bite at the electoral apple for the former Bain Capital CEO.

There's a scene in *Mitt* where Romney tells the workers in his Boston campaign headquarters after losing the 2012 election that to an extent he had to "steal the nomination" because the GOP is southern, conservative, and populist, while he's a rich moderate from the Northeast. While some would call that an unnecessary surrender to a liberal premise, it's also a key reason why Romney failed to turn out the three or four million conservative voters he needed.

On one level, this sentiment for Romney Part Three can be seen as desperation on the part of a GOP establishment which is rapidly losing power among its base voters. After all, Romney was the overwhelming choice of the party's insiders and K Street crowd in 2012, and yet he still struggled to put away the GOP nomination against a crowded but ultimately uninspiring field.

Things have only become worse between the GOP's conservative voters and the big-money insiders since then. The savage treatment of Ted Cruz and other conservatives during and after the government shutdown last year, the loss of a winnable gubernatorial seat by Ken Cuccinelli in Virginia (complete with accusations that with more support from the party he could have prevailed), and the appalling corruption of the establishment in saving the Mississippi GOP primary for Thad Cochran over Tea Party challenger Chris McDaniel have only widened the chasm between the factions.

As a result, the likely moderate candidates in the 2016 race look unelectable—Chris Christie for his unnecessarily combative statements and whiff of corruption, and Jeb Bush for his support of amnesty and backing of Common Core. With Christie and Bush appearing unacceptable, 2016 might be the first year where the Republican electoral dynamic is turned on its head; rather than the base having to choose the most palatable option among establishment candidates, the establishment will have to stomach someone whose political roots spring from something closer to the Tea Party.

Romney is therefore the last gasp of the establishment—and that makes the prospect of a "third time's the charm" result for him even less likely.

There is a Mitt Romney who already

would be president, sadly. President Romney would have been the man who outplayed Barack Obama in 2012.

Presented with a blitz of TV ads making the outrageously stupid claim that he was responsible for a Kansas City steelworker's wife dying of cancer because of a plant closing in



which Bain Capital played a role, President Romney would have taken the opportunity to destroy Obama's chief means of attack. President Romney would have ensured the American people knew that, in contrast to the out-of-touch plutocrat Obama and the media wanted to paint him as, he had given more money to charity than Obama has ever earned. President Romney would have gone so far as to make sure that at every campaign stop he brought one of his fellow out-of-touch plutocrat friends to descend upon a Ronald McDonald house or homeless shelter or some other charitable facility to very publicly "make it rain," and in the obligatory mugging for local TV cameras he'd say something like:

Is having my friend Mr. Warbucks donate \$200,000 to the Greater Roanoke Center For Poor Kids a shameless campaign trick? Sure. We're running for president. Everything you do is in pursuit of positive publicity. But that man in the White House is running TV ads suggesting I'm out of touch with regular folks, and I can tell you I've been all over this country in the last year and I've talked to tens of thousands of people. I'm as in touch as you can imagine, and my heart is broken over all the suffering I see in Obama's America.

So this campaign will be about helping to relieve that suffering. We will give to and raise money for charity everywhere we go, because win or lose we're going to try to help people who need it. And we're going to show that there's a better way to help the poor than to have the government rob the people who make the country

Photo: Dave Lawrence/Flickr

work and forcibly redistribute their wealth.

President Romney also wouldn't have stayed quiet when CNN's Candy Crowley took it upon herself to save Obama from the political effects of his incompetence and lies over the Benghazi attack. President Romney would have offered something like: "Candy...what are you doing? I didn't come here to debate *you*, I'm here to debate *him*. Let the presidential candidates talk."

And then he would have demanded Obama account for the five appearances by Susan Rice on the Sunday shows following the massacre in which Rice infamously blamed a YouTube video for a military-style al Qaeda attack occurring on September 11, of all days.

A President Romney also would have reminded Obama of his words at the UN: "The future must not belong to those who would insult the Prophet of Islam." He would have demanded that Obama explain to America how that wasn't an attempt to blame the YouTube video for Benghazi in front of the entire world.

Unfortunately, we only met President Romney in that glorious first debate, after which he disappeared, leaving the country to wither under Obama's misrule for the next four years.

Republican voters can't count on the re-emergence of President Romney. As a result, we're more than satisfied with wishing the guy in *Mitt* had won...and moving on to give someone else a chance. ☛

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We Need Another Gulf War Effort

by WILLIAM TUCKER

IN AUGUST 1990, Saddam Hussein led what was then the fourth largest army in the world, a battle-hardened group that had just fought the ten-year Iran-Iraq War, into Kuwait to seize its oil fields.

It was a clear violation of international law and national sovereignty, but as usual, Saddam had his own list of rationalizations—northern Kuwait really belonged to Iraq—plus the law that might makes right.

So what did we do? America's interests were clearly at stake—we were much more dependent on foreign oil—but we were

obviously not going to fight the whole of Saddam's army at such a distance. Instead, President George Bush, in what was probably the brilliant diplomatic effort of the century, spent a half year assembling a coalition of 36 nations from five continents lined up against Saddam. The entire Middle East signed on—they feared Saddam's incursions were only beginning—but countries from Europe, Africa, South America, and Asia signed on as well.

In the end, it was the world against Saddam. The shooting war finally broke out in January 1991, the final ground phase in late February lasting only 100 hours. The U.S. suffered 186 casualties and Saddam's army was completely routed. President Bush's approval ratings rose to 92 percent, the highest ever recorded.

The U.S. faces an almost identical situation now with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. ISIS is a rogue government that has very little local support even among the areas it is occupying. It relies on terror and conquest. Even in areas where it was originally welcomed, its harsh regimen and inhuman tactics have cost it the support of the population. Surrounding it are national governments that live in fear of its incursions. Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran and the Kurdish Regional Authority all see ISIS as an alien intruder that must be contained. Moreover, the threat of terrorism carries far outside the region. With a secure, Al-Qaeda-like "base," ISIS is in obvious position to threaten any country in Europe or North America with random acts of terror.

So why hasn't President Obama duplicated George Bush's effort and, working through the United Nations, assembled a coalition of forces that could put the stranglehold on IS? It might take many months but an alliance of nations could line up on ISIS's perimeter and advance in a coordinated effort from all sides. American air power would obviously play a crucial role but a huge commitment of U.S. ground forces would not necessarily be needed. Much more important would be providing these national armies with sufficient weaponry. Faced with a coordinated attack on all

fronts, it is doubtful ISIS could hold out for six weeks.

What has prevented President Obama from acting? There seem to be two things. First, he would be unable to "lead from behind" but would have to get out front in directing this global effort. Unfortunately, the President is surrounded by scholars and advisers who spend their time lamenting that America no longer has the power and prestige it once had in the world. Therefore these things are no longer possible. But this is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The less we try to do in the world, the more helpless we become.

Probably equally important, assembling a coalition to oppose an enemy halfway around the world is not the kind of thing the President wants to engage in right now. He frankly sees the Middle East mess as a distraction—probably as something that never would have happened if George Bush, Jr. had not invaded Iraq—and has been hoping the whole thing will go away.

He would much rather spend his last two years pursuing his domestic policies of redistributing wealth in this country, and implementing the "green agenda" for the American economy than in dealing with foreign adversaries. (We still haven't heard Secretary of State John Kerry say that ISIS represents a greater threat to the world community than global warming.)

ISIS represents a threat to Western civilization of a kind not seen since the Mongol Invasions of the thirteenth century. Then Europe found itself prostrated before a warrior nation of armed horsemen intent on destroying everything in their path and who treated their conquests with unbelievable cruelty. The Ottoman Empire continued this tradition for centuries afterward, beating on the gates of Vienna several times before finally being turned away by a united Europe in the later seventeenth century.

The ISIS threat is not going to go away. It is driven by a faith in conquest and violence plus the conviction that Moslems are destined to rule the world. If we do not strangle it in its cradle now, the problem will only continue to grow to world proportions. ☛

If we do not strangle the Islamic State in its cradle now, the problem will only continue to grow to world proportions.

Climate Worship at the Cathedral

by MARK TOOLEY

NATURALLY there was a religious auxiliary to the Global Warming jamboree in the form of the Interfaith Summit on Climate Change, sponsored by the World Council of Churches, among others. And of course it included earth-friendly worship at the flamboyant Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine, whose theologically provocative services some critics have labeled earth worship.

Those critics would have found vindication at the cathedral on Sunday, September 21, when “The Religions of the Earth Multi-

every moment of my life to bring into reality the beautiful peace prayer that my tradition has given us. Because protecting our species, defending the climate, and protecting the rights of people, is about making peace with the earth, and peace between people.”

An Eskimo elder from Greenland pledged with his stone to “somehow melt the ice in the heart of man,” as he summoned help from his ancestors with what one report called a “deep, piercing call that echoed off the walls and arches of the cathedral.”

Episcopalians often cherish their blue blood genealogy, but shrieking out for dead ancestors in church is not typical at traditional Episcopal worship. Not bound by orthodox tradition, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine has for decades experimented with and hosted highly non-traditional rites often focused on earth veneration that verge on pantheism.

Al Gore preached at the cathedral climate service of course, although his remarks seemed relatively tame, amid the rock piles, piercing appeals to the ancestors, and giant phoenixes flying overhead.

“We have a duty to be watchful, not just by opening our eyes but by opening our hearts,” Gore intoned in his Baptist voice. “It is time to be wakeful and to be alert. That is my pledge. To be wakeful, to be alert and to call on others to do the same.” Gore insisted the evidence for human induced cataclysmic global warming is “incontrovertible.”

But skeptics of Global Warming scare talk point out that global temperatures have largely

been flat for nearly 17 years. And a former Obama administration official from the Energy Department declared in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed in time for the New York climate festival: “We often hear that there is a ‘scientific consensus’ about climate change. But as far as the computer models go, there isn’t a useful consensus at the level of detail relevant to assessing human influences.”

Such modesty and nuance were largely absent from the secular and religious hoopla surrounding “The People’s Climate March.” The Interfaith Climate Summit and especially its fulsome, rock-strewn worship at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine better illustrate that much of the intense Global Warming activism is more based on dogmatic theology than objective science.

With similarly fearful devotion, the Reli-

gious Left once marched for population control based on urgent fears of imminent global mass starvation and overcrowding. Later it marched for unilateral nuclear disarmament based on theories of nuclear winter and the illusion of moral equivalence with the Soviets. Ever in search of imminent apocalypse to justify its worst apprehensions, in recent years the Religious Left has pleaded against fossil fuels as the ostensible poison that will suffocate the earth.

Of course, all of these apocalyptic causes demanding precipitate political action conveniently have synchronized with the Religious Left’s hostility to political and economic liberty in favor of heavily centralized authority. The increasing plentitude of inexpensive fossil fuel supplies benefiting the American and global economy is a special threat to hopes for curtailing economic growth and free markets.

The greatest beneficiaries of cheap, plentiful fossil fuels are the global poor, who are less and less dependent on the old oil cartel, and for whom environmentalist dreams of complete reliance on expensive and unreliable solar and wind alternatives were never feasible.

Hundreds of millions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America need more oil, gas and coal if they are ever to escape chronic poverty and ever hope for living standards approaching the wealth of typical worshippers at the Cathedral for St. John the Divine in New York.

“By this stone, we are reminded life is about circles,” pronounced one celebrant cradling a rock at the cathedral’s climate rally. Circles and metaphors might be fine for gurus and activists. But for most of the world’s population struggling to survive, progress and growth offer more tangible hope. ❧

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Scotland Stays

by DANIEL J. FLYNN

WHEN SCOTLAND “voted” on union with her southern neighbor 307 years ago, English troops flowed to the border and English pounds flowed through the Scottish parliament. English force sought, unlike Hadrian, to welcome and not repel. The parliamentarians quietly voted “yes”; their constituents loudly shouted “no.”

Robert Burns eloquently agreed with the screaming sentiment of the people rather than the pols:



faith Service” paid homage to Mother Earth by asking worshippers to pile stones on the altar to confirm their climate commitment. Over a thousand concerned religious activists filled the pews, praying for and at times seemingly to the earth, beneath two giant sculptures of feathered phoenixes that soared overhead in the huge gothic worship space.

Urging on the stone bearers was Chief Arvol Looking Horse, Lakota spiritual leader and 19th Generation Keeper of the White Buffalo Calf Pipe Bundle. He explained that rocks were first in the Great Spirit’s creation, worriedly adding, “Spirit Mother is sick, and has a fever.”

“These [rocks] are not inert matter, they are not dead matter,” further explained Indian environmentalist Vandana Shiva. “They are life. And with this rock, I commit myself

What force or guile could not subdue
Thro' many warlike ages
Is wrought now by a coward few
For hireling traitor's wages.

More than three centuries later, Scotsmen—rather than representatives who don't represent—voted whether to part from the Englishmen they had so controversially joined. Enjoying about as full a democratic expression as modern times have known, and minus the coercion, Scots apparently decided that differences did not dictate divorce, after all.

In what way, Scotsmen certainly contemplated, would untethering the crosses of St. Andrew and St. George change matters?

Would trade barriers restrict commerce between Adam Smith's homeland and William Gladstone's? Would Scots opt to drop English en masse for the ancient tongue? Would England prevent Scottish tourists from visiting London and Scotland prevent English tourists from visiting Edinburgh?

If the component parts of the whole fly separate flags and field separate soccer teams, then to some extent the "nation" isn't much of a nation. But a nation ain't what it used to be, as indicated by the Scottish "yessers" who hoped had the referendum passed to share a currency. So what would have been the effect of this parting between friends?

Strangely, the English might have won had "no" lost. Scottish members of parliament, overwhelmingly belonging to left-wing parties, necessarily make the United Kingdom more socialist. Scotland may have become a Scandinavian paradise, as some Scotsman had hoped. But such paradises rarely work in the world as they do in the imagination for the simple reason that fewer people work in them. In effect, the socialist Scots traded the cry of "Freedom!" from William Wallace, or at least his thespian medium Mel Gibson, for one of "Serfdom!"

Alas, the course of Scotland, even if the wrong course, remains for Scots to map. But following nationalist socialists, as history strongly suggests, isn't a course that winds up in the right place.

**Alas, the
course of
Scotland, even
if the wrong
course, remains
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to map.**

Conversely, Englishmen, not Scots, should chart England's course. Is England more English by diluting the British Parliament with the 59-member Scottish delegation that boasts exactly one Conservative Party member?

Such a better-off-without-them attitude characterized the antebellum secessionists in the American North. Outrage over the addition of the foreign slaveholding nation of Texas to the Union by simple majority votes in Congress (rather than through the more stringent requirements of a treaty or constitutional amendment) sparked secessionist sentiment in New England in the 1840s.

More scandalized that their flag flew over slavery than some Englishmen must be that their flag flies over socialism, anti-slavery activists, stoked by the speeches of William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, resolved at a meeting held a mile from my home 168 years ago: "That for Massachusetts to remain as a partner in a Union, in which her people are deprived of every constitutional right, and continually subjected to the most atrocious insults and outrages, is to make herself a willing bond slave, traitorous to the cause of human liberty, and responsible for every act of usurpation which has stained the Federal Government with pollution and blood."

Fifteen years later, some of the same activists who had supported secession supported killing secessionists. Everybody believes in their right to leave. It's the right of others to go that plays as such a sticking point.

Patriots, in England now and America then, obsess over subtraction. They overlook what William Lloyd Garrison and the abolitionists certainly did not: addition. Bringing outsiders into a deal doesn't strengthen the original stakeholders. It dilutes power.

The empire on which the sun never set may be more powerful today than yesterday. It's less English than it might have been. And that's the problem—oft seen in advance but seldom in hindsight—with Empire, Manifest Destiny, and their many relatives. There isn't power in a union. ☛

Solar Plant Fries Birds in Midair

by GREG WALCHER

AT THE MOST modern solar power plant in the world, researchers are setting birds on fire in midair—by the thousands. They call them "streamers," because of the smoke plume that is quite visible as they ignite and plummet to earth. Stories of the scorched birds were so widespread that alert investigators from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided to visit the plant—built by BrightSource Energy near the California/Nevada border. The Feds watched in horror as they saw an average of one "streamer" every two minutes.

Coincidentally, the company is asking California regulators to approve an even larger version of the solar plant, and the Feds are—predictably—urging the state to halt the application until more Feds can conduct more studies.

The Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System is an amazing engineering achievement, harnessing the sun's energy on a massive scale. The \$2.2 billion plant, just launched this spring, is the world's largest solar thermal plant. Some 300,000 mirrors reflect solar rays onto three boiler towers, each the height of a 40-story building. The water inside is heated to produce steam, turning turbines that can generate 392 megawatts a year, enough electricity to power 140,000 homes. A federal government that claims to encourage such renewable energy ought to be proud, but instead wants to hit the brakes.

The rash of sensational news stories about fried birds is not surprising—for two reasons:

First, any kid who ever used a magnifying glass to scorch ants could tell them that if you focus the sun's rays that intently, anything in the path will get burned. We also learn at a very young age that light attracts bugs. Thus, if you fill the desert with intensely focused light it will attract legions of bugs, which will attract legions of birds. Estimates of the number of birds fried while flying through the area range from at least 1,000 to as many as 28,000 a year.

Second, some federal agency can always be counted on to oppose anything—especially any use of any form of energy anywhere at any time. The coal industry is struggling to survive the EPA's newly proposed greenhouse

gas regulations, the effect of which will be to essentially ban coal-fired power plants. The feeding frenzy about “fracking” has spawned political initiatives across the country seeking to ban drilling for oil and gas, and the EPA also wants to federalize that issue. The Obama Interior Department imposed a moratorium on further leasing of oil shale lands (with deposits equal to all the known oil reserves of the world). The fledgling biomass energy industry is still sputtering in the West because the Forest Service does not make enough timber available to create significant energy. Finally, numerous organizations are up in arms about the impact of wind farms on birds, some threatening to sue the Administration for granting waivers to the wind industry.

Combine these two facts and you have the perfect recipe for controversy, so lots of tax money will be spent fighting, and defending, the newly proposed solar expansion. We can look forward to more studies, from the federal agencies themselves and from their friends in the environmental industry. And just in case you think federal agencies are consistent, the Fish and Wildlife Service is in the same Department as the BLM, which owns the land and permitted the Ivanpah plant.

In their defense, the plant’s owners are saying that not all the “streamers” are birds. Some of them, they say, are actually insects. If so, shouldn’t the Feds be shocked at that? Never mind the need for electricity at 140,000 homes — let’s worry about the callousness of a corporation that thinks it’s OK to fry insects like schoolboys with a magnifying glass!☹

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Eliminate the Position of White House Press Secretary

by JAY HOMNICK

I DON’T MEAN to josh; I mean this in earnest. I think it is time to eliminate the office of White House press secretary. There is no point in having a permanent Commander in Chief to tell us how great a job the President is doing, without regard to reality, actuality, verity or accuracy.

This musing overtook me as I watched the presiding plenipotentiary of the podium, Josh Earnest (I promise I am not making this name up), field a query about a contradiction between Second Term Obama and his popular predecessor, First Term Obama. Apparently old First Term was recorded saying he could not go about changing immigration law on his own because that power was reserved to Congress by the Constitution. However, Second Term has been saying that since Congress won’t do their job because they are busy trying to stop him from doing his job he must stop doing his job and do their job for them instead. For the uninitiated, this is the translation into Flapdoodle of promising to change immigration law by his lonesome.

Earnest was so shocked that someone would deign to match First Term twaddle to Second Term swagger that he lapsed into a circular stream of incoherence. Something along the lines of “the President has always believed that immigrants are the backbone of our democracy,” which crosses nobility with redundancy to produce meaninglessness.

Watching this spectacle, I could not help thinking it is time to write this office off as a lost cause.

Once upon a time it had a fairly lofty purpose. The idea was not to be the President’s campaign manager but to inform the people - through the press - of things they needed to know about the day-to-day deliberations in the highest echelons of the executive branch of government. It was never designed as a tell-all Freedom of Information Act outpost. No one expected to hear exactly what was said at that day’s Cabinet meeting, but it was possible to deliver some substantive sense of what was on the table at a given time. Without spreading classified material, a good press secretary could give the citizen some perspective on events.

It was also a vehicle for a President to get out messages to the nation, to give a broad sense of his direction and the goals of his administration. The President was shocked to hear about the passing of... The President was proud of the young lady in Oregon who risked her life to... The President was appalled at the behavior of the shopkeeper who refused to serve... The President was inspired by the victory of the underdog high school basketball team that overcame injuries and the tragic death of a teammate to...

What it never became was a license to lie and fake and feint and defraud and misinform and mislead and misrepresent and cov-

er up and double down. But somewhere the self-restraint broke down and another great national institution lost its conscience.

It is hard to pin down just when the job became that of a spin doctor. During the Clinton days, there was a lot of pressure on Dee Dee Myers and Mike McCurry to behave as full-time apologists for Bill Clinton’s misadventures. They were both nice people with a basic integrity to their character and they had to get out of there before too long, with some shreds of their consciences intact.

In the case of Barack Obama, the press secretaries have adopted all his flaws from Day One. While he traveled the country



blaming everything on George W. Bush, Mr. Gibbs and then Mr. Carney echoed his refrain. Everything Obama did was right and motivated by the noblest intentions; everything the Republicans did was wrong and motivated by the crassest intentions.

At this point, it is time to just shut this thing down. It has become an abomination. How do I explain to my children that every word out of the mouth of the latest sweet-faced shill is deliberate distortion? That the whole image of a responsible representative offering an insight into the President’s mind is an elaborate scam to gull sincere people into swallowing rank partisan propaganda.

Oddly enough, the ideal press secretary would be a combination of joshing and earnestness. A kidding relationship with the pack of journalists baying at his heels for more than he can give, tempered by an earnest effort to present fairly the facts that he can share. There seems little chance of that happening anytime soon, certainly in a Democrat administration. ☹

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Does interest in the World Cup show that Americans are finally taking to soccer?

Football vs. Fútbol— No Contest in El Norte

by LARRY THORNBERRY

IT'S NEVER as bad an experience, and I don't have to assume an undignified position. But the quadrennial World Cup has this in common with my annual exam by my urologist: at some point I'm sure to ask, "Good grief, isn't this over yet?"

It's not that I begrudge America's small band of true soccerphiles the chance to enjoy a game they like on a large stage. (These folks are well represented by my friend Wlady Pleszczynski, whose appreciation of fútbol is opposite my harrumphs.) But I'm mildly annoyed by the flogging and over-coverage of a sport few Americans know or care much about.

The dreamy prediction by the soccerati that futbol will soon break out as a major American sport has been making the rounds since Pelé was a pup. It hasn't happened and won't unless Barack Obama succeeds in his efforts to erase the southern border of the U.S. and shoehorn every Central American into the lower 48. Sure, non-Spanish-speaking folks like soccer too. But how central soccer will be in America's sports future will depend to a large degree on how Spanish that future is. The gradual increase in interest in soccer here closely tracks immigration, legal and otherwise, from south of the border.

Most people who play, watch, and/or care about sports usually stick with the ones they learned early on. I was marinated at a young age in baseball and boxing, the sports my dad and his blue-collar mates down at the plant knew and loved. I later learned basketball and football (as

opposed to fútbol). A late addition to my sports lineup has been hockey, a game absent from my Southern upbringing.

Most American men, and some fine women, engage with one or more of these five sports (not forgetting the tennis and golf aficionados amongst the Izod set). For sportsaholics who like all five, there simply isn't room for yet another entry.

Were there but world enough and time, sport No. 6 for me wouldn't be soccer. Mr. Nice Guy musings that you like what you learn first aside, please allow me some measured and totally objective observations: Soccer is slow, low scoring, low on action, and, as we learned during this year's Cup, features an alarming undercurrent of cannibalism. Besides, the matches last a day and a half, a long time to attend to any game that finishes nil-nil. Soccer has an offside rule that is as mysterious as the infield fly rule and makes less sense.

Soccer is the metric system of sports. It charms Lexus leftists who've visited Europe and should stay there. (Precincts with high densities of soccer fans correspond to those with high sales of bidets.) The most fascinating action produced by the sport are the fights in the stands between rival fans, brought on, my guess is, by boredom, because all these testosterone-besotted and beer-soaked young men are shoved together in tight quarters with nothing to do but watch fútbol. Perhaps TV cameras should focus on these fights rather than on the wiry guys leisurely kicking a ball around a big, green cow pasture.

THIS WORLD CUP YEAR, coming as it did after the politicization of the sports media, my annoyance escalated to irritation. The drones at ESPN (Every Sport Political Now), and their imitators at national broadcast outlets and newspapers down to the *River City Daily Bugle*, covered

the Cup extravagantly and took to nagging Americans to like soccer, for no other reason than that the rest of the world likes it. It's suggested, by the crowd that treats the arrival of the first openly gay player in the NFL as a fabulous cultural event, that anyone who doesn't appreciate soccer is a mouth-breathing, knuckle-dragging, nativist yahoo.

These scoldings aren't really about soccer, nor even about sport. They're about cultural politics, about how elites look down on Joe and Jill Americano and like to strike moral poses at their expense. These are the same scoundrels who hector us about global warming and want us to watch women's basketball. They needn't be taken seriously. But they can sure get up a guy's nose.

With all the nagging, the extravagant coverage, and the once-in-four-years chance for patriots to pull for an American team, Cup TV ratings increased by about 20 percent over 2010 (at least until the U.S. was eliminated), and at least a few sports bars overflowed with twenty-somethings drinking beer, flirting with each other, and possibly watching soccer on the conveniently located big-screens. There was even a front-page story with photos in my local *Tampa Tribune* about companies whose employees spent part of the work-day watching Cup matches. Advanced as evidence that soccer is coming on in America, this in fact just confirms that some people would rather watch a sporting event on TV than work.

Not an impressive haul considering the entire American elite was acting as a hallelujah chorus for "the beautiful game." After the Cup concluded, Major League Soccer in America has done no better in attendance or TV ratings than it did last year. Soccer is still a niche sport in El Norte. Roger Goodell needn't worry that his NFL will be kicked off of page one of America's sports sections any time soon—at least not for another four years, when the nagging will begin again. ❧

Larry Thornberry is a writer in Tampa.

The World's Game

by WLADY PLESZCZYNSKI

THIS IS GOING to be as easy as a penalty kick. Of course, if you're not a fan I can't help you. I don't mean a fan of soccer itself, just of any major sport. Openness to one leaves one open to all. Growing up in southern California, I quickly became a fan of baseball (the Dodgers) and soon enough of football (the Rams, USC) and basketball (the Lakers and UCLA). Soccer I don't know when I first heard of. A 1967 documentary whose name I've just now had to look up—*Goal! The World Cup 1966*—introduced me to Pelé and the great tournament itself, but more delightfully to such very English-sounding soccer names as Nobby Stiles and Bobby Charlton. There was a world out there.

My sense of it expanded soon enough when I found myself in Poland for a summer, cut off from Major League baseball and American sports pages. Soccer came to a rescue of sorts. Poland's national team played a "friendly" against Norway. It was nationally televised and my introduction to the host country's great star Włodzimierz Lubański. (My wife still swoons at his mention.) Poland won easily, and I was impressed.

Five years later Polish soccer peaked, the team qualifying for the 1974 World Cup and preventing England from advancement thanks to the two sides' epic 1-1 tie in Wembley Stadium on October 17, 1973. That's when I learned the phrase "A Tie Worthy of Victory!" (It sounded more dramatic in the original Polish: *Remis Godny Zwycięstwa!*) In the Cup itself Poland surged to the finals and defeated Brazil for third place. The country shut down not because of anything the communists did.

A few years after that I found myself deeper behind the Iron Curtain, summer-studying in Kiev. Sports there were barely visible, until I caught wind in late August of an upcoming soccer game in town, featuring the storied Kiev Dynamo against the Moscow Army team. Imagine such a match-up today. But back then it was a rather desultory affair. The stadium was at least half empty and thanks to the usual front row of KGB troops on all sides even deader than that. Ah, but the results: 5-0 Kiev, with Oleg Blokhin scoring three of the goals. You haven't heard of him? Even before 1977 he was regarded as the fin-

Wlady Pleszczyński is editorial director of *The American Spectator*.



est Soviet player, a European player of the year, and a member of Pelé's all-world team. He later became independent Ukraine's head coach. It's always more than a game.

And it's hardly the kinder and gentler sport of our social planners. In the 1970s I remember the emergence of Kyle Rote, Jr. as the face of American professional soccer. As the son of an NFL star and a golden boy in his own right he was perfectly positioned to represent the new alternative to America's most punishing sport. It never really got going, starting in my California hometown of Santa Barbara, where Rote often came calling. The city's professional team folded at mid-season. Co-ed elementary school soccer had a better chance of survival. I mention this only because it all seemed such a far cry from actual soccer. To my mind nothing captured it more than a not so friendly "friendly" in Hamburg between West Germany and Brazil in April 1978, in which the opening minutes consisted of nothing more than each side taking out the other at the shins at midfield. Until the referee restored control, that was soccer left to its own devices.

It's been slow going, but American soccer has grown up some since that naïve era. Not that the tough play required at the international level has become any easier as competition only intensifies as it becomes more widespread. At the same time, technology makes access to live soccer that much more

available—and in the U.S. it helps that advertisers and broadcasters have found a way to televise games without having to insist on two-minute warnings or even streaming ads.

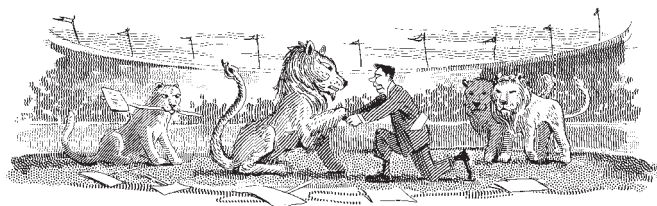
The quadrennial World Cup is an amazing selling point, a well-organized, efficiently run month-long pageant involving countries from most every continent and countless players and at least some teams of unmatched competitiveness and skills. There's of course the setting—sold out stadiums under majes-

tic sky for a game that showcases the uses of space on and above the field below. There are the players' unique set of skills—of foot, leg, knee, and head, for starters—and seemingly effortless stamina. Even American skeptics appear to give credit to those attributes. (Ever notice how any NBA player immediately receives extra recognition when someone notes he's a former soccer player?)

And then there's the scoring—supposedly always not enough of it in non-fans' eyes, but all the reason to respect it in soccer itself. A single goal can make all the difference, as Germany demonstrated in the World Cup finale last summer. And too many goals in a game cheapens their effect, as Germany also demonstrated in the Cup's semifinal last summer. It wasn't Germany's fault it played perfect soccer that day—simply Brazil's, for being such an unworthy opponent. Implicit here is soccer's profound understanding that glory in this world has to be earned, not given away, penalty kicks notwithstanding. ❧

**The World Cup
is an amazing
selling point, a
month-long
pageant involving
countries from
most every
continent.**

in the COLOSSEUM



by AMANDA C. ELLIOTT

The Negotiator

Raul Labrador on government shutdown, voter outreach, and John Boehner's honor.

WASHINGTON IS a city full of dueling egos, a kind of bubble of exaggerated self-awareness. But it's where Raul Labrador, the forty-something immigration lawyer-turned-Congressman, has made his bed.

There is something brutally honest about Labrador. And it's not just that he tells it like he sees it or that he has a diagnosis for every problem (though he does). He's in the negotiating business. From afar, his fellow conservatives in the House seem to be wandering leaderless through a desert, chasing budget cut mirages, hunting for Obamacare oases. In Labrador, they may have found their man.

Today, it's mid-summer and Labrador is sitting in his tiny office in a back corner on the fifth floor of the Longworth House Office Building. Outside, the Capitol is engulfed in the kind of steamy, blistering humidity Washington, D.C., is known for. Inside isn't much better. A portable fan is running to try to cool things down.

It's been four years since the wave that swept him and so many of his conservative colleagues into the marbled halls of Congress. Like so many others, Labrador fell into the hardline camp almost immediately. Now, credibility in tow, he's working to refine that image.

Though he says he disagrees with the accepted Washington narrative about disillusioned pols in a dysfunctional Washington, there's no denying things have been rough for him and the rest of the 2010 class. Debt ceilings. Continuing resolutions. Budget negoti-

ation after budget negotiation. A government shutdown that snuck in there along the way.

The class of 2010 came to Washington with a clear mandate. So far they've been thorns in the side of the Obama administration. But that's easy. What's more difficult is staying true to conservative principles and getting things done, all without turning Americans off. Labrador, for one, is perfectly honest about it: his party's messaging and negotiating techniques stink.

Take last year's government shutdown. Many have blamed the sixteen-day mess on Labrador and his fellow Republicans in the House, but won't mention that to his face. In fact, he outwardly bristles when I suggest that the shutdown was right out of his playbook. "It actually wasn't, because we never had a consistent message. We kept changing the playbook. So one day we're asking for X and the next day we were asking for Y," he says. "If you're going to negotiate, you have to be consistent and be clear what your demands are."

He continues: "What House conservatives were asking for was pretty simple: give us a one-year delay of Obamacare and we will give you a one-year CR. That was a pretty simple message," he says, clearly miffed. "That was never the message that came out of our leadership. Our leadership said give us a complete repeal of Obamacare and we will give you...nothing."

SAT DOWN with Labrador less than a week after the congressman had attempted the riskiest move of his political career. He threw his hat in alongside heir-apparent Kevin McCarthy to replace the defeated and outgoing Eric Cantor as majority leader. In many ways, it was the political story of the summer.

If nothing else, his leadership bid made people sit up and start paying attention.

Up until that point, Labrador was probably best known for his championing of comprehensive immigration reform, a position informed by his background as an immigration lawyer and very much in line with the aspirational Reagan-era conservatism in vogue when he came of age politically. Like Marco Rubio in the Senate, Labrador was young-ish, affable, articulate, and, of course, Hispanic: well-suited, in other words, to taking up the task of reaching out to Latino voters on behalf of his party. Many observers were surprised last June when he dropped out of the so-called "Gang of Eight," the bipartisan group devoted to pursuing immigration reform in the House. At the time he told reporters that he disagreed with his colleagues about immigrants' health care, saying in a statement, "Like most Americans, I believe that health care is first and foremost a personal responsibility."

Principles aside, it is hard not to see his retreat as a concession to political reality: hard as it may have been to predict back in 2010, the GOP grassroots has turned out to be thoroughly opposed to comprehensive-style reform and, some would say, to the optimistic view of immigration Labrador and Rubio made their names espousing. Without walking back anything he's committed himself to, he's beginning to sound like more of a hardliner.

Take the recent influx of child immigrants at the border: "This is why I said for a year that we shouldn't be talking about immigration, because I predicted what's happening at the border now," he says. "Now I didn't think it would be at the level that it's happening

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right now, but I knew as soon as you send a message to Mexico and Central America and South America that we're not actually following the law in the United States that they would rush to the border because everyone wants to live in the United States."

"Nothing would send a stronger message to these families than if all these children were returned," he adds. "People say that is inhumane, and I totally disagree. What's inhumane is what is happening to these children in their trajectory to the U.S. in order for them to get through Mexico. They're suffering. That is the real human tragedy, and I think the most humane we can be is letting them know there is no amnesty for them. There will be no pathway for them to remain in the U.S."

Born the only child to a single mother, Labrador spent the first thirteen years of his life in Puerto Rico while his mom worked in the hotel and restaurant industries—and even as a television personality—to make ends meet. As Labrador tells it, she was the kind of parent who would "drive me to the areas where people had nice homes. And she'd say, 'This is something that you can have someday.'"

"Instead of putting them down," he adds, "she actually wanted me to aspire to be in that environment." His mom, he notes, "always taught me pretty simple rules. If you want to be successful in life, study hard, play by the rules, learn the keys to success."

When he was thirteen, the family moved to Las Vegas. It was here, says Labrador, that his life really began to turn around. He refined his grasp of the English language. He found mentors. He joined the Church of Latter-day Saints and became interested in politics. After attending Brigham Young University and the University of Washington School of Law, he settled down to his legal work in Idaho.

For fifteen years he assisted companies in bringing workers to the United States and helped spouses of American citizens become legal permanent residents. He also defended illegal immigrants slated for deportation after being convicted of crimes.

These days, the father of five is focused on making a different sort of case: selling his version of conservatism to the American people, one that proves that Republicans are about more than just big corporations and the wealthy. He spends the better part of half an hour explaining how everything

people think they know about conservatives is just plain wrong.

Labrador leans back. It's almost time for him to leave for a briefing—as his press secretary reminded him more than once—but he appears to be in no hurry. He tells a story about the debt limit fight during the summer of 2011. During that first budget showdown, he says, he actually reached out and helped John Boehner get some of the more conservative lawmakers on board with a compromise continuing resolution. And



he took plenty of heat for it.

"I was the one who brought both sides together," he says. "I just think there's this false narrative that I'm not willing to work within the system and negotiate." But the delicate balance always remains: "I'm willing to negotiate as long as we stay within our commitment to our voters."

It's why he was willing to work with Democrats in the Gang of Eight. Things ultimately didn't work out and his abrupt departure raised some eyebrows, but part of negotiating is knowing when the debate's parameters have stretched too far and it's time to walk away. It's also about knowing when to stick your neck out in the first place. Labrador wants, and is willing, to go to the table.

At this point, Labrador could easily twist the knife in the gaping wound that is John

Boehner's lack of achievements as Speaker. I've put the target right in front of him; all he has to do is pick up the blade. But he demurs. "I actually think Speaker Boehner is a very honorable man, and he assumes that the people on the other side of the table are just as honorable as he is," says Labrador. "And I think that's a great mistake in negotiations. And I think he goes in there saying immediately what he's willing to give up without realizing that the other side wants to cut his throat." Spoken like an experienced haggler.

Labrador is probably the only politician I've ever interviewed who, when I ask whether there's anything he'd like to add right before I turn off the recorder, declines to keep talking. I prod him some more. Awkward silence ensues. Still, he declines to volunteer anything beyond what I've directly asked him to respond to. In the context of our entire discussion, it's so strikingly unlike the Boehner approach he has derided.

It may be Labrador's biggest asset. Unlike many politicians, he knows when it's time to stop talking. It's certainly why he's so bothered over the current leadership's message to the country.

"I think there's a void in telling the American people what we're for," he says. "We have spent the last four years telling the American people what we're against. We're against Obama. We're against Obamacare. We're against everything this administration does. But if you think about it, that's not how you win elections."

LABRADOR'S GOT A BILL of goods to sell to the American people, and with the midterm election just a few months away, he's almost running out of time. Last time around, Republicans squandered every election-year idea they tried to advance. The American people never really got anything except disenchantment. This didn't, and still doesn't, sit well with the congressman.

"We are talking not just about opposing the Obama administration and their ideology and really downright bad management of this nation, but also talking about what are the things that we are for," says Labrador. "What would we do with the tax system? What would we do with NSA reform? What would we do when it comes to treating everyone the same?"

It's with that he realizes what time it is. He's running late. ☛



Rick The Reformer

by JON CASSIDY

The Texas governor has a solid record.
But can he make voters forget 2012?

THREE YEARS AGO, a Texas reporter named Jay Root set out to chronicle the behind-the-scenes maneuvers that would land Governor Rick Perry in the White House. He couldn't have guessed that, in the end, the story wouldn't have much to do with ad buys or endorsements or personality conflicts. The real event, of course, played out in public, in the on-stage meltdown that gave Root the title of his 2012 e-book: *Oops!*

Yet that unforgettable moment when, during a nationally televised debate, Perry could recall only two of the three cabinet de-

partments he proposed to eliminate, was just the final indignity in a short campaign full of them. Remember that ad in which Perry complained that "gays can serve openly in the military, but our kids can't openly celebrate Christmas or pray in school," or the parodies it provoked? How about that rambling, free-and-easy speech Perry gave in New Hampshire that caused everyone to assume he was either drinking or still taking painkillers from his back surgery three months earlier? It was, according to James Carville, the worst campaign in American history.

But it turns out there may have been a behind-the-scenes explanation after all. Perry's campaign had insisted all along that he wasn't taking painkillers—which might have been the problem. According to Root's reporting, the governor was a sleep-deprived zombie in the fall of 2011, thanks to back,

leg, and foot pain, not to mention sleep apnea. He hadn't recovered from the surgery as fast as he'd hoped. The morning before one debate, Perry told an aide: "I didn't sleep a wink." Then he went onstage and said this:

I think Americans just don't know sometimes which Mitt Romney they're dealing with. Is it the Mitt Romney that was on the side of against the Second Amendment before he was for the Second Amendment? Was it was before he was before the social programs, from the standpoint of he was for standing up for *Roe v. Wade* before he was against verse *Roe v. Wade*—he was for Race to the Top—he's for Obamacare and now he's against it—I mean we'll wait until tomorrow and, and, and see which Mitt Romney we're really talking to tonight.

Even that teen Miss South Carolina had to cringe.

Jon Cassidy is the Texas bureau chief for *Watchdog.org* and a regular columnist for *The American Spectator online*.

But if you go back and watch the clips now, you can see the bags under Perry's eyes. At the time Texans were baffled to see Perry so baffled. This is not the governor they've been watching for fourteen years now. Around here, Perry's known for bluff and bluster, not delirium. Texans just don't do shambolic.

Perry's job now is to obliterate the nation's first impression of him, and he's been hard at work on that: talking about marijuana decriminalization with Jimmy Kimmel; showing up on the Sunday morning talk shows and in the *New York Times Magazine*; touring the border with Sean Hannity; visiting Iowa four times in eight months; picking a fight over foreign policy with Rand Paul in the op-ed pages of the *Washington Post*.

Much hay has been made of the governor's new look, including the square-framed glasses he has been sporting lately. "Rick Perry's run for the Republican presidential nomination was, arguably, doomed when he couldn't count to three," jabbed Noreen Malone in the *New Republic*. "Is it any wonder that since the summer, Perry's been appearing in public wearing hipster-professorial glasses? Now this looks like a man who could remember at LEAST ten pieces of information." More potshots came when word broke that Perry, hoping to alleviate continuing back pain, had decided to take off his cowboy boots for good. "Tell Rick that boots can be purchased with normal heels," Texas's state land commissioner quipped to a reporter. "I lament the fact that our governor could now pass for a West Coast metrosexual and has embarrassed us all with his sartorial change of direction."

Dress shoes...nerdy spectacles...does this all add up? When reporters ask Perry whether he's running for president, he doesn't play coy. "It's a possibility." "I'm not going to ride off into the sunset." "Over the last eighteen months, I have focused on being substantially better prepared."

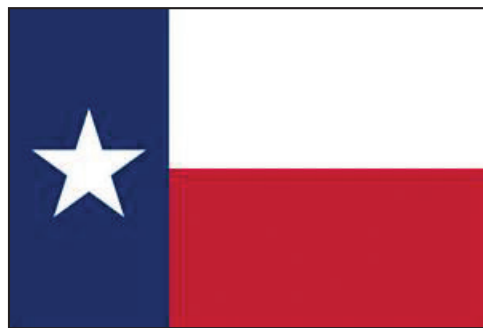
That preparation has included long meetings with scholars at Stanford University's Hoover Institution and most of the major conservative think tanks. Avik Roy, whose brilliant work for the Manhattan Institute and *Forbes* earned him a spot advising Romney on health care policy, has been meeting with the governor, too. "I think that the media is underestimating Governor Perry," Roy says. "If Perry does decide to run in 2016, I bet he surprises a lot of people with how improved he is as a candidate."

Mark P. Jones, chair of the political science department at Rice University, thinks Perry will run, foremost, to restore his national reputation. The next twenty years will be a lot more pleasant for him if he never has to hear

the word "oops" again. "While it is quite unlikely that Perry will win the GOP primary or the presidency," Jones says, "he can still emerge from the 2016 primary process as a winner by running a solid and respectable campaign and therein largely erase the less than flattering image created by his failed 2012 bid."

PERRY'S MOST OBVIOUS asset, in a time when polls show that voters still care more about jobs than just about anything else, is the fact that the Lone Star State is booming. The governor travels the country—particularly in overregulated, slow-growth states with Democratic governors—talking up Texas, and his tours have sealed the popular image of the state as hospitable to business. (Although there's still work to be done: Texas ranked thirtieth in regulatory freedom in the most recent "Freedom in the 50 States" study by the Mercatus Center.)

Democrats have tried to challenge the idea that Texas is an economic powerhouse, but they keep failing for reasons the journal-



ist Erica Grieder lays out in her book *Big, Hot, Cheap, and Right: What America Can Learn from the Strange Genius of Texas*. The most common misconception is that the state's numbers are inflated by the oil and gas boom, but Greider cites data from June 2011—when "the Texas oil and gas industry was at a high point"—that show the industry accounted for just 13 percent of job growth.

Some Democrats also try to argue that low unemployment in Texas just means a surfeit of badly paying jobs, but they're misreading the effects of mass immigration by unskilled laborers. The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas put out a report in March showing that from 2000 to 2013, Texas has been the engine of middle-class job creation for the entire country. The rest of the United States added to the payrolls in the top and bottom wage quartiles, but actually lost 720,000 jobs in the lower-middle and upper-middle brackets. On the other hand, Texas created 811,000 middle-class jobs (out of some two million in all).

Democrats also cry that the Texas model—low taxes, low government services—

leaves too many out in the cold. But the skies in Houston are blue, whatever you've heard. The schools do reasonably well, considering the large population of English language learners, and they do it for very low cost.

It's true that a quarter of the population has no health insurance, but this could actually help Perry in the primary, given the unpopularity of Obamacare. You can trust that he truly does not think it's his job to insure everybody. Unlike more than a handful of other GOP governors who have folded to demands to expand Medicaid, Perry makes the case that the program is broken, given that several studies have found that Medicaid patients suffer worse outcomes than the uninsured.

Instead, Perry's approach to health care has been to try to lower costs, in part by limiting malpractice damages with a 2003 tort reform law that attracted so many doctors that even the *New York Times* took notice. At a speech I caught recently, he told the story of a doctor who had moved his practice from Arizona to Texas, thereby cutting his malpractice insurance costs from \$77,000 a year to \$7,000. "We are now approaching 34,000 more licensed physicians in the state of Texas than in 2003," Perry told *Texas Monthly* recently. In a process that mystifies so many liberals, the increase in supply has kept prices down. Between 2003 and 2009, insurance premiums in Texas grew between 33 and 44 percent slower than in Massachusetts, according to a comparison Roy conducted. "The Perry-led reform of Texas' medical malpractice system yielded dramatic results," Roy concluded.

That focus on the bottom line isn't limited to the doctor's office. During Perry's time as governor, the state's budget has stayed roughly in line with inflation and population growth. The credit's not all his: Texas has a weak governor's office, the legislature is controlled by Republicans, and low taxes, with correspondingly reduced public services, have a long history. Still, it's a track record of fiscal restraint that none of his competitors can match.

SOME OF Perry's efforts to grow the economy, however, might not sit well with primary voters. The governor has convinced the legislature to put a billion dollars at his disposal in two economic development accounts—slush funds, really—called the Texas Enterprise Fund and the Texas Emerging Technology Fund. A state audit of the Enterprise Fund published in late September found staggeringly weak controls: hundreds of millions of dollars given away without applications or formal assurances that jobs would be created. By contrast, a proper job-creation program

may give away just as much on empty promises, but it fills out all the forms correctly. The Austin political class, even the guys who helped Perry run it, feigned outrage, but that sort of crony capitalism has deep roots in the state. A *New York Times* investigation in 2012 found that Texas leads the nation in corporate welfare, with some \$19 billion in giveaways each year.

Perry says the funds help close deals and create jobs. Lately, he's been talking up a \$40-million payment to Toyota, which recently agreed to relocate its 4,000-employee headquarters to a Dallas suburb. Toyota, however, is the rare company that couldn't even pretend to be grateful for the sweetener, which amounted to a rounding error in the company's \$23 billion profit margin for the year. A Toyota spokeswoman told the *Houston Chronicle* that the incentive "wasn't one of the major reasons" for the move, and its CEO for North America told the newspapers that he wanted headquarters to be closer to the company's plants. "At any given moment, there are going to be some companies moving into Texas," says Greg LeRoy, executive director of Good Jobs First. "What happens is he sees a few high-profile relocations, like Toyota, and he jumps to the front of the parade."

The companies that Perry can more credibly claim to have lured with incentives and subsidies are responsible for a small fraction of the state's job creation. LeRoy cites data for the first seven years of the Perry administration showing that Texas imported 28,375 jobs from other states, which is a gain of just 0.23 percent. "Almost all the net job creation over time comes from expansions and start-ups," LeRoy says. "He's clearly using a natural market event—he's presiding over a large state economy—and he's using it for political gain."

For years now, Republicans have blurred the distinction between pro-market and pro-business, nowhere more than in Texas. There are signs that this is changing. In June, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor lost a primary election in Virginia to an unknown economics professor named Dave Brat, who ran a populist campaign against crony capitalism. The party's leadership in Washington seems to be taking the message halfway seriously; for a minute it even looked like a few rowdy backbenchers had convinced their leadership to kill off the Export-Import Bank, which exists mainly to subsidize the exports of large American corporations.

The anger over crony capitalism might just be a Tea Party thing, but Jon Bond, a political

science professor at Texas A&M, points out that the Tea Party is supposed to be Perry's base. The governor is supposed to be the guy that "appealed to Tea Party conservatives, but he had political credentials that appealed to the Republican establishment." Will voters figure out that so-called economic development is mostly just a multi-billion scam that lets politicians take credit for job creation?



HOWEVER MODEST Perry's chances might seem, two recent events seem to be pushing the narrative right in his direction. The first, of course, is the governor's ongoing legal troubles. In September, Perry was indicted for vetoing the funding of the Travis County District Attorney's Public Integrity Unit after its chief proved herself less interested in public integrity and more interested in public drunkenness. When she's sober, D.A. Rosemary Lehmberg fires assistants who refuse to lie to internal affairs investigators and persists in unethical vendettas against Republicans such as Tom DeLay long after they've been exonerated. When she's drunk, she drives all over the road, and then berates and threatens the officers who arrest her.

"Y'all are gonna be in jail, not me," she said at one point during her infamous booking video. You might think that's just the sort of thing lawmakers had in mind when they created a felony for anyone who "by means of coercion...influences or attempts to influence a public servant in a

specific exercise of his official power..." A Travis County grand jury decided, however, that Lehmberg's actions didn't qualify.

Then came another Travis County grand jury to say that Perry's actions—when he vetoed the funding for this dissolute public integrity unit after suggesting that Lehmberg really ought to resign—*did* count as criminal coercion. The man responsible for this novel legal theory is one Michael McCrum, a former Obama nominee for U.S. Attorney and a very special prosecutor.

Perry had been working under the assumption that governors have the authority to veto legislation. It's an easy assumption to make, since the state constitution explicitly allows it, and it has been standard practice nationwide since the founding of the republic. Against this mountain of historical fact we are offered by McCrum a higher, mystical understanding of the law. Like some beardless Jerry Garcia, McCrum got shown the light in the strangest of places by looking at it right. Start with Texas Penal Code section 39.02, which prohibits officials from misusing government property in their possession. The right way to look at it is to let your eyes glaze over, wave your fingers in front of your face, watch the tracers, and then wait for the universe to whisper a secret directly into your soul. Or something. Because it's not there in the text. I've tried squinting five different ways, and still can't see how a law meant to keep bureaucrats from stealing office supplies has anything to do with veto power.

Yet McCrum wouldn't be swayed from his hallucinogenic epiphany: this veto was a criminal misuse of government property because it, like, harmed the person who was supposed to get that property. He's going to blow his own mind when he realizes what that theory means: any veto involving money is a crime. On its face, the idea is absurd, which is why liberals from former Obama advisor David Axelrod to Harvard professor Alan Dershowitz to the *New York Times's* editorial board have all belittled the indictment.

But let's rejoin McCrum on his acid trip and consider the nearly cosmic implications. He realizes that all of the governors have been breaking the law whenever they veto funding, and he must save them. "Stop," he cries out. "You're breaking the law. I'll have to bring charges." Then another McCrum materializes to warn our first McCrum that in threatening to accuse and indict the governors, he is illegally trying to influence the exercise of an offi-

cial power. Then McCrum C shows up to tell McCrum B that he has just illegally attempted to influence McCrum A in the same way. Then D appears. McCrum's trip has turned into a nightmare of infinite regression, like those fractal posters and M.C. Escher drawings beloved of acid freaks everywhere.

The problem here isn't just McCrum: it's bad laws. The Texas legislature meets for just three or four months every other year, and the lack of practice shows in its handiwork. Law professor and free speech expert Eugene Volokh points out that case law indicates coercion is only criminal when the threat itself is unlawful—e.g., “Let me go or you’ll be the one in jail!”—and that statutes reflected that understanding from 1989 until 1994, when the legislature mysteriously and thoughtlessly erased the distinction. A court would have to decide whether the distinction still exists. If it doesn't, then all sorts of lobbying, opinion journalism, and routine politicking are potentially criminal. And that's all Perry's guilty of here—routine politics.

THEN THERE'S, the child migrant crisis at the border. Perry has always been able to finesse the immigration issue, pounding border security without alienating the Latino voters who will eventually determine Texas's future. In the last primary, the rest of the field tried to seize upon his support for a 2001 state law allowing the children of illegal immigrants to pay in-state tuition, and Perry killed his own popularity by insisting that anyone who disagreed with him didn't “have a heart.” That was a rare misstep. He usually has an intuitive feel for the sweet spot, which Northerners lack: hammer “increased security” all you want, just don't start talking deportation.

When Perry announced in July that he was sending 1,000 National Guard troops to the border, he struck precisely the right balance—even if that balance meant being perched just over the edge of non-sequiturdom:

The plight of these unaccompanied alien children has rightfully captured the national attention as we learn the details of their harrowing journeys. Equally as concerning, however, is the fact that unaccompanied children only make up twenty percent of those crossing the border illegally. And as the brave men and women of our border patrol are pulled away from their law enforcement duties to give humanitarian aid, drug cartels, human traffickers, individual criminals are exploiting this tragedy for their own criminal opportunities.

When Brit Hume asked Perry what the point was, given that the troops couldn't

arrest anyone, the governor basically admitted that the operation was expensive theatrics. But theatrical doesn't mean frivolous. “They need to be right on the river,” Perry told Hume. “They need to be there as a show of force, because that's the message that gets sent back very quickly to Central America.” Perry understands that rumors and perceptions affect migration. Congress may not have understood the significance of its 2008 law requiring most unaccompanied child migrants to be released from custody—it passed unopposed—but Hondurans and Guatemalans sure did. The number of children coming illegally from Central America shot from 3,933 in 2011, to more than 20,000 in 2013, to almost 40,000 in the first nine months of the current fiscal year. Perry may have been the first American politician to notice.

Back in May 2012, he wrote President Obama a letter advising him that there had been a 90 percent year-to-year increase in child migrants apprehended over a six-month period. By “failing to take immediate action to return these minors to their countries of origin and prevent and discourage others from coming here, the federal government is perpetuating the problem,” Perry wrote.

The letter seems prophetic now, but the administration didn't even reply to him, more or less dismissing Perry as a grandstander. Other Republican candidates may think they can get to Perry's right on the issue, but all they'll have is their talk, while he will have action and foresight on his side.

Not all tough talk is created equal, however. Expressing concern about terrorists from Syria sneaking across the border appeals to hardliners without alienating immigrants, but it's also nonsense. Scott Henson, who writes the widely read Texas crime blog *Grits for Breakfast*, says that Perry tends to use demagoguery as political cover for sensible reforms, at least in the area of criminal justice. Perry trumpets his enthusiasm for the death penalty so often that nobody would think to call him soft on crime, which has allowed him to sign into law dozens of sensible bills that a Bill Clinton or a Gray Davis would never touch. These include laws establishing drug courts and expanding probation, parole, and mental health programs, while closing three state prisons.

He's reformed laws on jailhouse lineups, confidential informants, evidence discovery, and DNA testing. But more than any single law, Perry has ushered in a remarkable period in the history of the state, one in which Texas has begun to come to terms with the excesses of its hang 'em high jurisprudence.

Henson cautions that Perry's role in many of the bills was more passive signer than architect or advocate. Would he push for sentencing reform at the next level? “Probably not, based on his record,” Henson says.

Perry was bold enough three years ago to call Social Security a Ponzi scheme.

The way to get votes on that issue is to lie like everyone else.

“Although, he's owning the criminal justice reform issue much more now than he has during most of his governorship, for what it's worth.” That won't be enough to get a libertarian to abandon Rand Paul, but it's the sort of thing that makes Perry much more appealing than a generic tough-on-crime Republican. He didn't sign those bills because they were good politics; he took a little risk because it was the right thing to do.

The same goes for Perry and entitlement reform. He was bold enough three years ago to call Social Security a Ponzi scheme. The way to get votes on that issue is to lie like everyone else. Perry's honesty was treated as just another gaffe by reporters too lazy to look up the trustees' reports on Medicare and Social Security.

THE BOTTOM LINE is that if Perry can stick around long enough for voters to take a good look at his résumé once jockeying for 2016 begins, he's got a shot at becoming the consensus candidate. He may not inspire the excitement of a Ted Cruz or a Ben Carson, but he could be everybody's second choice. The Texas economy continues to hum along like a well-oiled Toyota. The governor knows how to work the immigration issue without alienating Hispanics. He talks the talk on entitlement reform. If the legal case against him goes to trial, and barring a jury of Forrest Gump's peers, he will be able to brag about having fought the law without the law having won.

All Rick Perry needs now is an opening—along with a good chiropractor and some comfortable shoes. ❧

Why Israel Won't Listen to Critics

*The war in Gaza leaves the Jewish state united against its enemies
and righteously indifferent to international opinion.*

by JONATHAN S. TOBIN

AT THE END of weeks of fighting in Gaza, international condemnation for Israel's conduct has been increasingly harsh with each passing day. With the toll of Palestinian casualties rising to nearly two thousand at press time, and with Israeli fatalities still only several dozen and most of them soldiers, the Jewish state faces fresh opprobrium from the press as well as even senior figures in the Obama administration as combat in the densely populated strip yields new horrors.

But Israel's resolve remains remarkably cemented, its people self-assured, as I observed personally during the opening weeks of the fighting. In virtually every other conflict in which Israel has been engaged in the decades since it came into possession of the West Bank and Gaza as a result of the Six Day War, public opinion has faltered. This stands as an exception. A country whose politics are generally characterized by bitter ideological divisions and whose elections have almost never yielded a majority to any party suddenly finds itself more united now than at any point in recent memory.

Jonathan S. Tobin is senior online editor of Commentary.

The contrast between the Israeli mood and the growing chorus of condemnation across Europe and even in the American press is stark. In the media and on the streets filled with large and noisy pro-Palestinian demonstrations, critics of the Jewish state have excoriated it for the suffering in Gaza. Even in the United States—where support for Israel has remained relatively steady—

when hundreds of thousands turned out to demonstrate against Menachem Begin's government when it was accused of involvement in the massacre of Sabra and Shatilla in the First Lebanon War. But this time the rising Palestinian casualty count has had virtually no impact on Israeli resolve. Astonishingly, even after weeks of heavy losses for the army units operating in Gaza, polls have

shown that nine out of ten Jewish Israelis enthusiastically endorse the war and their government's conduct of it. Opposition leaders in the Knesset have backed the government, and even some of Netanyahu's most prominent left-wing critics can be heard dismissing those same foreign detractors they had often cited in the past as proof of the prime minister's incompetence.

Why? Some of the country's detractors would argue that Israelis have grown self-satisfied and smug behind their security fences and

army, and that they no longer care about the cost of the ongoing war for their foes. But that answer fails to take into account both the reality of the conflict that is rarely understood abroad and the nature of the threat to Israel. If Israel is demonstrating that it no longer gives a fig for the good opinion of the world, then it is not because it has stopped listening to its conscience. Rather it is because it thinks critics are either dead wrong about the facts or malicious or both.



many of those who claim to be its friends have bitterly and publicly admonished the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the bad publicity generated by pictures of young Palestinian casualties.

Israelis have often been quite sensitive to foreign criticism. They have turned on even popular governments in the past when allegations of Israeli complicity in the killing of Palestinians in the midst of war were broadcast. That's what happened in 1982

To understand why this is so, one must not only unravel how this particular round of fighting began but also the events that preceded it in the last year as the United States pressed hard for negotiations to end the historic impasse between the two sides.

AS FAR AS most of the world is concerned, the current conflict began in June when terrorists believed to be of a Hamas cell in the West Bank city of Hebron kidnapped and killed three Jewish students hitchhiking home. The search for the trio transfixed Israel, a small nation where the crime was seen as a direct attack on the country's children. Conversely, Palestinians celebrated the crime with a social media campaign mocking the victims' plight and demonstrations in the streets aimed at obstructing the Israeli Defense Forces' search for the kidnappers.

The victims had been almost immediately murdered by their captors, a fact that was not generally known for some time. The general expectation among Palestinians was that the students would turn out to be "three Shalits," a reference to Gilad Shalit, the soldier kidnapped by Hamas terrorists and held from 2006 to 2011 before being ransomed by Israel in exchange for more than one thousand imprisoned Palestinian terrorists, including many guilty of egregious atrocities. But Hamas's expectation of profiting from the crime was dashed when the Israeli government decided the students' kidnapping was reason enough to re-arrest many of those freed in the Shalit deal.

Yet the next twists in the plot might well have forced Netanyahu to stand down. Violent protests in the West Bank led to the deaths of Palestinian demonstrators. Even worse, a group of Jewish soccer hooligans from the Jerusalem area decided to take personal revenge for the deaths of the three students and kidnapped and killed a Palestinian teenager in a gruesome fashion. The crime was widely condemned by the Israeli government and throughout the country. It also lessened the international sympathy that had been generated by the kidnapping of the students.

But Hamas decided that this was just the excuse it needed to intensify the conflict. Militants launched massive barrages of rockets at Israeli cities, forcing the Israelis to hit back with air strikes aimed at the launch sites and setting in motion the series of escalations and subsequent denunciations of Israeli conduct.

Hamas's decision had little to do with

any alleged grievances against Israel and everything to do with the Islamist group's own predicament heading into the summer. Hamas has ruled Gaza as an independent Palestine in all but name since the coup with which it seized power from its Fatah rivals in 2007. But its hold on the strip was weakened in 2013 when the Muslim Brotherhood government of Egypt was overthrown by the military there. The new government rightly regarded Hamas as an ally of—if not the creature of—the Brotherhood, an organization that, after its year of misrule in Cairo, the military was determined to suppress. As a result of this, Egyptian leaders shut down the smuggling tunnels between Gaza and Egypt and heightened the isolation that had been imposed on the strip since the Hamas coup. That in turn created financial shortfalls for Hamas and made it more difficult for the organization to continue to import the weapons and building materials from abroad that it was using to fortify the small area under its control.

Meanwhile, Secretary of State John Kerry had been pushing renewed peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. Given the divide among the Palestinians, Kerry's mission was given little chance of success and events proved the skeptics right. Hamas opposes Israel's existence; its charter demands not only its foe's obliteration but the slaughter, or at least the eviction, of Jews. So long as Hamas remained in control of Gaza, it was impossible for Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority, to sign a treaty that would recognize Israel's legitimacy, no matter where its borders were drawn. But Kerry, who had little patience with the Netanyahu government's demands for both security guarantees and a commitment to end the conflict for all time, chose instead to blame his failure on Israel when Abbas refused to continue negotiating in April. Abbas, rather than suing for peace, then surprised Kerry by choosing to sign a unity pact between his Fatah party and Hamas.

The American government saw this as a sign of Hamas's desperation and a chance for the Palestinian Authority to regain control of Gaza and moderate the Islamists' intransigent attitude. But this naïve interpretation of events underestimated the resolve of the

terrorist group to hold onto power as well as to outflank Abbas. The dynamic of Palestinian politics has always given a perverse advantage to the group depicting itself as the loudest voice in favor of violence against the Israelis. Kerry had predicted that the failure of his initiative would lead to a new round of violence, a self-fulfilling prophecy that earns him a share of the blame for the current conflagration. The failure of the peace talks as well as the blockade by Egypt gave Hamas an incentive to launch a new conflict that would both undercut their putative partner and might force the Egyptian government to loosen the isolation of Gaza.

Thus, although most of the international press is prone to blame Israel for any upswing in violence, it's Hamas that sought this conflict. Just as important from the point of view of the Israeli public, which is inclined to see skeptically any knee-jerk impulse to launch an offensive against Gaza by their center-right government, Netanyahu was slow to order his troops to attack.

Israeli citizens have not apologized for the fact that, thanks to Iron Dome, they are not dying in sufficient numbers to generate international sympathy.

When, after the West Bank kidnapping, Hamas began to fire missiles into Israel, Netanyahu showed himself reluctant to do anything more than order air strikes against Hamas launch sites. It was only when Hamas repeatedly refused cease-fires in which Israel offered "quiet for quiet" and it became clear that the border between Gaza and Israel was riddled with tunnels designed to facilitate terrorist attacks that the prime minister finally ordered the Israeli Defense Forces to launch a limited ground offensive.

FROM THE START of the conflict the main point about the fighting as far as the international press has been concerned is the lopsided death tolls for the two sides. In the first month of fighting, Hamas launched more than three thousand missiles at Israeli cities in the hope that some might get through the country's defenses and cause devastation. But thanks to the Iron Dome missile defense system—designed by Israel but developed as a joint U.S.-Israeli project—almost all of Hamas's rockets were either

intercepted or fell harmlessly into the sea or into empty fields. The Islamists were clearly outmatched. But their arsenal's increased range—in previous conflicts only those parts of Israel adjacent to Gaza were hit—forced nearly two thirds of the Israeli population to take shelter amid wailing air sirens. This was something of a victory for Hamas. When one rocket fell harmlessly a few miles from Israel's international airport, it was given an additional bonus in the form of a ruling from Federal Aviation Administration shutting down flights to Ben Gurion Airport by U.S. airlines. Though the ruling was soon reversed, it created havoc for travelers not booked on Israel's El Al airline.

Though Israelis faced the terror of constant attack from the air, few were injured, as both Iron Dome and the country's excellent civil defense system, with shelters and safe rooms included in all new buildings, saved countless lives. That was not the case

had no bomb shelters to flee to when the shooting started. But this was not for lack of facilities in Gaza that could have been used to prevent injuries to civilians. Gaza is actually honeycombed with underground structures built by Hamas at enormous expense. But rather than sheltering the civilians who were being victimized by the war the Islamists started, the underground city protected Hamas fighters and their arsenal. These were indeed “bomb shelters,” in the unusual sense that they were shelters for bombs, not people.

Israel has been accused of waging “total war” against Palestinian civilians. But throughout the fighting, convoys of food and medicine and other essential materials passed each day from Israel into Gaza as they had before the fighting started. The only holdups in this flow of aid came from Hamas attacks on the border crossings. The same concrete that Israel had been allowing into Gaza in recent

years to help rebuild damage done by recent conflicts was used to create an infrastructure of terror. Hamas dug dozens of tunnels, many of which extended for miles inside the strip in order to facilitate terrorist attacks across the border. The Israeli Defense Forces claimed to have found plans for a mass attack

this year on Rosh Hashanah. Whatever the immediate goals of Hamas, the discovery of these tunnels raised alarms inside Israel, forcing Netanyahu to order more troops into the strip to clear the border area. The result was more intensive fighting and dozens of Israeli deaths along with far higher Palestinian casualties.

But as Israelis coped with the fact that their enemies had constructed this underground maze—a notion that struck most as somehow more horrifying than the daily assault from the air—all the international press seemed to focus on was the fact that many more Palestinians than Israelis were dying in this war.

All armies forced into asymmetrical warfare face a difficult problem when seeking to combat terrorists who use civilians as human shields. American troops encountered it in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, where

similar civilian casualties have provoked anger on the ground in spite of highly restrictive rules of engagement for troops, restrictions matched or even exceeded in their stringency by those placed on Israeli soldiers and airmen.

All that said, Israelis couldn't help but notice that the suffering of Palestinians at the hands of their Jewish foes was somehow deemed more significant or egregious than the far greater casualties incurred in the Syrian civil war going on at the same time or any other of the far bloodier conflicts that simmered in the region. The horrors of war only seem to generate outrage when Israelis are involved, even though they are objectively speaking on the defensive. Nor were citizens of the Jewish state inclined to apologize for the fact that, thanks to Iron Dome, they were not dying in sufficient numbers to generate international sympathy.

Nor did it escape their notice that the battalions of foreign reporters who flooded tiny Gaza during the fighting and produced harrowing videos and pictures of Palestinian casualties never seemed able to find a single Hamas fighter out of the thousands of terrorist cadres operating there. The failure of foreign camera operators to snap a single picture of a rocket being launched in the strip during a time when hundreds were going up every day was also rightly considered proof that whether due to intimidation or self-censorship journalists were keen to avoid offending the rulers of Gaza. CNN's denials of restrictions on its activities also conjured up memories of their similar statements about such operations in Saddam Hussein's Iraq before his overthrow. But there were no similar difficulties finding shots of dead Palestinian children, and the context of their plight—being caught in the crossfire between the Israelis and the Hamas gunmen sheltering in their midst—rarely came across. The picture the world was given of Gaza was merely of Israelis attacking as if their heavily armed foes didn't exist.

Further deepening the disillusion among Israelis about international opinion was the nature of many of the protests being conducted against them abroad. In Europe, the mass demonstrations conducted by those who sympathize with the Palestinian cause were tainted by anti-Semitic slogans and signs. One such protest turned into a violent siege of a Paris synagogue. Similar incidents were reported elsewhere in Europe. Even in the United States, where polls showed a majority of Americans still supporting Israel, such anti-Semitic outbursts

The Israeli Defense Force claimed to have found plans for a mass attack this year on Rosh Hashanah. But whatever the immediate goals of Hamas, the discovery of the tunnels raised alarms inside Israel, forcing Netanyahu to order more troops into the strip to clear the border area.

in Gaza, where Hamas fighters continued to conduct operations from civilian areas in the densely packed strip. They used schools and other facilities operated by the United Nations as operations centers or to store arms. Three times rockets and other armaments were found cached in UN facilities; in one case the UN officials helpfully turned over the rockets to Hamas.

The same was true of mosques and hospitals. Hamas's military leadership sat out the war in the bunkers under Gaza City's Shefa Hospital, dodging their own rockets, which in one instance fell short and hit the facility.

Every time Israeli air strikes or artillery fire aimed at terrorists fell on such places, hitting also sheltering civilians, the ensuing slaughter fueled the growing anger at the Jewish state. Compounding this problem was the oft-reported claim that, in contrast to the Israelis, Palestinians in Gaza



American left did not object. Yet Israelis are expected to allow murderous fanatics with similar designs to operate with virtual impunity next door lest they err and kill civilians behind whom the Islamists take shelter. Israelis see this as not so much a double standard but as an indicator of the anti-Semitism and support for Israel's eradication that seems to characterize many of the protests generated by the war.

in the form of offensive placards were seen at demonstrations across the nation. The rising tide of anti-Semitism whose existence in Europe even the State Department has acknowledged seemed to be finding a foothold among Palestinian sympathizers on campuses as well as cities across this country.

FOR MANY of Israel's critics, this new round of violence is fresh proof that the "occupation" that enraged Palestinians has to end. But what Israelis—even those most committed to the peace process—understand is that Hamas's activities have had nothing to do with the diplomatic stalemate over the future of the West Bank that had stymied Kerry. When Hamas spokesmen noted their group's "resistance" to the occupation, they were not referring to controversial West Bank settlements, but rather to the cities inside pre-1967 Israel, such as Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem at which their rockets were aimed. Though the Obama administration seems fixated on the idea of using the fighting to revive Kerry's talks, even Israeli left-wingers who despise the settlers have acknowledged that Hamas's decision to launch a war had tabled the two-state solution for the foreseeable future.

After all, Israel had withdrawn every last soldier and settler from Gaza in 2005 only to see it transformed into a hub of terrorism rather than the incubator of Palestinian development that many hoped it would be-

come. The creation of a terrorist state there stands as a permanent obstacle to peace, since Israelis rightly fear that any withdrawal in the West Bank would simply mean, as Netanyahu put it, "twenty more Gazas" adjacent to Israeli population centers.

But rather than encouraging Israel to take out the Hamas terrorists who were effectively holding more than a million Palestinians hostage to their ideological commitments, the United States has spent most of the war either criticizing the Israelis' tactics or trying to broker cease-fires that would not only leave Hamas in place but give them political concessions that would strengthen them at Abbas's expense.

This is not merely situational irony. It is a testament to a worldview, one that Israelis believe has given short shrift to their dilemma in this war, as well as their hopes for peace. As much as they regret the loss of life in Gaza, Israelis are flummoxed at the notion that rather than have their army act against what is undoubtedly a weaker force, they should be content with sitting back and absorbing daily barrages of rockets that send them scurrying to shelters or live with the sinister threat of terrorists tunneling into their country. It should be remembered that when Islamists attacked Americans on September 11, the U.S. sent its armed forces to the other side of the world to wipe out terrorist bases and to eliminate the masterminds of that atrocity. The mainstream

Coupled with five years of tension with an Obama administration that seems determined to pick counterproductive fights with Netanyahu at every opportunity, this war has, more so than any previous conflict, bred in Israelis a contempt for world opinion and even the views of their American ally. Grateful as they are for American military aid (especially the funding for Iron Dome), they have come to question the sincerity of those who claim to be their friends and support their right of self-defense but scream bloody murder every time it is exercised even in circumstances in which Hamas has been the instigator.

At a time when international opinion seems to be tilting against the Jewish state and when even American supporters worry that it is losing support, Israelis appear to have lost interest in the advice of those who ask them for restraint. The contrast between the hypocritical criticism to which they have been subjected and the constant frightening specter of tunnels and air raids—and all this after decades of seeking the moral high ground in the public relations war with the Palestinians—seems to have bred a contempt for moralizing foreigners even among left-wingers. Saddened as they might be about the suffering on the other side of the conflict, they have come to the conclusion that the safety of their families takes precedence over the applause of an indifferent world. ❧

Death by Pension

California offers a case study of what happens when public employee unions control everything.

by STEVEN GREENHUT

WHEN THE November election was still a long way off, Sacramento-area streets were already plastered with campaign signs for a little-noticed political race: candidates are running to serve on the board of the California Public Employees' Retirement System, better known as CalPERS. While not as high-profile as the statewide and congressional races, these seats are arguably of equal importance to Golden State taxpayers. CalPERS, the largest state pension fund in the country, not only manages more than \$257 billion in assets, but also loves to use its political muscle to prod corporate America into "socially responsible" (read: leftist-friendly) investing.

Sacramento, as the state capital, is Public Employee Central, so the race has become heated and costly. The campaign signs that caught my eye promised "pension security" and were paid for by the Service Employees International Union. This election is a touchstone for the entire pension issue in California—and, per usual, it doesn't look good for the taxpayer.

In short, the people who benefit from CalPERS have complete control over it. Those who pay the tab have little if any say. Six of the board seats are set aside for various groups of CalPERS "members"—for example, one for retirees who receive pensions, one for eligible current state employees, and so on. Then there are three

members appointed by the governor and the legislature, both of which are wholly owned subsidiaries of California's public-sector unions.

And there are four "ex officio" members: state officials and employees that also—surprise!—have close ties to the union movement. That includes state Treasurer Bill Lockyer, who in a 2011 speech about CalPERS had this to say about the daunting unfunded liabilities that might force pension reform:

If we need to do it, then we ought to do it—but on our terms. We must not allow the debate on retirement security to be framed by those who simply seek to eliminate altogether defined benefits, the social and economic power of public pension funds in the market, and the power of workers and their unions to be a balancing force to business and the unregulated marketplace in American life.

The treasurer's staff underlined those words in the official text of the speech. When Lockyer said reform should only be undertaken on "our" terms, he meant those of the public sector unions and the government workers. He clearly was not sympathizing with California's hard-pressed taxpayers. The governor and most others in state government have the same attitude. They don't care about pension debts and the burden on taxpayers. They care about protecting the current system as it now exists.

AND WHAT a system that is, if one happens to be a government employee. California's entire public-sector compensation system is absurdly generous. For instance, the median pension for a recent state Highway Patrol retiree is \$98,000 a year—available at age

50, and paid for the life of the retiree and that retiree's spouse. The median pay and benefit package for a California firefighter is more than \$175,000 a year.

As the *Orange County Register* reported in 2011, the city of Newport Beach had fourteen full-time lifeguards, with thirteen of them earning more than \$120,000 a year in total compensation. "More than half the lifeguards collected more than \$150,000 for 2010 with the two highest-paid collecting \$211,451 and \$203,481 in total compensation respectively," according to the report. These are not aberrations.

California salary schedules are filled with city managers earning \$300,000 or more a year and low-level administrative employees earning around \$100,000 a year. This is true at the state-government level and even in the poorest cities. The San Joaquin Valley city of Stockton paid its workers at 125 percent of the California state average—and gave them a "Lamborghini-style" health-care plan that provided lifetime benefits after working for the city for as little as two months. Big surprise that Stockton now is in bankruptcy court.

In the private sector, most workers receive 401k-style defined-contribution plan, in which final retirement income is based on the amount the worker puts in and the success of the stock market. California's public workers, in contrast, receive what are called defined-benefit retirement plans, in which guaranteed payment amounts are based on a formula. Most so-called "public-safety" employees—police, firefighters, prison guards, billboard inspectors, school security guards, cooks at prisons, etc.—are eligible for the "3 percent at 50" plan. That means they receive 3 percent of their final pay times the number of years worked, and it is available to them

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at age 50. (It's usually calculated on base pay and not overtime, but overtime counts in some jurisdictions.) Thus, if a Newport Beach lifeguard earns \$150,000 a year, after thirty years he receives 90 percent of that pay—or \$135,000 a year—for the rest of his life and his spouse's life. The retirement ages are so low that in some cities taxpayers are paying for an entire second ghost workforce behind the one that's actually doing the job. (New York City already is past that tipping point, as taxpayers there pay more retired cops than active ones.)

Pension funds such as CalPERS invest the retirement contributions paid by workers or their employers (in many agencies, workers don't contribute a cent to their own retirements) in stocks and bonds. They guess at how well those investments will do. The higher the forecast returns, the better funded the system; the lower the predicted returns, the bigger the "unfunded liabilities." If things go well, the public employees split up the loot. If they don't go well, taxpayers must backfill the losses.

Union activists insist the average California pension is in the low \$30,000s, but that includes people who retired eons ago and ones who worked only a short time in the system. The formulas are the formulas, and they have increased dramatically since the late 1990s. Some workers have figured out pension-spiking gimmicks, as well, ways to

work the rules to inflate their retirements even further.

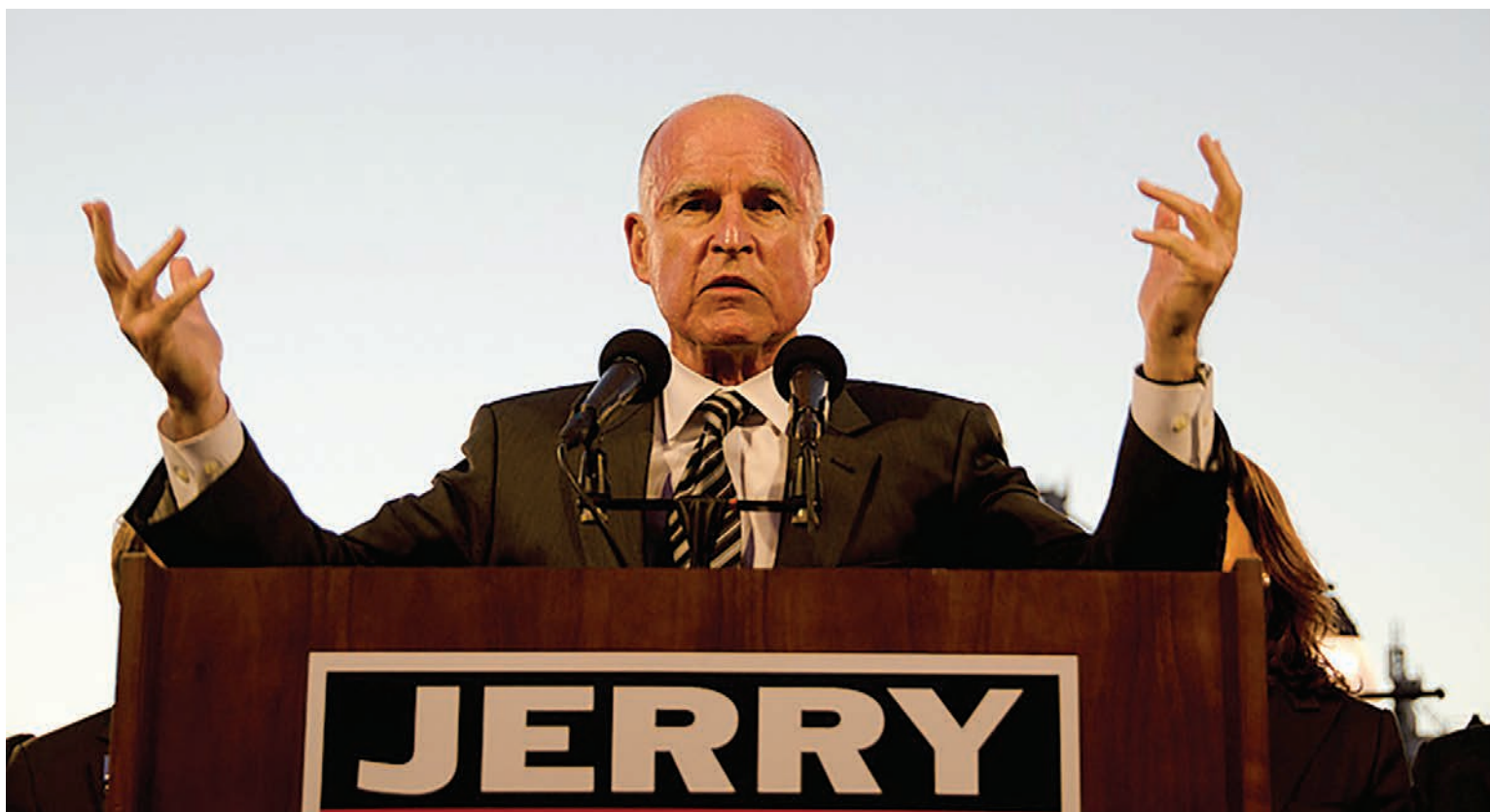
It's also important to note that pensions are guaranteed against any reductions once they have been granted. "Pension payments are senior obligations of the state to its employees and accordingly have priority over every other expenditure except Proposition 98 [K-14 education] expenditures and arguably even before debt service," said David Crane, former Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's chief pension adviser, in 2010 testimony before the state senate. Crane is a self-styled progressive Democrat, yet he is outraged at the way CalPERS has gamed the system—to the detriment of every public service. "All of the consequences of rising pension costs fall on the budgets for programs such as higher education, health and human services, parks and recreation and environmental protection that are junior in priority and therefore have their funding reduced whenever more money is needed to pay for pension costs," he added.

This isn't just a dire projection. Cities across the state are facing massive infrastructure breakdowns and they lack the money to fix them. Consider this picture painted by the *New York Times* earlier this

The median pension for a recent California Highway Patrol retiree is \$98,000 a year—available at age 50, and paid for the life of the retiree and that retiree's spouse.

year: "The scene was apocalyptic: a torrent of water from a ruptured pipe valve bursting through Sunset Boulevard, hurling chunks of asphalt 40 feet into the air as it closed down the celebrated thoroughfare and inundated the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles." The key point was buried deeply in the news story: "And here, as in other cities, the demand for public works comes as the costs of municipal pension plans are shooting up—a confluence that has alarmed business leaders."

Even when cities go belly up, they can't dislodge the main expense that is pushing



them over the brink, thanks to the power of CalPERS and to the elected officials who owe their seats to the state's muscular public-employee unions. Three recently bankrupt cities—Stockton, Vallejo, and San Bernardino—city officials came up with recovery plans that did not touch public-employee pensions. City officials preferred instead to stiff bond-holders, raise taxes on residents, and slash city services. I know Stockton well—and that beautiful old Gold-Rush city on the edge of the California Delta is falling apart because of a lack of public services. Vallejo officials publicly stated that they were unwilling to challenge CalPERS, which holds that all pension promises must be paid in full come hell or municipal bankruptcy. San Bernardino halted its payments to CalPERS, but eventually buckled under to that agency's threats. When exorbitant pensions for an elite class of government workers are protected at all costs, everything else suffers.

A FEW YEARS BACK, these realities were dawning on the state's leaders. Even Lockyer's "reform on our terms" speech was in the context of needing to reform. California faced a general-fund budget mess, and although only a small portion of the budget directly goes

toward pension payments, it highlighted the problem to voters.

In June 2012, the electorates in the state's second- and third-largest cities—San Diego and San Jose—approved significant pension-reform initiatives. Both cities have solid Democratic voting majorities, but both measures passed with around 70 percent support. San Jose's Democratic Mayor Chuck Reed pointed to his city's 350-percent increase in pension costs over the past decade and to the declining public services. He championed the city's reform as a model that could be followed in other struggling California cities.

Indeed, the public's concern over pension debt was so noticeable that polling showed it endangering Governor Jerry Brown's signature initiative for the November ballot—a large tax hike to help fill a red-ink-stained budget. Voters wondered why they should entrust this government with more of their money if it wasn't even tackling the problem of big debt.

Late in the session, the governor and legislature threw together a modest pension reform bill that basically ended the practice of pension spiking—inflating a public employee's final salary to enhance his retirement payments for life. It was political window-dressing that helped Brown and his fellow union-backed legislators get their tax hike. They since have echoed the

dishonest mantra: we reformed pensions and the system is fine!

They've also since claimed to have "fixed" the debts faced by the state's second-largest pension fund, the California State Teachers' Retirement System, or CalSTRS. Because of complex statutory reasons, CalSTRS is dependent on the legislature to backfill any losses, whereas CalPERS can simply raise its contribution rates on participating cities.

It became clear that CalSTRS would go belly up in thirty years if the legislature didn't start sending another \$5 billion or so its way annually. So Brown and company concocted another plan to ratchet up state contributions. But it, too, was largely phony. Under the plan, the state sends a pittance extra each year to CalSTRS, with the really large bumps in contributions pledged to take place years from now when it will be someone else's problem.

FRANKLY, BROWN, Democratic legislative leaders, and even the courts have been doing everything to derail any manner of reform.

The courts gutted the most significant part of the San Jose initiative. And while San Diego continues to implement its reform, Brown's appointees to the union-controlled Public Employment Relations Board have been suing the city to

stop the voter-approved measure. PERB claims the public vote was illegal because the city first had an obligation to negotiate with the unions representing the new workers who will face lower benefit levels. Union demands even trump the right to vote, in the administration's view.

Furthermore, a judge in Ventura County pre-emptively halted an election that would have asked voters to reform that county's pension system. CalSTRS did pass a reform that required teachers to pitch in a little more toward their pensions (in exchange for vesting other benefits, given that it is illegal in California to reduce public-employee benefits without giving something equal or greater in exchange).

In late August, the CalPERS board—you know, the same board run by union activists and union-controlled politicians—voted on a measure that effectively obliterates even the modest pension reform that Brown and company passed as a tax-raising window dressing.

Here's how it works: Currently, existing state and local employees get all sorts of special pay. There are ninety-nine extra-pay categories, most of which should induce mockery and anger. Librarians, for instance, are paid extra for helping library patrons find books. Police are paid extra for driving alone in patrol cars. Fire chiefs get special management pay. Gardeners get paid extra for fixing sprinklers. Those categories have existed since the 1990s, but a few years ago CalPERS decided that they should also be used when it's time to calculate an employee's pension—thereby inflating the final base pay and ensuring higher pension benefits for many years to come.

Brown's ballyhooed reform applied only to new hires. So the CalPERS board passed regulations that allow these ninety-nine categories to be used in a pension-spiking bonanza for these new hires, too. It seemed like a giant middle finger to Brown, although the governor's reaction suggests that he wasn't upset by the scam.

Brown is joined at the hip with the unions, even if he talks a good game about fiscal responsibility. He claimed to be outraged by the CalPERS decision, but of the ninety-nine categories used in the scheme, he said that he only objected to one. He has yet to follow even this half-hearted protest with any serious action. In other words, he seems fine with a CalPERS rule that destroys any gains made by his own pension reform, even as he championed an end of pension spiking during his gubernatorial debate.

IT KEEPS GETTING WORSE. In September, the California Supreme Court gave CalPERS the OK "to sue credit-rating giants Moody's and Standard & Poor's for hundreds of millions of dollars over the top ratings they gave to investments that collapsed in 2007-08," reported the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

CalPERS is blaming the credit agencies for its poor performance, which has led to higher-than-expected unfunded pension liabilities. This really is something when you consider what CalPERS has been promising taxpayers over the past many years. In 1999, for instance, CalPERS pressured the legislature to pass a massive pension increase—and to do so quickly and without all the normal committee hearings and vetting sessions. That CalPERS action has led to the bulk of the state's current pension problems.

The law, SB 400, boosted California Highway Patrol pensions by 50 percent, instituting that "3 percent at 50" pension formula mentioned above. Legislators did so retroactively—meaning that even officers a day away from retirement got the boost going back to the day they started working. The law practically begged local governments to follow suit. I recall when even in conservative Orange County, Republican legislators tripped over themselves to offer the huge pension increase.

As Crane said in his senate testimony: "Promising that 'no increase over current employer contributions is needed for these benefit improvements,' and that CalPERS would 'remain fully funded' despite the increases, the CalPERS Proposal claimed that enhanced pensions would not cost taxpayers 'a dime' because investment returns would cover the expense." Instead, it led to massive debts, billions of dollars in taxpayer expense, and obliterated public services.

Crane noted that CalPERS's promises would have "required the Dow Jones to reach roughly 25,000 by 2009 and 28,000,000 by 2099 for no such deficiencies to rise." He reminded senators that CalPERS never disclosed that its own employees would receive these massive pension increases.

CalPERS is suing the credit agencies, but no one is holding CalPERS accountable for the false information it provided in the capitol.

CALIFORNIA pension reformers continue to come up with new ideas to rein in out-of-control spending, to protect public services, and to create a generous but sustainable system. Every poll and indication shows that even the state's Democratic electorate supports these efforts. A number of Democratic local officials such as San Jose's mayor have the courage to try to reform their local systems. They are stymied at every turn by the union machine, and though they are a hardy group and they keep regrouping, it's looking fairly hopeless.

Bankrupt cities are desperately afraid of standing up to CalPERS and its enor-

Bankrupt cities are desperately afraid of standing up to CalPERS and its enormous political and legal might. Efforts to go around the machine and take the matter directly to voters via a statewide ballot measure cannot get past the union favoritism.

mous political and legal might. Efforts to go around the machine and take the matter directly to voters via a statewide ballot measure cannot get past the union favoritism. For instance, state Attorney General Kamala Harris gets to author the titles and summaries for all statewide ballot measures. Twice now, she has given such unfair ballot summaries to pension initiatives that even liberal editorial boards argued that they sounded as if they were written in the union hall.

What to do? In a recent verbal ruling, the federal judge overseeing Stockton's bankruptcy said that pensions are not protected when cities go bankrupt—the first good news in a long time. It's the only hope left to keep California from being doomed to a slow destruction of its public services and an ever-increasing tax burden to fund these lush retirements. But maybe politicians and voters in other states can take heed of the situation and learn that all is lost once the looters are given complete control of the treasury. ❧

In Defense of Liberal Arts

Who will speak up for Socrates?

by B.D. McCLAY

POOR LIBERAL ARTS. People don't esteem the term—or its cousin, “liberal education”—very much these days, it seems. Evaluating the success or failure of an education now requires measurable outcomes, such as test scores or post-college employment. Learning is, more and more, about return on investment. K-12 education is increasingly focused on testing. In everyday conversation, the evaluation of a college major generally assumes the form of a question: “What can you do with that?”

This is a reasonable question, albeit one that liberal education finds itself mostly unable to answer. Conjuring the image of a thousand English majors working behind the counters of a thousand coffee shops, critics of liberal education demand to know what could possibly justify *this* outcome. Though the most popular major in America is, in fact, business, followed by the social sciences, nursing, education, and psychology—none of which are liberal arts subjects—it's the useless liberal arts student, underemployed and deep in debt, that comes in for scrutiny.

From time to time, a few brave souls do pick up a pen to defend the liberal arts. Their justifications generally focus on some intangible characteristic students acquire along the way: improved critical thinking skills, increased empathy, better memo-drafting ability. Sometimes, as in *The Heart of the Matter*, a 2013 report by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences,

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writers point out the need for global leadership or an “adaptable and creative workforce.” There's a focus on almost everything but what liberal arts students actually study—or what the liberal arts even mean.

Such defenses fall flat in that they present liberal education as the most self-indulgent of finishing schools, where one is prepared for the

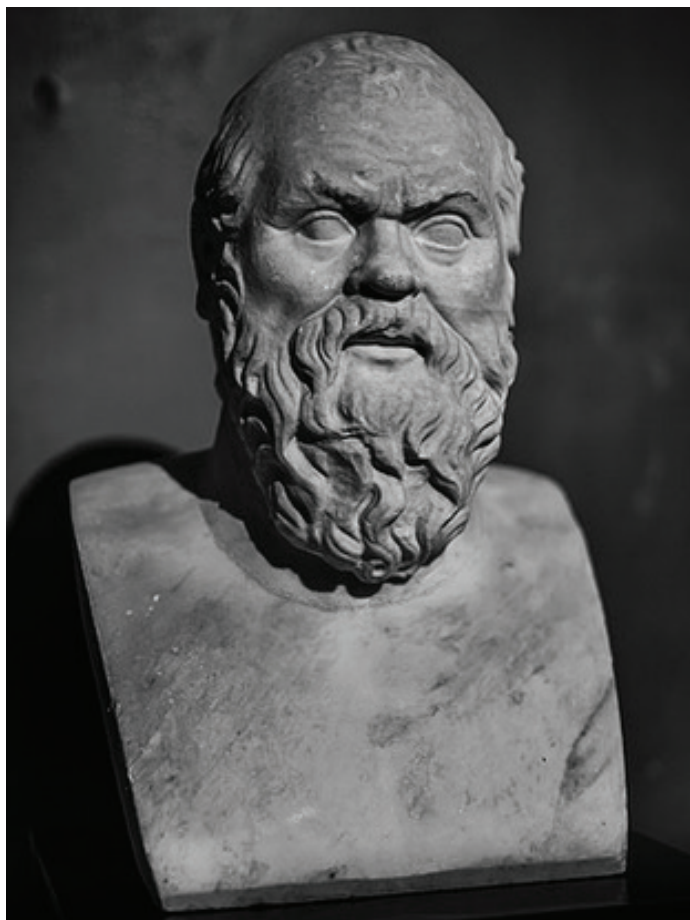
has begun to retreat. Even my own alma mater, St. John's College, a liberal arts college *par excellence*, has recently dropped both “liberal arts” and “liberal education” from its own self-description—which is a bit like the canary you brought down into the coal mine drawing out a little pistol and shooting itself in the head. St. John's now speaks about an education that develops “critical thinking and collaboration”—good things, to be sure, but skills one can learn behind that notorious Starbucks counter, where you're at least getting paid. Or, for that matter, in kindergarten.

WHAT IS liberal education? For most people, it means education that isn't a form of job training; if you take the phrase quite literally (which I do), it means an education that's meant to free students in some higher sense.

I called St. John's a liberal arts college *par excellence*, but a better turn of phrase might have been *ad absurdum*. There, “liberal arts” and “liberal education” are approached with an admirable open-mindedness. The goal of the program is self-consciously considered to be freedom. Students study philosophy and literature, but also mathematics (which is, after all, a liberal art) and the sciences. Since St. John's has no majors, even the most wispy and poetic souls are expected at some point to get up and demonstrate proofs of Maxwell's equations

to their peers—often without notes. And if you think that's bad, just wait until you're expected to do the same thing with Einstein's theory of special relativity.

These demonstrations come direct from Maxwell and Einstein, for the school follows a program of study wherein the



day-to-day reality of white-collar work by writing about Kant and Emily Dickinson. They do not even argue that the promised benefits—critical or creative thinking, for instance—could not be taught equally well by studying, say, engineering, a discipline that requires both.

Under this pressure, liberal education

students read primary texts only and discuss them in seminars. A faculty member (called a “tutor”) guides these as a kind of Socrates but doesn’t offer authoritative opinions. There are no tests, though students do undergo an oral examination on a book of their choice every year (and write a paper investigating some question, which they then defend in another examination).

Extramural reactions vary. The school’s disdain for expertise raises a certain degree of intellectual ire, as does the extreme impracticality of the subject matter. The school’s erstwhile refusal to present its education as job preparation in any sense certainly added to this doubt. Indeed, it demanded of its applicants that they consider why they intended to go to college at all. Which—as the job-preparation route turns out to be a dead end for many—is a question applicants *everywhere* should be made to ask themselves. If your liberal arts degree doesn’t prove to be the golden ticket to white-collar employment, the dirty secret is that neither do many people’s degrees in business or engineering.

But as someone who went through the program with a few deep reservations—which included my leaving for a year and then coming back—there is, I think, no other place where these higher goals can be pursued so openly and so easily. And if there are two different, mutually exclusive ends to education—freedom and job-preparation—it is good that there is (or was) at least one institution in the world that made that choice so clear.

REFLEXIVE CONTEMPT for liberal education is not a new thing. It goes all the way back to the Athenians who found Socrates’ notably public philosophy self-indulgent and embarrassing. “It’s not shameful to practice philosophy while you’re a boy, but when you still do it after you’ve grown older and become a man, the thing gets to be ridiculous, Socrates!” says Callicles in the *Gorgias*. “When I see an older man still engaging in philosophy and not giving it up, I think such a man by this time needs a flogging.” Get a job, Socrates.

Or, to pick a more recent example (less than two hundred years old), John Henry

Newman complains in *The Idea of a University* of the critics who insist

that Education should be confined to some particular and narrow end, and should issue in some definite work, which can be weighed and measured....This they call making Education and Instruction “useful,” and “Utility” becomes their watchword. With a fundamental principle of this nature, they very naturally go on to ask, what there is to show for the expense of a University; what is the real worth in the market of the article called “a Liberal Education,” on the supposition that it does not teach us definitely how to advance our manufactures, or to improve our lands, or to better our civil economy; or again, if it does not at once make this man a lawyer, that an engineer, and that a surgeon....

All those not-lawyers and not-doctors, it seems, have been disappointing their parents for a long time.

Much of Newman’s concern in *The Idea of a University* is with defining a specifically Catholic form of liberal education, but one needn’t be Catholic to appreciate his point: a serious liberal education frees the pupil and forms the soul, and encourages the pursuit of the truth as an end in itself. Such an education requires both seriousness of purpose and willing-

ness to be an amateur. It’s not for intellectual dilettantes who flit from interest to interest, but it doesn’t create experts either. Knowledge is acquired, but the goal is not the acquisition of knowledge.

Subjects such as philosophy, classical literature, and mathematics should be studied because they are themselves goods that the student should aspire to understand and make his own. They are—to put it strongly—among the good we live life for. Like Socrates, who was poor and shabby, the student of the liberal arts may never make much of himself. But for Socrates—and for his students—that was never the goal.

SINCE GRADUATION, I have kept tabs on what my former classmates are doing with themselves. Some have taken the traditional routes of law or graduate school. Some work at non-profits. Some

teach. A few are freelance writers or full-time journalists, who perhaps employ their education most explicitly (I recall fondly the friend of mine who asked a politician, “What is justice?”).

Then there are the ones who chose something different: a firefighter-in-training; a part-time welder and part-time Alaskan fisherman; a park ranger. And so on. These people use their educations as much as the others. Maybe more, since they also have the courage to pursue something different from what they is expected.

As for me, I suffered a period of prolonged underemployment. But though I was doing a job I neither was supposed to be doing (given my degree), nor especially wanted to do long-term, I still learned a great deal from my experience. What I found was that even when I was working at a low-prestige, low-paying job, my so-called useless education continued to provide me with something genuinely valuable. It was at that time that I discovered how freeing a liberal education truly is.

A defense of liberal education on its own terms, the idea that education is one of freedom’s necessary conditions, that the humanities teach us how to be human, will strike many as elitist.

But sooner or later, people take stock of life and wonder what it is for—and we ought to prepare them to answer. No matter how successful we become, none of us gets to escape this question, any more than we can escape the questions of how to live, or how to understand the world, or of how to organize our society. The person with the successful job and the nice home will still, one day, be called to make an account of himself.

Of course, success is a tricky word; it depends rather on the ruler you are using to measure. In that confrontation between Callicles and Socrates, after all, which of them is successful? We know, of course, what Callicles would say. He ends his admonition by conjuring up the idea of Socrates on trial and put to death without being able to defend himself—prophetic: though Socrates did defend himself, it was to people who did not understand what he was saying.

Look around you: There are many Callicles in the modern world. Let us raise our voices on behalf of Socrates—before he’s judged and put to death once more. ❧

Of course,
success is a
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using to measure.

Pop the Student Loan Bubble?

*Then overturn
Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*

by BILL McMORRIS

BUSINESS REPORTERS and talking heads are tripping over themselves to predict the next bubble. It's the least they can do after so many of them fueled the dot-com and real-estate booms and busts that tanked the economy and robbed millions of Americans of their hard-earned (or at least borrowed) money. Many have identified higher education as the next Big One. College spending has all the makings of an economic bubble: supply that exceeds demand; a market wildly inflated by government intervention; a return on investment on par with a Tulsa, Oklahoma timeshare; art history.

The doomsayer's case amounts to this: teenagers take tests, score poorly, apply to safety schools, and borrow tens of thousands of dollars to major in Film Studies, guzzle beer, smoke weed, borrow more money, get into cocaine, pawn the Playstation, discover the concept of gender identity, sleep with anyone accordingly, study little, earn high marks and a quarter-million-dollar piece of paper, apply for jobs beyond their qualifications, settle for jobs that reflect their qualifications, default on their student loans, declare bankruptcy, discover that student loans are the only kind of debt that can't be discharged in bankruptcy, die, and pass on the debt to their heirs, parents, or taxpayers. And you thought fraternity initiations were cruel.

Yet records for new college enrollment continue apace. Parents, desperately seeking a marquee university bumper sticker to show off to the neighbors, tell their children that college is the ticket to the high life, despite the fact that half of recent graduates are working jobs that do not require a college degree. Politicians bend over backward to boost student loans and keep interest rates artificially low, despite \$1 trillion in loans outstanding and default rates that would make Bear Stearns blush. The only thing

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Americans, Right and Left, seem to agree on is that college is an unquestionable good.

Daring to speak out against the lemming-like charge toward the higher education precipice seems to invite only scorn from reporters in the press, who, like me, are a tad self-conscious about their useless, over-priced, fraudulent, academically bankrupt journalism, communications, gender studies, and poli-sci diplomas. Yet a few men are taking on the challenge. Serial entrepreneur Peter Thiel uses the millions he made from shorting housing to issue \$100,000 investments to get promising students out of college and into the marketplace. Mike Rowe, of *Dirty Jobs* fame, is telling technically minded youths there's neither shame, nor poverty, in a hard day's work. Both men should be lauded for their realism about America's education obsession. But neither Thiel, nor Rowe, nor any college bubble apostle has offered anything but superficial scratches to the well-armored tank that is Big Education. That's because none has addressed

why young Americans are forced to go to college in the first place. Their money and brainpower would be better spent overturning *Griggs v. Duke Power Company*.

The 1971 Supreme Court decision remains largely unknown, but no ruling of the past forty-five years (except for *Roe v. Wade*) has done more harm to the American way of life. It changed the way companies hire, pay, and promote workers, ensuring that America would be a country defined by credentials rather than merit. *Griggs* is why we're wasting money and time on a dubious good like a B.S. degree—pun intended.

THE SAGA BEGAN in 1969 when Willie Griggs, a black man born in the segregated South, decided he was overdue for a promotion. In order to get one, per Duke Power Electric Company rules, he had to pass two aptitude tests and possess a high school diploma. Griggs smelled racism. The tests surveyed employees on basic math and intelligence questions. None of Duke's fourteen black workers passed. Griggs and twelve others sued the company for discrimination. A district court and federal appeals court

accepted Duke's claim that the tests were designed to ensure that the plant operated safely. Duke bolstered its case by pointing out that it offered to pay for employees to obtain high school diplomas and that white applicants who failed to meet the requirements were also denied promotions.

The Supreme Court wasn't buying it. This was North Carolina after all. The court compared the tests to Aesop's fable of the Fox and the Stork, in which a fox offers a dish full of milk to a stork, whose beak prevents it from satisfying its thirst. The implication that black and white workers were of a different species did not strike any of the justices as racist, unlike the objective tests. *Griggs* found that if blacks failed to meet a standard at a higher rate than whites the standard itself was racist—a legal doctrine known as disparate impact.

"What is required by Congress is the removal of artificial, arbitrary, and unnecessary barriers to employment when the barriers operate invidiously to discriminate on the basis



of racial or other impermissible classification," Chief Justice Warren Burger wrote in *Griggs*. "Diplomas and tests are useful servants, but Congress has mandated the common sense proposition that they are not to become masters of reality." Burger may have intended to free America of bureaucracy, but his decision in fact bestowed that title—"masters of reality"—on college administrators.

Diplomas do little to alter the dynamics of innate ability and intelligence—even less so now that institutions have lowered standards. The knowledge gap between college seniors and freshmen is negligible (see: *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*). Other studies have found that class ranks at

Photo: David Stoddard/Flickr

graduation closely mirror testing ranks upon matriculation. If businesses could recruit and screen candidates using testing metrics, it would allow workers to begin their careers earlier, advance quicker, and do it debt-free.

The lie that props up our Big Education regime is that the GI Bill, which paid for World War II veterans to attend college, produced the upward mobility and economic boom of the postwar period. It's a heartwarming story, the veteran who would have been a dust farmer but for the grace of government generosity. But it just isn't true. Only one out of every eight returning veterans attended college. The rest, the vast majority, benefited from something even more egalitarian: aptitude testing. The format favors raw talent above all else, allowing companies to hire high-potential candidates from any background and groom them to fit the company's needs.

These tactics came to commerce from a familiar source. The armed services were forced to process hundreds of thousands of recruits during the war, and in order to filter and assign soldiers, the government developed aptitude tests. Businesses witnessed the U.S. defeat the two most efficient peoples known to man, thought there must be something to this whole testing thing, and followed suit. The chief hiring metric in the postwar era was not whether someone had a degree, but whether he had the aptitude that would enable him to succeed. Every industry from blue-blooded high finance to immigrant-heavy manufacturing employed testing to determine who would rise through the ranks, regardless of lineage, heritage, or education. Testing enabled men who set out to be blue-collar workers to ascend based solely on their ability.

Above all, tests are effective.

"Despite their imperfections, tests and criteria such as those at issue in *Griggs* (which are heavily...dependent on cognitive ability) remain the best predictors of performance for jobs at all levels of complexity," University of Pennsylvania Professor Amy Wax has found.

Two years ago I interviewed Den Black, a former automotive engineer at GM supplier Delphi whose pension was slashed to speed up the auto bailout. His backstory interested me nearly as much as his grievance with the Obama administration. A few years before the Supreme Court issued the *Griggs* decision, he set out to join his brother as a line-worker at General Motors. He hadn't been the best student, didn't care much for school, but submitted to the hiring exam.

The test revealed that he had an advanced understanding of physics and mathematics. Within a few years, he was given the opportunity to take the entrance exam to General Motors University. After two years at GMU, where he combined shiftwork with education, he emerged an engineer in management. It's no bachelor's degree, but judging by the patents he helped generate, it was a worthy investment.

The *Griggs* decision has made that organic rise through the ranks impossible, as disparate impact left businesses liable for those who failed to pass hiring tests.

"Most legitimate job selection practices, including those that predict productivity better than alternatives, will routinely trigger liability under the current rule," Wax wrote in a 2011 paper titled "Disparate Impact Realism."

The solution for businesses post-*Griggs* was obvious: outsource screening to colleges, which are allowed to weed out poor candidates based on test scores. The bachelor's degree, previously reserved for academics, doctors, and lawyers, became the de facto credential required for any white-collar job.

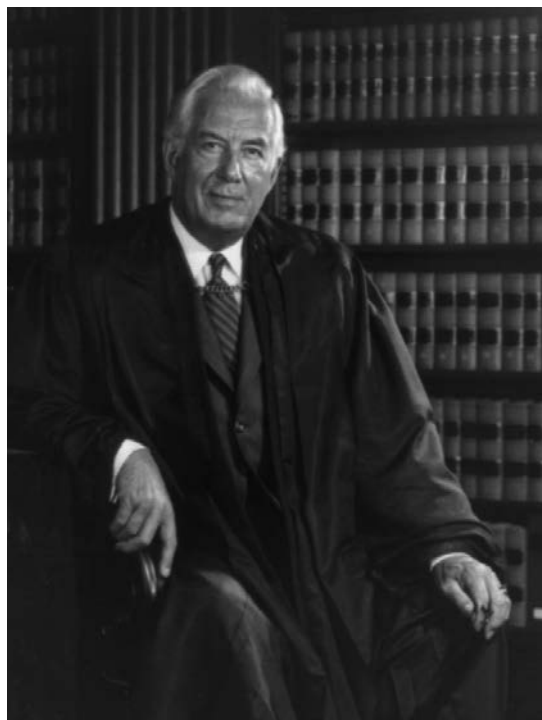
By the late 1970s, universities were in crisis mode. The baby boom produced more students than they knew what to do with, but declining birth rates left them with a smaller pool of tuition-paying students. Their new role as the gateway to respectable careers and higher salaries solved that problem. They replaced comprehensive liberal arts education with career-oriented majors that displaced the apprentice, rise-from-the-bottom system that had previously defined the American labor market. Curriculum quality and homework rates plunged, but endowments swelled.

"To keep their mammoth plants financially solvent, many institutions have begun to use hard-sell, Madison Avenue techniques to attract students. They sell college like soap, promoting features they think students want: innovative programs, an envi-

ronment conducive to meaningful personal relationships, and a curriculum so free that it doesn't sound like college at all," academic Caroline Bird noted in her 1975 essay "College Is a Waste of Time and Money."

Colleges, aware of their newfound utility and the easy money pouring in from student loans and Pell grants, jacked up prices. Education costs, as George F. Will has noted, grew 440 percent in the post-*Griggs* era.

That trend continues today. The Project on Student Debt found that total college loans increased 6 percent annually between 2008 and 2012. The average student today takes out nearly \$30,000 in debt to buy a ticket to the good life. They'd be better off taking that money and buying a new Mercedes CLA and faking the good life.



THE COMMON SENSE idea would

be to help people avoid this debt altogether. The solution we've received from policymakers on both sides of the aisle is to double down, to pour more money into university coffers, and to force more and more kids into an environment for which many are ill-suited. The numbers are daunting for these reluctant fellow travelers. More than three quarters of college freshmen who finished in the bottom 40 percent of their high school class will not graduate in eight years. Four out of ten college enrollees will not graduate in six years. More than 20 percent of graduates defaulted on their loans in the last year, dwarfing the mortgage defaults that spurred the Great Recession. The dropouts lose their ticket to a good job, but get to keep the debt.

No group has been hurt more by this arrangement more than black men, those *Griggs* was supposed to help. Chief Justice Burger noted in his decision that whites had an innate advantage over black workers because 34 percent of white males in North Carolina had high school diplomas, nearly double that of blacks. The gap remains roughly the same in Bachelor's degrees to-

day among black and white men, while both groups lag far behind women.

"That so many employers require college diplomas, tacitly or otherwise, means the court decision accomplished very little in blunting biased company hiring practices," reads a 2011 editorial at the Vault Education blog. "In fact, it's probably true that it's only helped make discrimination more rampant. The more the college degree became a standard employee-screening device, the more college degree holders there were vying for jobs of comparable skill level, jobs which weren't increasing at a equivalent rate. It was really only a matter of time before the bar raised up again, and again, giving employers more factors to discriminate against."

Which brings us to the next stage of the problem: inflation. The glut of bachelor's degrees means even the undergraduate diploma is beginning to lose its value. About 17 million college graduates work in fields that don't require a college diploma. There are 100,000 postal workers, 317,000 waitresses, and 18,000 parking lot attendants with undergraduate degrees. One out of every four bartenders has a diploma, and though they listen to moping for a living, few majored in psychology. Nearly 6,000 janitors have *doctorate* degrees, like something out of a Twilight Zone Good Will Hunting. College triumphalists brag about the 4.9 percent unemployment rate among graduates—lower than the national average. But, as Ohio University economics Professor Richard Vedder pointed out, that's triple what it was during the malaise of the 1970s. Workers are acutely aware of the overcredentialing crisis. Nearly 60 percent, including 40 percent of college graduates, told Gallup in 2013 that they do not need a college degree to perform their job.

The indebted former student is not the only one to suffer under the current arrangement. Research has shown that when graduates flood the unskilled job market they hurt the career prospects of their less-educated neighbors. The Ph.D. janitor waiting on the sale of his Great American Novel has displaced a worker without the résumé needed to get any other job. Consider how the gap between high-school and college wages has grown. The 1972 census estimated that over the course of their working lives (ages 22 to 64), college graduates would net \$199,000 more than high school graduates. By the late 1970s, college graduates earned 55 percent more per year than their high school counterparts. The gap shot up to 85 percent in 2012. Fear of litigation plays a role. A company that pays based solely on performance could find itself

rewarding the "wrong" person. A compensation manager at a leading technology firm told me that an engineer fresh from graduate school simply has to be paid more than a self-made engineer—the Den Black who learned the business over a twenty-year career, rising from basic laborer to accomplished engineer on his own merit. "There's too much risk in paying a guy without a diploma more even if he is a better contributor," she said. "God forbid the college graduate is a woman or a minority: They can sue you and claim that they were paid less because of discrimination, so we designed a system to pay people for their education, not their job." Thus the credential becomes a force of downward mobility for the educated and uneducated alike.

THE UP-BY-YOUR-BOOTSTRAPS mantra of America wasn't killed by businessmen; it was killed by the lawmakers and regulators who made the diploma into the bootstrap. So why are the same politicians and pundits who condemn inequality zealously defending credentialism?

Well, for one thing, there's money in disparate impact for the Department of Labor. "Essentially it's a revenue machine for the DoL," Keith Gutstein, a labor and employment partner at a law firm in Woodbury, New York, said of new federal wage discrimination laws. "In recent years the DoL has started to insist on CMPs—civil money penalties—and that money goes to the government."

President Obama's Labor Secretary, Tom Perez, acknowledged this at a confirmation hearing before the Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee. He came under fire from the GOP for orchestrating a quid pro quo with the city of St. Paul, Minnesota, to prevent a case that threatened to overturn disparate impact from reaching the Supreme Court. Perez's deal potentially cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. Republicans ripped him to pieces for being a poor steward of taxpayer money. The committee chairman, Iowa's Senator Tom Harkin, stepped in to save him.

"Isn't it true that applying disparate impact principle, the [Justice Department's] Civil Rights Division under your leadership has reached settlements totaling over \$600 million?" Harkin said.

"Yes, sir," Perez replied.

The government has made it so that you cannot be paid based on your individual performance. Businesses need to craft ever more narrow metrics that lump all employees together by education, job title, race, gender, sexual orientation, and whatever

aggrieved labels politicians award with protected status next. Your negotiations with the company will not reflect your impact on the bottom-line, but your impact on the payroll. MIT summa cum laude or record sales growth may be a big deal where you come from, but in the business world it won't mean a thing if your salary brings white males too far ahead of the demographics Democrats treat like endangered species.

Workers already suspect that meritocracy no longer governs America's economy—more than half of respondents to a 2011 Yahoo Finance survey said "office politics" was responsible for how people are promoted, double those who said hard work. And when they say office politics, they're referring to the illegitimate monarchy installed by government regulations that rewards the man who waltzes into a company with documents that trace his educational bloodline to Yale or Harvard, a lineage that makes him the rightful heir to the management throne. The company obliges, breeding distrust among the workforce.

Not only does the credentialing system undermine office comity, it's bad for business, too. A number of critics cited the MBA as a chief culprit for the housing bubble and stock market crash. Forty percent of graduates from elite business schools went into finance, rather than traditional businesses, at the time of the crash. They brought the formulas that dazzled in Harvard Business School to Lehman Brothers and Bear Stearns. Those equations never failed in college.

Academics called for more business ethics courses. In the wake of the crash, think tanks said admissions committees should screen out narcissists. Investors said there should be a renewed focus on risk management. Occupy Wall Street called for guillotines.

I'm with Occupy. Occupy thought the problem was the golden parachute, but the most gilded aspect of the advanced degree isn't the sizable severance check; it's the access and employment guarantees that come with the graduation cap.

The Supreme Court could resolve many of these issues by beheading disparate impact and the diploma-as-credential. Does Wall Street need humble, ethical young men and women? Then give them tests, start them at the bottom, and let them earn their way up based on merit. Want to teach risk management? Pull students out of the classroom goldfish bowl and put them in the real world.

The real world doesn't operate in idealized, rational markets. If it did, no one would go to college. ☘

Judge Us By Our Enemies...

MAYOR MICHAEL BLOOMBERG

“ *If Bloomberg terminals worked as poorly as New York City government does after a decade of Mr. Bloomberg’s leadership, the world financial system would grind to a halt. But it’s not just the incompetence; it’s the ideology. This is the Bloomberg-knows-best elitism that gets the mayor’s nanny-state initiatives lampooned on late-night talk shows and in editorial cartoons. His effort to limit the portion size of sodas as part of a battle against obesity was such a bizarre overstretch that it was too much for even the New York Times editorial board—not exactly famous as a hotbed of free-market libertarianism. The mayor and his health commissioner announced the results of a “National Salt Reduction Initiative” just three months before a new national study that the Times put on its front page under the headline “No Benefit Seen in Sharp Limits on Salt in Diet.”*

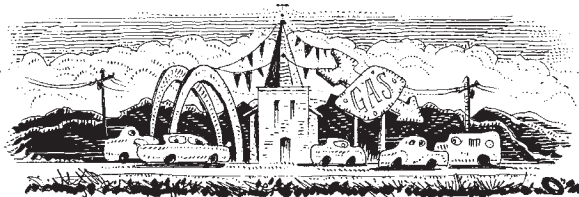
The mayor’s initiatives on other national issues, such as guns and immigration, have brought little in the way of legislative results—though not for lack of trying. Bloomberg and his coalition of Mayors Against Illegal Guns have trumpeted settlement agreements in lawsuits against gun dealers in Virginia, Georgia, and South Carolina, as well as a voluntary deal with Walmart to videotape firearms sales.... Bloomberg’s argument is that the guns from the South wind up being used to commit crimes in New York City, but the impression left is that he wants to impose his own Big Apple sensibilities on the rest of the country. ”

BY IRA STOLL, FROM THE SPECTATOR, JULY-AUG 2013



If you love to watch *The American Spectator* skewer the enemies of liberty and tradition—purblind harridans like Michael Bloomberg—then consider supporting the cause. The *Spectator* is a 501(c)3 non-profit that relies on reader donations to keep the lights on, the coffee hot, and the sabres sharp.

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by EVE TUSHNET

The Gift Shop of the Dead

A visit to D.C.'s Museum of Crime and Punishment.

FOR THE PAST twelve years I've volunteered at a crisis pregnancy center serving mainly low-income women in the District of Columbia, and I've noticed something about how our clients talk: Nobody ever says "prison." Boyfriends, husbands, fathers, sons were never "locked up," "in jail," or "serving time"; they were always "incarcerated."

There is an unexpected poignancy to the bureaucratic term—a lacy Latinate word suffused with so much pain, as if standardization and abstraction could dissolve shame. Hesitation first, and then that careful, strictly-speaking "incarcerated," like the set phrases we use in the confessional.

Nothing could be further from these women's delicacy than the National Museum of Crime and Punishment, a giant KFC bucket of suffering. I spent about four hours in this glitzy memorial-without-memory, accompanied by at least two school field trips. Admission is \$23.21 and, you know, your self-respect.

The Museum of Crime and Punishment is one big ad for a lot of things: law-enforcement jobs, *America's Most Wanted*, the myth of progress. In the dark entrance stairwell, clusters of televisions show disjointed, contextless crime footage. A man's voiceover gives the museum's mission statement:

In a free society like ours, some think nobody has the right to tell us what to do. But the law is on your side. It's there to balance the scales and restore the victims' rights. Remember, you wake up each morning with a choice: Play it straight, or press your luck. So is what you plan to do in your life worth a month, a year, or the rest of your

life behind bars? It's not. Not for you, not for the victims, or for your family....Eventually everyone faces judgment. Some pay the ultimate penalty. Others are sentenced to what many consider a fate worse than death.

I doubt many visitors hear this entire spiel. It plays on a loop, meant to set a certain atmosphere. I like the queasy theology of it—a promise of judgment without the hope of mercy—and the chop-licking reference to prison as "a fate worse than death," and I like how it answers its rhetorical questions just in case. I like how it addresses us as potential criminals who roll out of bed each morning feeling like Raskolnikov. I like, too, how the news headlines projected onto the walls of the stairwell contradict the voiceover's message: OJ SIMPSON FOUND NOT GUILTY. CONVICTED KILLER FOUND INNOCENT AFTER DNA TEST.

THE MUSEUM'S EXHIBITS are arranged in rough chronological order, starting with what the museum calls "Medieval Times" (or "The Dark Ages") but which actually seems to cover a period from about the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. These exhibits are history horror shows of gibbets, leg irons, "scold's bridles," a "shame flute" supposedly affixed to the faces of bad musicians, whips, chains, and baroque torturous bric-a-brac, accompanied by wall texts which gawp at

the brutality of the dead. There's a soundtrack of clanking chains. "It is considered an age before enlightenment..." etc. The middle-schoolers ahead of me are vocally horrified by a "Water Torture Funnel" which has an effect similar to waterboarding. Neither the wall captions nor the kids make this connection, since it doesn't fit the narrative of enlightenment. I've

read Jack Chick tracts with more nuanced approaches to history.

Let me pause and say that I genuinely appreciated the museum's focus on the use of shame and public humiliation as punishment. It's all framed as, "Look at these horrible 'medieval'!" But recognizing humiliation as a form of dehumanization—and maybe the central organizing principle of torture, since you have to dehumanize the subject before you can torture him—is somewhat countercultural these days.

We hide prisoners away so we don't have to take responsibility for what happens to them (and then make jokes about not dropping the soap). But tacit complicity is a little better than active participation. And maybe some kid will see the line, "In all cases the punishment was intensified by the fact that the victim was exposed to public insult," and wonder why the Museum of Crime and Punishment has a gallery of celebrities' mug shots. Would you trade a day in the stocks for a chance to get rid of the worst parts of your online, searchable, inescapable public persona? Or to ban the showing of "your episode" of *COPS*?

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Eve Tushnet is a writer in Washington, D.C.

The wall texts here decry “Double Standards” for men and women, rich and poor, consistently emphasizing our distance from the past. (“As Court Fees Rise, The Poor Are Paying the Price,” National Public Radio, May 19, 2014.) The Puritans criminalized crazy stuff like “dice cogging”! (“Bill Winters...will spend the rest of his life in prison for a string of petty crimes, the pettiest his final booking in 2009 over a box of candy swiped in a burglary,” Lafayette *Independent*, August 2, 2013. “Why Should Thousands of Prisoners Die Behind Bars for Nonviolent Crimes?” Liliana Segura, the *Nation*, November 13, 2013.)

Clumsy or ungrammatical phrasing and spell-check errors plague the museum. We get “Jessie James,” twice, but my favorite was the description of Bugsy Siegel’s Flamingo being built in “the dessert town of Las Vegas.” One exhibit titled “Medieval Executions” features a guillotine and a quote from Georges Danton, as if the French Revolution were medieval rather than the opposite of medieval. At least they spelled “Georges” right. In the Old West section there’s a quotation from one of the William Pitts. (Not sure which one.)

IT WOULD BE a mistake to attribute any philosophy or even a consistent mood to this desultory, sentimental museum. But to the extent that there is any continuity between exhibits, this continuity lies in the museum’s besotted swoon in the presence of power. Lawmen, bank robbers, even Pancho Villa (“ATENCIÓN GRINGOS!” his recruiting poster reads, “FOR GOLD AND GLORY”)—if you’ve got a gun and you look cool, without that creepy serial-killer dead stare, you will be glamorized here. There’s a section on pirates and although the wall text says that pirates were poor, and *modern piracy is bad, kids, don’t be a Somali pirate when you grow up*, the images



all show super-cool, well-tanned pirates shootin’ guns and havin’ funs. But then, “Hanging Judge” Isaac Parker is glorified too.

The museum is very “meta”: It spotlights, and claims to critique, the glamorization of violence in which it participates. Some researcher truffled up a terrific Ford Motors advertising card from the Dillinger years, which reads, “When will they catch Dillinger?” on the front. On the back: “Not Until They Get Him Out of a Ford V-8!” The museum highlights the way the James Gang, and Bonnie and Clyde, sought to create their own legends—and mostly succeeded. A wall text reads, “In many cases, the public actually rooted for the bad guy,” before reassuring that “ultimately, the bad guys got what was coming to them....”

The museum’s attitude toward power is exemplified in the opening to the section on American punishment. You go through a doorway and on the wall there are brief tributes to prison wardens who were considered more humane than the norm: James Johnston, nicknamed “The Golden Rule Warden,” or Thomas Murton, who reformed Arkansas prisons after major abuse scandals. But as you’re trying to read these wall texts, a video plays on a loop in which a fake warden snarls like something out of a nightmare—or at least *Cool Hand Luke*:

Within these walls, *we* are the law, and your freedom is just a memory. In your cell the sink and the toilet are exposed, and you will be too.... Remember, no one put you here but yourself. You are now in my custody, and the life you had no longer exists.

Benevolent use of power is kinda sexy, in a dad-like way. We can all get behind those nice wardens. But abuse of power is *really* sexy.

A big wheel on the wall says, “Hero or Villain? Turn the wheel to see if these legends were good guys or bad guys.” The wheel is broken.

There are things to notice in this museum, quiet hints of something. There’s a lot of glossed-over sadness in the description of the fatherless Barker Gang: “From the age of 10, [Alvin] Karpis ran with an ugly crowd of gamblers, bootleggers and pimps in his hometown of Topeka, Kansas. He spent time in reformatories, but his crimes only escalated. It was while doing time at the Kansas State Penitentiary that he met Fred Barker.” A lot of these criminals met their partners and learned the tricks of their illicit trades in the prison system, but I’m sure that’s just a coincidence.

In other areas, hard truths are simply ignored. There’s a big serial killer section—where nobody seemed to linger—and the description of Jeffrey Dahmer talks about his

victim who escaped and finally drew police attention to Dahmer's murders. It doesn't mention the earlier escapee who got to the cops but was returned to Dahmer, because cops sometimes look at drugged, nonwhite youths who say they're fleeing a killer and shrug their shoulders. Domestic dispute. "But the law is on your side," the stairwell voiceover reminds us.

The exhibit on police gear works hard to convince us that we are no longer living in "Medieval Times." Cops use safe "compliance weapons" like tasers, pepper spray, and flashbangs. ("Cops Beat, Taser Man to Death: 'They Just Weren't Done Until He Was Dead,'" *Daily Caller*, May 15, 2014. "New Mexico Woman Sues Over Pepper-Sprayed Vagina," *Toronto Sun*, November 28, 2013. "Georgia toddler critically injured by police's flash grenade," *Washington Post*, May 30, 2014.)

The museum's good-citizen instincts are at war with its show-business urges. Sober text is often contradicted by flashy, misleading "interactives." There's a surprisingly solid display about the unreliability of eyewitness evidence, including discussion of the Innocence Project, which works to use DNA evidence to free wrongly-convicted prisoners. But this is followed by a crime-solving game where you "witness" a man running from an apartment, and the text is all about how memory is tricky and eyewitness evidence is shaky—and then the man in your video stops, *the camera zooms in*, and he stands there so you can get a good long look at him. Later, when you're asked to give details about his appearance, the video replays first to help you out! I have a mind like a steel sieve, my memory is mostly made of wishful thinking, and I got every question right. (The only question I can remember was something along the lines of, "Did the man have long or short hair?")

Similarly, the descriptions of actual famous prisons like Leavenworth and Attica, and some of the texts on prison history, include novelistic details and empathetic descriptions of prisoners' suffering. There are glancing references to the horror of solitary confinement (today between 20,000 and 80,000 prisoners are in solitary, which the museum doesn't mention—as always, cruelty is confined safely to the past) and the overall tone is one of pity for prisoners who were isolated, forbidden from speaking, or beaten by racist guards. The Leavenworth exhibit notes that inmates raised and collected money for the 9/11 Relief Fund after the attacks. The Attica display

explains the 1971 riot by listing some of the abuses to which inmates were subjected, including assaults by guards, and vivid details like, "Inmates were only allowed one bucket of water per week as a 'shower.' They were issued one roll of toilet paper per month."

But all of these text-heavy displays are hard to read, because the museum has seen fit to display them behind fake prison bars. In order to make the displays more visually appealing or more "branded," the curators (if that's the word I want) made it much less likely that anyone would actually read them, instead of skipping to the colorful display of prison tattoos. The prison history section, where I spent a lot of time, was almost empty.

Maybe the most interesting thing in the museum is its treatment of prisoners' artwork. The text strains to ensure that we don't identify with prisoners. They've been caught, so they're helpless, rather than powerful like the pirates and gunmen we're encouraged to admire. But this is our only sustained glimpse of prisoners as people who do things other than crime. There are intriguing bits about how you make art supplies in prison and a note that artists can earn as much respect as tough guys. Some of the art is crude, colorful, and moving: One prisoner's "pano" or handkerchief art shows a sunlit woman holding a flower, the brightest painting you ever saw. Some of it is normal in the worst way: There's two eagles crying over 9/11, and a kitsch painting of a soldier hugging his daughter as she clutches an American flag.

THE MUSEUM is exhausting. You can learn to crack a safe, do a police training simulation, shoot carnival-style guns at an Old West-themed range, learn about the suit used in the *Robocop* movies, and on and on. I haven't mentioned the autopsy table with the fake body, or the small quiet tribute to law-enforcement officers who died in the line of duty, or the bizarre text about Prohibition in Washington that doubles as an ad for local cocktail bars. I haven't mentioned the various entertaining criminal knickknacks and attractions: Al Capone's rosary, Bonnie and Clyde's

bullet-riddled "death car" (and Bonnie's terrible, terrible poetry), quotations from Edmund Campion and Edmund Burke. I gave up somewhere in the basement level, in the sprawling "CSI" section. I skipped the *America's Most Wanted* wing.

And yet in this warren of sunny-side-up misery, so many things aren't mentioned. There is one mention of "making amends," in the description of a computer genius who, perhaps unwittingly, unleashed "the first computer worm."

Now he works on making Internet commerce secure. There's nothing on restorative justice or on returning ex-offenders to their communities, no display on the enormous number of "collateral consequences" that can follow someone who has served his time, nothing on moms in lockup (about one in twenty-eight American

children have a parent in prison; some of them have been on field trips to this place), nothing that even attempts to answer the question of whether incarceration reduces crime. No interactive exhibit asking which things *you* believe should be crimes—with the huge, unexplored exception of Prohibition, "crime" is treated as an Aristotelian natural kind rather than a category defined by the powerful. While there's a graphic comparing recent incarceration rates in different states, there's no graphic comparing the United States with other countries, even though we are the world's leading jailers.

And for all its self-righteousness toward the guilty, the museum has virtually nothing about their victims, or about the experience of being a victim of crime. There's nothing about trauma, recovery, the cycle of abuse (unless that sad depiction of the Barker Gang counts), forgiveness and reconciliation with the person who hurt you, or the debate over victims' rights movements. Victims are not powerful.

In the gift shop you can buy JonBenét Ramsey's father's book, and Aileen Wuornos's. There's a onesie that says, I JUST SPENT NINE MONTHS IN SOLITARY, and a gun to shoot ketchup onto your hot dog. You can buy an official Museum of Crime and Punishment lanyard with your name, or with the message, GOD IS LOVE. ☛

In this warren of sunny-side-up misery, nothing even attempts to answer the question of whether incarceration reduces crime.

POLITICS



by STEPHEN MOORE

Can't We All Get Along?

We have to if we're going to, you know, win.

AT A RECENT small dinner at the end of the fabulous Freedomfest gathering at the Paris Hotel in Las Vegas, major supply siders, libertarians, Tea Partiers, and traditional conservatives gathered to discuss strategies to regain political power in Washington. The libertarian faction fumed with the familiar complaint that the GOP will only win back young and female voters in 2016 by abandoning social issues like abortion and gay marriage—which would in effect toss the evangelicals off the bus.

Yet this has also become a common recommendation from the country-club Republicans who may not be members of the Tea Party movement but who write the big checks. “We must have a truce on the social issues; it is turning off voters” complains one prominent Wall Street financier who raises money for the party. By “truce,” he means “surrender.”

Regardless of how one feels about these social issues, does anyone honestly believe the GOP can put together a winning coalition without the reliable voters and activists who make up around 40 percent of the party? Will replacing a pro-life platform protecting the sanctity of the unborn with, say, one on drug legalization make the big tent bigger? It turns out Mitt Romney did a pretty good job “de-emphasizing” social issues, and look where that got him. Several million white evangelicals stayed home in 2012. This is an especially misguided political strategy given that the electorate is becoming *more*, not less pro-life over time.

Stephen Moore is chief economist for the Heritage Foundation and economics editor of The American Spectator.



Gallup shows the electorate split almost evenly today, at 46 percent pro-life and 47 percent pro-choice, compared to 41-51 in 2006, or 33-56 in 1995. The issue may be a net plus for the GOP in most states outside of liberal bastions like California and New York—places that Republicans aren't likely to win anytime soon anyway.

I would propose an altogether different strategy: Pull together the old Reagan coalition, which is still unbeatable when united. To borrow the immortal words of John Belushi in *The Blues Brothers*: it's time to “put the band back together.” Liberals can't win a majority when this coalition holds. Add up the Americans who identify as libertarians or conservatives, and you get 56 percent. Just 34 percent call themselves liberals.

Pursuing this fusion strategy may not be, as Dan Aykroyd put it, “a mission from God.” But undoubtedly the highest priority for conservatives, free marketeers, libertarians, and everyone else who wants to grow

the economy and shrink the government is to defeat *her* in 2016. A Hillary Clinton victory would cement in place and validate all the havoc and “transformation” that Barack Obama, Harry Reid, and Nancy Pelosi have inflicted on America. It could swing the Supreme Court to the left for two decades, meaning those 5-4 and 6-3 decisions will start tilting irretrievably against us. In short, a Clinton victory will be a colossal setback. The fact that Mitt Romney lost in 2012 only doubles the stakes in 2016.

SO WHY ARE ALL THE GUNS in the center-right coalition aimed at one other, not against the Death Star that is the modern

Democratic Party? The kind of squabbling that I saw in Vegas between social conservatives and libertarians is breaking out all over these days. The Chamber of Commerce is at war with the Tea Party groups, and both factions are spending money to defeat the others' candidates. The conservative super PACs have waged a war against Republican congressional leaders Mitch McConnell and John Boehner. Once upon a time conservatives (including your correspondent) declared

war against real tax-and-spend GOP liberals like Arlen Specter and Lincoln Chaffee. Now some people's litmus tests are so strict that a life-long conservative like Mitch McConnell is judged impure. Jeb Bush, one of the most innovative free-market reform governors of the last two decades, is denounced as “too moderate” at Tea Party events. When I wrote a column earlier this year defending Republican House Majority Leader Eric Cantor for his effective leadership in budget negotiations against Barack Obama in 2011 and for helping bring down the deficit from \$1.4 trillion to \$400 billion, I was attacked as a sell-out and a member of the “establishment.” My colleague Dan Henninger at the *Wall Street Journal* tells me he gets similar rant emails from Tea Party conservatives. “Wait a minute,” he replies, “I'm one of the original Reagan Republicans.” That's not good enough?

Even on the economic issues, dangerous fissures have appeared. A group calling themselves “reform conservatives” has sprouted

Photo: Marc Nozell/Flickr

with some good ideas about regulation and welfare reform, and some bad ones about tax policy. One plan being floated would increase the child credit to help families with children, but marginal tax rates would have to rise to pay for it. The *New York Times* has written fawningly (which says a lot) about reform conservatism. To supply-siders it is exactly the wrong way to go on tax reform.

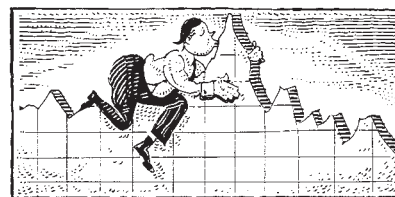
When it comes to tax policy, the reformers' agenda ignores the primary economic lesson of the last forty years, namely, that lowering tax rates ignites growth. Tax rates matter most at the margin, or on the last dollar earned, and credits and deductions are dead weight losses. This isn't dogma: it's a matter of economic history.

The problem for the middle class today is not that their income taxes are too high; it is that their incomes are not growing—in fact, they are shrinking relative to inflation. The middle class has been flattened financially over the last eight years, and putting more money in their pocket won't make up for \$2 trillion of lost growth.

What is worse is the idea of taking millions more families off the income tax rolls entirely. Currently about four out of ten Americans pay no income tax, and that could grow to more than five out of ten under this new tax plan. This smacks of "representation without taxation." The better way to go is to ensure that nearly everyone—except the very poor—pays at least some income tax. But everyone pays a manageable rate. If the party intellectuals are looking for something to really electrify voters, something like Herman Cain's 9-9-9 plan will be far more potent than a child tax credit. Of course there's nothing wrong with airing out different ideas in a presidential primary campaign, but the core principle of prosperity-based tax reform that should unite us all is "broad base, low rates."

My friend April Ponnuru, a prominent reformicon, says that Republicans have "nothing to say to a mother with three kids" in the bottom half. Yes, we do: it's called growth and opportunity, which come from businesses and jobs, which come from things like supply-side tax cuts. These dots aren't that hard to connect.

The challenge is to fuse a winning coalition united against a common and dangerous enemy. Saying that the GOP can't win with the Tea Party or with the pro-lifers or with the business wing is short-sighted. Those who think it's hard to win *with* these groups forget how painful it is to lose without them. ❧



by F.H. BUCKLEY

The Lois Lerner Curve

CORRUPT COUNTRIES, where the rule of law is weak and political pilfering is common, are poor countries. Entrepreneurs and investors cannot safely start or finance businesses in states that don't respect property rights and honor contracts, or that use the levers of the government to go after political opponents. And it's not as though America doesn't have a corruption problem. On Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, the U.S. comes in at number 19, behind most of the rest of the First World.

For anyone following the Lois Lerner scandal, that's not surprising. What *should* be surprising, perhaps, are her defenders. Lerner tampered with IRS nonprofit applications, and revealed them only when an Inspector General was about to report on them. Then the cover-up began. The IRS put out a story that blamed the shenanigans on low-level Cincinnati employees. We were told that the IRS hadn't picked on conservative any more than liberal groups. All lies. Then Lerner pled the Fifth, and her emails mysteriously disappeared.

Not to worry, the Left tells us. Joel Achenbach of the *Washington Post* beseeches us not to "sacrifice civil servants for the sake of short-term political optics." From on high, Rachel Maddow proclaims that "to continue to believe this story has merit and deserves to be taken seriously is deeply, painfully foolish." About Lerner's refusal to testify, Rep. Carolyn Maloney of New York primly observed that "I would like very much for her to testify, but she pleaded the Fifth Amendment and she has the Constitutional right to do so. I

pledged my loyalty to the Constitution when I was sworn in." Predictably, the whistleblower, Inspector General Russell George, found himself under attack.

WHEN A FEDERAL AGENCY such as the IRS goes after free market institutions, such as the Tea Party groups whose applications were held up, there's always an element of self-protection. After all, there wouldn't be much left of that big IRS building on Constitution Avenue if the Tea Party had its way. "Why does baloney resist the grinder?" asked William F. Buckley.

However, there's another reason why the Lois Lerner scandal was to be expected: we have an excess, not an insufficiency, of laws. Now, we do need laws to police corruption of the obvious sort, such as bribery and extortion. But anti-corruption laws can cause more corruption than they prevent when they rely on complicated five-point standards of the kind loved by Anthony Kennedy and law school professors, with balanced and nuanced rules that seek to apply a scalpel to tasks better suited to an earthmover. We end up giving politicized bureaucrats a weapon to use against their opponents. It's like handing a match to a giddy pyromaniac.

I call this the Lois Lerner Curve. With few laws policing corruption, there's a lot of it. Then, as law enforcement increases, corruption declines, down to point zero on the curve. Thereafter, however, additional laws result in more corruption, because citizens and bureaucrats alike become lost in the complexity and enforcement is unevenly applied.

If there's one thing tyrannical regimes believe in, it's the law. Vladimir Putin doesn't just lock people up. Rather, he accuses them of corruption, tries them, and

sentences them to prison, thus proving that Russia stands steadfast against corruption. Mikhail Khodorkovsky was a tax cheat, you see, and in Ukraine so was Yulia Tymoshenko. The problem isn't isolated in Eastern European basketcases. Why, we Americans almost elected a felon in the 2012 presidential election. Remember when Obama's deputy campaign manager, Stephanie Cutter, suggested that the Republican nominee had committed a crime under federal securities law? "Either Mitt Romney, through his own words and his own signature, was misrepresenting his position at Bain to the SEC, which is a felony," she said, "or he was misrepresenting his position at Bain to the American people to avoid responsibility for some of the consequences of his investments." The charge went nowhere, except

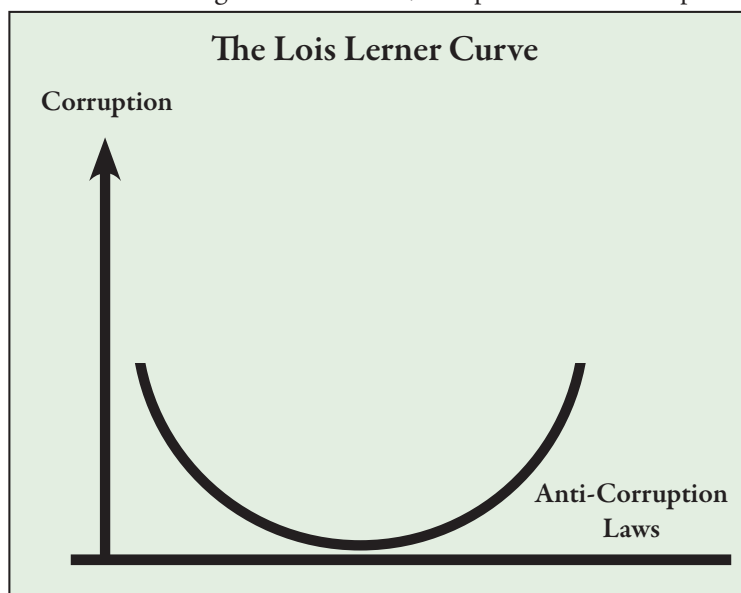
husband, which makes one wonder about D'Souza's judgment. Still, now he's a felon, and one can't help wondering whether there were political motives behind efforts to jail one of the most prominent critics of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

I think of this when I read about proposals for campaign finance reform. Sure, there's room for cleaning up the pay-for-play politics of crony capitalism and the gerrymandering that makes most Congressional seats into fiefdoms for life. And there are well-meaning people, like Harvard's Larry Lessig, who for honest motives want to limit campaign spending. Whatever their intentions, however, what they would do is take our election laws up the right-hand side of the Lois Lerner Curve, resulting in more corruption. Lurking behind them are Lois Lerner's duplicitous partisans, the bare-knuckled street fighters who seek to end the scandal of Republican money in politics, and who would give us a country as free of corruption as Russia. They are scoundrels in the cause of honor, whores who clamor for morality, thieves in defense of property rights.

Was that a little rough, just now? Then let me remind you about True the Vote, the conservative vote-monitoring

organization led by Catherine Englebrecht. True the Vote trains volunteers to record and report on suspicious voter registrations. We're not talking about the New Black Panthers with their baseball bats, but nevertheless Rep. Elijah Cummings opened up a congressional investigation into the group. His staffers wrote to Lois Lerner about it, and subsequently the IRS questioned its tax-exempt status. In in short order Engelbrecht's business was visited by the FBI, ATF, and OSHA. She testified about this in February, and what's interesting is how Democrats treated her. Cummings questioned her about her possible racist motives, and Gerry Connolly complained of McCarthyism and mocked her "paranoia" for thinking the audits might have been politically motivated.

Remember that next time a moderate conservative "reformer" proposes a bipartisan collaboration with Democrats to rid us of the scourge of political corruption. ❧



as one more element in an ugly campaign. What was remarkable, however, was that no one noted how the U.S. had flirted with a descent into Khodorkovsky territory.

We've already been there, mind you. In 1996, Republican Al Salvi ran for the U.S. Senate in Illinois against Dick Durbin. Salvi had contributed \$1.1 million of his own money to the campaign, as he had every right to do. The Federal Election Commission objected, however. As Salvi recently recounted to the Arlington Heights *Daily Herald*, an FEC official "told him the case would be dropped if he promised never to run for office again." That official was Lois Lerner.

We're seeing it now too, in the prosecution of Dinesh D'Souza for breaking an election law. Last May, D'Souza pleaded guilty to exceeding campaign contribution limits by parking money under the names of two other people. The other people in question were D'Souza's mistress and her cuckolded

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letter from PARIS

by JOSEPH A. HARRISS

Racist, *Moi*?

Excuse me Marianne, but your anti-Semitism is showing.

ISRAEL'S SUMMER OFFENSIVE against Hamas in Gaza sparked the predictable pro-Palestinian demonstrations across Europe. Organized by groups ranging from pro-Arab associations to far-left fringe parties, they were for the most part peaceful, but the Continent's centuries-old anti-Semitism resurfaced in countries like Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy. In Paris they turned particularly ugly and vicious, with hateful slogans and violent attacks on Jewish synagogues, businesses, and individuals. Aware that France is a racial tinderbox as home to both Europe's largest Muslim population, some six million, and its biggest Jewish community, around 500,000, President François Hollande had vowed beforehand that "no anti-Semitic or racist act or word will be tolerated."

With his popularity at 18 percent—the lowest of any postwar French head of state—he was largely ignored. Often wearing headscarves and flying Palestinian flags, marchers overwhelmed riot police and ignored clouds of tear gas to joyfully burn Israeli flags, trash kosher shops, and toss Molotov cocktails at synagogues. In the Paris suburb of Sarcelles, known locally as Little Jerusalem due to its large Sephardic population, the rampages were accompanied by chants including "Israel assassin," "Jews out of France," and the ever-popular "Death to Jews."

ALL IN ALL, the riots were an accurate reflection of what French Jewish leaders are calling the worst climate of anti-Semitism they have seen in many years. With the country's Muslims increasingly radicalized by jihadist preaching, New York's An-

Joseph A. Harriss is our Paris correspondent. His latest book is *An American Spectator in Paris*.

ti-Defamation League has found that France now has the highest percentage of people with anti-Semitic opinions in Western Europe: 37 percent, compared with 27 percent in Germany, 20 percent in Italy and 8 percent in Britain. And in the land that gave us the Dreyfus Affair, anti-Jewish slurs are becoming socially acceptable. That means Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder of the far-right National Front, can get away with suggesting that a Jewish folk singer might be better off in an oven. And that a popular comedian can pepper his nightclub stand-up routine with jokes about today's lamentable lack of gas chambers and the "exaggerated" fuss over the Holocaust. The attacks are not only verbal. The Council of Jewish Institutions in France says anti-Semitic threats and acts are getting worse by the day.

Although Jews form less than 1 percent of the population, compared with 10 percent for Muslims, they are the target of fully 40 percent of the country's ongoing racial violence. The attacks are now running at an average annual rate seven times that of the 1990s; in the first three months of this year alone, 140 such incidents were reported to authorities—surely only the tip of the iceberg—a 40 percent increase over the same period last year. To be sure, France's anti-Semitic violence rarely reaches the level of the March 2012 premeditated shooting of three Jewish schoolchildren and a young rabbi in Toulouse by a French Muslim of Algerian descent. Or last spring's killing of four people in the Jewish Museum in Brussels by a Frenchman just back from fighting with Islamists in Syria.

More typical of recent attacks are the two young Jews who were badly beaten on their way to synagogue; the yarmulke-wearing teenager shot with a stun gun; the mother of two punched out by a gang of Muslim girls as she walked on the Champs Élysées; another young mother strolling with her baby carriage who was jostled by a niqab-clad woman shouting "dirty Jewess, you Jews have too many children." Besides such physical assaults, there are the almost daily insults like "Jew, France is not for you," and the Star of David spray-painted on houses. Some Orthodox men have taken to wearing baseball caps over their yarmulke to avoid harassment. As a *Figaro* editorial put it, "The way things are going, France will soon look like the most anti-Semitic country in the Western world...it's becoming dangerous to be a Jew in France."

FOR NATAN SHARANSKY, the chess prodigy who spent nine years in a Soviet prison for his attempts to immigrate to Israel and who now heads the Jewish Agency, French anti-Semitism signifies something bigger and more sinister. "Something historic is happening," he told the *Jewish Daily Forward* this summer. "It may be the beginning of the end of European Jewry...What is happening in France, the strongest of Europe's Jewish communities, reflects processes taking place elsewhere in Europe." But no one who knows France and French history should be surprised by today's treatment of its Jews.

No one who knows France and French history should be surprised by today's treatment of its Jews.

The fact is that the French are endemically, reflexively racist. It's part of their history and culture. Napoleon, for one, reflected the country's anti-Semitic attitude, considering Jews degenerate and "the most despicable of men." His so-called Infamous Decree of 1808 attempted to assimilate them by force, limiting where they could live, encouraging intermarriage with gentiles, and creating obstacles to doing business. I still remember the day when my son came home from his Paris elementary school and informed me that, according to his teacher, the French were not a people or polity, but a *race* apart. This overemphasis on race might help explain why certain ideas about the Aryan race often fell on fertile soil during the German occupation.



Anyone who has lived here has heard in casual conversation the xenophobic racial slurs and insinuations that roll trippingly off the French tongue as easily as *bonjour*.

When Captain Alfred Dreyfus, an artillery officer of Alsatian Jewish descent, was abusively convicted of treason in 1894, it came at a period when French prejudice toward Jews had been incited publicly by books like Edouard Drumont's vicious *Jewish France* and half-a-dozen hate-filled anti-Semitic newspapers illustrated with grotesque racial caricatures. Dreyfus spent five years in the atrocious conditions of the Devil's Island penal colony before Emile Zola prodded the nation's conscience with his *J'Accuse* open letter accusing the army of corruption in the case.

The Vichy government's anti-Semitic policies actually went further than official Nazi regulations. While the latter defined Jewishness loosely as a religious practice, Vichy's official *Statut des juifs* defined Jews as a race. Its avowed goal was nothing less than the total elimination of Jewish culture from France. Jews were forbidden to join the civil service, their access to higher education and many professions was limited by a quota system, and their property could be "Aryanized."

This national shame was officially covered up for decades—the postwar government destroyed all documents related to the treatment of Jews—until official recognition of it began timidly in the 1990s. Thus the importance of Premier Manuel Valls's speech this summer, when he commemorated the anniversary of a mass roundup and deportation to Nazi death camps of 13,152 men, women and children in 1942. He acknowledged that "a new form of anti-Semitism" was spreading in France, "on the Internet, on social networks, in working class areas, among unemployed young people who have no awareness of history, who hide their 'hatred of the Jews' behind the facade of anti-Zionism and behind hatred of the Israeli state."

TRUE AS FAR AS IT WENT. But he failed to mention the root cause of this virulent new anti-Semitism: France's growing and aggressive Muslim population. Also avoided was the subject of France's close relationship with Palestine, while often criticizing Israel—Charles de Gaulle scorned it as "dominating and sure of itself." That pro-Arab posture was underscored ten years ago when PLO founder Yasser Arafat was flown to Paris in a French air force plane for treatment in a French military hospital after falling mysteriously ill. After his death, President Jacques Chirac publicly mourned beside his casket and ordered an official ceremony complete with military honor guard and national anthems.

Despite such obvious favoritism toward Palestine, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius and Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve co-signed an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* last July in an implausible attempt to reassure the worldwide Jewish community. They protested too much, with their heavy-handed declaration that "France is Not an Anti-Semitic Nation." Their argument, that there were fewer insults and violent acts last year than in 2004, simply made the unintended point that anti-Semitism has long been a constant in the country.

Nice try, but not enough to reassure many French Jews, who are increasingly heeding the advice of the late Ariel Sharon in 2004: "Move to Israel, as soon as possible." Polls show that as many as 75 percent of French Jews are now considering the move. Others, undaunted by the prospect of walking into a barrage of Hamas rockets, ready to forgo five-week vacations and a thirty-five-hour workweek, have already left. Last year they numbered 3,289, up 60 percent from the year before, with over 5,000 expected to follow this year. French Jewish émigrés to Israel are now second only to the exodus of Russians. For the first time since Israel was founded in 1948, they outnumber those from the United States. ❧

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PRESSWATCH



by JAMES TARANTO

The *Times*'s Little Saint Nick

Evaluating the error-prone Nicholas Kristof.

WE OFTEN assume that racism or sexism is primarily about in-your-face bigots or misogynists," op-ed columnist Nicholas Kristof lectured his *New York Times* readers in June. But no, it turns out "research" has demonstrated "that the larger problem is unconscious bias even among well-meaning, enlightened people who embrace principles of equality"—people like Nicholas Kristof.

Scientists, claimed Kristof, have proved that "females don't get any respect":

Researchers find that female-named hurricanes kill about twice as many people as similar male-named hurricanes because some people underestimate them. Americans expect male hurricanes to be violent and deadly, but they mistake female hurricanes as dainty or wimpish and don't take adequate precautions.

Just one problem: the study, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, was bunk. For one thing, the researchers skipped Katrina (along with 1957's Audrey), counting it an "outlier," so we can still blame George W. Bush.

For another, *National Geographic*'s Ed Yong noted that the researchers had considered hurricanes during the period 1950-2012. But until 1979, all hurricanes had women's names. "This matters because hurricanes have...been getting less deadly over time," Yong observed. When the dataset was limited to 1979-2012, there was only a "marginal correlation."

What's more, *Slate*'s Eric Holthaus tried running the post-1979 data without the sec-

ond-deadliest storm—2012's Sandy—and the correlation flipped direction. Excluding Sandy and Katrina, male-named hurricanes were deadlier. That points to another problem with the notion of a hurricane's sex. The researchers classified Sandy as a female name—as did the World Meteorological Organization, which sandwiched "her" between Hurricane Rafael and Tropical Storm Tony. But when naming human beings, Sandy can refer to someone of either sex.

Kristof not only swallowed whole the study's bogus claims but did so *after* critics had debunked it. He regurgitated it along with "embellishments not supported by the study, such as asserting the causality between implicit beliefs and action," noted *Slate*'s Jane Hu.

It was a characteristic performance for Kristof, who over the years has developed quite a record of advancing dubious factual claims. In a May 2012 column, he asserted: "A widely used herbicide acts as a female hormone and feminizes male animals in the wild. Thus male frogs can have female organs, and some male fish actually produce eggs."

"What herbicide exactly?" asked science journalist Deborah Blum in a critical blog post for the Public Library of Science. "Here, reader, you are just out of luck. Because he is just not going to tell you that." She guessed it was atrazine, which had been fingered as causing frog sex changes in two papers published—like the hurricane study—in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

But as Hank Campbell of Science 2.0 noted in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, those papers exemplified *PNAS*'s lackadaisical peer-review process. Both atrazine studies had the same

lead author, who was permitted to choose his own editor, a colleague. The Environmental Protection Agency undertook an investigation of the atrazine claims. "As the agency investigated, it couldn't even use those papers about atrazine's alleged effects because the research they were based on didn't meet the criteria for legitimate scientific work," Campbell wrote. "The authors refused to hand over data that led them to their claimed results—which meant no one could run the same computer program and match their results."

Blum had opened her post by describing herself as a "long-time fan" of Kristof, specifically of "his work in social justice journalism, his passionate reporting of problems others ignore....It's outstanding work and, oh, how I wish he would stick to it. Because his secondary crusade of the last few years, you know, the one against evil industrial chemicals, is really starting to annoy me."

DESPITE considerable in-the-field reporting, Kristof's "social justice journalism" has often proved fact-challenged as well. A December 2009 column made a pitch for Obamacare under the headline "Are We Going to Let John Die?" Kristof told the story of John Brodniak, a young Oregon man with a brain tumor. "Without insurance, John has been unable



to get surgery or even help managing the pain," he wrote. "John says the principal obstacle to treatment appears to be simply his lack of insurance."

But Michelle Malkin reported that three weeks before Kristof's column ran, Brodniak, who was on Medicaid, had arranged to be treated at the Oregon Health Sciences University. Malkin's scathing conclusion: "John Brodniak, a man who already has government health insurance and is already being treated for his illness, is the *New York Times*'s poster boy for why we need a new, massive nationalized health care system."

A January 2009 Kristof column told the story of Long Pross, a Cambodian teenager who

Photo by Monika Flueckiger/Flickr

claimed to have been kidnapped at age thirteen and sold to a brothel: "Glance at Pross from her left, and she looks like a normal, fun-loving girl, with a pretty face and a joyous smile," Kristof wrote. "Then move around, and you see where her brothel owner gouged out her right eye."

This past June, more than five years after the column appeared, an "Editor's Note" was appended to it on the *Times's* website: "This column reported the story of Long Pross, who said that she was forced to work in a Cambodian brothel, where a pimp gouged out her eye. A *Newsweek* article has raised fundamental doubts about her story, citing medical records showing that a surgeon removed her eye because of a nonmalignant tumor." The *Newsweek* story raised similar doubts about Somaly Mam, a Cambodian anti-trafficking activist who had been a major Kristof source. "I wish I had never written about her," he lamented in a blog post this June.

Similarly, in an April 2011 column Kristof had to distance himself from the work of Greg Mortenson, who ran a charity called the Central Asia Institute and whose memoir, *Three Cups of Tea*, described his work building schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Montana's attorney general was investigating the institute's finances. The case was settled a year later without criminal charges, but Mortenson had to repay more than \$1 million to the institute, leave its board, and promise not to oversee its finances.

"I've counted Greg as a friend, had his family over at my house for lunch and extolled him in my column," Kristof admitted. Mortenson even gave Kristof a book blurb. Little wonder, then, that Kristof was pained to acknowledge that Mortenson might have done wrong: "I don't know what to make of these accusations. Part of me wishes that all this journalistic energy had been directed instead to ferret out abuses by politicians who allocate government resources to campaign donors rather than to the neediest among us..."

THAT WISH is telling. Moral crusaders are especially vulnerable to confirmation bias, the tendency to be insufficiently rigorous about testing information that bolsters one's preconceptions. Kristof fancies himself a champion of social justice, and especially of the interests of women. The latter preoccupation has led even feminists to mock him as a "white knight."

No doubt Kristof means well. And some of his reporting is surely solid. But with a reputation like his for errors, one would have to be as credulous as Kristof himself to take anything he writes without a grain of salt. In the end, a cynic is a more honest man than a sincere naïf. ❧

campaign **CRAWLERS**



by **GROVER G. NORQUIST**

Governors Under Siege

Scott Walker and Sam Brownback must win re-election.

THE MATH looks good. Very good. One can presume that when the American people head to the polls this November, the GOP will hold the House and perhaps strengthen its majority there. The Senate is a tantalizing six seats from Republican control, and Republicans have twelve prospects. In three red states—Montana, South Dakota, and West Virginia—strong, experienced, Republican candidates are running ahead of second and third-string Democrats. In another four states that voted for Romney—Louisiana, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Alaska—first-tier Republicans are challenging incumbents who vote in lockstep with Obama. And in another five states—Iowa, Colorado, Oregon, Michigan, and New Hampshire—particularly strong Republican candidates could upset seemingly stronger opponents.

Republicans now have majorities in both chambers of the legislature in twenty-eight states, while Democrats fully control only seventeen. Come November, Republicans have a good shot at seizing control of the West Virginia House, the New Hampshire House, the Iowa Senate, and the Oregon House and Senate. There are no likely pickups for the Dems in state legislative bodies.

All that good news aside, forward-thinking conservatives would be well advised to consider how their opponents see the chessboard. Nationwide resources are flowing into two unlikely governors' races in Kansas and Wisconsin.

Why those two states? Kansas has an overwhelmingly Republican state legisla-

ture. In Wisconsin, Democrats organized recall elections for a host of state-level Republicans, including Governor Scott Walker, but the effort failed for the most part. Democrats trying to tackle Wisconsin looks, from the national level, like Sisyphus taking one more crack at rolling the rock uphill.

BUT THE LEFT is evil, not stupid. There is a big difference. Democrats are wisely targeting the two most dangerous Republicans running for office in 2014. Kansas Governor Sam Brownback has passed legislation that will phase out the state income tax. The tax rates were 6.45 percent, 6.25 percent, and 3.5 percent before his two tax cuts. They stand to phase down to 3.9 percent and 2.3 percent by 2018. After that point, every year that state tax revenues increase by more than 2 percent, income tax rates will be automatically ratcheted down until they reach zero. After that, the corporate tax rate similarly phases to zero.

Zero. No more income tax. No other votes are needed. Just time and a post-Obama rate of normal economic growth. Kansas once had the second highest income tax among its four neighboring states. Soon it will match the rate in Texas and Florida: zero.

Kansas is the model for a dozen other states flirting with phasing out their income taxes. Tying future rate reductions to incoming revenue from growth is the perfect strategy. No huge tax cuts are called for in any given year. Democrats had always seen revenue from growth to be their own personal piggy bank. Now growth is the taxpayer's friend. Already North Carolina is heading in this direction. The top tax rate has been reduced from 7.75 percent to

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5.8 percent. As in Kansas, the rates will continue to fall automatically to 3 percent as revenues increase over time. Next year Phil Berger, president pro tem of the state senate, plans to pass a law putting North Carolina on the road to zero personal and zero corporate income taxes. South Dakota, Nebraska, Arizona, Oklahoma, and Louisiana have all shown signs of wanting to head this way, too.

Hence the attacks on Governor Brownback. His opponents know that it will work, and they fear that governors in other states will adopt the same tactic. State Senator Laura Kelly has claimed that Kansas will be short \$1 billion over the next four years. But real projections suggest that the state need only reduce spending or even reallocate existing tax dollars by a total of \$315 million over the next few years: an easy fix. (One often done by previous Democratic administrations, we might add.) But Kelly and her allies in the lefty media are not bound by actuarial reality.

If Brownback were defeated it would slow the drive to add a dozen states to the march toward zero income taxes. This would reduce the pressure on Illinois, California, and New York to reform their own spending so as to compete with low or no-income tax states.

SCOTT WALKER has long had a target stapled to his back for the same reason. His decision to reform public sector unions hurts progressives where it counts (which is to say, in the pocket book) and frees up state and local officials to spend money more efficiently.

States control the unionization rules for all non-federal public sector employees. The National Labor Relations Board—whose members at this point have all been appointed by Obama—writes the rules for private sector unions. When Walker signed Wisconsin's Act 10 in 2011, he

presented a template to the twenty-four states that Republicans control. Act 10 abolished tenure for teachers. It made union membership voluntary and forbade mandatory withholding of union dues from workers' paychecks. Now,

if the union wants its \$1,000 from a teacher earning \$50,000 in wages (the standard 2 percent of salary), it must ask for it. Workers can say, "No, thank you." Unions cannot negotiate on pensions or benefits or workplace rules: just wages. And wages can only be negotiated up to the rate of inflation. Anything

higher must be approved by a referendum of the people in the affected town, city, or school district.

Every year each union must "recertify"—meaning its members must vote to continue the union. If a majority of the union's members (not a majority of the votes) do not cast "yes" ballots, then the union disappears. This is a significant hurdle, since most unions today are filled with people who never once voted to put a union in place.

It is estimated that over 100,000 public-sector workers in Wisconsin have chosen to leave a union. Union dues have

fallen by millions of dollars. If this were to happen in twenty-four red states, organized labor and its friends in the Democratic Party would lose billions of dollars. Half of all union members work in the public sector. Meanwhile, many in private sector unions work in industries Tom Steyer and Barack Obama wish to destroy—or at least move offshore.

ALREADY THINGS are picking up. Louisiana, Florida, Idaho, and Indiana have abolished tenure for public school teachers. Michigan and Alabama have banned the withholding of union dues. But in Pennsylvania and Florida, GOP majorities in the House and Senate have balked at following suit. Some are terrified of union bosses; others feel beholden to them.

When Walker and his legislature are re-elected this fall, now for the third time, it will be a powerful signal that it is safe to go the full monty against the abuse of government workers at the hands of unions. In Wisconsin, even liberal Democratic mayors have all taken advantage of their newfound flexibility under Act 10 and reformed their own governments.

Wins in Kansas and Wisconsin will clear the way for further victories in dozens of states and cities liberated from union control.

So the Democrats are very smart to be fighting. If they win, they buy precious time, perhaps allowing the courts to change the rules. To lose in November is their doom. ❧



Wins in Kansas and Wisconsin will clear the way for further victories in dozens of states and cities.



by BENJAMIN J. STEIN

In the Time We Have Left

Tuesday

THIS CANNOT be happening. Just can't be. I am in my condo at the Shoreham Towers getting my toenails cut by my manicurist, Mickey, a beautiful but not young woman. I am too old and my eyesight is too poor to really see my toenails well enough to clip them.

I switched on my TV, to Fox News. There are two people talking about the most gruesome genocidal massacres I have ever heard of or at least in a long, long time.

ISIS, the wildly insanely cruel, fanatical radical Islamist group that has seized large parts of Syria and Iraq, is apparently killing as many Assyrian Christians and Chaldean Christians as it can get its hands on. It is killing young boys by cutting their heads off slowly with a pen knife. It is raping young women, then selling them into slavery.

There were representatives of the Chaldean and Assyrian Christians on TV, on Fox, speaking with extreme emotion. They were asking where President Obama is. The host, Hannity, told the truth. Mr. Obama is playing golf on Martha's Vineyard. Yes, while the Christians of the Middle East are getting tortured to death, the President is playing golf, admittedly a difficult game.

The woman speaking for the Assyrian Christians said boldly, "We have an Army. We have Marines. We have the Navy. What are they for if not to prevent horrors like this?" (I am paraphrasing.)

This horror show, worse than a horror movie, gets more gruesome. After the young boys are killed, their heads are put on wires and displayed outside what were Christian

homes, marked with an "N" for "Nazarene."

Good God, we are all busy with our work, with our golf, with our investments, with our kids. But please dear God, move the heart of Mr. Obama to save these children. To save their mothers and fathers and sisters.

Can this kind of barbarity really be happening in this world? It can be and it is and Mr. Obama is playing golf. On Martha's Vineyard.

And that dear woman is totally right. What do we have our military for if not to prevent a genocide like this or anywhere else?

Meanwhile, I am going to shock you right now. RIGHT NOW.

I am proud of HRC. She gave a speech recently and took questions. What she said was like a flash of God's truth. She was asked if the riots and demonstrations in Europe about Israel's bombing of the Gaza Strip had its roots in anti-Semitism. Basically, paraphrasing again, she said, "Look, the demonstrations about Israel, which is just trying to protect its life, have been exponentially larger and more ugly than any demonstrations at all about the shoot down of the Malaysian Airlines jet with the loss of 300 innocent people by the pro-Russian separatists of Ukraine, armed by Russia. Of course it's Arab anti-Jewish feelings—and Arabs are a large part of Europe now—combined with ultra-right parties in Europe. So, of course it's anti-Semitism."

WHY THE HECK COULDN'T OBAMA HAVE SAID SOMETHING THAT HONEST AND HARD HITTING? Why can't our Republicans? I guess Senator Graham, my hero, does, and so does the greatest guy in the Senate, John McCain. But what is Rand Paul going to say about it? He scares me.

Meanwhile, the only nation in the Mid-

dle East that guarantees full religious rights to every minority—Yazidi, Chaldean Christian, Assyrians, Catholics, the Presbyterians, Muslims—is Israel. And yet Mr. Obama sees moral equivalence between Israel and the Islamists. Amazing.

(Meanwhile again, my Word Perfect does not know the word "Nazarene"!!!!)

So, I keep thinking back to my old boss at the *Wall Street Journal*, Bob Bartley. I was a lowly scrivener on the edit page, writing mostly about popular culture. Bob was editor of the editorial page. By total chance, he lived very near me in Brooklyn Heights. Once in a great while, we would take the subway to work together.

One day, when some crisis between Gerald Ford and Israel about arms for Israel was brewing, and Ford was being led into bad behavior by some anti-Israel people around him, I asked Bob what he thought about it.

Once again paraphrasing, what Bob Bartley said was this. "The United States has to help the Jews in Israel. Yes, there are a lot more Arabs than Jews. Yes, they have a lot of oil. Yes, none of our European 'allies' are with us on this.

"But we still have to help Israel because it tells the world and it tells us what kind of people we are. Are we going to help the most persecuted people in history, who are also our friends, or are we going to just go by the numbers at the UN? We stand with Israel because it's a moral matter."

I can still recall walking out of the subway stop under the World Trade Center with Bob, my head reeling at the great man's great moral sense. I miss him keenly every day. But the edit page at the *Journal* still consistently takes the moral high road and God bless them.

Anyway, it is incredible that someone with as little moral sense as Obama is president. Hannity also showed him campaigning on taking the last U.S. troops out of Iraq—and then just recently blaming George W. Bush for ending U.S. involvement in Iraq.

How long, I wonder, until Mr. Obama becomes a big enough man to admit his mistakes and stop blaming George Bush for everything that happens?

By the way, I miss Mr. Bush. He was not especially eloquent, but he had a strong moral sense. And as my pal Renae Garcia says, it's wrong to blame him for Iraq when everyone in the country wanted to go to war with someone over 9/11. Yes, he made a huge mistake. But war fever was running high so it's not really entirely his fault. Presidents can catch war fever, too.

Ben Stein is a writer, actor, economist, and lawyer in Beverly Hills and Malibu.

Thursday

THIS HAS BEEN an amazing day. Yesterday, I had a so-called PET scan from a machine made by GE. This was because an earlier test by a CAT scan machine had detected something in my lungs that was abnormal. The PET scan was to determine if that abnormality was something life threatening.

I can tell you I was scared. There is way too much cancer in my family and I have already had some experience with a very mild form of it. "Three score and ten are the days of a man's life...." That's what kept going through my brain. I am almost there. I have a lot of filing to do before I die. I don't want to leave my wife with all of this filing.

So, as I say, I was scared. I did my usual Fox News show this morning with the incredibly witty Neil Cavuto as host and the perennial witty crew. But I was nervous throughout. On my way home, I called my doctor.

"How are you, Bill?" I asked.

"I'm good," he said, "and so are you. Nothing lit up so there is no cancer in your lungs."

I think that might have been the happiest minute of my life.

I like my life a lot. I have the world's greatest wife. A genuine angel of God. The sweetest, most beautiful dog on the planet, Julie Good Girl. My challenging but adorable son. My stone gorgeous daughter-in-law and our granddaughter, the adorable Coco. Plus I live in America and I have interesting work and a swimming pool and a Cobalt boat. Plus I have the world's greatest sister. And I have Phil DeMuth. Plus, I have my 12-step program that I love beyond words. And Wlady and Bob and John and Aram and Becki and Jerry and Nancy and Mike and Tim and Penny and Barron and Steve.

So, I'm a happy guy.

I had lunch with Phil at a humble car wash burger joint. Then I was part of a group that interviewed young people about their financial plans and how they plan to provide for retirement. I am doing this on my own. No one has paid me to do it. But I am fascinated with the ultra-importance of savings. I don't want to miss an opportunity to spread the good gospel of prudence in retirement planning.

The best advice I ever got about it was from Ray Lucia—diversification plus a lot of liquidity. Makes total sense. Maybe even better advice from Mr. Buffett: an idiot with a plan can beat a genius without a plan.

Hmmm. What the heck is my plan?

For today, to be on my knees with gratitude. Thank you, GE, for that machine that took such a weight off my mind. THANK YOU, GOD.

conservative TASTES



by JAMES BOWMAN

There's No Breaking Away

THIS YEAR for the eighth summer in succession I presented—along with free pizza—a collection of old movies on a theme. The theme of this year's series, jointly sponsored by the

Ethics and Public Policy Center, where I am a resident scholar, and the Hudson Institute in Washington, where the films were shown, was "Middle America and the Movies." There were six selections, all of them having something to do with the Midwest as seen from Hollywood and, therefore, as in some sense representative of the country as a whole in a way that Hollywood itself never quite managed to be—though it used to come a whole lot closer than it does today. Four of the six movies were set, wholly or partly, in Indiana, which I take to be the movie capital's Platonic ideal of a Midwestern state, and which was as well the original home of *The American Spectator*. In fact, Steve Tesich, the Oscar-winning screenwriter of *Breaking Away* (1979), the final movie in the series, was a fraternity brother and roommate of the *Spectator's* own R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr., at Indiana University in Bloomington, where the film was set.

Breaking Away, directed by Peter Yates, along with the first of this year's films, the less well known *Remember the Night* (1940), may also give us the best clue as to what it is that the movies find evocative or significant about the Midwest and its distinctive brand of Americana and Americanism. For in all these

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movies, the look inward also tends to involve a look backward. Sometimes this portrait of the American past is only allusive, as in the two films already mentioned, and sometimes it is more direct, as in the other four films in the series, all of them set in the past. Three of the four—*King's Row* and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942 both), and *On Moonlight Bay* (1951)—take as their temporal locus the period around the turn of the last century up to America's entry into World War I in 1917. *On Moonlight Bay* ends with the hero, William Sherman (Gordon MacRae) on the point of going off to war, but with no slightest hint on the part of the filmmakers—Roy Del Ruth directed this adaptation of Booth Tarkington's "Penrod" stories by Jack Rose and Melville Shavelson—that he might not come back to his Indiana home in the same mental and physical condition as when he left it.

In that picture, as in *Remember the Night*, which was written by the great Preston Sturges and directed by Mitchell Leisen, the early years of the twentieth century are seen as a time when America was at her best, and when there must have seemed a general agreement that the best of America was the Midwest. By contrast, *King's Row* and Orson Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons*, also an adaptation from Booth Tarkington, show the progressive impulse looking back on the same period, although not without affection, as more a time of innocence, not to say naiveté, with little to offer the present but a lesson in the advisability of submission to the onward thrust of moral and material progress. The backward look in the final two films in the series, Terrence Malick's *Badlands* (1973) and *Breaking Away*, is toward the much more recent past of the 1950s, though *Badlands*, like the other films Mr. Malick has made since—notably *The New World* and *The Tree of Life*—also has its eye on

an imaginary or mythical past of unspoiled purity before the shackles of society and civilization were placed on us. And by “us,” of course, I mean those of us who allow ourselves be flattered into joining him and other fashionably lonely survivors, in imagination, after civilization’s disappearance. It describes a time when what there is of humankind is supposed to have lived in harmony with nature and away from the corrupting influence of, you know, *people*. The idea of the unspoiled frontier, whose potency throughout the history of the movies to that point had always had to do with its being seen as past and settled, took on a new lease of life with Terrence Malick, as it did with the hippies at about the same period, when it was re-imagined as a freer alternative to the disappointing American present for those willing to simplify their lives.

Innocence is also a central theme of *Breaking Away*, but there it is a more down-to-earth sort of innocence presented to us without that distinctively American longing for those imagined wide open and empty spaces. One of the main characters, it’s true, fantasizes about sleeping under the stars in Wyoming, but this remains as much a fantasy as the hero’s affectation of an Italian accent and culture. Innocence is ignorance in this movie, not a sentimental romantic fantasy but something that must end with the youth that an old world realism tells us must and should be lost before we can take up our natural and inevitable position in an inevitable community and economy. Steve (birth name Stojan) Tesich, now alas deceased, was a Serb, a refugee from the former Yugoslavia, who always had a refugee’s love for and gratitude toward this country, as well as a critical perspective on it quite unlike that of Terrence Malick and other progressives of the 1970s who believed in the fantasy of extended innocence of the hippy philosophers, and that our transplanted European civilization had only destroyed some better thing that it had displaced.

Mr. Malick’s independent film *Badlands* and *King’s Row* by Sam Wood, a typical product of the studio system, are both manifestations of a kind of innocence-ignorance on the part of the filmmakers that answers the more common kind they both portray, and which keeps me from being as hard on them as they no doubt deserve. The difference is that *King’s Row*, starring Ronald Reagan in his greatest screen role, is innocently hopeful about the power of science and enlightenment to bring human life on earth nearer to perfection, while *Badlands* strikes one—it strikes me, at any rate—as close to despair about human possibility as anything much above

the animal level achieved by its two morally unschooled heroes, played by Martin Sheen and Sissy Spacek. The movie achieves a kind of emotional quiescence by reassuring us not only that Mr. Sheen’s serial killer, Kip, simply doesn’t know any better but that it is pointless to expect him or his kind to know any better.

The fantasy of innocence here is also a fantasy of exemption from moral responsibility, which is swallowed up along with the former American civilization in the vast, indifferent prairie that is the movie’s central image. Yet it must be admitted that *Badlands* has proved a better predictor of the future than *King’s Row*—at least to the extent that the future, now present, is refracted through the

the illnesses of mind and spirit which seem to afflict so many more of us than they did seventy years ago.

Yet in a pop cultural environment more riddled with fantasy than it has ever been, there is something that looks reassuringly real about the Indiana of *Remember the Night* and *Breaking Away*. Both dare to suggest that American civilization is not the malign and corrupting thing it is to Mr. Malick, nor yet the unlovely commercial-industrial expression of ambition and greed that it mostly appears to be in *The Magnificent Ambersons* or the pullulating mass of neuroses of *King’s Row*. Instead it is prefigured in the loving families that are at the center of both movies



media’s lens. Kip, who was based on a much less photogenic—and much, *much* less sympathetic—serial killer from Nebraska named Charlie Starkweather, is the prototype of all the fame-hungry moral retards whose enthusiastically reported rampages from Columbine to Sandy Hook have made Middle America a by-word for crazy killers to much of the rest of the world. They, like Kip all those years ago, have been schooled in moral ignorance by our wonderful celebrity culture. Meanwhile psychiatrists, like the early prototype of one played by Robert Cummings in *King’s Row*, are now mostly pill-prescribers and seemingly further away than ever from being able to cure

and that are still, for most of us, our first and best lessons in how to get along with others and the importance of taking responsibility for our actions. That is made explicit in one of the final scenes of *Remember the Night* in the words of Barbara Stanwyck’s character, who gets her lesson in love comparatively late in life: “When you make a mistake, you have to pay for it; otherwise you never learn.” What a concept! And yet once a people who thought of themselves as free took it for granted as the foundation of their free society. If Hollywood and the media have forgotten that, it is still possible to believe that there are those in Middle America who haven’t. ❧



A Lady With the Spark of Wit

The Informed Air: Essays

By Muriel Spark

(NEW DIRECTIONS, 352 PAGES, \$24.95)

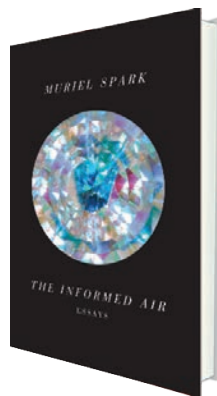
REVIEWED BY LYDIA SHERWOOD

HOW DO YOU DO IT?" asked Evelyn Waugh in a letter to Muriel Spark. He had just finished reading *The Bachelors*, her fifth novel, and was "dazzled" by it. "Most novelists find there is one kind of book they can write (particularly humorous novelists) and go on doing it with variations until death. You seem to have an inexhaustible source."

How *did* Spark do it? Twenty-two novels and not a dud in the bunch. And then there are the critical biographies, plays for stage and radio, a children's book, a volume of memoir, and collections of short stories and poetry. Spark, known for her wit, dark humor, and versatility, was the queen bee of the postmodernists, and arguably one of the most innovative British novelists writing in the second half of the twentieth century.

It's about time that Spark's nonfiction was collected. She died eight years ago; it has been a decade since her last novel, *The Finishing School*, was published. *The Informed Air* has been edited by Spark's literary executor, best friend, and late-life companion Penelope Jardine, who has written a preface wonderfully tender toward Spark. Like nearly all her books, *The Informed Air* is a slim beast. Here pictures get their own pages; often there are blank pages between pieces; and several of the works collected are no longer than 200 words. Still, everything here is excellent,

Lydia Sherwood is a librarian in Virginia.



retrospective essay on *Gone With the Wind* is placed in "Miscellany" rather than "Literature," though in this case the decision seems justified given Spark's assessment of the novel: "To evaluate a mammoth labor like *Gone with the Wind*, whether it is a good book or a bad book, seems irrelevant. Of course it is bad art. But you cannot say fairer than that it is, like our Albert Memorial, impressive." Even more amusingly, Spark's essay on cats, "Ailourophilia," has been filed under "Faith" rather than "Miscellany," which is also, in its way, fitting. "If I were not a Christian," the essay begins, "I would worship the cat." But the piece isn't all metaphysics: "Whereas the bourgeois dog needs a kennel or a fireside in order to be a somebody, even the sleek alley cat retains the incomprehensible importance of its catness."

Spark could always make the humdrum wildly interesting. My favorite piece in this collection is "Eyes and Noses." An editor at the *Observer* asked her to write an essay about eyes, but Spark, in her typical mischievous way, forwent the eyes-window-soul cliché and decided to write about noses instead. "The more I thought about eyes," she tells us, "the less I had to say about them, and the more I ponder noses." She goes on to argue

indeed sparkling. There isn't a boring sentence in the whole book.

The Informed Air is divided into four parts: "Life," "Literature," "Miscellany," and "Faith." Jardine clearly had a bit of fun deciding which pieces go where. Spark's

that "the transcendent function of the nose is to proclaim humankind." She cites Genesis on man, which tells us that God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." Hence, as Spark puts it, "The first thing that happened to Adam happened to his nose." Perhaps the most amusing bit is Spark's observation that all of Botticelli's nymphs and goddesses have pink-tipped noses:

He understood that they exist, by nature, in an element so purified and perfect that when they came into a natural framework they would find the atmosphere odd. Giving them form, in their immortal poses, he gave them a human reaction to change of climate, a cold.

What more can I say? Spark has me totally convinced.

JARDINE NOTES IN HER PREFACE that biographers have failed to capture Spark's "brave and generous spirit...the optimism and joy of her personality." I'm not sure that I agree: Martin Stannard's biography is favorable and touches on all these characteristics. But the pieces collected here under "Life" do show us Spark at her most jovial. In "The Celestial Garden Party" Spark writes about her mother's compulsion to buy wide-brimmed decorated hats perfect for the gatherings that she never ended up attending. At the time her mother was buying these hats, Spark was learning about Plato at school. "I formed the opinion that my mother's hats were designed for an ideal Garden Party which took place somewhere in the sky." Fast-forward to Spark's later life and she has couture dresses in her closet that "beautifully hang there for some useless celestial occasion." It is a fun read, light and exuberantly feminine, but it has almost nothing to do with Spark's life. A

few experiences serve as the springboard, but the essay is really a playing out of Spark's complicated but whimsical metaphysics. The same sort of thing happens in "What Images Return," an essay written about the days surrounding her father's death. The essay is not about her father, her family, her estrangement from them in middle age. Instead we see Spark looking



out the window of an Edinburgh hotel, reflecting on the birth of her aesthetic consciousness. She focuses her attention on the prehistoric Castle Rock that stands tall between the old and new sections of the city. "I imbibed, through no particular mentor, but by breathing the informed air of the place, its haughty and remote anarchism." When the call comes that her father has died, Spark looks out the window to see "that the rock and its castle loomed as usual in the early light. I noticed this, as if one might have expected otherwise."

In the pieces that touch on her life there is a certain joy at work, an electric energy; but there is also an air of artificiality, an obvious distance between Spark and her raw material. In her fiction this element seems to give her books their clever edge, but in what should be autobiography, it makes her seem cold. Then again, Spark herself made it clear that she disliked writing about the past. In another piece collected here, "The Writing Life," she admits that "I find it difficult to re-read the novels and abundant stories I have written in the many years since then."

THE SMALLEST section in this collection is actually "Miscellany," but "Faith" seems the slimmest, puffed up as it is with essays on cats, cannibalism, and Guy Fawkes (all wonderful, but not quite faith-related). Spark wrote almost nothing about her conversion to Catholicism, or her religious experience thereafter. Jardine reminds us in her preface that

the essay "My Conversion," often quoted by scholars when discussing Spark's religion, was not written by her, but about her by a priest to whom she gave an interview. We know that Cardinal Newman was the catalyst for Spark's conversion and that she was not terribly orthodox, instinctively feeling the particulars of the faith to be flexible. I always think of Vatican II as tumultu-

ous, but the chaos it brought was masked with a respectability that probably suited Spark's personality. It is a pity that she failed to write about the most complex facet of her complex personality, but I suspect her religious experience was too mystical for even her talent. The closest we can get to understanding her faith is to look at the religious topics that interested her most.

She was obsessed with the Book of Job. At one time she planned to write a critical study

of it. She spent almost a year on the project, but eventually put it aside in order to "get on with my life." Though the study never materialized, Job was a recurring presence, one who seeped into her fiction, too: her first novel, *The Comforters*, gets its title from the friends of Job who try to convince him that his suffering is a product of sin; in her seventeenth, *The Only Problem* (which is suffering, of course), the protagonist is obsessed with studying the book. Questions about suffering—why we suffer and, especially, why so many of us are fascinated by suffering—is a theme running through all Spark's work. Like Job, Spark was not convinced that suffering is the product of sin or

that sin necessitates suffering. Those interested in this topic will find writing collected in *The Informed Air*, including the introduction to *The Only Problem*, well worth reading.

For those who have only read her fiction, the essays on Mary Shelley or the Brontës serve as wonderful introductions to Spark's critical work. Like her novels, Spark's criticism is smart and complex. Her greatest achievement was her biography of Mary Shelley. *Child of Light: A Reassessment of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (later revised as *Mary Shelley: A Biography*) argues that the author of *Frankenstein* possessed intellectual and literary sympathies independent of those of her famous husband and her parents. Of chief interest among the pieces collected here is Spark's proposal for the biography, which reminds us what an excellent businesswoman she was.

Drawing attention to Spark's critical achievements will dampen the popular misconception that her literary career began at age thirty-nine with *The Comforters*; she was of course busy doing brilliant things long before then. Besides, Spark never considered herself a novelist. This bizarre insistence is a theme sprinkled throughout speeches, introductions to books, and pieces published in the *New Yorker* and the *Daily Telegraph*. "I thought in many ways that novels were a lazy way of writing poetry, and above all I didn't want to become a 'lady novelist' with all the slop and sentimentalism." She saw herself as primarily an artist and secondly a poet claiming "a

poetic perception, a poet's way of looking at the world, a synoptic vision."

It is always tempting to finish a review of a book published posthumously with speculation about its author's reputation. Personally, I'm nervous in the case of Muriel Spark. I'm sure she won't be embraced by the academy. Her work is seriously lacking in

trendy liberal moralism and the tedious seriousness favored on undergraduate syllabuses. Really I am sure of only two things: that those who do read Spark will be just as dazzled by her as Waugh was, and that *The Informed Air* is a nice addition to my shelves. ❧

"If I were not a Christian," Spark's essay Ailourophilia begins, "I would worship the cat."

Mini-Me to the Man Who Would Not Die

The Greatest Comeback: How Richard Nixon Rose from Defeat to Create the New Majority

By Patrick J. Buchanan

(CROWN FORUM, 392 PAGES, \$28)

REVIEWED BY ARAM BAKSHIAN, JR.

TO BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING, I happen to believe that Pat Buchanan is one of the ablest, most eloquent political writers alive today. If his take-no-prisoners style and love of the mischievous quip occasionally cause him to charge a bridge too far, it never diminishes his mastery of the language. Agree with him or disagree with him—and I tend to agree with him more often than not—Pat is always a delight to read. Even a critic reviewing one of Pat’s earlier books for the *Washington Post* conceded that “Buchanan is a muscular writer, fully in command of the English language...adept at linking history, statistics, and the writings of philosophers and economists

to proffer forceful arguments,” while a reviewer for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* would praise him as “an honest writer who opens his mind and psyche in a way few people can....He minces nothing except an occasional opponent.” What the eighteenth-century poet and playwright Oliver Goldsmith said of that rambunctious old Tory Dr. Samuel Johnson could equally be applied to Pat: “There is no arguing with Johnson: for if his pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt end of it.”

But before reviewing Pat Buchanan’s latest, and in many ways most interesting, book, a bit of up-front disclosure is in order. From 1972 until Richard Nixon’s resignation four decades ago, Pat and I were next-door neighbors, occupying adjoining suites in the Old Executive Office Building, I as one of the president’s full-time speechwriters and Pat as a sort of speechwriter emeritus, still lending his hand on major addresses, but also over-

Aram Bakshian, Jr. served as an aide to Presidents Nixon, Ford and Reagan. His writing on politics, history, gastronomy, and the arts has been widely published in America and overseas and he is a contributing editor to *The National Interest* magazine.



seeing production of the daily press digest, producing policy memos for the president’s eyes alone, and something more.

If not quite a political surrogate for the son Richard Nixon never had, Pat was certainly the chief’s Mini-Me, the aide whose gut beliefs and political instincts most closely matched Nixon’s own. I don’t think there was anyone else on the White House staff with whom Nixon was quite as comfortable. Even when he had already decided to steer a different course for reasons of *Realpolitik*, Nixon relished Pat’s forceful, forthright polemics, which probably represented what Nixon really believed and would have liked to do if only he dared: for example, Pat’s suggestion that he make a bonfire of the Oval Office tapes.

An added reason for the Nixon-Buchanan affinity was the fact that, while there were a few old Washington and California hands who had known Nixon from his earliest political days, Pat was one of a handful of bright, energetic, and dedicated men and women, most of them fairly young at the time, who were at the heart of Richard Nixon’s incredible political resurrection after he had lost both the 1960 presidential election and the California gubernatorial race two years later. After the latter humiliating defeat, the anonymous pundits at *Time*

had smugly—and a bit prematurely—declared Nixon dead: “Barring a miracle his political career ended last week,” they wrote in their November 16, 1962 issue.

THE MIRACLE DULY occurred, thanks mostly to Nixon’s incredible ability to pick himself up off the floor, dust himself off, and figure out how to get it right the next time. Get it right he did, in 1964 and 1966 as a party unifier and tireless campaigner for hundreds of GOP candidates. Then he went on to craft and continuously fine-tune a campaign for the presidential nomination and the White House itself. Pat Buchanan was there from the start, seeing it all and shaping a lot of it himself. In *The Greatest Comeback* he provides the reader with a funny, moving, incisive account of history as it happened. As such, his book will make

fascinating reading not only for Nixon lovers and haters old enough to remember the events covered, but for future historians in search of an informed, intimate account of one of the greatest political resurrections of all time.

At its very heart is a portrait of the Richard Nixon few others knew and understood as well as Pat Buchanan did. Besides bringing Nixon alive in all his contradictions in the narrative, Pat also includes a fascinating

If not quite a political surrogate for the son Richard Nixon never had, Pat Buchanan was certainly the chief’s Mini-Me.

appendix of notes and memos he sent to Nixon along with RN's handwritten edits and responses, a real glimpse into the interaction of two very sharp, highly attuned political minds.

This past August, which marked the fortieth anniversary of the Nixon resignation, I was asked to do a short reminiscence for the website of the *National Interest* on the end of the saga that began with the events described in *The Greatest Comeback*. I mentioned that I had had the privilege of working closely with three presidents: Nixon, Ford, and Reagan, and that I had come to like and admire each of them in different ways.

Each one had entered office at a time of crisis, each one had to tackle massive inherited problems, and each one had made a substantial contribution against heavy odds. But Richard Nixon was the most fascinating and complex of the three, a man who rose from the political dead more than once and lived to attain hard-earned standing as an elder statesman after being driven from office in disgrace. Nothing came easily to him. There were no inherited privileges, none of the superficial charisma that often covers a multitude of sins, and no loyal cadre of establishment cheerleaders to rally public opinion. But it was Richard Nixon and many of the team members he assembled—Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, and Patrick Moynihan to name only three, plus scores of less well-known policy experts and skilled specialists—who would lend intellectual strength and depth to domestic and foreign policy for the rest of the twentieth century and beyond.

And then there were the millions of blue-collar, independent, and Democratic voters who, for the first time, cast their ballots for a Republican president, hesitantly in 1968 and overwhelmingly in 1972. They and their descendants returned to the Republican fold again in 1980 to make the Reagan Revolution possible, just as the “lasting structure for peace” crafted by Richard Nixon made the historic collapse of communism achievable without global conflagration.

“Not all that bad,” I concluded, “for what most historians continue to dismiss as a ‘failed’ presidency.” One hopes that, even now, Pat Buchanan is at work on a successor volume, offering his unique insider’s view of the triumphant and tragic events that followed *The Greatest Comeback*. No one could tell that story better. ❧

Reading the Reformist Manifesto

Room to Grow: Conservative Reforms For a Limited Government and a Thriving Middle Class

By Peter Wehener, Yuval Levin, et al.
(YG NETWORK, 121 PAGES, FREE)

By W. JAMES ANTLE III

CONSERVATISM, properly understood, requires a healthy respect for the past as well as a clear-eyed appraisal of the present. So on paper, reform conservatism—billed by proponents as a movement to find new ways to apply conservative principles to contemporary problems—should appeal.

Many conservatives, however, find reform conservatism elitist, if they think of it at all. In the movement’s earliest iterations shortly after Barack Obama was elected president, it seemed to be pitched as a self-conscious alternative to the kind of conservatism embodied by the Tea Party.

These reform conservatives were seen as an ivory tower phenomenon rather than a grassroots one. While they were supposed to be re-creating the winning formula pioneered by Ronald Reagan and the old domestic-policy neo-conservatives, instead the kind of people who wrote at David Frum’s *Frum Forum* website mostly sounded like they were pining for the way Republicans used to lose elections before Reagan—decisively, but civilly and moderately.

If the Tea Party was a little too Michele Bachmann for some people’s tastes, reform conservatism was Jon Huntsman all the way—without Huntsman’s most attractive feature, his critique (however restrained) of George W. Bush’s foreign policy.

In fact, what criticism of Bush existed in early reform conservatism concentrated more

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on his style—especially the red-state identity he shared with Bachmann and Sarah Palin—than his policies. There was a certain amount of warmed-over compassionate conservatism and not much rethinking of the Bush-era overspending and foreign-policy Wilsonianism—two areas that cried out for true conservative reform.

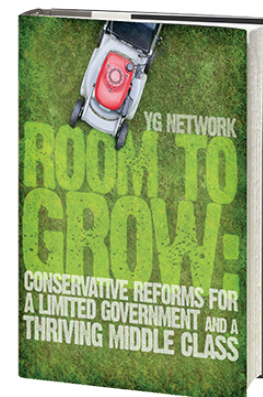
All that said, *Room to Grow*, a free collection of essays about reform conservatism hailed as the movement’s manifesto, suffers from few of these defects. It is a smart introduction to some reformist ideas mostly centered on the following insight: conservative economic policy has become sharply divorced from the actual financial anxieties experienced by the middle class; but that conservatives need not morph into low-budget liberals in order to appeal to voters in Ohio.

Yuval Levin, founding editor of *National Affairs* and one of the intellectuals who spearheaded this project, deserves a lot of credit for helping to make reform conservatism congenial to the Tea Party. He acknowledges the importance of constitutionally limited government and the right’s reticence to merely tinker with the leviathan. He is especially thoughtful when writing about the left’s use of the welfare state to “liberate” us from real family and communal ties, so we may all live the Life of Julia.

Ramesh Ponnuru of *National Review* also contributes a solid essay on constitutionalism to *Room to Grow*. The takeaway is that the Constitution is too important to be left just to judges. Popularly elected officials must also make judgments about the constitutionality of laws and programs, defending the document from unconstitutional encroachments.

Both of these points are important to rescue reform conservatism from the charge that it is simply interested in replacing Democratic technocrats with Republican ones. A smaller federal government that is more obedient to the Constitution and a more robust civil society are the main goals.

Someone who helped make this point is



There is zero evidence that working people whose tax liabilities have been wiped out by Republican tax policy vote for big government.



Senator Mike Lee of Utah. Lee isn't a *Room to Grow* author, but he is quoted in the collection and he is the member of Congress most likely to act on its policy recommendations. A dedicated constitutional conservative and major Tea Party figure, Lee has proposed limited-government solutions to everything from college costs to family flex time.

Lee is no Bush-league compassionate conservative. He teamed with Ted Cruz in last year's attempt to defund Obamacare and he has joined forces with Rand Paul on civil liberties. He was elected by unseating a Republican incumbent who voted for the Wall Street bailout. The son of a Reagan solicitor general, Lee has written that many federal entitlement programs are hard to square with Washington's enumerated powers. His interest in reform conservatism could help it reach the grassroots.

Some of the proposals will need his help. In *Room to Grow*, Robert Stein makes the case for cutting taxes for families, chiefly by expanding the child tax credit. Lee has in fact introduced legislation advancing a version of this idea, and you would think that a pro-family tax cut in the classic fusionist sense would be universally popular among conservatives.

YOU WOULD THINK WRONG. Many conservatives and libertarians, rightly concerned about cluttering up the tax code with credits and carve-outs, view this as "social engineering." Others feel that expanding credits detracts from the supply-side emphasis on marginal rates and economic growth. Finally, there is the Mitt Romney "47

percent" fixation. Is it wise to further decrease the share of Americans who pay income taxes, which expanding the credit would do?

Stein ably rebuts most of these objections. The truth is that cutting the current 39.6 percent tax rate would have significantly smaller supply-side effects than did cutting the 70 percent rate Reagan found when he took office in 1981. We've seen this in practice. Compare the clear-cut growth and the favorable shift in incentives to work, save, and invest caused by the Reagan tax cuts to the more ambiguous results following subsequent fluctuations in the top rate.

It is difficult to meaningfully cut middle-class taxes in a revenue-neutral way by focusing only on marginal rates. Moreover, such rate cuts would also have little effect on the work incentives of someone whose income tops out in, say, the 15 percent bracket. The end result is that quadrennial Republican tax plans are viewed skeptically by the middle class and can easily be portrayed by Democrats as tax cuts for the rich.

The tax code has always recognized the burden of supporting dependents. This is not social engineering. Stein merely proposes that the tax code do this more effectively for families with children, while recognizing our entitlement programs' implicit tax on childrearing. Writes Stein: "Even as the old-age pension system collectively depends on a population of productive young workers, it diminishes the incentive for adults to raise them—and so undermines its own sustainability."

Pace Romney, there is zero evidence that working people whose tax liabilities have been wiped out by Republican tax policy—including the Reagan, Gingrich, and Bush tax cuts—vote for big government. There is a lot of evidence, however, that married parents of children vote Republican. And who believes it is more conservative or libertarian to spend money on the government than on supporting your own kin?

Similarly, James Capretta makes valuable points in his chapter on health care, where rising costs have gobbled up growth in cash wages for much of the middle class. By allowing themselves to be seen as defenders of the pre-Obamacare health care status quo—which, Capretta reminds us, was no small-government, free-market wonderland—conservatives have made it easier for liberals to grow government. He sketches some helpful, genuinely free-market alternatives.

Room to Grow is unfortunately silent on foreign policy. The author who has previously been most outspoken on the issue, Peter Wehner, served under Bush and has never given the impression he thinks his former boss's approach to world affairs needs reform. (Wehner's chapter is a fine discussion of conservatism and the middle class.)

Overall, *Room to Grow* is a decent first step toward a solutions-oriented conservatism that won't make red-blooded Tea Partiers automatically want to tune it out. That may not sound like a ringing endorsement, but it is. ❧

Does Language Shape Thought?

The Language Hoax: Why the World Looks the Same in Any Language

By JOHN H. McWHORTER
(OXFORD, 208 PAGES, \$19.95)

REVIEWED BY JOHN DERBYSHIRE

CHINESE HAS an extraordinary number of verbs meaning “carry.” If I carry something on a hanging arm, like a briefcase, the verb is *tí*; on an outstretched palm, *tuó*; using both palms, *péng*; gripped between upper arm and body, *xie*; in my hand, like a stick, *wó*; embraced, like a baby, *bào*; on my back, *bei*; on my head, *díng*; on my shoulder, *kāng*; on a pole over my shoulder, *tiào*; slung on a shoulder pole between two guys, *tai*....

Every foreign language learner encounters similar curiosities. The question naturally occurs: Since speakers of different languages carve up the world so differently when they speak, do they likewise do so when they *think*? Do they *conceive* of the world differently?

If so, in which direction does the arrow of causation point? Which of the following propositions is the case?

- A: Conceptions shape language, or
- B: Language shapes conceptions.

Proposition B, that language shapes thought, occurred to many people—Nietzsche, for instance—but is nowadays associated with the American anthropologist Benjamin Whorf. Whorf died young in 1941, but his friends publicized and popularized his ideas, and Whorfianism—most often as “the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis”: Edward Sapir was Whorf’s mentor at Yale—became part of the common furniture of Western intellectual life in the later twentieth century.

In *The Language Hoax* John McWhorter, Professor of Linguistics at Columbia University, pooh-poohs Whorfianism. This is an odd sort of thing for him to do.

It’s odd for *anyone* to do it. Among scholars of linguistics, Whorfianism was out of favor by the 1960s. My 1987 edition of *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* says of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that: “in its strongest form it is unlikely to have any ad-

herents now.” Why is Prof. McWhorter flogging a dead hypothesis?

Things become even odder as the author reveals himself to us. Whorf’s ideas belonged to the egalitarian reaction against early anthropological attempts to rank peoples, and by extension their languages, as primitive or sophisticated, less developed or more.

The keynote for this reaction was struck in the 1860s by German anthropologist Adolf Bastian, who coined the phrase “the psychic unity of mankind.” Bastian’s student Franz Boas carried these ideas to the U.S.A.; Sapir studied under Boas; Whorf under Sapir.

Of my two propositions above, only B is compatible with the psychic unity of mankind. Proposition A suggests innate mental differences—kryptonite to egalitarians, although reasonable on evolutionary grounds.

McWhorter is himself a keen egalitarian. He *twice* quotes, in scandalized tones, the definition of “Apache” from a Whorf-era edition of *Webster’s Dictionary*: “of warlike disposition and relatively low culture.” I can’t myself see the objection. Ancestors of, say, Victorian Britons had lived in societies very much like the Apaches’. When had ancestors of the Apaches lived like Victorians?

Again, on page 67: “One might expect that complex grammar would be more typical of “advanced” civilizations.”

I suppose one might (though there is a good counter-argument in the book, lucidly presented); but why the scare quotes?

Because McWhorter’s egalitarianism is of the most fiercely extreme kind, that’s why. Therein lie his issues with Whorfianism, and the reason for this book. *Whorfianism is not egalitarian enough*.

For one thing, it is condescending. “To scorn diversity is antithetical to egalitarianism. However, to fetishize it, while perhaps seeming progressive, can be equally elitist. Do we feel people as interesting in studied ways...ultimately because we can’t quite feel that they are our equals just in being human?”

Hoo boy, it’s tough to be a progressive! You have to respect other people, but *not too much*.



For another thing, a school of neo-Whorfianism has come up, devising psych-lab experiments that show language shaping thought in tiny ways, under contrived circumstances.

Russian, for example, has different words for “light blue” and “dark blue.” OK: set up an experiment where Russians and non-Russians have to match off blue squares by shade as fast as they can. It’s been done, with all the cross-controls you can think of. Russians do better. McWhorter accepts the results, but labors mightily to show that *it doesn’t matter*.

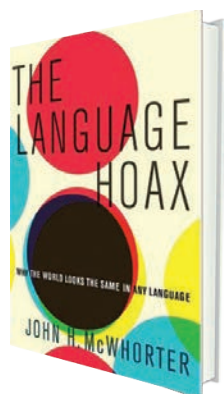
What then accounts for all those “carry” words in Chinese? “There is an endless variety of life’s nuances that a language may end up marking....Which ones they mark is a matter not of what its speakers need or what its speakers are like, but chance.”

Not only does comparative linguistics not show up differences between peoples, it proves that *we are all exactly the same!* “If you want insight as to what makes all humans worldwide the same, beyond genetics, there are few better places to start than how language works.”

Leaving aside the profound ignorance of genetics revealed there, this is just obscurantist. *No need for further research! It’s all just chance!*

It’s also incoherent. It is true in a trivial sense that human beings, as members of one species, are the same in major structure. So are dogs. That doesn’t mean the differences aren’t interesting, worth studying, and biological in origin.

It’s hard to write a dull book about linguistics, and *The Language Hoax* has many fun facts about obscure languages. Its overall tone, though, is that of a fanatically extreme egalitarian protesting too much. ☹





by R. EMMETT TYRRELL, JR.

Paul Ryan's Mysterious Way

WASHINGTON

THERE IS A MYSTERY about Congressman Paul Ryan's new and very good book, *The Way Forward: Renewing the American Dream*. Perhaps there are several mysteries.

Ryan, the chairman of the House Budget Committee and Mitt Romney's vice presidential running mate, begins by writing at length about the place he has lived all his life, Janesville, a town of 60,000 in southern Wisconsin. It is rural, but it also has industry. Moreover it has Ryans. Sixty-seven of his cousins live nearby. The Ryans have lived there for generations along with other Catholics, Protestants, and presumably citizens utterly oblivious to religion's call. But the point is that most of the citizens of Janesville are decent, law-abiding, can-do citizens. Ryan describes it as an ideal community to grow up in and to discover the American Idea. It is his idea of how we live as Americans. It is also the Founding Fathers' idea, and the basic idea of modern conservatism of which Ryan is a leading member.

Ryan grew up very religious, very moral, and very can-do, but there were bumps along the way. At age 16 he found his father dead in bed, a victim of alcoholism and a heart attack. That is when the young man decided he could "sink or swim." He decided to swim, and while giving up his faith in college and taking aboard a bit too much recreational hooch, he applied himself to his studies in earnest and followed

a regimen of strict physical fitness. Eventually he gave up hard liquor, returned to the Church, and increasingly threw himself into what he calls "the battle of ideas," first in college, then in Washington as a junior member of the conservative group, Empower America, headed by Bill Bennett, Jack Kemp, and Jeane Kirkpatrick. He returned to Janesville in 1998 and ably assisted by a gang of Ryans, plus energetic others, he deposed his district's Democratic representative to the House of Representatives. Congressman Ryan was now ready to devote himself to public policy, a thing he loves almost as much as deer hunting.

Hence the second part of this well-written and well-paced book, "Where We Go From Here," in which he makes his famous apology. In the 2012 campaign, fetched by the

report that 60 percent of the American people took some form of government subsidy, he began talking about "takers" and "makers." A listener objected to his characterization of "takers," and Ryan reflected: on the closing of General Motors' Janesville plant leaving the town without its \$220 million annual payroll, on the Social Security survival benefits that sustained him and

his mother after his father's death, on his mother's receiving Medicare. He writes, "I realized that I'd been careless with my language. The phrase gave insult where none was intended. Ultimately it was also ineffective, because the problem I was trying to describe was not about our people. Rather, it was rooted in a very different philosophy of government that I believe threatens to destroy the American Idea."

The philosophy of government threat-

ening the American Idea is progressivism. In the second half of his book Ryan writes lucidly about how progressive programs have grown beyond the limits of the sustainable. How with such new programs as Obamacare we are approaching national bankruptcy. Then Ryan outlines very clearly how these extravagant, mostly unmonitored programs can be replaced with sustainable programs. He would repeal Obamacare and replace it with "market-based, patient-centered reforms." Before Social Security goes belly up he would reform it with personal retirement accounts, among other reforms. He would reform taxes, return to sound money, end crony capitalism, and adopt regulatory reform. All of this will have to be done eventually because we are going broke. When Barack Obama took office the national debt was \$10.6 trillion. Today it is up to \$17 trillion and growing. By 2024 the Congressional Budget Office predicts it will total \$27 trillion. You could expropriate the wealth of the top 1 percent and you would still not cover our debt. What is more, the debt would continue to accumulate.

In a word, progressivism is moribund and it needs to be replaced. Ryan's book contains the blue print to save the American Idea. Still, it is a mysterious book. In the memoir section of his book he adumbrates a rising young man with near perfect character. In the policy section of his book he lays out very compelling programs for getting America out of its present drear. Did Ryan intend to give us his credentials for the presidency? In the past he has convincingly argued that he is comfortable in the House of Representatives. Recently I sense that he is wavering.

At dinner a month or so ago there was a sense of urgency in his concern for the country. Now in *The Way Forward* he quotes Mitt Romney as saying he is "deeply worried" about the wobbly direction of the country. Ryan adds, "That's what motivates me, too." Read the book, and I think you will agree with me. Ryan has the character and the programs to lead us out of this mess.

Marijuana vs. Scotch and a Low IQ

WASHINGTON

TURNING ONCE AGAIN to what the sociologists call "coping mechanisms": there is marijuana and then there is alcohol. They are increasingly the civilized options.

**Progressivism
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save the
American Idea.**

Consider alcohol. Consider a suave scotch and soda. One does not sit down to a scotch and soda to get blitzed, unless one is a veritable drunk. One sits down and sips a scotch and soda while conversing with friends. Perhaps one reads a book. One enjoys the scotch for the taste. With scotch there are scores of different tastes. One drinks a single malt. One drinks a blend. The same is true with bourbon and all manner of alcoholic drinks. One imbibes for the taste, then for the refreshment, finally for the relaxed feeling it imparts. Very very finally, some drinkers drink a scotch and soda to get blitzed and drop out. Maybe the pathetic drinks to pass out or to throw up. A true alcoholic

at first, but mainly one becomes steadily more isolated, more alone. Is this really civilized? A pot party, as opposed to a cocktail party, can be a pretty gray affair. With contemporary marijuana the tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) rate, that is to say the psychoactive ingredient in the drug, is about 15 percent higher than it was in the 1960s or 1970s. The increased level of THC makes the drug at least five times more powerful and brings with it increased medical problems. This little known fact hints at how widespread our ignorance of marijuana really is during the current debate about marijuana, or I should say the current non-debate

Recent polls indicate increased toler-

broad legalization.” In sum, the studies show that in teenagers and young adults regular use of marijuana—which means about once a week—leads to cognitive decline, poor attention and memory, and a decline in IQ of about six points—and our young people’s IQ rates are low enough already. This mental impairment seems to last for years. One study found that teenagers who smoked marijuana daily developed abnormal brain structure. Moreover, there are psychiatrists who for years have argued that extended use of marijuana was linked to psychosis and to permanent brain damage.

Possibly these findings might bear on Michael Brown’s erratic behavior in Ferguson, Missouri, before his tragic death. We know that the 6’4”, 292-pound teenager was at least on marijuana. We know that ten minutes before he was shot he robbed a liquor store of cheap cigars. And, at least some of us know, that those Swisher Sweet cigars are used as a conduit for ingesting a mixture of PCP and marijuana. My guess is that Brown’s senseless death was brought on by what the psychiatrists mentioned in the above paragraph have referred to as psychosis and permanent brain injury.

Yet, marijuana despite these findings is increasingly considered the civilized alternative to moderate use of alcohol. How can this be? How can a country that has recently driven out tobacco—whose problems most people were well aware of—suddenly legalize a drug found to be so dangerous by modern science? Lung disease is terrible, but mental health disorders are arguably worse and they occur across a wide range of human behavior.

My answer is weariness. We have been fighting marijuana and other drug use for years and it seems to me the country is fatigued with throwing up the same arguments. They are valid arguments, but many fellow citizens, especially the young, are tired of them. Another way of saying it is that Americans have become bored by the subject. So, as Colorado goes so goes America, and recent events in Ferguson, Missouri, may just be a harbinger. ☛



is a sad spectacle. A drunk is a person who has ruined many a good drink.

Consider the increasingly civilized option, marijuana. One smokes a joint to get stoned and steadily to dropout. Is that really civilized? I have never heard of a connoisseur savoring a joint for the taste. One smokes it for the effect. One takes it in a brownie or cookie for an even more immediate effect—some times a deadly effect. Colorado, which has legalized recreational marijuana, has already reported at least two casualties and many more hospitalizations. Possibly the marijuana smoker becomes more convivial

ance for a drug that until recently was considered malum prohibitum across the nation. In January a CNN/ORC International study found 55 percent of Americans favoring legalization of marijuana. Most consider it harmless. I would not be surprised if they adjudged it less harmful than scotch and soda. Yet in a very instructive piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, former drug czar William J. Bennett and attorney Robert A. White wrote that “while almost all the science and research is going on one direction—pointing out the dangers of marijuana use—public opinion seems to be going in favor of



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current WISDOM



New York Times

Paul Krugman, filled with laughing gas, as he reads of President Barack Obama slipping on yet another banana peel:

The truth is that these days much of the commentary you see on the Obama administration—and a lot of the reporting too—emphasizes the negative: the contrast between the extravagant hopes of 2008 and the prosaic realities of political trench warfare, the troubles at the Department of Veterans Affairs, the mess in Iraq, and so on. The accepted thing, it seems, is to portray Mr. Obama as floundering, his presidency as troubled if not failed.

But this is all wrong. You should judge leaders by their achievements, not their press, and in terms of policy substance Mr. Obama is having a seriously good year. In fact, there's a very good chance that 2014 will go down in the record books as one of those years when America took a major turn in the right direction."

(June 16, 2014)

The Progressive

Prog columnist Miss Kate Clinton tells of the grim treatment accorded our canine friends at the hands of the incarcerated ladies of Hoosierland:

If I have the time in a town, I appreciate a good tour. Each tour guide's particular interests shape the highlights.

In Indianapolis, my guide, a passionate animal rescuer, took me through a shelter that sends dogs to the women's prison, where women train them to be companions for people with special health needs.

(June 2014)

StreetInsider.com

Another theological determination by the pious Rev. Serene Jones, president of the Union Theological Seminary, on the occasion of the infamous Hobby Lobby decision:

As a Christian, I believe that God creates human beings individually, and that the mark of our individual blessedness before God is

our souls. It is this soul that allows us to be bearers of rights and obligations and rational agents capable of holding religious beliefs. Hobby Lobby would have us believe that corporations, too, have souls. This is not the case. I am horrified by the thought that the owners of Hobby Lobby as Christians think their corporation has a soul, and I'm even more appalled that the Supreme Court agrees.

New York Magazine

Confessions of two rising Hollywood sex goddesses, Shailene Woodley and Brie Larson, during a New York Magazine interview conducted apparently in a public toilet:

This free-spiritedness does not come without opinions. Both Woodley and Larson have been acting professionally since they were tiny children, and they are keenly aware of how Hollywood works and they aim to challenge conventional notions of emerging stardom, especially female stardom. They are outspoken about their goals and philosophy, part of a New Age continuum, on everything from what parts they want to play to what they want to eat. On the healthy-living front, both are particularly passionate: Larson is an avid locavore (as well as a vegan), and Woodley has seriously considered becoming an herbalist. When she's feeling ill, she makes tea out of pine needles (apparently a great source of vitamin C); she brushes her teeth with clay and whitens them by swishing sesame oil in her mouth for 20 minutes. She staves off yeast infections by giving "my vagina a little vitamin D" sunlight."

(June 2-8, 2014)

Washington Post

The cartoon fantasy world of E.J. Dionne Jr. as related by him in his column on the Opinion Page of the estimable Post, not to be confused with the comic pages:

You cannot talk for very long to a conservative these days without hearing the words "constitutional" and "constitutionalist."

Formulations such as "I am a constitutional conservative" or "I am a constitutionalist" are tea party habits, but they are not confined to its ranks. Many kinds of conser-

vatives contend that everything they believe is thoroughly consistent with the views and intentions of our 18th-century Founders.

Wielding pocket-sized copies of the Constitution, they like to cite it to settle political disputes.

(July 7, 2014)

Washington Post

More fantasies, this time from Richard Cohen, who provides irrefragable source material while he builds his Ark in preparation for the hellish future we face underwater:

It is a stunning thing, when you think about it: GOP conservatives adopting a position of studied ignorance or, to put it more humorously, a version of what Chico Marx said in “Duck Soup”: “Well, who you gonna believe, me or your own eyes?”

My own eyes show rising ocean levels. They show the Arctic ice cap shrinking. They show massive beach erosion, homes toppling into the sea and meteorological records indicating steadily increasing temperatures. The Earth, our dear little planet, just had the hottest May on record.

My eyes read projections that are even more dire—drought, stifling heat, massive and more frequent storms, parts of coastal cities underwater and, in the American Southeast, an additional 11,000 to 36,000 people dying per year from the extreme heat. These and other ghoulish statistics are taken from a report on global warming funded by former treasury secretary Hank Paulson, former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg (I) and hedge fund manager Tom Steyer.

(July 1, 2014)

TheAtlantic.com

At the Atlantic liberal guilt reaches a heretofore unimaginable climacteric upon finding White Anglo-Saxon yogis in league with the Ku Klux Klan. Shame!:

Thick, glossy copies of *LA Yoga*, *Yoga Journal*, and *Yoga Magazine* cover the rickety folding table in the lobby of Green Tree Yoga and Meditation. The magazines share tales from Malibu, Santa Monica, and Pasadena. Nearly every spread features a thin woman, usually in slim yoga pants and a tight tank, stretching her arms toward the sky or closing her eyes in meditation. Nearly all of these women are white.

But in South Los Angeles, where Green Tree opened last year, fewer than one per-

cent of residents look like the people in those pictures.

“You can look at all those journals and you’ll not see one woman of color,” said Raja Michelle, herself a white woman, who founded the studio. “We associate yoga with being skinny, white, and even upper class.”

“You go to classes and you’re the only black person, or there are very few,” said Robin Rollan, who practices yoga in New York and D.C. and runs the popular blog Black Yogis. “People who find my blog say, ‘I thought I was the only one.’”...

“Racism is so implicit that you never even notice that it’s a white girl on the cover every single time,” added Amy Champ, a PhD from the University of California, Davis, who wrote her dissertation on American yoga. “But when you begin to ask yourself, ‘What does yoga have to do

with my community?’, then you begin to question all these inequities.”

(July 8, 2014)

New York Times Book Review

A bookish interview with novelist Amy Bloom in which she longs for the literary style and quality of mind of the late Dr. Kevorkian:

What’s the one book you wish someone else would write?

I wish someone else would write a book that clearly and persuasively articulated why women’s reproductive rights are so important to this country, on both moral and legal grounds. When I say “clearly and persuasively,” I mean that, after reading this wonderful book, all opposition to women’s reproductive rights would evaporate, like morning mist.

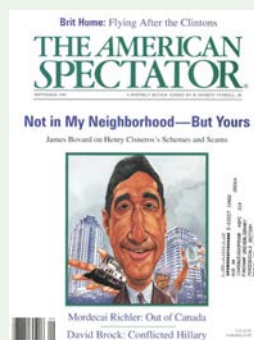
(August 3, 2014)

From the Archives: Timeless Tosh from Current Wisdoms Past

September 1994

New York Times Magazine

You’ve never met a physician like Michael Kinsley:



STAHL: I just want to make the point that we’re handling Paula Jones completely differently by really holding back and trying not to jump out of the gate before we know and by saying in almost every story that maybe she isn’t telling the truth; let’s really look at this.

QUINDLEN: Is that why we’re handling the Paula Jones story differently, Jeff? GREENFIELD: First of all, it would be good to make the point that we ought not to talk about the media monolithically. There’s an old joke where a guy says, “Do you want a book for your birthday?” and the other guy says, “No, I already have

a book.” The American Spectator is not The Washington Times and it’s not The New York Times.

KINSLEY: But The Washington Times is The American Spectator.

(June 26, 1994)

Washington Post

A blurt from Columnist Richard Cohen, another suffering victim of Elders Syndrome, a syndrome named for our historic surgeon general and referring to her capacity to speak passable English despite having no brain at all, not even a headache:

More to the point, she [Paula Corbin Jones] waited until the very last minute to file her suit. She did so only after The American Spectator, a journal of political pornography, alluded to her in a story about Clinton’s allegedly rambunctious extramarital sex life. Pardon me for suspecting that Jones is more interested in clearing—or promoting—her name than in proving she was sexually harassed. To say the least, those are not worthwhile reasons to damage a presidency or to financially bust the Clintons.

(July 1, 1994)

last CALL



by KYLE PETERSON

Shopper's Delight

FEW THINGS can buoy the human spirit more than a trip to the local store. There, on endless shelves, stacked ceiling high, sit the progressive fruits of thousands of years of civilization, just waiting to be plucked into a shopping cart. Sometimes I come home giddy, and, while putting the cereal and milk in their proper homes, I regale my wife with the magic of it all. You probably think I'm kidding.

Maybe the best way to explain my heightened state of mind is to quote a little from comedian Louis C.K., a guy with twenty-five Emmy nominations to his name. A few years back Mr. C.K. did a bit on late night TV—the video subsequently whooshed around the Internet—on how “everything’s amazing and nobody’s happy.” My favorite part is when he makes fun of airline gripes, the horror stories friends and relatives tell about their arduous journeys after arriving in a matter of hours from thousands of miles away.

“First of all, we didn’t board for *twenty minutes*. And then we get on the plane, and they made us *sit there* on the runway for *forty minutes*.”

Oh, really. What happened next? Did you fly through the air, incredibly, like a bird? Did you partake in the miracle of human flight, you noncontributing zero? You’re flying! It’s amazing. Everybody on every plane should just constantly be going “OH MY GOD! WOW!” You’re sitting in a chair in the sky.

Wandering into Safeway or Kroger is a far cry from sitting in a chair in the sky. But aisle by sparkling aisle, it’s a miracle all the same. Hard as it may be to believe, as we lie nestled comfortably in the cushions of modernity, most Americans are but a handful of gener-

ations removed from subsistence farming. Our forebears watered the crops they planted in tiny plots of land with their own sweat; we stand in air-conditioned bazaars and pick from an endless array of produce—pears from Chile, and chilies from Mexico, and kiwis lovingly cultivated by actual Kiwis—and then complain about the Muzak.

The spice section of a grocery store contains a hundred history lessons all their own. Herodotus remarked, as Andrew Dalby recounts in *Dangerous Tastes: The Story of Spices*, that cinnamon sticks were

brought to Arabia by large birds, which carry them to their nests, made of mud, on mountain precipices which no man can climb. The method invented to get the cinnamon sticks is this. People cut up the bodies of dead oxen into very large joints, and leave them on the ground near the nests. Then they scatter, and the birds fly down and carry off the meat to their nests, which are too weak to bear the weight and fall to the ground. The men come and pick up the cinnamon. Acquired in this way, it is exported to other countries.

Nonsense, retorted Pliny the Elder. The Ethiopians buy cinnamon from neighboring troglodytes and “bring it over vast seas on rafts which have no rudders to steer them, no oars to push them, no sails to propel them, indeed no motive power at all but man alone and his courage.” Once upon a time men such as da Gama and Magellan chased spice to the ends of the Earth; now spice chases man, as competing purveyors redesign their packages to catch the consumer’s eye.

Sheer selection at the supermarket overwhelms. I was struck recently by the alarming number of items of whose history, use, and preparation I am completely ignorant. Pitted loquats are \$3.19 a can, and whole lychees in syrup only two quarters more. Head cheese

remains a mystery—and please, please don’t enlighten me. I have no idea what a yucca root is, but yucca’n get one for less than a buck a pound. I came home from the grocer’s a few weeks back and excitedly proposed to the dear wife that we work our way around the produce section and sample the unfamiliar wares. This culminated in my butchering a squishy, yellow, football-sized orb known as a crenshaw melon, which was underripe (how were we to know?) but still good.

Even the most banal-seeming products remain pinnacles of cumulative genius. In one of libertarians’ favorite parables, *I, Pencil*, our narrator, the eponymous No. 2 writing instrument, reflects that no one person actually knows how to make him—how to cut the cedar, and mine the graphite, and mix the lacquer. Markets is the moral. As I pass each grocery shelf, I hear foodstuffs of all shapes and sizes shouting out similar tales:

I, Box of TGI Friday’s Frozen Crispy Buffalo-Style Boneless Chicken Bites!

I, Can of Progresso Loaded Baked Potato Soup!

Nobody knows how to smelt ore, and manufacture tin-coated steel cans, and fill them with liquid nourishment made from dozens of other similarly complicated agricultural commodities. From our perspective it seems as if somehow, some years ago, we just sort of figured it out. Thus turn the gears of commerce.

Truly, shopping has its frustrations. The cart inevitably has only an odd number of good wheels, causing it to careen wildly into endcap displays of corn chips or the occasional seeing-eye dog. The elderly dame leading the self-checkout queue is always ill-prepared for the task. But take a deep breath. A few minutes standing in line is simply a further opportunity to reflect: that laser bar code scanner is pretty amazing! Who the heck invented that? ☞

Kyle Peterson is the managing editor of The American Spectator.



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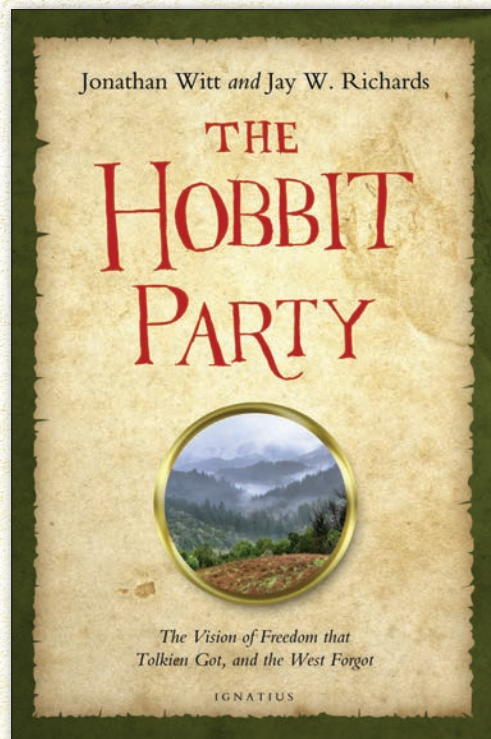
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