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JAMES LILEKS on 'the Perry Approach'

NATIONAL REVIEW

THE END OF THE FUTURE

PETER THIEL

PLUS: **TIMOTHY B. LEE:** Patent Absurdity

ALLISON SCHRAGER: In Defense of Financial Innovation

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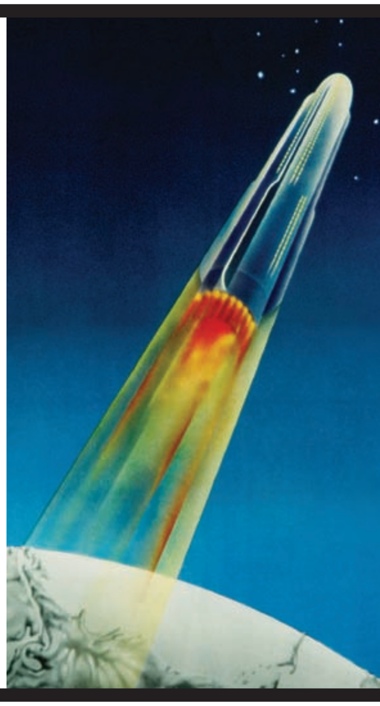
Swift Blind Horseman?

There is no law that the exceptional rise of the West must continue. So we could do worse than to inquire into the widely held opinion that America is on the wrong track, to wonder whether Progress is not doing as well as advertised, and perhaps to take exceptional measures to arrest and reverse any decline. *Peter Thiel*



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BOOKS, ARTS & MANNERS

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NATIONAL REVIEW

OCTOBER 3 ISSUE; PRINTED SEPTEMBER 15

Letters

The Ron Paul Movement Rides On

It is not surprising that with the polls ranking him third nationally, Ron Paul would finally make the cover of NATIONAL REVIEW ("Ron Paul's Last Crusade," September 19). It is also not surprising, sadly, that although the accompanying story is sometimes humorous, it is generally negative toward Paul.

Kevin D. Williamson has many things to say about the 2012 Republican presidential candidate, and he does not hesitate to lampoon everyone—Paul, his senator son, the campaign staff, and, of course, Paul's army of enthusiastic supporters. But perhaps Williamson's truest sentence can be found in the first paragraph. Williamson writes of Paul: "He is, for better and for worse, a man of ideas—maybe the last true man of ideas in American politics."

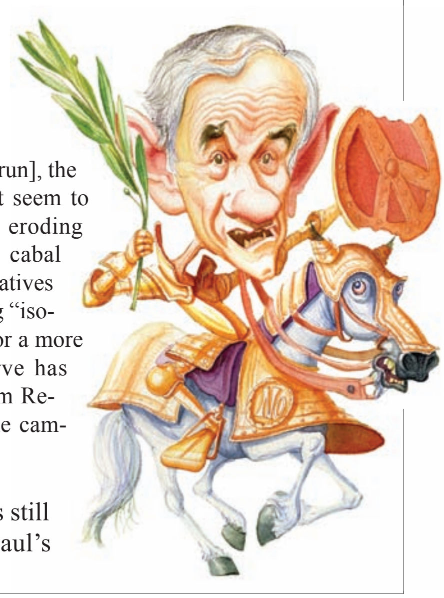
But what are those ideas? Williamson notes of Paul, "He wants to talk about fiat money, the American Empire, the Fed." Williamson then portrays those who support Paul's ideas in an unflattering light, to say the least.

It is a well-established trick of the Left to attempt to marginalize opposition by focusing on the eccentric rather than centric. For example, last summer, many liberal pundits were far more concerned with the theology of Michele Bachmann's church than with explaining why she is popular with many in the grassroots. Liberals are even prone to imply that her theology is *really* what attracts people to Bachmann.

In his repeated attempts to portray Paul and his campaign as beyond the pale, Williamson takes aim at Paul's Iowa campaign chairman, Drew Ivers, noting that Mr. Ivers also worked for Pat Robertson in 1988, Pat Buchanan in 1996 and 2000, and some third-party candidates. But Williamson conveniently fails to mention that Ivers was also a county chairman in Iowa for Ronald Reagan's presidential campaigns in 1976 and 1980. Obviously, Reagan rose to power aided and abetted by "fringe" and "extreme" elements in the Republican party.

This type of marginalization is what the Left does best. This is not to say that eccentricities or actual fringe behavior should be ignored, whether on the left or on the right. But it is to say that any genuine bottom-up grassroots movement—like the Tea Party or the Ron Paul movement—is going to be filled with everyday people, some of whom might not say the right things or present the right temperament for many in the political class.

Whereas Williamson chose to put a negative "fringe" spin on the person even he admits is the "last true man of ideas in American politics," the current issue of *Time* actually examines how those ideas are impacting the 2012 presidential election. In a story titled "The Prophet," *Time* reports:



> In the four years since [Paul's last presidential run], the world has changed in mostly grim ways that seem to affirm Paul's worldview. His vision of an eroding Constitution and a Washington–Wall Street cabal helped spark the Tea Party movement. Conservatives who once sneered at his foreign policy as being "isolationist" have grown weary of war. His call for a more accountable and transparent Federal Reserve has morphed from quaint obsession to mainstream Republican talking point in Congress and on the campaign trail.

Time also notes of Paul: "As prophet, he is still defining the GOP race." For some, that Paul's

Letters, cont'd

brand of conservatism now shapes the Right is bothersome. Former NR contributor David Frum expressed such concerns when Rand Paul won the Kentucky Republican primary last May: "Rand Paul's victory in the Kentucky Republican primary is obviously a depressing event for those who support strong national defense and rational conservative politics. . . . How is it that the GOP has lost its antibodies against a candidate like Rand Paul?"

Senator Paul is now considered by the grassroots to be one of the most conservative senators, in league with Jim DeMint and freshman Mike Lee. Similarly, Congressman Paul is increasingly considered to be a leading conservative figure, something reflected by his strong poll numbers and the dominance of his ideas in this election.

Which leads us to the underlying but primary question: What is conservatism, and who gets to define it?

In 2008, NR and many others on the right picked Mitt Romney as the conservative alternative to John McCain. In 2012, few on the right who endorsed Romney are comfortable even calling him "conservative" anymore. Has conservatism changed, or have the acceptable parameters of that term? What many on the right today lazily like to call Ron Paul's "leftist" foreign-policy views are similar to the generally non-interventionist foreign-policy views of early NR giants Russell Kirk, Robert Nisbet, and Richard Weaver. Did NR secretly use to be liberal—or is Paul simply unearthing an older Right? At the end of his life, William F. Buckley Jr. said that the Iraq War was a "failure." In 2005, Buckley said of the Bush Doctrine, "It's not at all conservative. It's anything but conservative."

Was the founder of NR a "leftist," or has there always been a place on the right for conservatives who share Paul's foreign-policy views? And is that "place" expanding?

Though most are reluctant to admit it, the growing pushback on the right against Paul is more about his expanding influence than about any specific issue. For reasons typically having more to do with establishment attachments than principles, a GOP nominee Paul or even a President Paul is some conservatives' worst nightmare—and many now fear that Paul's movement and what it represents are here to stay.

A common dismissal of Paul is to note the congressman's strong youth support; many old-guard Republicans complain about the constant presence of those passionate but pesky "Ron Paul kids." In his recent blog post "I Have Seen the Future and It Is Ron Paul," *The New Republic*'s Jonathan Chait cites recent poll data showing greater support for Paul than for any other presidential candidate among young Republicans.

Paul's young supporters stand to have a major impact on the future of the Republican party. Youth might not turn out in droves at the ballot box, but their activism has long helped steer both major parties and particularly the conservative movement—recall the Republican National Convention of 1960, in which the young turned out to support Barry Goldwater, a candidate of the insurgent anti-establishment Right. Of Goldwater's youthful supporters, NATIONAL REVIEW wrote: "They are going to be around for a long time to come, which is something the Republican leadership should take note of."

This gives us a sense of what Paul's impact on American conservatism and the Republican party means now and could continue to mean in the future. Even Williamson admits, "The Ron Paul movement goes on." And to the extent that some on the right realize this but don't like it, we can expect them to marginalize Ron Paul every chance they get.

Jack Hunter
Official Ron Paul 2012 campaign blogger; assisted Sen. Rand Paul with The Tea Party Goes to Washington

KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON REPLIES: I do not object to Ron Paul because I wish to discredit the ideas with which he is associated; I object to Ron Paul because he discredits the ideas with which he is associated, and most of them are good ideas.

Having good ideas is not enough; Ron Paul lacks judgment. For example, he is correct that the monetary policy of the United States is defective and inflationary. Unfortunately, he also believes that the Federal Reserve is a kind of wicked cabal and therefore focuses his energies on dissolving it, the result of which would be to put monetary policy in the hands of Congress, an even worse outcome. If Mr. Paul has thought through the consequences of that, there is very little evidence of it in his book *End the Fed*. In a similar way, he is so blinkered by his antediluvian commitment to the gold standard that he fails to account for the fact that a government that can manipulate other commodities' prices also can manipulate the price of gold, particularly if it happens to be the world's largest holder of it by several orders of magnitude. He is correct, in my view, that our military is too widely deployed and too lightly called out; he is wrong that the United States is an "empire"—strange empire, that pays tribute to its conquered foes rather than extracting it!—or that the malefactors in Tehran and elsewhere can be trusted to mind their own business if we mind ours.

And if Mr. Hunter wishes to associate Mr. Paul with Ronald Reagan, he ought first to consult with Mr. Paul, who famously expressed his desire to "totally disassociate" himself from the Reagan administration and its policies, a fact reported in my article, and a fact that, like every other fact in the piece, stands unchallenged by Mr. Hunter, Mr. Paul, or his acolytes.

Letters may be submitted by e-mail to letters@nationalreview.com.

The Week

■ Bad news for the Democrats: It turns out some of those people who cling bitterly to their religion are Orthodox Jews in Queens.

■ The great strength of the conservative is to prepare for the worst; the great temptation is to expect it. There was worry, ahead of time, that the 9/11 commemorations in Shanksville, Washington, Virginia, and New York might be too austere—no clergy, no firemen: the naked public square incarnate. In the event those worries blew away in the early-autumn breezes. At the climactic ceremony at Ground Zero, President Obama read Psalm 46 ("Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed"). Former president George W. Bush read Abraham Lincoln's letter to the bereaved Mrs. Bixby ("the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom"). If the musical program was not perfect, it included "The Star Spangled Banner," and the pipers of the Bravest and the Finest skirling "The Minstrel Boy." *Thy songs were made for the pure and free / They shall never sound in slavery.*

■ Is President Obama going through a Carter-like meltdown? Republicans won two special elections for House seats: one in New York, where Anthony Weiner (D.) had to resign in disgrace, and one in Nevada, where Dean Heller (R.) was elevated to the Senate after John Ensign (R.) had to resign in disgrace. Opposition to same-sex marriage, support for Israel, the tenacity of the Republican candidate, the charmlessness of the Democrat, and the declining popularity of President Obama yielded the New York result. The large margin of victory in Nevada, in a district that had been moving to the Democrats, offers further evidence that Obama is dragging his party down. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, was reduced to saying of the New York race, for a seat last held by Republicans in 1923, "It's a very difficult district for Democrats." There seem to be an increasing number of those these days.

■ In search of an activist supplement to the traditional conservative economic prescription of low taxes, light regulation, and the rule of law, Mitt Romney is campaigning against China and promises on his first day in office to begin the process of imposing economic sanctions on Beijing. China, Mr. Romney argues, is an impenitent currency manipulator, seeking to privilege its exporters at the expense of its global competitors. This is undeniably true—of China, of Japan, of Europe, and, to a lesser degree, of the United States, where Ben Bernanke's currency manipulation is oriented more toward raising spending at home than toward bolstering exports. That manipulation is called "monetary policy," and China, being a police state whose currency is not freely traded on the foreign-exchange markets, is an unusually robust practitioner of that and other dark arts. But the effects of China's currency manipulation are mixed, with the costs overstated: U.S. consumers benefit from low prices, while U.S. exporters do not compete that much with Chinese firms in overseas markets, since Americans

ROMAN GENN

specialize in airliners and iPhones, while the Chinese specialize in shoes and plastic toys. The Chinese regime is to be faulted for many things—mass murder, torture, and repression spring to mind—but the policies that are undercutting American competitiveness originate mostly in Washington, not Beijing.

■ Jon Huntsman, the former Utah governor running for the Republican presidential nomination, debuted a tax plan that eliminates almost every tax deduction and credit and lowers the rates. He won plaudits from the *Wall Street Journal*, and the general thrust of his plan indeed deserves praise. But with housing markets weak, is this really the right time to end the mortgage-interest deduction? And the child tax credit, which Huntsman would eliminate, is no more a distortionary tax break than are the low taxes on capital he favors. The credit partly offsets the double taxation of parents contained in our entitlement system, to which they contribute through both payroll taxes and the raising of children. Any flat tax that aims to raise roughly the same amount of revenue as the present system is likely to raise taxes on the middle class. By opting for a version of the flat tax that ends the child credit, Huntsman ensures that the burden will be borne disproportionately by middle-class parents, who are also known as the Republican base. Huntsman has not found the solution to the problems in our tax code, or to his low poll numbers.

■ Robert P. George, the Princeton constitutional scholar, surprised the presidential candidates at a debate by asking them whether they believed, first, that the Fourteenth Amendment gives the elected branches of the federal government the power to protect unborn life, and second, that those branches should exercise that power despite the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* ruling. Governor

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Romney balked, expressing fear of a "constitutional crisis." This fear is overblown. When the Supreme Court declared partial-birth abortion a constitutional right, Congress defied it by passing a federal ban. The Court, wiser for the replacement of Sandra Day O'Connor by Samuel Alito, reconsidered its earlier decision. (There was a face-saving pretense that the new ban was actually compatible with that earlier decision, but everyone understood the game.) Abraham Lincoln, as Professor George's question noted, had it right: For Congress and the president to accept the infallibility of the Supreme Court would be the real constitutional crisis.

■ Another GOP presidential candidates' debate a couple of days later was moderated by Brian Williams of NBC and John Harris of *Politico*. Well, most of it was. Halfway through the scheduled time, Williams introduced Jose Diaz-Balart from the Spanish-language TV network Telemundo. Mr. Diaz-Balart proceeded to ask the can-

They Live Among Us

FOR quite a long time now the *New York Times* crowd—you know of whom I speak—has talked about red-state America as if it were another country, one that, in cultural terms, is much farther away than London or Paris, never mind L.A. or Seattle. The shorthand to make this point usually includes mention of Pauline Kael's endlessly quoted—and misquoted—1972 line that she can't believe anyone voted for Nixon because she didn't know anyone who voted for Nixon (the actual quote is less damning, but you get the point). But the trend is much older than that. Back in the 1920s, *The Nation* ran a regular series, "These United States," where the sophisticates would mock the inhabitants of the American interior. That renowned equine posterior Sinclair Lewis remarked of his native Minnesota: "Scandinavians Americanize only too quickly!"

Of course, Minnesota was a reliably liberal state back then. But in recent decades, geographic snobbery had melded with political snobbery. Manhattan liberals still look down on flyover country, but they also consider Republican voters as a class to be the sort of people who use their sleeves as napkins as they eat their lunch on the back of a turnip truck.

NY-9 victor, Bob Turner

Well, there's good news for Maureen Dowd and others who are eager to disparage those whackadoo wahoos inhabiting the hinterlands but find the trek out to quote-unquote America so exhausting. The hinterlands are getting closer.

New York's 9th congressional district, the most Jewish district in America, just turned into a mini–red state. It's a 20-minute drive to Forest Hills from the *Times*'s midtown offices. Just tell your car service where you're going, he'll know where it is. Heck, your driver probably lives nearby. NY-9 has been in the hands of Democrats since the 1920s. It's sufficiently liberal to have sent Geraldine Ferraro, Chuck Schumer, and, most recently, Anthony Weiner to Congress, and to have given Al Gore 67 percent of the vote. Barack Obama got 55 percent.

Now, I'm not trying to gloat excessively here. Sufficiency is all I'm going for. Just a couple of years ago, a very nice and smart fellow at the *Times* wrote a book called *The Death of Conservatism* that, as its name suggests, argued that the jig was up for the Right. Now poor Mr. Tanenhaus is like one of those Roman poets getting news that the Goths have set up shop in Marcianopolis. I mean, it was one thing when one of the barbarians captured Senator Kennedy's seat, since for many New Yorkers, Massachusetts remains something of a provincial backwater. But this is looking like a trend. They're in the city limits! And—oh, dear Lord—they're . . . Jews!

As one wag on Twitter put it, if this continues, the Republican party is in danger of becoming a regional rump party—in the Northeast.

Yes, yes, one can over-read all of this. It certainly doesn't spell the end of the Democratic party or the "Death of Liberalism" or anything of the sort.

But what it should do is deal a significant blow to "endism," or the tendency to take a given moment and draw an infinitely straight line into the future. In 2008, the air was thick with bloviation about the unstoppable liberal realignment. Young people were now permanently in the Democratic camp. Hispanics were forever lost to the GOP. Conservatism was dead. "Their coalition no longer works in the changing demography of the day, and is dangerously old; their Southern strategy . . . has become a relic of the past; their tech and media tools have not kept up with the times; their ideas have become spent and discredited. . . . They are an aging and frayed bunch, living off the fumes of a day and politics gone by," proclaimed Democratic strategist Simon Rosenberg in 2008. This wasn't analysis, it was wishful thinking on steroids.

The NY-9 election is just one data point among a large number of data points. Does it signal the long-anticipated rightward shift of American Jews? Does it foretell the doom of the Obama administration? Yes! No! Maybe! We'll just have to wait and see, because if a Republican can win in Forest Hills, anything is possible.

—JONAH GOLDBERG

SPENCER PLATT/GETTY

didates questions about immigration policy, and about nothing else. We don't doubt that Mr. Diaz-Balart (American-born, to Cuban parents) is a thoroughly professional journalist and a credit to his network, but . . . why was this particular person brought in to help moderate this particular topic? Do Spanish-speakers now "own" immigration policy? If so, why? Did Messrs. Williams and Harris not feel competent to deal with immigration issues? Are the nation's policy discussions now to be allotted by ethnic interest, with Hispanics owning immigration, blacks owning poverty, Muslims owning religious accommodations, and so on? Are the rest of us to be permitted no opinion? Who gets to own agriculture—the Amish?

■ John Bolton flirted with the idea of running for president, then decided against it. The good news is that he will be available to write for publications such as this one. And the bad news? He would have added both spice and heft to the Republican primaries. If the Republican nominee happens to win in November 2012, he or she could do worse than to have Bolton as secretary of state, much worse.

■ Teamsters president Jimmy Hoffa Jr., warming up a Labor Day crowd for President Obama, urged unions to "take these son-of-a-bitches [i.e., Republicans] out" in 2012. There has been altogether too much fretting about the ordinary combative rhetoric of American politics—"target," "crosshairs," etc., etc. But literary critics since Aristotle have pointed out that rhetoric is shaded by the character of the speaker. When a Teamster and a Hoffa says he wants to take you out, better ask where you are going first (hint: not the Meadowlands).

■ The Obama administration had been contemplating intrusive new rules on ozone emissions but suddenly reversed itself. The news came as a surprise to the president's environmentalist buddies—and, more significant, to the EPA, which was not involved in the decision-making process and whose chief administrator was informed of the decision less than 24 hours before it was announced. That the Obama administration, which fancies itself a post-ideological, technocratic outfit guided by experts and "the science," did not bother to consult with the experts at the agency in charge of the regulation suggests that the White House is running scared from its own policies and their deplorable economic consequences. This is an excellent thing.

■ New details continue to trickle out regarding Operation Fast and Furious, the sting operation in which the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives allowed Mexican drug cartels to buy thousands of firearms at American gun shops—and then let the guns and their new owners "walk." It recently came to light that Fast and Furious guns were tied to at least two crime scenes in the U.S. The congressional committee investigating the program is having limited success, and President Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder still maintain that they knew nothing about the operation. If indeed they didn't, why didn't they? This is one of many questions the government has yet to answer about this confusing, dangerous program.

■ The week preceding Labor Day is designated National Labor Rights Week. It naturally fell to Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis to kick off the festivities. She did so by signing "partnership" agreements with ambassadors from a group of Latin American nations: Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador. Similar agreements have been signed this past year with Mexico, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. "I'm very proud of this," the lady said. The purpose of these agreements is to protect the labor rights of "migrants" from the represented nations. What, including illegals? Definitely: "No matter how you got here or how long you plan to stay, you have certain rights." Does Madam Secretary have anything to say about, you know, *American* workers? Why yes: Just two days later she was talking up her government-issued SUV, a Chevy Equinox, government purchase of which is meant to "send a signal that we are for supporting our American workers, [and] American-made products." Turns out the Equinox is made in Canada. How we miss the quiet competence of Elaine Chao.

■ Solyndra, a manufacturer of solar panels, is bankrupt, which is inconvenient for the Obama administration, which extended half a billion dollars' worth of loan guarantees to the firm as part of the president's stimulus effort. The inconvenience extends to the 1,100 Solyndra employees who have just lost their jobs and to the U.S. taxpayers who may be on the hook for the bankrupt firm's loans. The project was indeed "shovel ready," as the president likes to put it; unhappily, in this case, the shovel belongs to the gravedigger. Perhaps the gravestone could read: "Another project funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act."

■ The Obama administration sued to stop AT&T from merging with T-Mobile, fearing diminished competition and thus higher prices in the wireless industry. The administration's analysis of the market suggests that the industry is already too concentrated—which suggests that the analysis is wrong. There is an enormous amount of innovation and investment in this sector, which is not what we should see if the analysis were right. The best thing the government can do to ensure the health of the industry is to let phone companies lease spectrum from broadcasters, and then get out of the way.

■ The Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County, Md., has set a new record in wasteful government spending by putting up twelve homeless people in a brand-new apartment building—at a cost of $4 million for one year. The *Washington Examiner* reports that the "permanent supportive housing" facility, located in Bethesda, Md., will offer six studio and six one-bedroom apartments, as well as a gym, a computer room, and an "outdoor enclosed courtyard." You might ask who would pay for such a thing, but you already knew the answer to that: you. Yes, the project received $1 million in stimulus money, as well as over $900,000 from the county's housing department and $2.1 million in state tax credits. That amounts to an average cost of about $333,000 per person—which is more than the nationwide median price of a new single-family home ($221,800). At the risk of sounding heartless, we might propose that it would be cheaper for the commission to buy each person a new house. We might also suggest it would have behooved the commission not to place twelve recovering addicts in a building across from a liquor store.

■ The International Longshore and Warehouse Union, unable to reach a contract agreement with the EGT Terminal at the Port of Longview near Seattle, has resorted to mayhem. The facility in question is still a union shop, but it has transferred its business to a different union. In response, the longshoremen's union dispatched an armed militia numbering 500, which attacked the terminal, destroyed property, threatened police, disrupted operations, and, incredibly, went so far as to take hostages. The union already was under a federal restraining order that followed prior assaults and death threats. Perhaps some labor bosses misunderstand the meaning of the phrase "the right to strike"?

■ When federal agents raided the Gibson guitar factory in Nashville for the second time in less than two years, they disrupted the company's business so severely that you would almost suspect Fender was a big Democratic donor. The stated explanation was that they were seizing ebony guitar parts that had been imported illegally; the company denies any irregularity and says it has been buying from the same source for 17 years. If the parts were mislabeled, as the Department of Justice alleges, Gibson disclaims any knowledge of it. Still, given the state of the world's hardwood forests, perhaps Holder's Raiders can be forgiven their excess of zeal: Anything to save the environment, right? Well, not exactly. According to the *New York Times*, an affidavit submitted in support of the search warrant "maintains that unfinished fingerboard blanks that are more than a centimeter thick cannot be exported under Indian law; only finished pieces of veneer, about half as thick, can be exported. The intent of the law is to protect woodworking jobs in India." The American law that DOJ has invoked, the Lacey Act, was enacted in 1900 to regulate milliners' imports of bird feathers. So a law designed to protect feathers is now protecting featherbedding.

■ The notion that solar fluctuations might have something to do with warming and cooling on earth is hardly new. But just recently a group of scientists from CERN, the prestigious European physics-research institute, published a paper with experimental data detailing how this happens (solar cosmic rays, which vary with the number of sunspots, promote the formation of clouds) and how much of an effect it has (nearly half of all observed warming, they estimate). Before publication, however, CERN's director warned the researchers "to present the results clearly but not interpret them" and to avoid "the highly political arena of the climate-change debate"—even though scientists who believe in anthropogenic global warming have never hesitated to interpret their results. Any scientific question, particularly one with such great importance to the world, can be resolved only with vigorous inquiry and debate, and muzzling scientists will merely delay the process of understanding how human activity and natural cycles affect global temperatures.

■ Returning to their desks for the fall semester, the public-school students of New Jersey find themselves under a new anti-bullying regime, thanks to a law signed by Gov. Chris Christie in January. The law is extraordinarily comprehensive. It defines the offense of bullying thus: "any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act . . . that is reasonably perceived as being motivated . . . by any actual or perceived characteristic" of a person. So should child A call child B "Fatso," and should child B report this outrage to the school authorities, an investigation must be launched. All schools must employ an anti-bullying specialist to carry out these investigations, and all incidents must be logged with an anti-bullying bureaucracy in Trenton, the state capital. As the *New York Post* observed, the measure "doesn't just outlaw childhood, it criminalizes it." Count this law as a mark against Governor Christie.

GIBSON GUITAR CORP.

■ California governor Jerry Brown has undergone many transformations over the past four decades, from Governor Moonbeam to populist presidential candidate to law-and-order mayor of Oakland, and he continues to evolve. "Not every human problem deserves a law," he wrote in early September of his decision to veto a bill that would have required minors to wear helmets on the slopes of California ski resorts. The Democratic governor explained to a baffled legislature that while he "appreciate[s] the value of wearing a ski helmet," he's "concerned about the continuing and seemingly inexorable transfer of authority from parents to the state." In the land of the banned Happy Meal, such concerns aren't theoretical. Californians should hope that Brown's latest incarnation as a libertarian proves lasting.

■ A *New York Times* exposé revealed that video-game companies can take advantage of a variety of tax perks: They can claim to be software developers, entertainment companies, and online retailers, and, in addition, governments often give game companies special deals to lure jobs. The video-game industry is a lot of things—some of them good (profitable and creative), some of them unfortunate (prone to revel in the violent and antisocial). One thing it is not, however, is deserving of government largesse: Leaving aside the question of whether taxpayers should ever subsidize arts or entertainment, this particular industry is above average in its ability to make its own profits and below average in its cultural value.

■ Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta is recommending keeping only about 3,000 troops in Iraq after this year. He's contradicting the senior U.S. commander on the ground, who wants roughly five times that. Panetta's rump force would be good for little except protecting itself, although even that is doubtful. We would kiss goodbye to counterterrorism and keeping a lid on Arab–Kurdish tensions. Every malign force still competing for Iraq's future, including the Iranians, must be pleased. After all the years and blood and treasure, we are preparing simply to quit. Disgraceful.

■ On Friday night, September 2, at 11 o'clock, American soldiers scaled the walls of a compound in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Soon they shot dead Sabar Lal Melma, described by NATO as a "key affiliate of the al-Qaeda network." He had once been in U.S. control: held at Guantanamo Bay until 2007. Then he was released back to Afghanistan, where he rejoined the fight. Two years ago, the Pentagon said that 61 former Gitmo inmates had rejoined the fight. There are now 171 inmates in this prison. Maybe they should stay there.

■ While pooh-poohing the prospect in public, financial authorities in Brussels and Berlin are preparing for a sovereign default by Greece, the possibility of which is now placed by economic forecasters at 98 percent in the next five years. Greece's deficit in the first half of 2011 is 22 percent larger than in 2010, even after spending cuts and tax increases. In early September, Athens imposed a new national property tax and a 7 percent cut in government workers' salaries, but these emergency measures have done little to quell bondholders' concerns, and Germany's economy minister, Philipp Roesler, has broken the taboo and spoken publicly of "an orderly bankruptcy of Greece." The Europeans will be lucky if it is only that:

On a recent bond issue, Italy found itself forced to pay the highest interest rates it ever has, as investors recognized the symptoms of *la maladie grecque*. If Greece is forced to leave the eurozone, Italy almost certainly will be frog-marched out, too, sparking a financial crisis in France, where the banks are heavily exposed to Italian debt. Spain's finances are teetering as well. All these events and possibilities have the thrifty Germans, the Uncle Moneybags of Europe, wondering what's in it for them. Which is an excellent question.

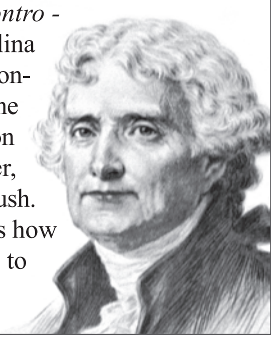
■ A grim night of violence in Cairo almost had explosive repercussions throughout the Middle East. Mobilized by the extremist Muslim Brothers, thousands of demonstrators marched to the Israeli embassy to protest about a recent clash: Palestinian terrorists from Gaza had killed eight Israelis, and, in an exchange of fire, Israeli troops had mistakenly shot five Egyptian border guards. Here was the pretext to manipulate anti-Israeli sentiment that the Muslim Brothers believe will bring them success in elections due at the end of the year. Armed with iron bars and sledgehammers, protesters broke into parts of the embassy. Six armed Israeli security guards were preparing to do and die. Egyptian police stood aside. Desperate telephone calls between Washington, Tel Aviv, and the generals of the Egyptian military council coordinated a rescue. Egyptian commandos took control. An Israeli military aircraft arrived and immediately flew out the Israeli ambassador, the security guards, and some 80 members of the staff with their families. It doesn't bear thinking about the consequences had any of the Israeli diplomatic mission either been killed or else been obliged to defend themselves by using their weapons. The Israelis had the misfortune to be caught up in the crucial test of strength that will determine whether the future of Egypt belongs to the Muslim Brothers or to the generals of the military council. In Cairo, the Arab Spring has left power waiting to be picked up in the streets.

■ The rift between Turkey and Israel is serious and growing. The two countries had been allies, with military and defense agreements, and $3.5 billion in overall trade last year. There are no real grounds for hostility, but Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has fabricated them. In power for a decade, he is experimenting with an Islamist foreign policy. To gain leverage with Arab and Muslim countries, he has to hold off the United States and openly break with Israel. Last year, the perfect opportunity arose. The Turkish government backed Islamists sailing a ship, the *Mavi Marmara*, from Anatolia to Gaza carrying what was described as humanitarian aid. Fearing that the ship was gun-running, the Israelis boarded it, and nine Islamists were killed in the fracas. Erdogan peremptorily demanded an apology. The United Nations appointed Sir Geoffrey Palmer, former New Zealand prime minister, to investigate this incident. The report, just released, concludes that Israel acted within its legal rights. No apology is necessary or forthcoming. An enraged Erdogan expelled the Israeli ambassador and canceled all military agreements. He threatens to send warships into the eastern Mediterranean and prevent Israel from developing its newly discovered deposits of natural gas in that area. It's an astonishing display of enmity from the erstwhile friend of the Jewish state.

■ Bill Richardson, the former U.S. ambassador to the U.N., has been in Cuba, trying to see Alan Gross. The Cuban authorities have not let him. Gross is the American aid worker who has been held prisoner by the Castros since December 2009. He is their pawn, a tool for the extraction of (further) concessions from the Obama administration. Richardson, in a burst of candor, referred to him as "an American hostage." The administration should make it clear to the Cuban dictatorship that there are consequences to what it has done to Gross. If America is seen to be a pitiful, helpless giant, it will be bad for Americans wherever they roam.

■ It famously took Richard Nixon to go to China. Now, perhaps, it has taken John Cleese to go to London. The British comic, who has lived in the United States for more than two decades, recently lamented that "London is no longer an English city," suggesting that, while diversity was a generally positive thing, "when the parent culture kind of dissipates, you're left thinking, 'Well, what's going on?'" Cleese is a noted liberal, and has made a series of party political broadcasts for the Liberal Democrats over the years. For a man of the Left to make such a statement is notable, and provided clear opportunity and cover for a discussion about London's cultural atomization. As usual, however, his comments were met with immediate condemnation: Multiculturalism has not gone too far, and London's diversity should be "celebrated," came the immediate retort. Who said this, missing the golden opportunity with which he had been provided? None other than a spokesman for London mayor Boris Johnson. Monty Python's "Upper Class Twit of the Year" competition was obviously held 40 years too early.

■ The world first heard that Thomas Jefferson had fathered a family by his slave Sally Hemings in 1802, thanks to a disgruntled former associate, James Callender. Over the centuries the story generated laughs (Jefferson, wrote the poet Thomas Moore, "dream[ed] of freedom in his bondsmaid's arms") and some earnest work, notably by Fawn Brodie and Annette Gordon-Reed, though most historians rejected it. Then in 1998 a DNA study showed a Jefferson-family chromosome in the genes of descendants of two of Hemings's children, and the old tale became the new orthodoxy. Case closed? Not yet. Thirteen scholars—including several familiar to NR readers: Charles Kesler, Harvey Mansfield, Forrest McDonald—examined the evidence in 2001, and again more recently. *The Jefferson-Hemings Controversy* (ed. by Robert F. Turner, Carolina Academic Press) summarizes their conclusions, which are not unanimous: One scholar, Paul Rahe, still finds Jefferson guilty as charged. The rest, however, suspect Jefferson has gotten a bum's rush. Case closed now? Not yet. But this is how history, and historians, are supposed to work.



HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY

■ A certain Mr. Obama Onyango was arrested on August 24 outside a fried-chicken shop in Framingham, Mass. He had narrowly avoided colliding with a patrol car, and when breathalyzed, he registered twice the legal limit of alcohol in his system. On further investigation Mr. Onyango was found to be in the U.S. illegally, having overstayed a student visa, then ignored a 1992 deportation order. But wait: What's that name there? Yes, this is another twig on our president's colorful family tree. Mr. Onyango—referred to as "Uncle Omar" in the president's autobiography—is in fact the brother of Barack Obama's aunt Zeituni Onyango, who was discovered living in Boston public housing shortly before the 2008 election, having herself ignored a deportation order in 2004. A pliant judge granted Aunt Zeituni legal-resident status in 2010. The same grace will undoubtedly be extended to Uncle Omar: He has already been released from custody. House Judiciary Committee chairman Lamar Smith voiced the general indignation: "Why should citizens and legal immigrants be threatened by drunk-driving illegal immigrants when the administration can deport them?" Why? Because we are now a nation not of laws but of men: That's why.

■ To the older cohort of our readers, the name Doris Day can evoke nothing but pleasant nostalgia. Her careers as singer and movie actress spanned the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and a little more at both ends. During those decades her lovely voice, pretty face and figure, and considerable acting skills endeared her to her countrymen and made her an icon of American womanhood to tens of millions of people worldwide. Miss Day is still with us, aged 87. She has just released an album of songs with the title *My Heart*. In the United Kingdom the album has already entered the Top Ten, making her the oldest artist ever to attain that distinction with an album featuring new material. (Some of the songs are from studio recordings not previously issued.) We offer our heartfelt congratulations to this great American lady—and lifelong Republican!—and hope that we shall continue to be blessed with her presence for many, many more years.

■ The situation calls out for a modern-day Emily Post: What do you call a half-sibling who was conceived through artificial insemination with the same donor as you? Sister-in-sperm? Basterbrother? The question has more than linguistic interest, since, according to a recent news report, one industrious donor has sired more than 150 children. That's an extreme case of turning your hobby into a job, but less-heroic sperm vendors can still have scores of children, most of whom usually live in a single region. Children of the same donor (sometimes known only by a number) form online communities and organize gatherings; a father of 70 keeps track of his multifarious offspring with a spreadsheet. What will the notion of family mean to these children? And how can we make sense of the donor's status, having supplied a common inheritance to so many children, yet legally excluded from any responsibility for them? It all goes to show what happens when you turn the sacred and mysterious processes of life into a matter of commerce. Limiting sperm donors to, say, ten children, might be a sensible reform.

■ For centuries, ships transported goods in small units, which were loaded and unloaded by laborers. But in the 1950s, an engineer named Keith Tantlinger invented a way to ship cargo in more efficient units: the modern metal shipping container. The innovation allowed hundreds of containers and tens of thousands of tons of cargo to be stacked on one ship, and the goods to be moved from ship to rail to truck almost without manual labor. Tantlinger's invention changed the world. First, it encouraged one of the most important waves of globalization: As the cost of shipping goods around the world dropped dramatically, ordinary consumers gained access to international goods while American industries had to face new competition from abroad. Second, there was no longer a need for nearly as many longshoremen and stevedores to unload the cargo. The container marginalized their unions, which were infamously portrayed in *On the Waterfront* and represented the worst of organized labor, known for corruption, intimidation, and violence. Tantlinger's invention evinces the dramatic progress and destruction that technological and commercial innovation encourages. A revolutionary engineer, dead at 92. R.I.P.

PUBLIC POLICY

Unstimulating, Again

If $900 billion in fiscal stimulus did not deliver us from high unemployment, perhaps another $450 billion will do the trick: That was the theory underlying President Obama's speech. The same as before, but less impressive—which, come to think of it, isn't a bad summary of this stage of his presidency.

Obama's familiar hectoring tone, condescension, and pose of post-partisanship should not be allowed to obscure the fact that every so often he mentioned a good idea. A simultaneous reduction

in corporate tax rates and corporate tax breaks was one. Extending the payroll-tax cut enacted last year was another. Enacting trade agreements would count as a third if the main obstacle to their enactment were not Obama himself and his congressional allies.

If President Obama were not so inflexibly liberal, there would be much more he could do to promote job growth. He claimed, for example, that his existing regulatory policy already balances economic goals with safety and environmental protection. On this point he was quite strident, pretending, for example, that Republicans had proposed to eliminate most regulations on the books. The fact is that the number of regulations, their cost, and the size of the workforce at regulatory agencies have all increased substantially under this president, and that regulatory activism shows no signs of abating. A moratorium on new regulation until unemployment returns to a tolerable level would have cost the president no permanent ideological ground, but he was unwilling to propose it.

The rest of the speech was dismal. Obama wants a larger tax credit for companies that hire people who have been unemployed for six months or longer, which seems like an incentive for companies to fire some of their employees, replace them with eligibles, and pocket the credit. (It's also an incentive for people not to take job offers if they are close to the six-month mark, in order to get a piece of the subsidy in the form of the higher wages employers would offer them.) In the deficit-reduction portion of the speech, the president returned to his familiar theme that the rich need to pay their fair share. We have no objection to asking those with high incomes to give up subsidies—but where was the president's call for changing entitlement programs to achieve that goal? Instead he seeks to raise taxes on capital income, which can hardly help the country's long-term growth.

"This isn't political grandstanding. . . . This is simple math," said Obama, a few sentences after denouncing "tax loopholes for oil companies." Actually, what simple math tells us is that these loopholes are an infinitesimal part of the deficit, and that their elimination has nothing to do with creating jobs. The attentive reader can determine what this reference was doing in the president's speech.

Obama concluded with a college-freshman stab at political philosophy: We need to do things together that we cannot do on our own, and therefore we need big government. This discussion grew especially senseless whenever it touched on education. Assuming that government must construct and maintain schools, for example, why should it be a federal responsibility? "While they're adding teachers in places like South Korea, we're laying them off in droves." What relevance the first datum had to the second was left unsaid. Are we to conclude that more teachers is always better? Or that unemployment among teachers—which is lower than the national average—is a particular tragedy? If so, why? Because the teachers' unions are reliable foot soldiers of the Democratic party?

In one of the more ringing passages of the speech, Obama said, "The next election is 14 months away. And the people who sent us here—the people who hired us to work for them—they don't have the luxury of waiting 14 months." No, they don't. But we suppose they are going to have to.

SIPA USA-KT/SIPA/NEWSCOM

CAMPAIGN 2012

The Republicans' Social Security Choice

Rick Perry has drawn a lot of criticism, not least from Mitt Romney, for calling Social Security a "Ponzi scheme," but the fact is that it bears more than a passing resemblance to one. In both cases earlier participants can get their money back only if new participants join; in both cases no wealth is actually created; in both cases the earlier participants get a better return than the later ones; and in both cases the system is unsustainable. But of course there are also differences. Ponzi schemes are run to make their originators a profit. The federal government is running Social Security at a loss that is set to increase.

And Social Security, unlike a Ponzi scheme, can be reformed to be made sustainable. Slow the growth of benefits sufficiently, for example, and the program's fiscal gap will disappear. Its disincentive effect on saving, and on delaying retirement, would also diminish. But neither Perry nor Romney has offered any specific proposals on Social Security in the course of the presidential campaign, and both of them run the risk of setting back the cause of reform.

In Perry's case, the risk comes from the combination of rhetorical maximalism with policy vagueness. He says that the program is unconstitutional, a failure, and a lie. These claims would seem to imply that the program should be abolished. He has mused about the idea, and his spokesmen for a time refused to rule it out. Under criticism he clarified that he does not intend to abolish the program, and indeed would maintain benefits for current retirees and those about to retire. How would he do this? He does not say. And his ability to persuade the public to accept reform, notwithstanding its aversion to risk, has been compromised. Any reform he presents as president will be greeted by Democrats as a covert attempt to destroy the highly popular program, and his previous words will give their attacks credibility.

Romney correctly notes that the public, while aware that Social Security's financing is unsound, remains extremely attached to the program. "Our nominee has to be someone who isn't committed to abolishing Social Security, but who is committed to saving Social Security," he says. But is he that man? He has expressed openness to raising the eligibility age, imposing a means test on the program, and instituting voluntary personal accounts. But unless he unveils his own plan, the effect of his attacks on Perry will be to strengthen the political taboo against candid and realistic discussion of the program's flaws. Romney has a choice to make: He can run as a realistic reformer, or he can say "Me, too" to Democratic criticisms of conservatives.

As it stands, the feud between Perry and Romney is accomplishing nothing for anyone outside the White House.

DARREN GYGI

Social Security Alert

Perry and Romney debate a program in need of reform

BY RAMESH PONNURU

RICK PERRY and Mitt Romney have begun a lively debate about Social Security, but it's not the one we need. Their debate mostly concerns whether it was a good idea to establish the program. Perry has made it abundantly clear that he thinks the answer is no. The program's creation was an affront to the Constitution. Romney objects to this line of argument. He implies that he would have voted for it in the 1930s.

Neither of them is saying much about the actual question the country faces today: Given that we have a Social Security program and are not going to abolish it or devolve it to the states (as Perry has daydreamt), what should we do about it? Romney says he is open to various reforms, though he has not made any specific proposals. Perry has been even vaguer.

Romney is almost certainly right that forthright opposition to Social Security in principle is a losing proposition in American politics. It remains one of the most popular federal programs, and polls consistently find that voters want to prevent benefits from being cut. When pollsters have divided respondents by party and ideology, they find that this consensus includes strong majorities of self-described Republicans, conservatives, and tea-party sympathizers. (Nobody, to my knowledge, has even done polling on whether the federal government should withdraw from the field altogether.)

Polls also consistently find that the public understands that Social Security is in trouble. But Americans want the program to be saved, not eliminated or replaced. If he becomes president, or even the Republican presidential nominee, Perry will have to have a politically realistic agenda for Social Security. But for any set of reforms, resistance is likely to be greater if the public thinks they are motivated by a desire to undermine the program.

Governor Perry is also right, however, to suggest that the program is deeply flawed—and its flaws, as he has hinted, go beyond its much-discussed funding shortfall. Rates of elderly destitution are much lower since the development of Social Security, but this gain came at a cost. Martin Feldstein, the distinguished Harvard economist, has long maintained that the program markedly reduces the nation's capital stock—and thus economic growth and wages—by diminishing the incentive to save. It diminishes the incentive to work, too, by encouraging retirement in the early and mid-60s, even though lifespans have increased and hard physical labor has declined.

An increasing number of studies demonstrate that the program shrinks the average American family, too, by socializing the returns to child-rearing. Parents contribute to the program's future twice, first by paying payroll taxes and second by raising children; but the program recognizes only the first set of contributions.

The program also has some baleful political effects. It makes the electorate much more dependent on the federal government, and thus on the political class, than it otherwise would be. Social Security did not just cause the federal government to outgrow the constraints of the Constitution; it also did a lot to create a citizenry unmindful of those constraints.

The program's structure was designed to spread false beliefs about it that would make it politically unassailable, and that now make it hard to reform. The purpose of creating a payroll tax supposedly dedicated to the program was to convince Americans that they were paying into a special fund and would later withdraw what they contributed. In reality, the program bears only a passing resemblance to this picture. But many liberals, from the dawn of the program to this day, have not believed that Americans would support the amount of redistribution the program entails if this redistribution were transparent.

Finally if most pressingly there is the question of the program's solvency. Social Security is currently paying out more in benefits than it takes in. While it may run a surplus again if we ever see a strong economic recovery, within a few years the increasing number of retirees—ten thousand Boomers will quit working every day for the next 20 years—will push the program into deeper and deeper deficits starting just a few years from now.

For a while, the program will pay the excess benefits out of its "trust fund": the pile of IOUs it accumulated when the program ran a surplus and the rest of the federal government borrowed from it. To repay those IOUs the federal government will have to either raise taxes, cut other spending, or go even deeper into debt. When the IOUs run out, the law imposes a sharp cut in Social Security benefits. The current projections have it that the program will cut benefits by 23 percent starting in 2037. Under current law, then, the program will make federal deficits much worse for more than two decades and then sharply cut benefits. Neither part of this future is desirable, or politically sustainable.

There are five reasons the program's spending has been growing faster than its revenues and will continue to do so. First, we have more retirees. Second, their retirements are lasting longer. Third, birth rates have fallen, so there are fewer work years to support each year of retirement. Fourth, there is a cap on the taxes the program imposes on any individual. But as income inequality has risen, a higher proportion of wages has been above the cap and thus gone untaxed.

Fifth, the program's benefit levels rise with wage levels throughout the economy. In his 2010 book *Social Security: The Unfinished Work*, Charles Blahous, who advised Pres. George W. Bush on the issue and now serves as a trustee for Social Security and Medicare, noted that a medium-wage worker retiring in 2010 at the normal retirement age would receive an annual benefit of $17,700. A medium-wage worker retiring at the normal retirement age in 2035 is expected, on the other hand, to receive $24,000 annually (plus whatever inflation occurs between now and then).

Of course, that future worker will also be putting more into the system because he will be paying taxes on a higher wage level. So it might seem as though that benefit level is only fair: It replaces the same percentage of a worker's wages when he retires tomorrow as it replaces today. But this is the wrong way to think about the problem. If the retiree population grows faster than the work force, the only way to maintain that replacement ratio is to increase taxes constantly—and while raising taxes on higher-income workers can generate some of the needed income, much of any plausible tax increase would have to fall on this medium-wage worker himself. Neither a free lunch nor a free retirement can be assumed.

The unfunded liability of Social Security—the excess of projected benefits over projected revenues—is estimated at $16 trillion. Yet there are people familiar with the projections who nonetheless regard Social Security as a second-tier problem for the federal budget. The liberal version of the argument goes like this: Health-care inflation rather than population aging is responsible for the bulk of our future spending explosion, and therefore our main goal should be to impose cost controls on health care rather than change benefit formulas to account for new demographic realities. The conservative version simply notes that Medicare has an even larger unfunded liability: $30 trillion. In the long run, it is primarily responsible for increased spending, and Social Security is an afterthought. Both of these arguments have helped reduce the pressure on presidents and presidential candidates to put Social Security reforms on the table.

The liberal argument is simply mistaken. By all means we should look for intelligent ways to moderate health-care inflation. But the Congressional Budget Office reports that 64 percent of the increased cost in Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid between now and 2035 is a result of population aging. The conservative argument is stronger, but it may take too long a view. Between now and the early 2030s, Social Security is expected to remain larger than Medicare, and over the next 15 years its growth will put more strain on the budget than Medicare's.

Fix Social Security now, and you still have time to solve the larger but longer-run problem of Medicare spending. Fix Medicare now, and the country still moves into very rocky fiscal territory in the next two decades.

Fixing either program is of course politically difficult, or else it would have happened already. But fixing Social Security is conceptually easy: Raise the eligibility age and moderate the growth of benefits. Let the medium-wage worker who retires in 2035 receive the same benefit level, adjusted for inflation, that the medium-wage worker who retired in 2010 receives. We could change the benefit formula so that benefits for the lowest earners continue to rise even when adjusted for inflation.

Jed Graham, a writer for *Investor's Business Daily*, proposes an additional tweak in his book *A Well-Tailored Safety Net*: Make sure that benefits for the oldest of the old are higher than benefits for the newly retired. This goal too is easy to achieve in theory. Reform initial benefit levels as discussed, so that they rise with inflation. But then give every beneficiary an increase every year of retirement that more than keeps up with inflation.

Paring back the growth of benefits would make the program solvent while reducing its effects on the length of working life, the savings rate, the incentives of voters, and the size of families. (On this last point, however, there is no good alternative to instituting a large child tax credit that compensates parents for their contribution to the program.) Raising taxes would, on the other hand, make the program's negative side effects, such as its discouragement of work, worse.

For the last 15 years or so, most conservatives have also sought to introduce personal savings accounts into Social Security: allowing workers to retain possession of some of their payroll taxes so that they could invest for their own retirement. This proposal had two great virtues. It attempted to make all workers into small-scale capital owners, so that the electorate would become less entitlement-oriented.

And it was a mechanism to pre-fund retirement. Politicians have long claimed to want to reserve excess Social Security revenues to pay for future benefits rather than use them to pay for other operations of the federal government. This was the point of Al Gore's much-mocked "Social Security lockbox." The accounts would have been several million lockboxes. If the federal government had used the Social Security surpluses of the last two decades to launch personal accounts, the federal government would not have been able to tap these funds and might have had to go on a diet. If that had happened, the accounts would have been a net increase in national savings.

But we aren't running surpluses anymore. Starting the accounts means moving some federal expenses from the future into the present budget. A worker who participates in the accounts agrees to get a smaller payment from the traditional program in the future in order to put money into the account now. The feds, in return, pay less later but have to allow funds to flow into the accounts now. In a time of massive deficits and debt—with both set to rise—that trade-off is not going to look attractive. And the accounts are now less likely to yield an actual increase in national savings: We are probably not going to cut more spending than we have to cut in order to fund the accounts. Even if a Republican presidential candidate runs on a platform including personal accounts, then, he will probably have to quietly shelve them if he wins.

It is just barely possible to imagine the next president's moderating the growth of Social Security's benefits so as to make them affordable. It is a matter of some urgency that this scenario happen. Governor Romney and Governor Perry should do what they can to make it more likely—and refrain from doing anything to make it less likely. If they are not going to advance credible reform proposals, perhaps it would be best if they refrained from talking about the issue altogether. NR

Dead Letter

Tough unions, weak management doom USPS

BY ROBERT VERBRUGGEN

IT'S not news that the United States Postal Service is going bankrupt, but the reality of the situation has finally started to sink in. The *New York Times* reported in early September that the agency cannot afford a $5.5 billion pension-fund payment that's due this month.

At the core of the problem are the horrific contracts that USPS has negotiated with its employees' unions. As the *Times* reported:

> Decades of contractual promises made to unionized workers, including no-layoff clauses, are increasing the post office's costs. Labor represents 80 percent of the agency's expenses, compared with 53 percent at United Parcel Service and 32 percent at FedEx, its two biggest private competitors. Postal workers also receive more generous health benefits than most other federal employees.

Unions are a hard thing for any company to deal with—firms ranging from Delta to Hyatt to Boeing have struggled with organized labor over the last several years alone. American labor law deserves some share of the blame. But employers aren't completely helpless—which leaves us looking for other explanations for USPS's willingness to cave to the unions' demands. Chief among them: The company faces little competition, has no profit motive, and has an implicit promise of a bailout from the federal government.

The current situation is self-evidently ridiculous. Since the advent of e-mail, USPS's business has been in steep decline. Between 2007 and 2010—long after the Internet revolution took hold—mail volume fell 20 percent, and the agency lost $20 billion. Overwhelmingly, the mail that remains is junk, and even Netflix, USPS's biggest corporate customer, is delivering more of its movies digitally.

You wouldn't guess any of that from the contracts USPS has signed with its unions—the National Postal Mail Handlers Union, the National Association of

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Smart Luxuries—Surprising Prices

Letter Carriers, the American Postal Workers Union, and the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association—in recent years. All four contain "no layoff or reduction in force" clauses that prevent payrolls from falling along with USPS's business. In May of this year, as the agency was staring into the face of bankruptcy, USPS reached an agreement with the American Postal Workers Union that would "safeguard jobs, protect retirement and health-care benefits, and provide a 3.5 percent wage increase over the life of the contract," according to the union's president. (He called this a "win-win.")

All told, as of 2009 the average postal worker received $79,000 in wages and benefits, as compared with $59,000 for the average worker in the private sector as a whole. As Robert Carbaugh and Thomas Tenerelli wrote in a recent *Cato Journal* article, "Although these data are not adjusted for factors such as worker skill and working conditions, they suggest that the Postal Service unions have done well for their members."

It's tempting to blame this entirely on the unions and the laws that enable their behavior. USPS workers gained the right to collectively bargain with the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970. For the most part, the law put USPS's labor relations under the National Labor Relations Act, the legislation that governs union activity at most private companies. As I argued in these pages last month ("National Labor Relations Bias," NATIONAL REVIEW, Aug. 1), the NLRA gives unions too much power, including the "right" to represent workers who don't support them. In addition, while postal employees cannot strike, an arbitrator may impose a contract when negotiations break down. Ludicrously, arbitrators are not required to consider USPS's financial situation when deciding which provisions to include.

Even so, it's not as if employers have no role in the bargaining process. In fact, in the private sector, when competition is intense and wage increases could put a company out of business, unions tend not to make much progress at all. And yet USPS contracts for the last ten years—contracts no profit-seeking company would have signed—have been made without arbitration. (To be fair, talks with the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association broke down late last year and are going to arbitration.)

A reason for this is that USPS faces very little competition. In fact, it has a federally guaranteed monopoly on the delivery of letters; it's actually illegal to send a letter that's not "urgent" via UPS or FedEx. Whereas most companies lose ground in the marketplace if they let their unions run wild (see: GM), the Postal Service has nothing to fear.

And further, as an "independent agency" of the federal government, as opposed to a private company, USPS has no reason whatsoever to turn a profit—in fact, it's virtually forbidden to. Thus, its negotiators have no reason to play hardball when they sit down with organized labor.

For much of its history, USPS was required to set rates that were revenue-neutral. Thanks to a 2006 law, it has a little more leeway now: For service categories in which it competes with other providers, it can set its own prices. However, non-competitive services—for which USPS must charge the old revenue-neutral rates, plus inflation—account for about 88 percent of USPS's revenue.

One might think that even in the absence of a profit motive, USPS would have an incentive to preserve its very existence. However, companies with strong ties to the federal government seem to have an implicit bailout guarantee—think Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Considering that mail delivery is far more popular than those two government-sponsored enterprises ever were, it seems highly unlikely that the federal government will let the Postal Service go under. Even Republicans seem hesitant to suggest that course of action.

Right now, Congress has only a few options aside from a bailout. One would be to allow USPS to stop pre-funding its retirement benefits—which is basically just borrowing from the agency's not-so-bright future; it's true that other agencies don't have this onerous requirement, but any retirement benefits that aren't funded while an employee is working will have to be funded while the employee is retired.

Another is to take measures to cut costs—the postmaster general has suggested ending Saturday delivery, closing lots of post offices, and breaking the agency's contractual obligation not to lay off union workers. These would be a good start, though the prospect of a government that breaks its own agencies' contracts is frightening, however laughable the contracts in question are. Rep. Darrell Issa (R., Calif.) has suggested requiring older workers to retire instead, a less heavy-handed alternative. He estimates that such a measure could remove 200,000 workers from the payroll.

In the long term, however, the best solution to this problem is to end USPS entirely. Congress should sell USPS to the highest bidder and eliminate its monopoly on letter delivery. Ideally, the buyer would start with a clean slate: Unions would have to win elections if they wanted to continue representing employees, and they would face an opponent that actually had something to lose.

In early America, the mail was the only way to communicate over long distances, and most likely, private companies wouldn't have served all of the nation's rural areas. In fact, the Constitution itself authorized (though it did not require) Congress to set up post offices and post roads for the purpose of facilitating mail delivery.

Today, by contrast, affordable Internet access is available to just about everyone—and we can expect Americans who prefer daily letter deliveries to pay for that service themselves, in the free market, through either existing delivery companies or a reconstituted and fully private USPS. As it currently exists, the Postal Service has outlived its usefulness, and taxpayers shouldn't be on the hook for its steady stream of deficits and poor decisions. **NR**

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Crime, Punishment, and Rehabilitation

When they've done the time, expunge the crime

BY MITCH PEARLSTEIN

PEOPLE on the right tend to be enthusiastic about yoking men and women in marriage and about locking bad guys up in prison. To what extent, however, does the latter practice undermine the former?

Research verifies common sense by showing that married men are less likely than single men to break the law. Getting married is thus a good way for a man to help himself avoid getting locked up. But what about single men who have already been charged with committing crimes? They are less attractive marriage partners, not just because they may be incarcerated, but because rap sheets are not conducive to good-paying, family-supporting jobs. By not marrying, they lose a major source of support in straightening out their lives. How can they escape this trap?

Before suggesting a few ideas—which will be short of far-reaching, given the vast size of the problem—let's look at some discouraging numbers. (Unless otherwise stipulated, references to "prison" and "incarceration" are to state and federal penitentiaries, not local jails.)

- The incarceration rate in the United States is approximately seven times the average for Western Europe, and is approached elsewhere only by a few tiny states and some former Soviet republics.
- At year end 2009, there were more than 1.6 million inmates in federal and state prisons. During the twelve-month period ending June 30, 2009, 12.8 million inmates had been admitted to local jails.
- As of the early 2000s, more than 11 percent of American men could expect to go to prison at some time in their lives.
- Across the country, studies consistently show that more than 40 percent of low-income men who father a child out of wedlock have already been in jail or prison by the time their first son or daughter is born.
- One in four black men born between 1975 and 1979 had experienced imprisonment by 2009. The comparable ratio for white men was one in 19. The chance of having been imprisoned for black men in this cohort who had not graduated from high school was two in three.
- As of 2000, about 25 percent of black men between the ages of 22 and 30 were married. Among incarcerated black men, the marriage rate was less than half of that, 11 percent.

Statistics such as these powerfully raise the question of whether the United States locks up too many people. This issue has become more salient over the last three decades as prison populations have exploded, in large part because of ever-increasing numbers of drug convictions, along with a trend toward stiff mandatory sentences for crimes in general, including life or very long terms for a third felony conviction ("three strikes, you're out"). Over the last third of a century, the U.S. incarceration rate has grown about fivefold, from approximately 100 to approximately 500 prisoners for every 100,000 people.

But it's hard to accept claims that the American judicial system is too quick to put people away, given that nearly every time someone is arrested for some heinous crime, his rap sheet is found to be pages long, yet he was still on the street. More than 90 percent of inmates in state prisons are either violent offenders or convicted recidivists. This is no small matter: A significant reason that crime rates have decreased, often dramatically, over the last two decades is that a lot of potential murderers, robbers, and rapists have been behind bars.

Incarceration aside, though, an inescapable conclusion is that far too many Americans, for whatever reasons, commit far too much crime. How does marriage help reduce this problem? Or to look at things another way, how does the absence of marriage increase it? Here's an illustrative example.

As recounted by demographer Linda J. Waite and journalist Maggie Gallagher in

Mr. Pearlstein is the founder and president of Center of the American Experiment, in Minneapolis. His new book, From Family Collapse to America's Decline, *has just been published by Rowman & Littlefield.*

their invaluable 2000 book *The Case for Marriage* (still the best research roundup on the subject), a study of 500 chronic juvenile delinquents, aimed at determining why some young men abandoned criminal behavior while others continued it into their early 30s, found that a good marriage made more than a little difference. The men in the study who improved their ways were very similar to those who did not in terms of measurable childhood characteristics such as poverty rates and IQs. They also had been rated as equally "difficult" and "aggressive" and had been arrested as teenagers about as often. Nevertheless, over time, "those who entered a good marriage sharply reduced their criminal activity"—by about two-thirds—compared with men who did not establish good marriages or did not marry at all.

Not at all unrelatedly, the U.S. Justice Department reported in the mid-1990s that single and divorced women were four to five times as likely as married women to be crime victims (although widowed women were the least likely to be victimized). Single and divorced women were three times as likely as married women to be the victims of aggravated assault, and almost ten times as likely to be raped. The evidence, writes Gallagher, is "overwhelming that being unmarried puts women at special risk for domestic abuse," since a large body of research shows that marriage is a much less dangerous arrangement than cohabitation.

With public-safety considerations always paramount, what steps should we take to reduce the destructiveness of past incarceration? More specifically, outside of conventional reentry programs and faith-based programs such as Prison Fellowship (in which I have greater albeit still limited confidence), how can we remove obstacles to ex-offenders' getting and keeping decent jobs? Let me suggest several modest ideas, preceded by a brief word about a worsening impediment that reduces the employment prospects for people with records.

The terms "collateral sanctions" and "collateral consequences" are used to describe the legal and extralegal (which is to say, much broader and more insidious) blockages to employment and other benefits for ex-offenders. Collateral *sanctions* include any legal penalty, disability, or disadvantage imposed automatically upon conviction: for example, ineligibility for various jobs, such as school-bus driver or property manager for an apartment building. Collateral *consequences* encompass the full range of bad things and debilitating restrictions—official or unofficial, codified or not—that regularly confront people after they've served their sentences. In the words of lawyer Margaret Colgate Love, who both practices in and writes about this area, collateral consequences include not only the specific sanctions mandated by the judicial system, but also the "degradation of social status often called the 'stigma of conviction.'"

These are huge issues, increasingly compounded by rapid growth in the number of companies providing potential employers with instantaneous online access to everything in a person's criminal record. Also increasingly accessible is every scrap of incorrect information that may live on in the file of a man or woman who is straining to play by the rules.

"While it has never been easy for a former convict to secure a full-time job," reporter Mike Meyers wrote several years ago in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, "the rise of the electronic background check and fear of lawsuits among potential employers are creating ever-higher barriers to work for those leaving prison." In 2004 the *Wall Street Journal* reported that about 80 percent of big U.S. companies were doing criminal-background checks. And if 80 percent of big employers were doing checks back then, it's hard not to believe the proportion is bigger now.

In response to all this, here are three suggestions:

Review collateral sanctions with an eye to safely reducing their number and duration. When compared with all the other problems former inmates face in trying to turn their lives around, laws and rules prohibiting them from filling certain specific jobs are usually not the main obstacle. Most of these will have little or no impact on ex-cons' lives. In Ohio, for example, people convicted of a felony, or who have pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor, are forever prohibited from serving as a police chief or even a constable. And no one in Ohio can be an auctioneer or apprentice auctioneer for ten years if convicted of a felony or any other crime involving fraud. Moreover, there are many proper and essential restrictions across the country when it comes to felons' working anywhere near children and other vulnerable people.

All that said, some states have collateral sanctions that are more the product of overkill than of necessity. For example, Ohio disqualifies anyone with a "second conviction . . . arising from two or more separate incidents" from ever getting a commercial driver's license. And there are many other examples from around the country, often pertaining to marijuana convictions.

Consider the implications of widespread Internet availability of criminal records. I don't suggest restricting public access to criminal records, because the problem here is not access itself but permanence. I have little faith that any law mandating the removal of certain records from public scrutiny, in order to protect the privacy and good name of individuals *who deserve to be so protected*, can withstand the onslaught of high technology. An ex-offender's name can be removed from the official government register, but it would be very hard to scrub it from all records and caches of data on the Internet.

It's unfair for people to carry around arrest records for the rest of their lives when they've never been guilty of anything beyond failing to pay parking tickets. And it is especially unfair if they were found innocent of whatever they were

With public-safety considerations always paramount, what steps should we take to reduce the destructiveness of past incarceration? More specifically, how can we remove obstacles to ex-offenders' getting and keeping decent jobs?

arrested for. Yes, there are procedures for sealing or expunging such information, but it always takes time and often takes money to do so, and by the time all the bureaucratic hurdles have been jumped, serious damage can already have been done, since documentation of the arrest may be forever recorded in cyberspace. By serious damage, I mean unfairly being denied jobs, housing, and other opportunities and benefits. Viewing the issue in terms of race, we should remember that many of the large number of black men arrested every year get picked up because they were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time; when that happens, the injustice should not afflict them for the rest of their lives.

One possible remedy would be for police to make greater use of citations, which don't necessarily wind up on the Internet, instead of actual arrests. This idea, which was proposed several years ago by the Minneapolis-based Council on Crime and Justice, would help a significant number of people avoid life-scarring records. "The police," the council urged, "should use the citation process for low-level offenses . . . unless an arrest is justifiable because the offender presents an articulable threat to public safety."

Investigate the safest possible ways of helping former offenders cleanse their names. The traditional ways of helping individuals who have completed their sentences to get on with their lives have been legal and administrative devices, such as pardons and the expunging of records. The aforementioned Margaret Colgate Love, whose practice concentrates on pardons and relief from collateral consequences, has admitted that expunging records requires a willingness to "rewrite history," something that is "hard to square with a legal system founded on the search for truth." Also, to the degree that it hides an individual's criminal record, "it tends to devalue legitimate public-safety concerns." Nonetheless, she writes, granting a clean slate is an indispensable part of fair treatment for reformed criminals—essential to justice and to reducing recidivism.

While Love fails adequately to appreciate the public's fear of growing crime in the 1970s and 1980s, which led governments at all levels to come down harder on criminals, she puts her finger on the central question when she quotes the legal scholar Aidan R. Gough: "We sentence, we coerce, we incarcerate, we counsel, we give probation and parole, and we treat—not infrequently with success—but we never forgive."

How, exactly, to forgive—safely?

Drawing on a model penal code drafted by the American Law Institute a half century ago, Love, in a 2003 article, offered a route worthy of consideration: reintegrating offenders into society "not by trying to conceal the fact of conviction, but by advertising the evidence of rehabilitation." She and the model code proposed doing this in a two-tiered process. First, the original sentencing court "may issue an order relieving all legal disabilities after an offender has satisfied his sentence." This would remove statutory bars to employment, housing, and the like. Second, after a further period of "law-abiding conduct" (the model code suggested five years), the sentencing court "may issue an order 'vacating' the convictions." In practical terms, this means setting the convictions aside. What might such an approach accomplish that others would not?

The proposed scheme, Love argues, gives the offender an incentive to pursue rehabilitation and satisfies the need for a ritual of reconciliation. In relying primarily on the sentencing judge, it provides a more reliable and accessible process than pardons or other executive acts, and a more meaningful one than automatic statutory provisions. In contrast with expungement, it does not sacrifice the legitimate concerns of law enforcement or undermine respect for the value of truth in our legal system.

Would such a system, which essentially became law in Illinois in 2010, help some people move on with their lives in good ways? It would seem so. Would the reform likewise increase the likelihood of some ex-offenders' marrying? It would seem so again, if only in fairly small numbers. Yet, stepping back and surveying the larger nexus of crime and marriage, it's impossible not to recognize how far beyond sad the whole problem is, starting with millions of young men, disproportionately of color, whose lives are crippled from a very young age because of criminal behavior. What a ruin for themselves, their families, and our nation—and what an opportunity for creative policies that can reinforce family-oriented goals even as they serve the interests of justice. **NR**

The Right Kind of Tyrant

What Steve Jobs gave the world

BY ROB LONG

THE business world is famous for its difficult bosses, to put it as mildly as possible. There are screamers and throwers and silent-treatment types—all kinds and shapes of cruelty. If you go to the right bars around the downtown area of any major city and get a stool close to a group of young-looking people in suits, you can hear some pretty alarming stories about their bosses. The American economy, it sometimes seems, is run by demanding and irrational psychopaths assisted by terrified fauns.

It's hard, though, when you reach a certain age, not to instinctively side with the psychopaths.

Steve Jobs, the two-time impresario behind the astonishing success of Apple Computer, has a reputation for being—well, I won't use the "P" word, so we'll have to settle for "demanding." He's a demanding boss, from all accounts.

A friend of mine who spent some time in Cupertino—and that's how the cool kids refer to Apple HQ: "Cupertino," which is where it's based, deep in Silicon Valley—has shared lots of stories about Jobs's famous temper, his obsessive perfectionism, his willingness to shelve any project or product (or employee) that doesn't meet his high standards.

"In a meeting with Steve, you have to be prepared for his questions," my friend told me, adding darkly, "*all* of his possible questions, from how long a product will take to build to how it might be shipped to whether it should come in blue. When he asks a question, you have to be prepared."

Or?

My friend shook his head, deep into an Angry-Steve Flashback. "It's not good."

The stories of Steve's temper are passed around Silicon Valley like business cards. Steve tossing a chair when a prototype wasn't thin enough. Steve firing an engineer in an elevator when the engineer told him about the battery life of a new iPhone.

Steve scrapping an entire product line because it wasn't perfect, and had no hope of becoming perfect. Steve demanding more features. Steve insisting on better syncing. Steve shouting for thinner. Steve screaming for lighter. Steve terrifying his employees, his vendors, his business partners. Steve, engaged in furious e-mail exchanges with journalists, bloggers, and random customers who happened to e-mail him at the right moment, when he was taking a break from making his employees sweat and from engineering even higher standards.

And somehow, in the midst of all of this shouting and demanding and firing and insisting, Steve starts a movie studio, Pixar, and produces some of the most lasting and powerful animated movies ever made, like the *Toy Story* trilogy and the magnificent *Up*.

He didn't accomplish any of this by being an understanding boss.

When a young engineer absentmindedly left a working prototype of the unreleased newest iPhone at a Silicon Valley bar, it was big news in the tech world. One industry blog managed to get its hands on the unit, prompting Steve to call in the cops. Friends of the engineer said they expected him to be plucked off the street one day and disappear into an unmarked van. They were only half-joking.

It's hard to keep that in mind, when you pass through the gleaming high style of your local Apple store, with the beehive of purposeful, slightly scruffy young people milling around in T-shirts. The Apple Store is such a friendly place. That's a big part of the Apple brand—ease of use, sleek design, shiny screens. When the company introduced its revolutionary Macintosh computer in the early 1980s, the product photo showed the squat, mini-looking unit with a smiley face on its screen. "Hi," the computer was saying, thus giving birth to one of the most successful consumer brands ever.

Apple computers are nice. They say "Hi." Your grim, beige Unix-based terminal at work, or your heavy black Dell at home, don't say "Hi." They say "ILLEGAL MODE IN KERNEL 1009A5 RE - START" or whatever.

Apple computers are also irritatingly smug, if that's possible. Well, not the computers themselves—although the early Mac that said "Hi" did seem, somehow, pleased with itself—but the users. Lord help us! Mac users won't shut up about

KIMBERLY WHITE/NEWSCOM

Steve Jobs

their machines. They're tireless missionaries of the Church of Steve: how much better Macs are than Windows-based computers, how much faster and less susceptible to viruses, how much better looking, how much cooler, which is what it really comes down to. In movies and on television, when characters sit down to work on a computer—and even when one is just there, in the background—it's almost always a Mac. In the painfully fashionable coffee shop around the corner from my house in Venice Beach, the hipsters all tap their fingers onto some kind of Apple product. Some will be typing on a MacBook Air; some will be poking out text messages on an iPhone; some will be editing music or video on a MacBook Pro; some will be flipping the pages on an eBook on the iPad; and some will manage, somehow, to be doing three of these things at the same time.

And if there's a Dell user in the pack somewhere, you'll spot it instantly, like someone wearing a tuxedo with brown shoes.

When I say "hipsters," of course, I'm speaking very broadly. I'm writing this essay on a MacBook Pro, which syncs automatically to my Dropbox storage file in the cloud, so if I choose to finish proofreading it at the local coffee shop I can do it easily, either on my impossibly slender MacBook Air, or my shiny Verizon-enabled iPad. When my editor calls, wondering where the piece is, his name will flash up on my iPhone, which will allow me to ignore it and get back to the important stuff, like making a new iTunes playlist and scooting farther away from the person using the HP.

In other words, I am one of those irritating Apple fanatics. If it makes you feel any better, no one is more irritated by this than I am. But given the tiniest opening, I'll bore you senseless with my devotion to my Phone, my Pad, my Air, my Book. I'll ignore your glazing eyes, your watch-checking, your backing away, and I'll just keep going: The machines are better designed and better made, have better software, and are easier to use. The MacBook Pro has revolutionized all media. The iPad is saving the newspaper business. The iPhone has liberated the world.

Well, not the whole world. Not Cupertino. Although that might change. Steve Jobs, the Tyrant of Cupertino, announced that he is stepping down as Apple's CEO. A long battle with a form of pancreatic cancer has made it impossible for him to operate at the level of intensity that he's famous for. His successor, Tim Cook, has assured customers and shareholders that Steve's relentless perfectionism is embedded deep into the corporate culture. Apple, he insists, will remain Apple.

But when you start using weasel words like "corporate culture," you're already tipping your hand. When Cupertino quaked under Tyrant Steve, no one needed to worry about the culture of the place. The culture was simple to understand: fear and unforgiving standards. It wasn't an easy place to work, but that was part of the appeal: Apple's engineers and designers didn't love coming to work *despite* Steve's insane temper and unpredictable rants, they loved coming to work *because* of those things. Because they knew Steve was trying to do great things, trying to revolutionize an entire market, trying to put incredible technology into a beautiful package and into the hands of ordinary people.

And that's impossible to do without being "demanding." **NR**

NR Innovation Special

DARREN GYGI

Swift Blind Horseman?

Look, listen—proceed

BY PETER THIEL

When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine." (Revelation 6:5–6)

I.

MODERN Western civilization stands on the twin plinths of science and technology. Taken together, these two interrelated domains reassure us that the 19th-century story of never-ending progress remains intact. Without them, the arguments that we are undergoing cultural decay—ranging from the collapse of art and literature after 1945 to the soft totalitarianism of political correctness in media and academia to the sordid worlds of reality television and popular entertainment—would gather far more force. Liberals often assert that science and technology remain essentially healthy; conservatives sometimes counter that these are false utopias; but the two sides of the culture wars silently agree that the accelerating development and application of the natural sciences continues apace.

Yet during the Great Recession, which began in 2008 and has no end in sight, these great expectations have been supplemented by a desperate necessity. We need high-paying jobs to avoid thinking about how to compete with China and India for low-paying jobs. We need rapid growth to meet the wishful expectations of our retirement plans and our runaway welfare states. We need science and technology to dig us out of our deep economic and financial hole, even though most of us cannot separate science from superstition or technology from magic. In our hearts and minds, we know that desperate optimism will not save us. Progress is neither automatic nor mechanistic; it is rare. Indeed, the unique history of the West proves the exception to the rule that most human beings

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through the millennia have existed in a naturally brutal, unchanging, and impoverished state. But there is no law that the exceptional rise of the West must continue. So we could do worse than to inquire into the widely held opinion that America is on the wrong track (and has been for some time), to wonder whether Progress is not doing as well as advertised, and perhaps to take exceptional measures to arrest and reverse any decline.

The state of true science is the key to knowing whether something is truly rotten in the United States. But any such assessment encounters an immediate and almost insuperable challenge. Who can speak about the true health of the ever-expanding universe of human knowledge, given how complex, esoteric, and specialized the many scientific and technological fields have become? When any given field takes half a lifetime of study to master, who can compare and contrast and properly weight the rate of progress in nanotechnology and cryptography and superstring theory and 610 other disciplines? Indeed, how do we even know whether the so-called scientists are not just lawmakers and politicians in disguise, as some conservatives suspect in fields as disparate as climate change, evolutionary biology, and embryonic-stem-cell research, and as I have come to suspect in almost all fields? For now, let us acknowledge this measurement problem—I will return to it later—but not let it stop our inquiry into modernity before it has even begun.

The official explanation for the slowdown in travel centers on the high cost of fuel, which points to the much larger failure in energy innovation.

II.

When tracked against the admittedly lofty hopes of the 1950s and 1960s, technological progress has fallen short in many domains. Consider the most literal instance of non-acceleration: We are no longer moving faster. The centuries-long acceleration of travel speeds—from ever-faster sailing ships in the 16th through 18th centuries, to the advent of ever-faster railroads in the 19th century, and ever-faster cars and airplanes in the 20th century—reversed with the decommissioning of the Concorde in 2003, to say nothing of the nightmarish delays caused by strikingly low-tech post-9/11 airport-security systems. Today's advocates of space jets, lunar vacations, and the manned exploration of the solar system appear to hail from another planet. A faded 1964 *Popular Science* cover story—"Who'll Fly You at 2,000 m.p.h.?"—barely recalls the dreams of a bygone age.

The official explanation for the slowdown in travel centers on the high cost of fuel, which points to the much larger failure in energy innovation. Real oil prices today exceed those of the Carter catastrophe of 1979–80. Nixon's 1974 call for full energy independence by 1980 has given way to Obama's 2011 call for one-third oil independence by 2020. Even before Fukushima, the nuclear industry and its 1954 promise of "electrical energy too cheap to meter" had long since been defeated by environmentalism and nuclear-proliferation concerns. One cannot in good conscience encourage an undergraduate in 2011 to study nuclear engineering as a career. "Clean tech" has become a euphemism for "energy too expensive to afford," and in Silicon Valley it has also become an increasingly toxic term for near-certain ways to lose money. Without dramatic breakthroughs, the alternative to more-expensive oil may turn out to be not cleaner and much-more-expensive wind, algae, or solar, but rather less-expensive and dirtier coal.

Warren Buffett massively capitalized on both of these trends with his $44 billion investment, most made in late 2009, in BNSF Railway—making it the largest non-financial company in the Berkshire Hathaway portfolio. Understandably, the Oracle of Omaha proclaimed "an all-in wager on the economic future of the United States" and downplayed any doubts he might have harbored. For present purposes, it suffices to note that 40 percent of railroad freight involves the transport of coal, and that railroads will do especially well if the travel and energy consumption patterns of the 21st century involve a regression to the past.

In the past decade, the unresolved energy challenges of the 1970s have broadened into a more general commodity shock, which has been greater in magnitude than the price spikes of the two world wars and has undone the price improvements of the previous century. In the case of agriculture, at least, technological famine may lead to real old-fashioned famine. The fading of the true Green Revolution—which increased grain yields by 126 percent from 1950 to 1980, but has improved them by only 47 percent in the years since, barely keeping pace with global population growth—has encouraged another, more highly publicized "green revolution" of a more political and less certain character. We may embellish the 2011 Arab Spring as the hopeful by-product of the information age, but we should not downplay the primary role of runaway food prices and of the many desperate people who became more hungry than scared.

While innovation in medicine and biotechnology has not stalled completely, here too signs of slowed progress and reduced expectations abound. In 1970, Congress promised victory over cancer in six years' time; four decades later, we may be 41 years closer, but victory remains elusive and appears much farther away. Today's politicians would find it much harder to persuade a more skeptical public to start a comparably serious war on Alzheimer's disease—even though nearly a third of America's 85-year-olds suffer from some form of dementia. The cruder measure of U.S. life expectancy continues to rise, but with some deceleration, from 67.1 years for men in 1970 to 71.8 years in 1990 to 75.6 years in 2010. Looking forward, we see far fewer blockbuster drugs in the pipeline—perhaps because of the intransigence of the FDA, perhaps because of the fecklessness of today's biological scientists, and perhaps because of the incredible complexity of human biology. In the next three years, the large pharmaceutical companies will lose approximately one-third of their current revenue stream as patents expire, so, in a perverse yet understandable response, they have begun the wholesale liquidation of the research departments that have borne so little fruit in the last decade and a half.

III.

By default, computers have become the single great hope for the technological future. The speedup in information technology contrasts dramatically with the slowdown everywhere else. Moore's Law, which predicted a doubling of the number of transistors that can be packed onto a computer chip every 18 to 24 months, has remained broadly true for much longer than anyone (including Moore) would have imagined back in 1965. We have moved without rest from mainframes to home computers to the Internet. Cellphones in 2011 contain more computing power than the entire Apollo space program in 1969.

From the perspective of Palo Alto, a return to the party year of 1999 appears almost within reach. All that glitters seems to be golden. Thousands of new Internet startups launch each year, and valuations of Web 2.0 businesses have surged; and not entirely without reason, as maybe two to six per year of these newly minted ventures will break into the billion-dollar-plus valuation zone within five years of their founding. In tandem with this new life for the new economy, Google has led a parallel move towards a near-doubling of wages for the most talented computer engineers, all in just the last three years. Beyond the dollars, one must look no farther than *The Social Network* to see the ways in which Facebook and its 750 million users have captured the new zeitgeist.

The economic decoupling of computers from everything else leads to more questions than answers, and barely hints at the strange future where today's trends simply continue. Would supercomputers become powerful engines for the miraculous creation of wholly new forms of economic value, or would they simply become powerful weapons for reshuffling existing structures—for Nature, red in tooth and claw? More simply, how does one measure the difference between progress and mere change? How much is there of each?

IV.

Let us now try to tackle this very thorny measurement problem from a very different angle. If meaningful scientific and technological progress occurs, then we reasonably would expect greater economic prosperity (though this may be offset by other factors). And also in reverse: If economic gains, as measured by certain key indicators, have been limited or nonexistent, then perhaps so has scientific and technological progress. Therefore, to the extent that economic growth is easier to quantify than scientific or technological progress, economic numbers will contain indirect but important clues to our larger investigation.

The single most important economic development in recent times has been the broad stagnation of real wages and incomes since 1973, the year when oil prices quadrupled. To a first approximation, the progress in computers and the failure in energy appear to have roughly canceled each other out. Like Alice in the Red Queen's race, we (and our computers) have been forced to run faster and faster to stay in the same place.

Taken at face value, the economic numbers suggest that the notion of breathtaking and across-the-board progress is far from the mark. If one believes the economic data, then one must reject the optimism of the scientific establishment. Indeed, if one shares the widely held view that the U.S. government may have understated the true rate of inflation—perhaps by ignoring the runaway inflation in government itself, notably in education and health care (where much higher spending has yielded no improvement in the former and only modest improvement in the latter)—then one may be inclined to take gold prices seriously and conclude that real incomes have fared even worse than the official data indicate.

Like Alice in the Red Queen's race, we (and our computers) have been forced to run faster and faster to stay in the same place.

This dismal and straightforward conclusion tends to be obscured by a range of secondary issues, which are important but do not really change the larger point about trends since 1973:

- Mean incomes outperformed median incomes (inflation-adjusted in both cases), and there was a trend towards greater inequality. Median incomes rose by only 10 percent. Mean incomes rose by 29 percent, which works out to a glacial pace of only about 0.7 percent per year—much slower than in the preceding four decades.
- Non-wage benefits, mostly health care, increased by about $2,600 per worker, for an additional 0.2 percent per year since 1973. So if the U.S. government has underestimated inflation by only 0.9 percentage points per year, then mean wages and benefits have been completely stagnant.
- Corporate profits increased from 9 percent to 12 percent of GDP—again, a significant but easily exaggerated shift.
- Women were hired in the 1980s and men were fired in the 2000s.
- College graduates did better, and high-school graduates did worse. But both became worse off in the years after 2000, especially when one includes the rapidly escalating costs of college.
- The era of globalization improved living standards by making labor and goods cheaper, but also hurt living standards through increased competition for limited resources. Free-trade advocates tend to think that the first effect dominates the second.

● Economic progress may lag behind scientific and technological achievement, but 38 years seems like an awfully long time.

The economic future looked very different in the 1960s. In his 1967 bestseller *The American Challenge*, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber argued that accelerating technological progress would widen the gap between the United States and the rest of the world, and that by 2000, "the post-industrial societies will be, in this order: the United States, Japan, Canada, Sweden. That is all." According to Servan-Schreiber, the difference between the United States and the rest of Europe would grow from a difference of degree into a difference of kind, comparable to the difference between Europe and Egypt or Nigeria. As a result of this steady divergence, Americans would face less pressure to compete:

> In 30 years America will be a post-industrial society. . . . There will be only four work days a week of seven hours per day. The year will be comprised of 39 work weeks and 13 weeks of vacation. With weekends and holidays this makes 147 work days a year and 218 free days a year. All this within a single generation.

We need to resist the temptation to dismiss Servan-Schreiber's space-age optimism so that we can better understand how the consensus he represented could have been so terribly wrong—and how, instead, for many Americans, the Fourth Commandment ("Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy") has been effectively forgotten.

'I will gladly pay you a dollar on Tuesday for a hamburger today' works only if a dollar gets earned by Tuesday.

V.

Like technology, credit also makes claims on the future. "I will gladly pay you a dollar on Tuesday for a hamburger today" works only if a dollar gets earned by Tuesday. A credit crisis happens when earnings disappoint and the present does not live up to past expectations of the future.

The current crisis of housing and financial leverage contains many hidden links to broader questions concerning long-term progress in science and technology. On one hand, the lack of easy progress makes leverage more dangerous, because when something goes wrong, macroeconomic growth cannot offer a salve; time will not cure liquidity or solvency problems in a world where little grows or improves with time. On the other hand, the lack of easy progress also makes leverage far more tempting, as unleveraged real returns fall below the expectations of pension funds and other investors.

This analysis suggests an explanation for the strange way the technology bubble of the 1990s gave rise to the real-estate bubble of the 2000s. After betting heavily on technology growth that did not materialize, investors tried to achieve the needed double-digit returns through massive leverage in seemingly safe real-estate investments. This did not work either, because a major reason for the bubble in real estate turned out to be the same as the reason for the bubble in technology: a mistaken but nearly universal background assumption about easy progress. Without fundamental gains in productivity (presumably driven by technology), real-estate values could not go up forever. Leverage is not a substitute for scientific progress.

VI.

The technology slowdown threatens not just our financial markets, but the entire modern political order, which is predicated on easy and relentless growth. The give-and-take of Western democracies depends on the idea that we can craft political solutions that enable most people to win most of the time. But in a world without growth, we can expect a loser for every winner. Many will suspect that the winners are involved in some sort of racket, so we can expect an increasingly nasty edge to our politics. We may be witnessing the beginnings of such a zero-sum system in politics in the U.S. and Western Europe, as the risks shift from winning less to losing more, and as our leaders desperately cast about for macroeconomic solutions to problems that have not been primarily about economics for a long time.

The most common name for a misplaced emphasis on macroeconomic policy is "Keynesianism." Despite his brilliance, John Maynard Keynes was always a bit of a fraud, and there is always a bit of clever trickery in massive fiscal stimulus and the related printing of paper money. But we must acknowledge that this fraud strangely seemed to work for many decades. (The great scientific and technological tailwind of the 20th century powered many economically delusional ideas.) Even during the Great Depression of the 1930s, innovation expanded new and emerging fields as divergent as radio, movies, aeronautics, household appliances, polymer chemistry, and secondary oil recovery. In spite of their many mistakes, the New Dealers pushed technological innovation very hard.

The New Deal deficits, however misguided, were easily repaid by the growth of subsequent decades. During the Great Recession of the 2010s, by contrast, our policy leaders narrowly debate fiscal and monetary questions with much greater erudition, but have adopted a cargo-cult mentality with respect to the question of future innovation. As the years pass and the cargo fails to arrive, we eventually may doubt whether it will ever return. The age of monetary bubbles naturally ends in real austerity.

On the political right, we are seeing a quiet shift from the optimism of Jack Kemp to the pessimism of Ron Paul, from supply-side economics to the Tea Party, and from the idea that we can combine tax cuts with more spending to the idea that money is either hard or fake. A mischievous person might even ask whether "supply-side economics" really was just a sort of code word for "Keynesianism." For now it suffices to acknowledge that lower marginal tax rates might not happen and would not substitute for the much-needed construction of hundreds of new nuclear reactors.

VII.

We have seen that even the simple question of *whether* a technology slowdown has occurred is far from straightforward. The critical question of *why* such a slowdown seems to have occurred is harder still, and we do not have the space to tackle it fully here. Let us end with the related question of *what* can now be done. Most narrowly, can our government restart the stalled innovation engine?

The state can successfully push science; there is no sense denying it. The Manhattan Project and the Apollo program remind us of this possibility. Free markets may not fund as much basic research as needed. On the day after Hiroshima, the *New York Times* could with some reason pontificate about the superiority of centralized planning in matters scientific: "End result: An invention [the nuclear bomb] was given to the world in three years which it would have taken perhaps half a century to develop if we had to rely on prima donna research scientists who work alone."

But in practice, we all sense that such gloating belongs to a very different time. Most of our political leaders are not engineers or scientists and do not listen to engineers or scientists. Today a letter from Einstein would get lost in the White House mail room, and the Manhattan Project would not even get started; it certainly could never be completed in three years. I am not aware of a single political leader in the U.S., either Democrat or Republican, who would cut health-care spending in order to free up money for biotechnology research—or, more generally, who would make serious cuts to the welfare state in order to free up serious money for major engineering projects. Robert Moses, the great builder of New York City in the 1950s and 1960s, or Oscar Niemeyer, the great architect of Brasilia, belong to a past when people still had concrete ideas about the future. Voters today prefer Victorian houses. Science fiction has collapsed as a literary genre. Men reached the moon in July 1969, and Woodstock began three weeks later. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that this was when the hippies took over the country, and when the true cultural war over Progress was lost.

Today's aged hippies no longer understand that there is a difference between the election of a black president and the creation of cheap solar energy; in their minds, the movement towards greater civil rights parallels general progress everywhere. Because of these ideological conflations and commitments, the 1960s Progressive Left cannot ask whether things actually might be getting worse. I wonder whether the endless fake cultural wars around identity politics are the main reason we have been able to ignore the tech slowdown for so long.

However that may be, after 40 years of wandering, it is not easy to find a path back to the future. If there is to be a future, we would do well to reflect about it more. The first and the hardest step is to see that we now find ourselves in a desert, and not in an enchanted forest. **NR**

PATENTLY Absurd

Copyright law can meet the needs of software developers

BY TIMOTHY B. LEE

IN 1994, Claudio Ballard was an unemployed computer programmer with a great idea: a system to scan paper financial documents and store them on a secure server. Ballard built a prototype, raised venture capital, and founded a company called DataTreasury to commercialize his system. At the peak of the dot-com boom, DataTreasury had an office on Long Island with over 100 employees.

At the time, banks were still clearing checks by shipping them around the country, and Ballard knew they would save a lot of money by scanning checks and exchanging the images instead. He thought his system would be perfect for the job. But the major banks weren't interested, choosing to work with other vendors or implement digital check-clearing systems of their own.

Around 2001, DataTreasury ran out of money and had to lay off most of its staff. For most startups, that would have been the end of the story. But DataTreasury had an ace in the hole: a portfolio of broad patents. One of them covered the concept of attaching a scanner (an "imaging subsystem for capturing the documents") to a server (a "central data processing subsystem") via a "communication network."

It's hard to see how anyone could build a digital check-clearing system without infringing this patent. I suggested to a company spokesman that DataTreasury had effectively patented the concept of digital check clearing. He disputed that characterization, but he struggled to explain what specific techniques the patents covers. And he couldn't think of any kinds of electronic check-clearing systems that didn't infringe DataTreasury's patents.

In 2002, DataTreasury, by then just a shell of its former self, launched a patent-litigation campaign against the nation's banks. Those legal battles continue to this day, and have netted DataTreasury hundreds of millions of dollars in licensing fees and damages.

The banks turned to their friends on Capitol Hill for help. In 2009, Sen. Jon Kyl (R., Ariz.) proposed an amendment to that year's patent-reform bill that limited financial institutions' liability for infringing DataTreasury's patents, which the amendment listed by number. The bill didn't pass, and the banks got a lot of bad press for the stunt. So this year's patent-reform bill, known as the America Invents Act, is a little more subtle. A provision inserted by Wall Street's senator, Chuck Schumer (D., N.Y.), singles out data-processing patents related to financial services for extra scrutiny from the patent office.

The banks' response to DataTreasury is a microcosm of the

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broader patent debate. The banks describe DataTreasury as a "patent troll": a company that has no products of its own but earns a living by filing patent-infringement lawsuits.

The shoe does seem to fit. And DataTreasury is just one of the hundreds of patent trolls now shaking down productive companies. And the explosive growth of patent trolling is just one of the many problems created by our dysfunctional patent system.

The America Invents Act is full of such technocratic provisions that tilt the playing field toward big businesses without doing anything to address the system's deeper flaws. For example, one widely discussed change would grant patents to the first party to file for them; in the current system, the patent goes to the person who can show he arrived at the invention first, regardless of when he filed. Large companies would like such a system because they can afford to hire many patent attorneys to help them file applications quickly. But there's no reason to think the change will benefit the rest of the economy.

DataTreasury now lists its address as being in Plano, Texas. That's probably not a coincidence. Dozens of companies with names like Lodsys LLC, Gemini IP LLC, Oasis Research LLC, and Imperium (IP) Holdings, Inc., have flocked to the patent- and plaintiff-friendly court district in eastern Texas. In a recent episode of *This American Life*, two NPR reporters tried to visit Oasis Research in the eastern-Texas town of Marshall, and instead found corridors of empty offices adorned by the names of tech companies. None of these companies appear to produce any useful products or services; their revenue comes entirely from suing companies that inadvertently infringe their patents.

Most patent trolls target large companies such as Microsoft or Apple. But more recently, smaller firms have been hit as well. Lodsys has become famous in the mobile-software industry for threatening dozens of small developers. As with most patent trolls, there's no allegation that the defendants specifically copied Lodsys's technology. Rather, Lodsys patents, which are related to purchasing electronic content from mobile phones, are simply so broad that dozens of companies have (allegedly) infringed them by accident.

Large companies like to focus on patent trolls, but they are just one manifestation of the patent system's flaws. Large companies have been stockpiling vast numbers of dubious patents themselves. Consider the contrast between Microsoft and Google. The United States Patent and Trademark Office has granted Microsoft more than 18,000 patents. In contrast, as of August, Google has been granted fewer than 800 patents. Microsoft is an innovative company, but few people would say that Microsoft has been 20 times as innovative as Google. Rather, Microsoft had a big head start in building the large legal bureaucracy required to file dozens of patent applications each week.

Building such a bureaucracy isn't just slow and expensive; it also requires a shift in corporate culture. The time and attention of a company's most productive engineers is a scarce and valuable resource. It takes a systematic campaign of reeducation to persuade those engineers that filling out patent paperwork is a higher priority than improving the company's products. Such a shift is much less costly for a mature company such as Microsoft, which has more money and engineers than it knows what to do with, than for a rapidly growing company such as Google over the last decade.

Microsoft now has so many software patents that it has become impossible to build a mobile-phone operating system without infringing some of them. Just 7 percent of consumers chose to buy phones running Microsoft's Windows Phone 7 operating system in the second quarter of 2011, compared with the 40 percent who chose Android phones. Yet manufacturers of Android phones have to pay royalties on Microsoft's patents—and they pass these costs on to consumers.

This represents a fundamental shift in the software industry. One of the industry's traditional strengths has been its low barriers to entry. Over and over again, tiny software companies such as Microsoft, Google, and Twitter have dislodged incumbents many times their size. But while a small team of brilliant engineers can build some of the world's best software, it has no hope of keeping up with big companies' rate of patent filings. Patents threaten to turn Silicon Valley into a place where new firms must develop large legal bureaucracies before they can challenge incumbent firms.

Ironically, one of the first people to recognize this problem was Microsoft's Bill Gates. Software was originally ineligible for patent protection under a pair of Supreme Court rulings from the 1970s, but that began to change after a third, more equivocal ruling in 1981. When the Patent Office began to interpret that ruling as a green light for software patents, Gates was alarmed. "If people had understood how patents would be granted when most of today's ideas were invented, and had taken out patents, the industry would be at a complete standstill today," Gates wrote in a 1991 internal memo. Microsoft was still relatively small, and Gates worried that "some large company will patent some obvious thing," which could give the company "a 17-year right to take as much of our profits as they want."

Gates began retooling Microsoft to take full advantage of software patents, but others were more idealistic. The database vendor Oracle emerged as a leader in the fight against software patents. "Oracle Corporation opposes the patentability of software. . . . Copyright protection for computer software is sufficient to preserve the rights of software developers," the company wrote in testimony at a Patent Office hearing in 1994. "Patent protection is excessively broad and enormously expensive." Other leading software companies, including Borland, Autodesk, and Adobe, echoed Oracle's arguments.

But the industry's protests went unheeded. The Patent Office approved more and more software patents. The final straw came in 1998, when the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit decided the case of *State Street Bank v. Signature Financial Group*. The ruling removed all meaningful limits on patenting software and appeared to flatly contradict the Supreme Court's precedents, which allow software patents only in limited circumstances.

Patent trolls are just one manifestation of the patent system's flaws.

But the Supreme Court didn't review the decision, and has not ruled on the patentability of software since.

It's impossible to know whether Bill Gates and Oracle CEO Larry Ellison still privately believe that patents are bad for the software industry. But the companies they led certainly aren't opposing software patents today. In a 2007 op-ed, Microsoft general counsel Brad Smith wrote that "protection for software patents and other intellectual property is essential to maintaining the incentives that encourage and underwrite technological breakthroughs." Oracle stopped lobbying against software patents years ago and is currently suing Google for infringing patents related to the Java programming language.

Yet grassroots opposition to software patents is undiminished. In August, investor Mark Cuban wrote that "every technology company I have is getting hit by patent lawsuits" and called for software patents to be abolished. This view is widely held among rank-and-file members of the software industry. The programmers and technologists who comment on websites like *Ars Technica* and *Slashdot* are overwhelmingly opposed to software patents, as are the entrepreneurs who read sites like *TechCrunch* and *Hacker News*.

There are at least three reasons to exclude software from patentability. First, software development is an individual, creative activity, more akin to writing a novel than designing a jet engine. A single programmer can inadvertently infringe dozens of software patents in the course of a single project. That means that virtually every organization with more than a handful of employees, including the Cato Institute and NATIONAL REVIEW, has an IT department producing potentially infringing software. We don't expect novelists to hire patent lawyers before publishing their work; nor should we expect computer programmers or their employers to have patent attorneys on retainer.

Second, software patents are especially prone to litigation. In their influential book *Patent Failure*, James Bessen and Michael Meurer document a startling rise in patent-litigation costs during the 1990s. Much of the rise is attributable to software patents, which are more than twice as likely to be litigated as other categories of patents.

Finally, software patents are unnecessary because software is already eligible for copyright protection. Not only is copyright law simpler and less expensive than patent law, it also doesn't have patent law's problems with inadvertent infringement. As long as programmers write their own code from scratch, they can be confident they aren't infringing others' copyrights.

Unfortunately, given the political influence of large companies with substantial patent portfolios, there's little hope of Congress's reversing the legalization of software patents by the courts. The best hope for reform is that the courts will correct their own mistake. The Supreme Court has never endorsed the lower courts' radical expansion of software patents. This means that, in principle, the Supreme Court could eliminate most software patents with a stroke of a pen, simply by reiterating that its 1981 ruling is still the law of the land, and that lower courts misinterpreted it during the 1990s.

That would be a controversial step, since it would invalidate thousands of patents worth billions of dollars. It would have been much better if the Supreme Court had overruled the Federal Circuit's disastrous *State Street* decision in 1998, before it could do any damage. But fixing a mistake late is better than not fixing it at all. **NR**

Innovations and Limitations

Where financial innovation went wrong, and how to set it right

BY ALLISON SCHRAGER

INNOVATION propels economies forward. It is why most Americans live long lives in relative comfort instead of toiling on a subsistence farm. Innovation usually refers to the creation of a new product or a new method of production. But it comes at a price; it is, by nature, unpredictable. When a new good comes to market, there is typically uncertainty regarding its true value. This may initially cause economic instability and dislocation.

But if the benefits of innovation are worth the cost, is financial innovation different from innovation in other fields? Lately, a popular perception has emerged that innovation coming from Silicon Valley is good and innovation from Wall Street is bad. But this view fails to appreciate how interconnected financial innovation is with innovations in other fields, and it ignores the fact that some inventions, even in finance, are better than others.

When financial innovation is successful, it channels capital to its most productive uses. A firm gets the capital it needs at a fair price. This is achieved in finance by identifying, pricing, and managing risk. Risk is a function of uncertainty; it may mean you do not know how much an asset you buy today will be worth tomorrow. It also involves liquidity; assets you can sell easily at any time provide more certainty and are more desirable. Financial innovation should come up with new ways for investors who desire less risk to hedge it, and for investors who want more risk to take it on. In exchange for taking on more risk, investors are rewarded with larger expected returns.

As the market for new financial products develops, the tradeoffs become clearer. That compels more investors to participate in financial markets. With more capital available, prices become lower and assets more liquid. That makes it easier and cheaper to start or expand a business and for governments to raise money for wars, infrastructure, or social programs.

Some recent financial innovations did not achieve these goals—quite the opposite. But the success of any innovation depends on three things. The first is how good the product is to begin with. Some financial products are poorly conceived or designed. Next is the appropriate use of the product: Is the product meant for a particular market or type of risk? And finally, the value of an innovation hinges on the competence of the person implementing it. Many of the products associated with the financial crisis failed on all these fronts. Some were created with the intent of obfuscating risk rather than making it more transparent. Other failed products were good ideas in theory but

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were misused and fed data that assumed housing prices would never fall.

But this does not mean that *all* recent financial innovation failed or that financial innovation poses such a grave danger that it must be stopped. Rather, the solution is better regulation. Like any other innovation, some new and poorly understood financial products have the potential to cause harm. But saying we don't need new financial products and should go back to the methods of the 1960s is as absurd as saying we've cured enough disease and don't need new medicine.

WHILE financial innovation's history goes back thousands of years, the post-war era is notable in several ways that changed finance. The first change was technological. Computing power made it possible to solve complex mathematical problems in an instant. The second was the emergence of finance as an academic discipline. Ideas that came from academia fed the financial industry. These factors spawned new ways to identify and hedge risk so that innovation became more about supplying capital to new, small firms and individuals than about supplying it to old, large firms and governments. The pace of innovation that occurred in finance amounts to a revolution in the field. But in the wake of the financial crisis, the question has been raised: Was it good for you? Clearly it was good for people in the financial industry. Many became very wealthy while wages for most Americans in other industries stagnated.

This is remarkable, because this is the very period in which finance became more democratic. It became much easier and cheaper for individuals and small businesses to get capital. Corporate finance—raising funds through equity (in which the investor buys a piece of a company) or issuing debt (through which an investor lends money to a company and is promised a series of payments)—had existed for centuries, but new ideas and technology meant it became much more important in this period. This made it much cheaper and easier for firms of all sizes to get capital to fund their growth. According to Thomas Philippon of New York University's Stern School of Business, starting in the 1970s, investment opportunities shifted from large, older firms that used their own cash to young, smaller firms that raised money by issuing debt or equity. He believes this explains most of the growth in the finance industry from the post-war period up until 2000.

Nonetheless, if democratization of finance was good for America, you'd expect it to help more than a handful of talented entrepreneurs. But rising income inequality does not mean America did not benefit from financial innovation. The root of growing income inequality in America goes much deeper than financial innovations; it has more to do with disparities in education. Also, while income stagnated, increased globalization and entrepreneurship provided a broader range of goods to American households at cheaper prices. This was made possible by financial innovations that made trade and international finance less risky and entrepreneurship cheaper.

Innovation is usually associated with rich, sophisticated investors. But a notable aspect of recent financial innovation is how much more accessible financial markets became. Investing in American and foreign companies became easier and safer for the average person because of the availability of mutual and index funds. Before, few people owned stock, and if they did, they usually had shares in five or fewer companies.

Robert Litan of the Brookings Institution and the Kauffman Foundation recently assessed the value of many post-war financial innovations. He argues that many—credit cards, money-market funds, mutual funds, and credit scoring—have been beneficial for the American economy, and not just for people who work in finance. These innovations were instrumental in expanding the average American's access to credit and capital markets. He also found that private equity and venture-capital markets were extremely important to the growth of the technology sector. Even though many useful financial innovations were not complex products that relied on rocket science, Litan notes, most financial derivatives, such as options, forward contracts, swaps, and even credit-default swaps, have been beneficial to the American economy by making capital cheaper and the market more liquid.

Financial derivatives are the most controversial aspect of financial innovation, because they are less comprehensible to the average person than a straightforward stock or bond. The market for derivatives took off in the early 1970s, when Fischer Black, Myron Scholes, and Robert Merton created and solved the Black-Scholes formula, which is a tractable way to price options. Soon after, Texas Instruments developed a calculator that used this formula to calculate that price in seconds. Derivatives had been traded for centuries before this, but they were priced using arbitrary strategies that differed from investor to investor. The ability to derive a common price made it possible for a vibrant and liquid market of derivatives to evolve. This not only made international trade and investment easier, because investors could hedge currency and foreign-asset risk, it also changed the nature of corporate finance. The derivatives market provided a new set of tools for firms to raise the capital they needed to be globally competitive.

Some have criticized derivatives models for relying on assumptions that are too simple and do not adequately account for very bad outcomes. But since the 1970s, models like Black-Scholes have proven to be quite flexible and robust under a range of different assumptions. Using these models requires knowing how to apply them and what assumptions to make. Using any financial model when investing is like going on a car trip with a road atlas. The map gives you a sense of where you are going and how your destination relates to other major landmarks. But your skill as a driver is still necessary to avoid accidents and unpredictable hazards, or to travel on a new road if your atlas is out of date. The existence of the road atlas means more people are on the road and not driving around aimlessly in circles. But it does not guarantee a perfectly safe journey.

Economists such as Amar Bhide argue that finance should go back to simple, local, bank-to-person lending, and that complex derivatives mainly cause harm to the economy. But it's important to remember that while derivatives have the potential to be misused, they also often make markets safer and more transparent by pricing risk and allowing investors to hedge it. Securitization, the process by which an individual's debt (such as a mortgage or student loan) is bundled together with other people's debt and sold in pieces, is one example of this. Josh Lerner and Peter Tufano, both of Harvard Business School, recently conducted a study to assess what America would have been like without post-war financial innovation. They found that the American economy benefited from simpler forms of securitization, increasing access to homeownership, especially among minorities. Up until 2006, securitization reduced bank foreclosures, because it made home lending less risky.

Whether securitization in all its forms made markets less risky is a harder question to answer. Taken to the extreme, securitization contributed to the housing bubble and caused the financial crisis. Securitization is supposed to spread small, manageable amounts of risk across many investors, making the economy safer. It didn't work out that way. What went wrong? It was a combination of misguided regulatory policy, incompetence, and greed.

BORROWING money and then investing it can be very profitable, but it is also very risky. That is why regulation exists dictating the amount of liquid assets a bank must hold to cover potential losses. This is known as a capital requirement, and the level of the requirement depends on how risky the bank's asset portfolio is. Less risk means a less onerous requirement. Large banks used securitization to lower their capital requirements to take on more risk. They did this by taking securitized housing assets and refashioning them into tranches of different risk levels. The least risky tranche received a AAA rating, meaning it was considered very low-risk but still offered a high return. Such a high-return and low-risk assessment depended on the assumption that national house prices would never fall. Banks were supposed to sell these products to investors, spreading the risk around to a safe level, but many banks kept these assets. According to Viral Acharya and Philipp Schnabl of the Stern School of Business, 50 percent of AAA asset-backed securities remained in the banking system. Keeping the AAA mortgage assets meant banks did not have to hold as much capital to comply with regulations. Through more engineering, some of these assets could even be held off balance sheet, which lowered the capital requirement further still. So when housing prices fell, and no one wanted to buy housing assets, many large banks had insufficient capital to cover their losses.

According to Franklin Allen and Glenn Yago's new book, *Financing the Future*, much of the abuse and negligence involving mortgage products was not true innovation. Often it involved complicated products with the sole intention of *creating* risk and avoiding regulation rather than identifying and hedging existing risk. They stress that financial innovation is supposed to make risk more transparent, not obfuscate it. What happened in the market for mortgage assets is a prime example of something that resembles innovation at its worst. But rather than vilify all financial innovation, we should focus on the lessons we can learn.

It is very difficult to know in advance which products will benefit society and which ones have the potential to blow up the economy. Simple securitization had a noble goal—to increase home ownership—but it was impossible to foresee in the early days how things might go wrong. Regulation can help, but too much regulation can also be self-defeating. In fact, when regulation is too strict, it encourages regulatory arbitrage, innovation for the sole purpose of skirting the rules and creating opacity.

Litan asks whether finance should be regulated the same way drugs are by the FDA: Should new products be required to demonstrate their value and safety before they're made available? The alternative is what we do now, letting the market decide which innovations are useful, with the government stepping in only if there is a clear danger.

In order to foster an environment where good and socially useful innovations are discovered, regulation must take the wait-and-see approach. Some of the best innovations were created to service a particular client need. Financial products that are not born from market demand—complex innovations for the sake of complexity—are often just marketing ploys that create opacity and provide little value. Regulation under the presumption of guilt would make the process of demand-driven innovation prohibitively slow. It takes years for the FDA to approve a drug. A similar timeline would undermine the competitiveness of financial firms, because clients can go elsewhere. As perilous as it may be, the only lab where new financial products can be tested is the market.

Lerner and Tufano explain that new financial products are adopted in stages. The early creators and buyers are often the most sophisticated and competent. Then, as the product is adopted by others, more naïve investors participate. They take the fact of a product's popularity as a substitute for adequate diligence. This tends to be the stage at which things go wrong. Transparency and accountability help get around this problem, and these must be the principles of successful regulation.

AS the global economy continues to evolve, new needs will emerge, requiring more innovation. It is impossible to predict what all these needs will be, but I can already see a few.

One is how to deal with retirement. A notable feature of our time is that people live longer and retire earlier. This leaves people with the complex financial task of funding their retirement. Up until the 1980s, employers took on this responsibility with defined-benefit pension plans. The existence of large pension funds changed wealth- and risk-management. In the last 30 years, the burden has been shifted to individuals, and their investment needs differ from those of a large institution. Everyone now must figure out how much he needs to save and how he should invest for a comfortable retirement. New financial products have the capacity to help us with these decisions (full disclosure: I am working on developing such a product).

Another area is the environment. Pollution, for example, occurs in part because individuals often do not pay for the negative externalities they impose on others. Innovation can be used to create a sophisticated market that forces people to pay for their impact on the environment. There is also a need to provide capital for the development of new, sustainable forms of energy. They will require a large, up-front, fixed investment but may not be profitable for many years.

The scope for future innovation, in any field, depends on a paradox. On one hand, innovation becomes more difficult over time, because the most obvious, simple discoveries—the wheel, double-entry bookkeeping—already have been made. At the same time, innovators today have it easier, because they stand on the shoulders of giants and have a tremendous base of knowledge at their disposal. If we are to remain competitive, future financial innovation must continue to evolve in response to our changing economic environment. That may or may not mean more complexity of the sort we saw in housing finance: Often the best innovations are simple and do not require any mathematical complexity at all, and even the most complex products must hold up to basic common sense. It is the responsibility of the innovators and regulators to ensure that they do. **NR**

The Bent Pin BY FLORENCE KING

Terminal Eloquence

This column was supposed to be about presidential personality problems. I should have started writing it sooner to give myself plenty of time but I was irresistibly distracted by a little book somebody sent me called *Famous Last Words*. This subject has been on my mind lately thanks to the rash of statements designed to shove the aging back into the womb. First there was "40 is the new 30," then came "50 is the new 40," next we had "60 is the new 50," and now they're saying "70 is the new 60."

In this as in every area of philosophical introspection, American optimism is the new bull. I have reason to believe that 75 is the new 90, so I put my column aside and embarked on an intensive course in the history of last words.

First the bad news: You need people around you to the very end to keep your last words from being innocuous, like the "Good morning" Calvin Coolidge said to a house painter before dying of a heart attack some time later while alone.

By contrast, your exit may be too crowded. Many last words are in dispute due to the bedside presence of people not known for listening well: Doctors, who never listen to anybody, especially their patients; nervous kinfolk, who listen *for* rather than *to* so they can decide what will need to be softened or deleted; and, for the dying V.I.P., one or more self-appointed spokesmen. This is how we ended up with two very different versions of the death of King George V in 1936. In one he says "How fares the dear old British Empire?" and in the other he snarls "Goddamn you!" to the doctor giving him an injection. The best way to make sure your last words are undisputed is to commit suicide in public like Hart Crane, who climbed on the rail of his cruise ship, shouted "Goodbye, everybody!" and jumped into the sea. Another way is to have both a death wish and your own TV show, like croc-hunter Steve Irwin, who announced "They rarely swim backwards," whereupon the sting ray he was following suddenly swam backwards and pierced him through the heart.

The most famous undisputed last words were spoken by someone who died not just suddenly but instantly, and in the presence of an adoring crowd. Isadora Duncan jumped nimbly into the topless Bugatti, flung her long scarf behind her, and cried out to her fans, "Farewell, my friends! I go to glory!" As the powerful racing car shot forward, the scarf wrapped around the rear wheel and snapped her neck like a breadstick. This is what romantics call "What a way to go!" and everyone else calls "What a way to go."

Having a clergyman present at the end is no doubt spiritually beneficial but it can have a chastening effect on last words. The speaker either uses his remaining strength on some very long prayers, or else takes on the even more exhausting burden of woulda-coulda-shoulda regret. Henry VIII left a cryptic example of this. His deathbed was ringed by Anglican bishops he himself had created, but supposedly his last words were "All is lost! Monks, monks, monks." Was he having second thoughts, or were the bishops?

Other theologically controversial figures make a point of beating off woulda-coulda-shoulda with a club. The most defensive last words? Charles Darwin: "I am not in the least afraid to die."

Some last words seem flat-out unbelievable. The winner in this category is Dominique Bouhours, a French grammarian, who, it is claimed, said: "Je vais ou je vas mourir, l'un et l'autre se dit ou se disent," which translates: "I am about to or I am going to die. Either expression is correct." Before we dismiss this out of hand, remember that it was a French chef who committed suicide because the shrimp were not delivered in time for his bisque. That's why I said "seem." The French, after all, are French.

I do contest Heinrich Heine's "God will pardon me, that's his line of work." It sounds too jauntily American for a German poet, unless the translator is to blame. The first law of last words is that they must sound like you. Tallulah Bankhead's "Codeine, bourbon" was pitch-perfect, as was Pavlova's "Get my swan costume ready." But it is Oscar Wilde, whose inability to sound like anyone except himself unfortunately extended to the witness stand, who takes first place in the last-words contest. Lying ill in a cheap French hotel in the company of his few remaining friends, he gestured weakly and said, "Either this wallpaper goes, or I do." According to the people with him, he was trying out last words, and had even ordered a bottle of expensive champagne so he could test "I am dying beyond my means." It was close, but he went with the wallpaper.

I sensed that the time had come to put my own last words in order. I knew what I wanted to say: "The English language was the love of my life; the rest were just fun and games." The question was whether modern medicine would let me say it. If last words are to be audible and coherent they need to be delivered before you have any tubes up your nose or down your throat. Otherwise the nurse gets the last word when she says, "Don't try to talk, honey."

I wondered if they could put it on the plastic bracelet where they put your D.O.B., your blood type, and your allergies. Maybe if I shortened it, cut the second part, and just kept "The English language was the love of my life" it would fit. Or maybe if I lied and told them I have no allergies it would leave more room for—

What was that rattling noise? It sounded as if a truck carrying railroad ties was driving past my building. In fact, it sounded like a railroad . . . like that scene in *A Letter to Three Wives* where Linda Darnell lives on the other side of the tracks in the most literal sense, so that when the train goes through, her whole house shakes and—

A book fell off the shelf and hit me on the head. It was an earthquake. We were having an earthquake and I was going to die in it.

"Oh, s**t!" **NR**

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The Long View BY ROB LONG

The Twitter stream of @youthcaptain, the next leader of North Korea . . .

Girls, help me out. If a guy is powerful and connected, does it matter if he's a little on the plump side? Asking for a friend. Please RT!

Hey! @gwynethpaltrow! I think ur very very pretty and would love to show you the lights of Rason City. Know that you're in a relationship. Doesn't have to be big thing. NSA fine with me.

Suggested to @dearleader that maybe he should think about making a big jobs speech like @barackobama. He asks why, I tell him about unemployment #s in DPRK. Looks at me strangely. #badfeelingaboutthis

Gotta say sad news from Tripoli. Wishing I was back partying with the @gaddafyboys #brosb4hos

Do my feet look fat in these boots? twitpic.com/fr55k0

Please stop DMing me, @saifelislamgaddafy. Seriously. No help here. Also: @dearleader would like the centrifuges back.

Sometimes you wear the jumpsuit, sometimes the jumpsuit wears you. Try to tell that to @dearleader and all I get is a nasty look. #fathersandsons

Hey! @kristenstewart! Am shooting a film here in @therealkorea and would love to have you in the cast! Can pay you in ginkgo! DM me!

@youthcaptain just checked into Quizno's Pyongyang #foursquare

@youthcaptain is Mayor of Quizno's Pyongyang!! #foursquare

Watching the Republican debate on the satellite. @dearleader likes @jonhuntsman but I think @rickperry won it hands down. The minute I say that, @dearleader sulks furious.

Wondering what selvedge is, and why I need my jeans to be selvedge. Answers, @jcrew?

Sometimes when @dearleader falls asleep he looks like Korean version of American movie star Bette Davis near the end. See for yourself twitpic.com/3z1r4

DM @saifelislamgaddafy I wish I could help. Be really cool to get together again. But @dearleader is insisting we get the missiles back. Please @reply me.

Wondering if @evalongoria has ever seen Mt. Kumgang in the moonlight. Well, if she hasn't, I'm inviting her! PLEASE RT!

Watching the after-debate spin with @dearleader. Consensus seems to be that @rickperry won. @dearleader now agrees. When I say it, he ignores me. When @wolfblitzer says it, it's true. Sigh.

Hey! @merylstreep! I think ur very very pretty and would love to show you the lights of Rason City. Know that you're in a relationship. Doesn't have to be big thing. NSA fine with me.

DPRK labor statistician no longer answers my DMs. Wondering if maybe I should have kept my mouth shut re: unemployment #s. Oh well.

Thing about kimchi is, when you think you've had enough, you've already had way way too much. #kimchibreath

In a meeting with some of @dearleader's advisers. Mentioned that it would be great to have our own DPRK version of "Morning Joe." Suggested self as "Joe." Wonder when exactly we Koreans lost our traditional politeness. #laughwithmenotatme

Hey! @michelebachmann! I think ur very very pretty and would love to show you the lights of Rason City. Know that you're in a relationship. Doesn't have to be big thing. NSA fine with me.

Is it weird that of all the characters on #entourage I really really identify with Turtle? #justbeinghonest

Don't get the appeal of @ronpaul. Seems like a crazy old man on a park bench. And I have some experience with those. Hint, hint @dearleader.

Hey! @joanrivers! I think ur very very pretty and would love to show you the lights of Rason City. Know that you're in a relationship. Doesn't have to be big thing. NSA fine with me.

So my new thing is to be very steampunk. Put on a whole outfit, walked into the TV room, and @dearleader looks at me and asks if we've restarted the DPRK space program. #cantwin

Does this look right to you? Wondering if this is just a rash or something more. Any MDs among my Tweeps?? twitpic.com/81fgdf

Hey! I'm going to be live tweeting this meeting of the People's Revolutionary Agricultural Progress Council! @reply me your questions for the group.

Hey! I'm not going to be live tweeting this meeting of the People's Revolutionary Agricultural Progress Council! Was not aware that I was violating security protocols. My mega bad.

Hey! @meredithvieira! I think ur very very pretty and would love to show you the lights of Rason City. Know that you're in a relationship. Doesn't have to be big thing. NSA fine with me.

Athwart BY JAMES LILEKS

Proper Aim

ASK any employer, and you'll hear the same lament: We'd love to hire people, but we need an inexplicable modification of the tax code exquisitely calibrated to provide a tiny incentive. Well, the president has intuited their needs, and brought forth a bill that will get the nation moving again. At first it was rather vague, and we wondered whether we'd have to pass it in order to know what's in it—a phrase that should be spoken only by a doctor in reference to a stool sample—but now we have some hard-core specifics. It goes something like this:

> Employer (hereafter, "enemy of the people") shall receive, or get, or be entitled to get by way of receiving, a 0.05 percent quarterly reduction in the adjusted tax rate for fiscal 2012 according to Schedule B pursuant to the 1983 amendments to Article 3, Subsection II, of the Tax Simplification Act of 1982, if Employer shall hire a person who has been unemployed for more than, but not less than, but equal to, in the sense of being the same as, nine months (averaged as calendrical units of 29 days each); "unemployment" shall be construed for purposes of this act to mean continuous sitting on the sofa, staring blankly at the wall, wishing that listening to those old Springsteen records helped, but man, it just doesn't.
>
> This shall not be construed as a replacement of the 1933 Fitz-Sturgeon Employers Credit Reduction Addition Act, or the 2001 revisions of the 2000 revisions of the 1993 Transparency in Government Act (Latin-language version). Offer may be withdrawn at any time. Void where prohibited. Ask your doctor if this bill is right for you.

That ought to do it. Then there's the Rick Perry approach: See that tax over there, sittin' on the fencepost? Okay, I'm going to shoot it with my eyes closed and it's gonna not be there afterwards. Here, hold my beer.

The Perry approach has two things going for it: simplicity, and effectiveness. When Obama ascended to the Oval Office, it was seen as the rise of the Smart People, the cool and credentialed intellects who could tweak and recalibrate the magnificent machinery of government. Inequity: down, somehow. Also sea levels. We would have a green economy; the evening news would run stories on high-school dropouts who now design software for wind farms or invent solar-powered tofu extruders.

The Perry approach: That's fine, but you see that car there? Runs on gas. Might want to find some. I hear we got a barrel or two 'round these parts.

If the Perry approach is gaining traction, it's because the administration seems unable to realize that its ideas do not work. You cannot Taser a corpse and expect it to get up and dance. You cannot help the pork-slaughtering industry if the EPA declares "squeals" to be an environmental toxin, and when the plant moves to Mexico it really doesn't help if you announce a tax break to convert the facility to an interactive museum about the struggles of abattoir unionists. Even if Matt Damon reads the narration for the multimedia exhibit. Granted, that's one job saved or created, but it's not really an even swap.

The jobs bill may do less of what didn't work before. It has the same fallacies as the stimulus: Prosperity magically happens when you take money from the kulaks and hoarders, and build high-speed trains for teachers. Sure, you may say it's an inefficacious gout of liquefied folly sloshed over the stony ground of a moribund economy, but at least it's paid for. More or less. Sort of. It'll cost $447 billion—not $448 billion, as some had feared—and the bulk of the money will come from curtailing itemized deductions, i.e., subsidies for the rich who donate a chair to the college library. The seat makes a whoopie-cushion razz when used by someone whose father wasn't an alum. The CBO says the charitable-deduction limitations wouldn't raise more than $300 billion or so, but perhaps the administration is counting on Warren Buffett settling with the IRS for the make-up money. Pass this bill!

The Rick Perry approach: That's a half-trillion dollars y'all could spend personally on things you like. So let's not do that.

Not to say the Perry approach is the only alternative. As we saw in the tea-party debate, Mitt Romney has a seven-part plan, which excites people who think PowerPoint presentations are always too dang short. Ron Paul has a plan that consists of yelling at paper money until it turns into shiny silver dimes, and so on. All the serious candidates are swinging axes at the status quo, not picking at gnats with tweezers. This is good. The tea party has changed the terms. A candidate can't say he'll keep driving the federal locomotive towards the cliff but promise he'll ease up on the throttle and lean out of the right side of the engine instead of the left. Now it's full stop, decouple half the cars, and scrap subsidies to develop sails to power the train. *For Davy Crockett's sake, get me some coal.* Perry may not be everyone's choice, but he's surely the anti-Obama. Simplicity of purpose, uncomplicated disdain for egghead solutions, good humor with a dash of mean-hombre swagger—when Perry tucks his chin as he listens to a question, it's like he's crafting a response, but also thinking how you'd dance if he shot at your feet—these qualities smother the professorial palaver of the administration with scorn and impatience.

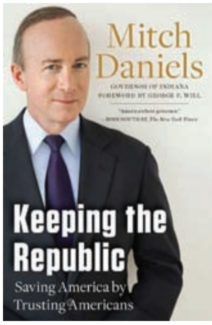
"Pass this bill" vs. "Get 'er done." **NR**

Mr. Lileks blogs at www.lileks.com.

RICH SCHMITT/ZUMA/NEWSCOM

The Missing Man

MATTHEW CONTINETTI



Keeping the Republic: Saving America by Trusting Americans, by Mitch Daniels (Sentinel, 252 pp., $26.95)

ONE of the most striking moments in this excellent book arrives on page 15, when Mitch Daniels notes that, in the early days of the American republic, currency often bore the Latin inscription *Exitus in dubio est*: "The outcome is in doubt." The detail is telling for two reasons. It shows how the Founders were immersed in a classical culture to which most contemporary Americans pay absolutely no attention. And it proves that the founding generation did not believe their experiment in self-government was a sure shot.

The infant nation was threatened. For America to survive, it would have to avoid further conflict with the dominant superpower, the British Empire, not to mention the meddling Spanish and French. Nor was the fear of foreign invasion the only thing that worried Jefferson, Madison, and Hamilton. The authors of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution harbored grave doubts about the ability of mankind to control its passions and govern through "reflection and choice" rather than "accident and force." American democracy, in their view, would be a test of American character—one not graded on a curve.

Mr. Continetti is opinion editor of The Weekly Standard *and author, most recently, of* The Persecution of Sarah Palin.

The problems on this test have appeared in different forms. We've waged war against slavery, fascism, Communism, and Islamism. We've fought inequality, corruption, trusts, and big government. Yet the substance has always been the same: In each case, America has defended itself against those Daniels calls the "Skeptics," who believe that "most human beings are not capable of disciplining their appetites, postponing gratification for the sake of the long term, or deciding for the common good, and therefore cannot be trusted with the ultimate political control of society." In each case, America has vindicated the founders' idea that human beings are born capable of self-rule.

What makes this book so compelling is the force with which Daniels argues that, despite our many successes, the outcome remains in doubt. The challenge of America's massive debt and unfunded liabilities may prove too hard for this generation to solve. "For the first time in my life," Daniels writes, "I am desperately alarmed about the condition and direction of the American republic": America faces a new enemy, the "Red Menace," just as dangerous as her previous foes. The debt we've accumulated through profligacy and wishful thinking is liable to wreak devastation around the world.

And generations of deficit spending have already had an effect beyond economics: They have inculcated an entitlement mentality in the citizenry. We've come to believe that government "owes" us things that were never the government's to deliver in the first place. A dependent people is an unfree people, and Daniels describes well the remarkable inversion that has occurred over the last several decades: "The traditional concept of public service has been stood on its head. With almost no one noticing, government workers rose from underpaid public servants to the position of a privileged elite." Interest groups, meanwhile, continue to attach themselves to Leviathan's belly and seek constantly to feed the beast. Optimism about the future has been eclipsed in the public mind by a sense of foreboding and national decline. World-famous columnists fantasize about America's becoming "China for a day."

Daniels's goal in writing this book is to "challenge the idea that a government of and by the people is incapable of dealing with such a crisis once it has gone this far." As evidence that democracies can face down the red menace, he offers his experience making state and federal government more efficient in Indiana and Washington, D.C. The book contains many wonderful stories of penny-pinching and belt-tightening. I chuckled when Daniels ordered an Indiana "efficiency crew" to put pennies on the tires of state vehicles to see whether the coins would still be there after one month—then got rid of the cars that hadn't moved.

I cheered when the Indiana legislature passed an automatic state refund by which unspent money was returned to taxpayers at the end of the fiscal year. If only other states followed Daniels's example! Governors across the country, as well as congressmen and bureaucrats active in transportation policy, also could learn a lot from his successful privatization of the Indiana Toll Road.

And yet as I read these passages I couldn't help feeling angry and betrayed. For the structure, tone, and narrative of *Keeping the Republic* is exactly that which I have come to expect from books written by a major politician at the start of a great campaign. In this sort of book, the author devotes the first part to laying out the mess the country is in, the second part to a record of his achievements in dealing with smaller messes, and the final part to his prospective agenda for cleaning everything up.

The unwritten final sentence of such books is: "And that's why I'm running for president." But Daniels's is the exception. Because he announced last May that he wouldn't run for president, this otherwise wonderful story ends in something of an anticlimax. *Keeping the Republic* is a campaign book with no candidate.

Daniels had his reasons for not running: Family is more important than politics, and the Daniels family was against a presidential bid. Still, for those of us who remain more than a little disappointed in our options for president, the appearance of *Keeping the Republic* is nothing less than a provocation: Here, between two covers, is yet another reminder that the nation's most accomplished governor, with experience in the private sector as well as in state and federal government, a man with a sharp mind, a decent character, and knowledge of the drivers of our debt, voluntarily removed himself from contention for our highest office.

At this writing, no candidate has followed what one might call the "Daniels Model": calm, collected, straight-shooting, and self-deprecating analysis of the causes of and potential solutions to the gusher of spending coming from Washington. There's plenty of bluster, to be sure. There's more than enough red meat. There are even, if you look hard enough, policies to improve the economic outlook, reduce spending, and create jobs.

What the field still lacks, however, is a voice prepared to level with the country about the size of the debt and the tough decisions necessary to put America on a sustainable trajectory. Neither Paul Ryan nor Chris Christie answered the call. Rick Perry, to his credit, has been willing to speak provocatively about Social Security and Medicare. Michele Bachmann is implacable in her opposition to Obamacare. But, at any gathering of 2012 Republican presidential candidates, there is always a missing man: someone such as the governor of Indiana.

The Republican contenders are all decent people with impressive résumés. There's a fair chance one of them will be the next president. And—this is to their credit—most of them would be unwilling to accept the "social truce" Daniels proposes. As far back as May 2010, Daniels said that conservatives might have to declare a truce on such issues as abortion in order to unite the country in a fight against the red menace. As he puts it here, "It does not belittle at all the importance of the social issues to point out that, in terms of the survival of the American experiment, they do not rival the Red Menace and the related dangers we face from our overwhelming debt."

But is this really true? There are many people—millions of them, in fact—who believe that the human toll of 30-plus years of abortion on demand has been far more damaging to the American character and polity than spending too much money on health care for seniors. At a

IN THESE PHOTOGRAPHS, MY RIVAL

. . . grips a tapered wine glass, nearly drained,
Beneath a gold band and engagement gem;
Ham-fisted, left-hand fingers round the stem,
Forefinger lifted, fattened with the strain.
The symptoms of her sloe-eyed pose are pained,
Her lips pulled wide and reddened. Under them,
The edges of her V-dart collar hem
Conceal, almost, the goblet. Golden-veined
In theme, the lavish suite behind her speaks
Of debts and delegations fit for kings,
Troubadour orchestras, prime execution,
Absolute power and official leaks.
The velvet of its jetty panels sings
Of *coups d'état,* Rousseau and revolution.

And here, in this, she wears true blue, couture
In polished rayon, modernist in flair
And line; the padded shoulders—broad and square—
Fall through long arms, thigh-level, too obscure
For fair description—lowered in demure,
Meek relaxation. Glossed and dense, her hair
Falls to the bijou throat's transcendence, bare
Of ornament: off-parted, insecure.
She seems anatomy immune to force:
Before her, ceremony and applause,
Behind and after nothing, barren space.
Be gratified, but warned, Self: In due course,
These hues will clash and die, those classic jaws,
The tongue that teased for hours a lover's face.

But even death, her ghost, won't bring you ease.
Some cranny of the house, some corner room,
Will be conscripted as a waking tomb
In which her soul is stored and made to freeze
Or swell by disproportionate degrees:
Her wardrobe, willow china, her perfume,
Initialed stationery—each assume
Precedence to your flawed, impassioned flesh;
A mothball take on mystical allure
Where you will be the spider in a welt
Above her bookshelf, spinning out your mesh
In mortal coiling, cloistered and impure,
Your webbing clogged with pastry cloth and felt.

—JENNIFER REESER

Republican debate in August, Michele Bachmann got it exactly right when she pointed out that "you can get money wrong, but you can't get life wrong." To disarm unilaterally in the middle of a decades-old fight—a fight that has coincided, uncoincidentally, with Republican success at the polls—would be not only wrong but foolish.

Worse still: Such a move would deny conservatives the opportunity to draw a connection between the unmooring of moral principle and America's drift away from the ideas that animated the Founding.

Daniels concedes, for example, that "the breakdown of the traditional family over recent decades is a huge contributor to virtually every heartbreaking social pathology we face, and to economic difficulties." Then is it really far-fetched to assert that the redefinition of the family, the flight from individual responsibility, and the preference for immediate gratification over self-control may be related to government's inability to exercise fiscal restraint?

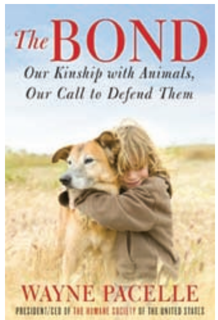
And might it not be the case that the demand for entitlements will persist so long as Americans believe the purpose of government is to provide them stuff? Convincing voters otherwise will require more than charts and graphs. It will take a moral argument that relies on standards of right and wrong applicable, in Lincoln's words, "to all men and all times": that human beings are created equal, that governments are formed to secure the rights we possess in the state of nature, among them the *right to life*, liberty, and . . . you know the rest.

So, a social truce will not do. To the contrary: Perhaps it's time to expand the definition of "social issues" to include fiscal and national-security matters that reflect the type of society in which we live. This is something Daniels clearly understands, since his call for the "social truce" hasn't diminished his pro-life stance.

One can hope that the governor's decision to abstain from the presidential race did not mark the end of his political career. Certainly every Republican now running would leap at the chance to have Gov. Mitch Daniels as his vice-presidential nominee. Think of how he'd crush Biden in debate. Think of all the good he could do in Washington. America still needs you, Mitch. *Exitus in dubio est.* NR

Bless the Beasts

CLAIRE BERLINSKI



The Bond: Our Kinship with Animals, Our Call to Defend Them, by Wayne Pacelle (William Morrow, 423 pp., $26.99)

SOME virtues are by accidents of history associated with utopianism, hostility to private property, anti-clericalism, and other core beliefs of the Left. I can scandalize a yoga instructor anywhere in the world by declaring myself an avid admirer of Margaret Thatcher, though I challenge you to read the yoga sutras and conclude from them that devotees must favor an overregulated financial sector.

Concern for the welfare and dignity of animals is such an issue, associated with nihilist leftists such as Peter Singer and local totalitarians who seek to regulate pets out of existence. But one need not believe that animals have been endowed with all the rights of humans to insist that they are more than a commodity that tastes good.

The conservative case against routine indifference to animal suffering has best been made by Matthew Scully in his 2002 book, *Dominion*. As I read it, the cat in my lap stretched out her paw and tenderly patted my cheek. "She would taste good," I thought, was not a morally serious answer to the question, "Should I eat her?" And if it was not, how could it be a serious answer to this question: Should I eat an animal that has been separated from its mother at birth; confined its whole life to a pen in which it could not lie down to sleep or even turn around; castrated without anesthetic; force-fed; maddened by pain, fear, and sensory deprivation; and often inadequately stunned before slaughter, and therefore boiled and dismembered while still conscious?

Wayne Pacelle, the president and CEO of the Humane Society, is not notably a philosophical conservative. Nor has his record at the Humane Society been unimpeachable; Michael Vick remains—despite his apologies and Pacelle's—as plausible a campaigner for his organization as O. J. Simpson would be for the National Domestic Violence Hotline. Pacelle has been too quick to praise animal shelters that are no more than killing machines. (There are better solutions: trapping, neutering, vaccinating, and releasing, for example.) He is not Scully's equal as a prose stylist; his writing is a bit schmaltzy. But many of the arguments in this book are compelling; some are new, and those that are not are cogently restated and worth restating.

Our instinct, he proposes, to care for animals is as much a part of our nature as our instinct to exploit them, and a better part of it. If Scully locates his argument, ultimately, in natural law and Christian theology, Pacelle appeals to the bond we instinctively feel with animals, one so ancient that to dismiss it as effete sentimentalism is surely to take the easy way out. This bond may be viewed through many modern prisms—genetic, evolutionary—but it has been observed from Aesop to Kipling. Children are born with a keen curiosity about animals; their horror at the thought that the animals are to be slaughtered must be trained out of them. It is well known that children who torture animals have something very wrong with them: They often grow up to practice this enthusiasm on humans.

I am happy to accept that animals are not humans and that the life of a human is more sacred than a cow's. But it requires tergiversations of the mind and soul to accept that animals are thus like plants and their lives no more sacred than a carrot's. We need not value animals *more* than children to ask, as Bentham did, whether they suffer, conclude that they do, and demand of ourselves that we limit the amount of suffering we impose upon them.

As Pacelle observes, it is not normal in human history to see animals as com-

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modities much like plasma TVs even as we live in ever greater intimacy with them as pets. It is perverse to share our beds with cats and dogs as millions more of them every year are gassed or injected with sodium pentobarbital in animal shelters—a grotesque euphemism, as is the word "euthanasia," for there is no shelter there, nor mercy in the killing of animals who are healthy, rambunctious, and young. They die terrified, and they die pointlessly: Very few are vicious, and most are capable of forming deep, affectionate bonds with humans. Revulsion at this is neither a left-wing sentiment nor a new one. "Though critics try to cast the animal-protection movement as something foreign, eccentric, and subversive," Pacelle writes, "this cause has long been a worthy and natural expression of the great Western moral tradition." William Wilberforce, he adds, is rightly remembered as a campaigner against cruelty to animals.

Pacelle's *tour d'horizon* of the development of our understanding of animal nature raises important points. The Cartesian and Skinnerian views of the animal mind are dead. Since the cognitive revolution began in the 1950s, psychologists have grudgingly come to accept the obvious: Animals have minds. (No one without a Ph.D. in psychology could have failed to see this in the first place.) What kind of minds? We do not precisely know, but surely they have them.

Do they suffer? Of course. Do they love? Everyone who has lived with a cat or a dog knows the intensity of their emotions. Not just the cats and dogs, either; the natural world is bursting with stories of animals who have formed loving bonds with humans—lions, tigers, elephants, all the way down the phylogenetic tree to octopi. What are we to make of the sight of a monster crocodile who slobbers his way toward the edge of his pool, snorting with satisfaction, in order to be chucked under his chin by his trainer? That is a reptile, after all, one whose ancestors were on the planet millions of years before humans appeared. The capacity for this behavior appears to be at least latent throughout the animal kingdom. Is it right to observe this and conclude that our behavior toward animals is morally unimportant, or, as Pacelle characterizes the arguments of critics, that "animal welfare is ultimately a trivial matter—the product of effete modern sensibilities?" No, I agree with Pacelle: Our treatment of animals is a measure of our character, and to mistreat an animal "is low, dishonorable, and an abuse of power that diminishes man and animal alike."

In any event, I've not yet noticed that anyone who cares for animals is diminished in his capacity to care for humans. To the contrary, in fact. Surely our compassion is not in such finite supply that we must measure it out in teaspoons lest there be none left.

The book ranges over a horror of commonplace cruelties, from puppy mills to sport hunting, but common sense suggests to me that of all these cruelties, industrial farming is both the worst and the one we least wish to think about. It is good, many conservatives will respond, because it is efficient: The world needs cheap food. Profits are good, and wealth is good—but most will allow that some industries are profitable and vile. That it is possible to make a fortune as a pornographer does not mean it is noble. That it is possible to become rich by making music that glorifies gang culture and cop-killing does not mean we ought to admire those who do so.

Still: It is immensely difficult to arrive at a position of personal decency untainted by contradictions or hypocrisy. Animals, when left to their own devices, often die of disease or eat one another. It is absurd—if only because *ought* implies *can*—to suggest we must do something about that. Perhaps here the principle should be Arthur Hugh Clough's: "Thou shalt not kill; but needst not strive / Officiously to keep alive."

Still: Many animals, my beloved cats included, are obligate carnivores. I feed them meat—yet I have rescued and liberated mice from their clutches. No *reason* for this, I know; just sentiment.

As for laboratory animals, I'm willing to leave the moral gray area as a gray area and concentrate on the obvious abuses. Only the obtuse would endorse torturing primates, for example, to do research that serves no higher purpose than to put out a paper no one will ever read establishing for the 50th time that primates don't seem to like being tortured. I'm more willing to accept sport hunting and medical research on certain animals, under limited circumstances, than I am factory farming. The way the animals are cared for is important, as is the point of the research. That the answers to these questions are difficult, and that our principles come into conflict, does not mean we should shrug at the questions or say that they do not exist.

All farming, not just the industrial production of meat, causes harm to animals. Plowing and harvesting cause immense suffering to field animals; as Barbara Kingsolver aptly put it, "I've watched enough harvests to know that cutting a wheat field amounts to more decapitated bunnies under the combine than you would believe." "Cruelty-free" is a marketing slogan, not a serious argument. Yet the fact that *some* animals must suffer is not an argument for absolute license. *We* are not obligate carnivores, and we have a great deal of choice about how much meat we eat and how we treat the animals we eat before we slaughter them, if to slaughter them we are determined. At least we might ask ourselves whether they were permitted to run; sleep unmolested; enjoy the company of their own kind; experience sunlight, daytime, and nighttime; and express the instincts with which they were endowed by their creator. We *choose* to impose the hell of factory farming upon them so that we can eat something that tastes good and costs less. The word for this, as Matthew Scully remarked, is gluttony; it is not a virtue.

Although it is not precisely the argument Pacelle makes, one seems to me implied: The more an animal has the capacity to love us, the more shameful it is to mistreat it. It is partly that dogs love and trust us so that makes our betrayal of them so shameful; it is morally relevant that no one has ever said, "He's loyal as a snake." Unlike Pacelle, I support comprehensive No Kill legislation of the kind promoted by Nathan Winograd, and hope to see it enacted in every American city.

As for factory farming, I doubt the practice can be changed until widespread moral revulsion takes hold. I encourage the stirring of conscience. To me, those cows and pigs in factory farms look a lot like the cats and dogs who have laid their heads on my chest.

Before you object, ask yourself: Are you *sure*? Really? Are you sure you are not twisting yourself into rhetorical knots to justify your impulse to do anything you please to creatures who cannot object? After all, if you come across a paper bag in the gutter and it seems something's in it and you don't know if it's alive, you don't kick it, do you? **NR**

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TUE/Nov. 15	San Juan	1:00PM	11:00PM	morning seminar late-night smoker
WED/Nov. 16	St. Thomas	8:00AM	5:00PM	morning/afternoon seminars evening cocktail reception "Night Owl" session
THU/Nov. 17	AT SEA			morning/afternoon seminars
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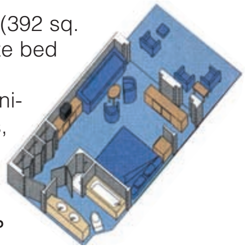

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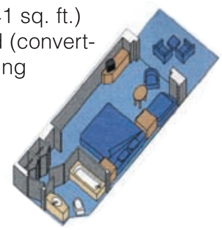

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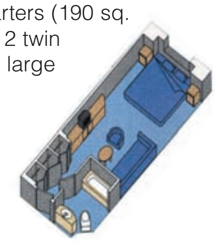

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CANCELLATION PENALTY SCHEDULE: *(cancellations must be received in writing by the date indicated):* PRIOR to *June 13, 2011 cancellation penalty is $100 per person; June 13 to August 12, 2011 cancellation penalty is $600 per person,* AFTER *August 12, 2011 cancellation penalty is 100% of cruise/package.*

CANCELLATION / MEDICAL INSURANCE is available and recommended for this cruise (and package). Costs are **Age 0–49: 7%** of total price; **Age 50–59: 8%** of total price; **Age 60–69: 9%** of total price; **Age 70+: 11%** of total price. The exact amount will appear on your cruise statement. Purchase will be immediate upon your acceptance and is non-refundable.

☐ **YES** I/we wish to purchase the Trip Cancellation & Medical Insurance coverage. Additions to the cruise package will increase my insurance premium.

☐ **NO** I/we are declining to purchase the Trip Cancellation & Medical Insurance coverage and understand that I/we will be subject to applicable cancellation penalties.

Important!

PASSPORT REQUIRED! Everyone cruising, including children, will be required to bring a valid passport. Current passports must be valid through May 20, 2012. Failure to do so will result in being denied boarding of the *Eurodam*. **RESPONSIBILITY:** Notice is hereby given that the cruise advertised herein, including all tickets, vouchers and coupons issued and all arrangements for transportation or conveyance or for hotel or lodging or for sightseeing/shore tour services are made by H20 Ltd. d/b/a The Cruise Authority (TCA) on behalf of National Review (NR), as agency for Holland America Line (HAL), and/or service providers and/or suppliers providing services necessary for operation of the tour upon the express condition that TCA shall not be liable for injury, acts of terrorism, acts of war, damage, loss, accident, delay or irregularity to any tour participant or his or her property that may result from any act or omission of any company, contractor or employee thereof providing services in connection with the tour, including but not limited to transportation, lodging, food and beverage, entertainment, sightseeing, luggage handling and tour guiding. Furthermore, TCA shall not be responsible for delays or costs incurred resulting from weather, road connections, breakdowns, acts of war-declared or undeclared, acts of terrorism, strikes, riots, acts of God, authority of law or other circumstances beyond its control. In the event that a participant be entitled to a refund of monies paid, TCA will not be liable in excess of amount paid. TCA reserves the right to decline any persons as a tour participant at any time. TCA shall not be held financially or otherwise responsible should NR cease to exist and this cruise not go forth as planned. In the event of the demise of NR, and guest(s) elect not to sail on this cruise, every effort will be put forth to refund as much of the payment as possible dependently solely on the cruise lines cancellation terms. TCA is not responsible for price increases or surcharges imposed by HAL and/or service providers. TCA is not responsible for breach of contract or any intentional or careless actions or omissions on the part of HAL and/or service providers, such as suppliers of tours or other services used or obtained on or at the time of the cruise or shore excursions, which result in any loss, damage, delay or injury to you or your travel companions or group members. TCA does not guarantee any of such suppliers rates, booking or reservations and TCA shall not be responsible for any social or labor unrest, mechanical or construction difficulties, diseases, local laws, climate conditions, acts of war-declared or undeclared, acts of terrorism, abnormal conditions or developments or any other actions, omissions or conditions outside of TCA's control. TCA, nor NR, shall be responsible for the accessibility, appearance, actions or decisions of those individuals promoted as guest speakers for this cruise. On behalf of those guests listed in this application, I authorize TCA/NR to use image(s) (video or photo) for purposes of promoting future NR cruise events.**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: I understand and accept the terms and conditions of booking this cruise package and acknowledge responsibility for myself and those sharing my accommodations:**

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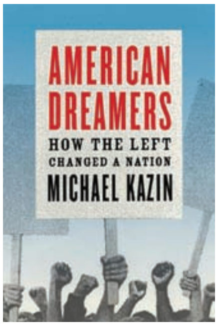
SIGNATURE OF GUEST #1 **DATE**

A Long Red Sunset

HARVEY KLEHR



American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation, by Michael Kazin (Knopf, 352 pp., $27.95)

ONE of the hardy staples of American history is the question of what happened to American socialism. As the only industrialized nation in the world in which avowedly socialist or Communist parties have never held power or even seriously contended for power, the U.S. has been a persistent thorn in the grand Marxist scenario that had the whole world progressing inevitably towards a workers' paradise. If capitalism was doomed, why were its gravediggers in the most successful capitalist nation on earth having so much trouble?

It was a question that worried even Marx and Engels, although they comforted themselves with the thought that, while slightly delayed, American socialism would imminently spring to life. But as the years went by and American socialism remained a pale shadow of its counterparts around the world, a minor academic industry sprang up to consider various explanations for "American exceptionalism." All kinds of factors have been trotted out, from German sociologist Werner Sombart's quip that "on the shoals of roast beef and apple pie, all socialistic utopias founder," to implausible claims that a repressive American police state had blocked radicalism's advance. Structural impediments to third parties, the nature of American immigration, the American frontier, and America's lack of a feudal past have also been mentioned. Since the collapse of Communism and the conversion of many of Europe's once proudly militant socialists to free markets and capitalism, a few people have had the temerity to wonder whether the absence of socialism in America marked, not its backwardness, but that of Europe.

Mr. Klehr is Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Politics and History at Emory University and the co-author of Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America.

A handful of American writers have even taken to proclaiming socialism's *victory* in the U.S. Michael Harrington, the late founder of Democratic Socialists of America, proclaimed the AFL-CIO America's disguised socialist vanguard. Michael Denning has claimed victory for the Left in the battle for American cultural hegemony. Now comes the latest celebratory salute, albeit a far more sophisticated and subtle one: Michael Kazin's *American Dreamers*.

The book has a number of virtues. Kazin, a distinguished historian, provides an entertaining journey through some of the fascinating byways of American radicalism, filled with rogues, idealists, and quacks. (Many of the leading radical figures, he agrees, were personally eccentric or dogmatic or illiberal.) His writing is fluid, avoids professional jargon, and is often witty. Unlike many of his colleagues in history, with whom he shares a left-wing orientation, Kazin is fair to conservative critics of radicalism.

Most important, the book's general thesis is largely accurate. Kazin admits that the Left has done far better at changing the moral culture than the political or economic system. When it has won political battles, it has done so by attaching itself to some wing of the American establishment. Where it has championed individual freedom, as in the abolitionist and feminist movements, it has succeeded in changing the country. But as individualism has triumphed, the Left's collectivist vision of economic equality and solidarity has faded. Even as the culture celebrates the liberated individual, unions have been decimated and the political and economic system has been left largely intact.

Many of the stories Kazin tells are familiar ones, about crusaders against class inequality (Thomas Skidmore), slavery (David Walker), and women's oppression (Fanny Wright). The two most successful 19th-century radicals were Edward Bellamy and Henry George. Bellamy's utopian novel, *Looking Backward*, eschewed notions of class struggle and was permeated with notions of the Social Gospel. George, whose single-tax program put the blame for America's problems on land speculators, appealed powerfully to Irish immigrants. Large-scale industrialization and increasingly violent labor confrontations in the 1880s set the stage for the growth of the first substantial radical parties. Radicals were weakened because of incessant fights between purists unwilling to compromise and "opportunists" willing to accept small, immediate gains. Oddly enough, Kazin never mentions Daniel De Leon, the leader of the Socialist Labor party, whose talents helped catapult the SLP into prominence and then ensured that it would wallow in sectarian isolation because of his ideological rigidity (he even expelled his own son from the party for disagreeing with his interpretation of Marx's theory of value).

Kazin's discussion of the Socialist

Party of America reiterates the political problems radicals faced. Its base was among midwestern Protestants, both skilled workers and tenant farmers, and New York Jewish garment workers; it had messianic visions, but conservative social views. Neither its radical wing nor its reformist wing could surmount these internal tensions. Oklahoma had the most politically successful Socialist party in the country before World War I, but the party was destroyed when the small farmers who formed its core decided to march on Washington to seize the government after the U.S. declared war. The Green Corn Rebellion (the marchers planned to subsist on corn en route) was quickly suppressed and socialism in Oklahoma became a distant memory.

In Milwaukee, socialists captured city hall and remained in power for decades. But the largely German brewery workers at the party's core were derided by other radicals as "sewer socialists" because of their inevitable need to focus on the mundane tasks of governing a city. Even the charismatic national leader of the Socialist party, Eugene Debs, was too smitten with Marxist notions of the inevitable collapse of capitalism to accept the idea that political reform was the best route to victory. And, in his romanticism, Debs embraced the Industrial Workers of the World (the Wobblies), whose bloodcurdling rhetoric thrilled those who hated capitalism but terrified more moderate socialists.

Another wing of the Socialist party also scorned moderation. Around the turn of the 20th century, a new cultural Left was emerging in America, centered in Greenwich Village and championing modernism in the arts, sexual freedom, and secularism. Its newspaper, *The Masses*—which was not, Kazin notes, much read by the masses—scorned compromise, much preferring the Wobblies to the boring sewer socialists.

The weakest chapter of *American Dreamers* is the one dealing with the Communist party. Kazin recognizes that the CPUSA was a tool of the Soviet Union, defended one of the worst tyrannies in human history, and included a substantial number of Soviet spies. Yet he maintains that its members fought on behalf of civil rights, labor organizing, and the jobless, and, except for the period of the Nazi-Soviet pact, against fascism. But anyone who allied himself with the Communists on any of these issues soon learned that their commitment to such causes lasted only so long as the needs of Soviet policy permitted it.

Kazin recognizes that what the CPUSA did achieve was largely accomplished by deception. Why, then, does he defend most of its members? Part of his ambivalence stems from the same familial connection to the Left that frequently hinders American historians trying to make sense of its fealty to a tyrannical foreign power: He admits that virtually all of his wife's family were CPUSA members. Their Communist activity, like that of thousands of other decent people, must have contributed to a better America. If their motives were noble, it must have been that *other* Communist party, the one staffed by Stalinoid drones operating out of a walled-off compound in lower Manhattan, that betrayed the dream of utopia.

Kazin's argument for the Communist impact on American culture is much more persuasive. Communist-influenced artists, writers, and photographers—including Woody Guthrie, Yip Harburg, John Steinbeck, and Dorothea Lange—created many of the iconic works of Depression-era America. But the particular radicalism of their works has long since vanished from popular understanding. Kazin notes the revolutionary verses excoriating capitalism in Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land," but 99 percent of Americans who hear the song take it for a paean to American patriotism.

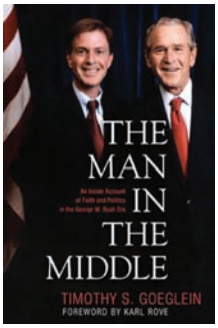
Kazin himself was a Sixties SDS radical who lived on an Oregon commune. He denounces the Maoists and Weathermen as "minute" movements, products of a "fatal delusion" about how to change America. Their major impact, he believes, was to tarnish the anti-war movement. Again, his personal nostalgia may have distorted his judgment. While only a small fraction of the New Left fully embraced revolutionary violence, a much larger faction either justified or apologized for it. And the culture of drugs, hatred of authority, and contempt for "bourgeois" values that the New Left popularized did far more damage to America than Kazin is willing to admit. The urban riots of the 1960s—he calls them "rebellions"—may have been immediately precipitated by acts of police brutality or anger at racism, but they became orgies of destruction, laying waste to vast stretches of American cities whose downtowns and businesses never recovered. The anti-war movement got the U.S. out of Vietnam, but evinced scant interest in the horrors that followed in Cambodia.

Kazin is not surprised by the failure of Pres. Barack Obama to meet the high expectations many on the left had for his administration. Obama had ties to community organizers spawned by the New Left, but the most important elements of the Left's political organization had disappeared into the Democratic party, and the truly radical independent left-wing groups have been marginalized. Left-wing writers such as Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein, and Howard Zinn sell millions of books, but their hatred of their own country (Chomsky), lack of an economic alternative (Klein), or simplistic "Manichean fable" (Zinn) have severely limited their political influence. The result has been the frustrating failure of the Left to realize most of its collectivist plans.

Having provided a thorough account of the American Left's failure to make socialism a viable political or economic force, Kazin abruptly switches gears in his conclusion. Even though he forthrightly admits that "moral capitalism" is far better than "authoritarian socialism," he stubbornly insists that we still need a utopian vision. A campaign for incremental change cannot inspire people. Without a passionate socialist Left, he fears, liberal change will not come easily. His problem is that far too many figures in the political movement he highlights in *American Dreamers* either embraced authoritarian socialism or had no compelling answers about how to avoid it. The socialist economic vision no longer is compelling to socialists; it is hard to understand how it will appeal to many Americans, who for more than two centuries have embraced private property, economic liberty, and political liberty. When American radicals—whether they were abolitionists, feminists, or gays—have agreed to those values, they have had an impact on American life. When they have started preaching collectivism, Americans have tuned them out. **NR**

Bush Reconsidered

QUIN HILLYER



The Man in the Middle: An Inside Account of Faith and Politics in the George W. Bush Era, by Timothy S. Goeglein (B&H, 241 pp., $19.99)

THE late administration of George W. Bush has found its Dr. Pangloss. In some respects, that might be a good thing.

Pangloss, of course, was the character in *Candide* who insisted against all contrary evidence that we live in "the best of all possible worlds." In this new memoir, Bush's longtime deputy director of public liaison, Tim Goeglein, paints his former boss as the best of all possible presidents. Indeed, his account of Bush sometimes borders on hagiography, as he gushes that in various ways Bush compares well historically with Margaret Thatcher, Winston Churchill, and even George Washington. He also makes the extravagant claim—ludicrous even for those of us who to this day defend the decisions to wage war in Afghanistan and Iraq and who credit Bush for the famous "surge" in the latter—that Bush was "one of our country's most effective wartime presidents ever." Goeglein marshals little evidence to bolster this extraordinary declaration.

To appreciate this book, a reader must move beyond this annoying over-enthusiasm and beyond numerous instances where stronger editing could have improved the final product. Moving beyond, however, is well worth doing. Goeglein's account is a convincing and necessary reminder that, on some fronts, Bush was a superbly dedicated and effective conservative president. Goeglein also provides a moving testament, on multiple fronts, to Bush's essential human decency. Most of all, the author frequently, and with great eloquence, makes an intellectual and moral case for full-throated conservatism "without prefix or suffix," and outlines an attractive vision for a conservative American "renaissance."

Mr. Hillyer is a senior fellow at the Center for Individual Freedom and a senior editor of The American Spectator.

Goeglein's job as coordinator of the administration's outreach to conservative-activist groups, combined with an earnest and eminently likable personality, made him a well-regarded professional friend for literally hundreds of right-thinking activists. It also meant that his well-publicized fall from grace in a plagiarism scandal sent waves of disbelief through the conservative-activist world. Goeglein forthrightly addresses his culpability, makes no excuses for his dishonesty—and, in an account almost chill-inducing, tells of the president's grace-filled response to the staffer's deep transgression. The Bush who emerges in this vignette, told at the book's very beginning, gives the reader reason to excuse the grateful Goeglein's overabundant praise for Bush's job performance. A soul redeemed can be forgiven for looking through rosy lenses at a mentor who served as a key vehicle for that redemption.

In retrospect, it is undeniable that George W. Bush was the most dedicated and policy-effective social-conservative president this nation has known. Goeglein ably recounts Bush's thoughtfully considered decision to block federal funding for any *new* embryonic-stem-cell research; his largely (but not entirely) realized commitment to aiding, rather than discriminating against, faith-based initiatives; his embrace of the cause of traditional marriage; his various protections of religious liberty and freedom of conscience; his dedication (often, but not always, unyielding) to appointing originalist judges; his life-saving assistance for health care in Africa; and his strong stands against abortion. The reader sees that the president's stances, contra the media image of a fundamentalist yahoo in the Oval Office, grew both from religious conviction *and* from careful analysis of law and empirical evidence.

The author also reminds us that Bush stood tall (and with great effectiveness) for missile defense and for lower taxes and (unsuccessfully but bravely) for reforming Social Security via a system of private accounts. Finally, *The Man in the Middle* makes an effective case, too little credited by conservatives, that the president's overall results in fighting terrorism were far more admirable than not. Goeglein doesn't admit that the president stumbled and bumbled frequently in managing the two wars half a world away; but the fact remains, as he recounts, that Saddam Hussein, Mullah Omar, and Moammar Qaddafi all were dangerous threats before Bush's efforts, but all were either off the scene or neutered by the time Bush left office.

None of this, however, gets to the heart of why this is a valuable book. Its best parts are not the testimonials to Bush, marred as they are by beatifying impulses. Instead, the choicest reading comes in the form of two charming accounts of Goeglein's fortuitous friendships with conservative giants Russell Kirk and William F. Buckley Jr., and in his learned and attractive expositions of the conservative intellectual tradition and its practical applications.

In one long sentence, Goeglein achieves a summation of the cause that, while hardly original in substance, is about as apt and concise as any we are likely to see:

> The essential nature of 21st-century American conservatism is a view that the federal government is too large and should be relimited; that governments like families should live within their budgets; that the market economy is the road to prosperity and is consistent with human nature; that our defense budget must be robust in defense of our liberty; that above all we need to preoccupy ourselves with the moral framework of our freedom; and that we need to preserve the values of Western civilization in the Greco-Roman but especially the Judeo-Christian traditions as the bulwark of virtue that nurtures freedom.

If somehow we manage to achieve all those ends in the American renaissance Tim Goeglein envisions, Dr. Pangloss's assessment of the world would become a happy reality. Goeglein certainly makes the reader want to try. **NR**

Film

Going Viral

ROSS DOUTHAT

SOME of the scariest material that Stephen King has ever written—scarier, in its way, than anything in *The Shining* or *'Salem's Lot* or *Pet Sematary*—is contained in the first hundred-odd pages of his apocalyptic magnum opus, *The Stand*. There are no ghouls or vampires in those pages: Just the vivid and remorseless account of how a deadly supervirus, once freed from its home in a military laboratory, swiftly joyrides its way across the continental United States, passing from cop to waitress, patient to doctor, parent to child, as the Centers for Disease Control and the military frantically struggle to catch up.

Marion Cotillard in Contagion

WARNER BROS.

I first read *The Stand* on a crowded summertime beach many years ago, and I remember looking up from the novel to stare with mounting paranoia at the bathers around me, suddenly seeing them only as 500 disease vectors baking in the sun.

In its most effective moments, Steven Soderbergh's star-studded thriller *Contagion* captures exactly this kind of nonsupernatural horror. The movie has the structure of a globalization message movie like *Babel* or *Syriana* or Soderbergh's own *Traffic*, with various big-name actors headlining intersecting stories that link bats in Hong Kong to blogs in San Francisco to public buses in Chicago. But *Contagion* is less sentimentalized and more ruthlessly efficient than its predecessors in the genre, and for most of its running time its only real message is this: Be Very Afraid, and stock up on Purell.

The movie opens with a coughing Gwyneth Paltrow, playing an American executive en route home from a casino opening in Hong Kong, and taking a layover in Chicago to reconnect with an old flame. Her cuckolded husband, embodied by Matt Damon, welcomes her back to suburban Minneapolis soon afterward, and a few short scenes later she's dead: Patient Zero in a pandemic that evokes SARS and H1N1, but proves far deadlier than both.

From Hong Kong, Minneapolis, and Chicago, the infection ripples outward across Asia and North America, killing millions within weeks. Borders are sealed, riots erupt, and the Internet goes wild with conspiracy theories. In Minneapolis, a CDC field operative (Kate Winslet) tries to manage the mounting chaos, throwing up makeshift hospitals in armories and schools. In Hong Kong, a World Health Organization official (Marion Cotillard) tries to trace the infection to its source. In Atlanta, the head of the CDC (Laurence Fishburne) tries to coordinate a national response, while one of his scientists (Jennifer Ehle) races to develop a vaccine. And from his well-trafficked Bay Area website, a sinister blogger (Jude Law) spreads claims of Big Pharma cover-ups and persuades the suffering to dose themselves with forsythia instead.

Back in Minnesota, Damon's character, now a widowed father, supplies the human center around which all of this action revolves. He's apparently immune to the superflu, but his teenage daughter may not be, and in his efforts to quarantine her in the heart of a crowded, increasingly lawless suburb, we see what a pandemic looks like on the ground level—from the ransacked supermarkets and the emptied ATMs to the rank fear that attaches to even a casual encounter with another human being.

Contagion is more like a ripped-from-the-headlines thriller than a Stephen King novel, so the audience senses that civilization probably isn't going to collapse completely. (The disease's infection rate, established early on, clearly isn't dire enough for that.) What becomes apparent as the story moves along, though, is that this movie is something more unusual as well: It's a pro-establishment thriller, in which not only scientists but also bureaucrats and federal agents and even the U.S. military (embodied by *Breaking Bad*'s Bryan Cranston, as the rear admiral working with the CDC) are the good guys, and instead of the usual run of sinister military-industrial-complex types the only villain is Law's rogue blogger, ranting about a corporate-government cover-up while he profits from his own misinformation.

I'm of two minds about this theme. It's always nice to see Hollywood debunk conspiracy theories rather than going all-in for the paranoid style, and there's something refreshing about a disaster movie in which human institutions and their leaders turn out to be up to the task at hand, and the fate of the world doesn't end up in the hands of a teenager or a crank scientist or a superhero (or some combination thereof).

On the other hand, the cartoonish contrast between *Contagion*'s blogger villain—the handsome Law is equipped with a snaggled front tooth and the last name Krumwiede, in case we didn't get the point—and the heroic bureaucrats of the CDC and the World Health Organization eventually feels absurd in its own right. By the time a Homeland Security agent is telling him, "If I could throw your computer in jail, I would"—a line that's clearly supposed to inspire cheers from the audience—*Contagion*'s pro-establishment bias has stopped seeming novel, and started seeming a little creepy instead.

"Nothing spreads like fear," runs the movie's tag line, but anyone who thinks that bloggers spread fear more effectively than the mainstream media has clearly never turned on cable television. I can believe that global civilization might be imperiled by the cross-breeding of a pig virus and a bat virus deep in the forests of East Asia. I'm less persuaded that it's imperiled by the blogosphere. **NR**

The Straggler

Catalog Shopper

JOHN DERBYSHIRE

We do ever more of our shopping online, I am told. The printed book is facing extinction, I am also told. The U.S. Postal Service is in dire straits, I am further told. Taken together, these facts imply, along of course with much else, that the big, printed, mail-delivered store catalog may soon be at one with Nineveh and Tyre. The consumer revolution launched by Richard Sears in 1888 will then have run its course. Let us pause, therefore, to cherish the printed shopping catalog while it is still with us.

The particular one I have just been cherishing is from Cabela's, the national chain of country-sports megastores (in which neither NATIONAL REVIEW nor I have any financial interest). Cabela's actually issues an assortment of special-interest catalogs: one for fly fishing, one for archery, one for camping, and so on. The one I have on my desk is none of those picayune sub-catalogs. It is the Spring 2011 Master Catalog: a quarto-size hardback book of 1,364 pages, weighing four and a half pounds, left behind by a visiting friend. What a feast for the idle browser!—at any rate, for the browser with an interest in the outdoors.

My own interest therein is mostly theoretical. In my schooldays, and for a few years thereafter, I hiked energetically up and down the mountains of Scotland and Wales, spent many a night in tents of various sizes and degrees of water resistance, and subsisted for many a day on canned rations, tea made from spring water boiled over a Primus stove, and Kendal Mint Cake. (That last item was an early type of energy bar whose wrapping proudly told of its having been taken up Mount Everest by Sir Edmund Hillary & Co. They must have used their ice picks to break the stuff up: As I remember, it had the consistency of granite.)

Adult Passive Sedentary Disorder (APSD) then set in, and it has been many long years since I last struck camp. I spend a night in the family treehouse now and then, weather permitting, and enjoy a very occasional pheasant shoot, but that's all of it. Yet still in memory I hear the call of the wild.

There are purely imaginative pleasures to be indulged, too. Could I survive alone for a time in the woods? How long a time? What would I need? What's available? How much does it cost? And here's the Cabela's catalog with the answers.

It's the "Camping/Backpacking" tab that I turn to first. What advances there have been! The march of progress is most noticeable in the art of finding your way around in the wild—or more to the point, in my experience, trying to avoid getting lost. The key equipment used to be a map, a map case (on the usefulness scale, wet maps are down there close to the bottom, just above chocolate teapots), and a Silva compass.

Maps are pretty much gone, other than some "trip planner" atlases and topographical software. Map cases are more thoroughly gone than that: Cabela's catalog doesn't even have an entry for "map case." This whole zone now belongs to the hand-held GPS gadget. Should a malicious enemy knock out our GPS satellites, the following few years will be punctuated by periodic news stories of ragged backpackers with foot-long beards emerging dazed from our wilderness areas like post-war Japanese soldiers from Philippine jungles. Oddly, though, the dear old Silva compass is still cataloged. Why? "Inexpensive insurance for those with high-tech navigational aids." Much use *that* will be without a map . . . and of course a map case.

The classic Primus stove fueled with paraffin (i.e. kerosene) is now an antique. Today's camp stoves are fed from nifty little gas cylinders. This is no loss at all. Considered simply as a gadget, the Primus stove was a masterpiece of design, but paraffin is an enemy of humanity, as Jerome K. Jerome explained in *Three Men in a Boat*:

> We had taken up an oil-stove once, but "never again." . . . I never saw such a thing as paraffine [*sic*] oil is to ooze. We kept it in the nose of the boat, and, from there, it oozed down to the rudder, impregnating the whole boat and everything in it on its way, and it oozed over the river, and saturated the scenery and spoilt the atmosphere. Sometimes a westerly oily wind blew, and at other times an easterly oily wind, and sometimes it blew a northerly oily wind, and maybe a southerly oily wind; but whether it came from the Arctic snows, or was raised in the waste of the desert sands, it came alike to us laden with the fragrance of paraffine oil.

Footwear is next on my interest list. Again we are two or three design and technology revolutions away from the army-surplus stiff black-leather boots of my own hiking days, with triple hobnails hammered into the leather soles for traction. Cabela's offers a whole gallery of footwear for the outdoorsperson: hunting boots, snake boots, logger boots, desert boots, and page upon endless page of "hikers." None of them have hobs; indeed, none have leather soles into which hobs could be nailed. Again, nothing to regret there. If, as advertised, wet feet have been eliminated from the hiker's life, I'd rate that a civilizational advance up there with the conquest of polio.

Activities less familiar to me—bow hunting, fishing, canoeing—have their own curious gadgets, garments, and gear. I did not know until browsing the Cabela's catalog that anglers need no longer rely on intuition and folklore to locate their prey: The FishEasy 350c portable sonar will "display fish targets at higher boat speeds." Nor need the modern Robin Hood depend on his unaided vision: The Ten Point crossbow comes equipped with a red-dot scope that "allows you to place the shot exactly where you want it."

Cabela's catalog is compelling enough to squeeze a dollar out of even the most reluctant consumer. I have treated myself to a camper's folding cot. ("Extreme comfort in seconds! 350-lb. weight capacity!") It will be handy for a quick nap in my attic study. Heck, I might even take it camping; though then I'll be needing a bivy tent, some hiking boots, one of those GPS things . . . **NR**

Happy Warrior

BY MARK STEYN

Flight

At the start of the summer, I attended a graduation ceremony in Vermont, for which a bigshot speaker had been flown up from New York. "Your world is changing so fast!" he told them, as is traditional on these occasions.

I couldn't see it myself. For one thing, no matter how fast our world changes, college education seems to get slower and slower, judging from the remarkably aged appearance of many of these Green Mountain "youth." But in a broader sense, precisely *what* is changing so fast? Their first car is no different from my first car. Which was no different from my grandfather's first car. To be sure, they've dispensed with the hand crank and rumble seat and installed a GPS and iPod dock, but essentially it runs on the same technology as a century back. Which are the faster-moving times? The age that invents the internal-combustion engine? Or the age that plugs a Justin Bieber download into it?

I make a similar argument in my new book, and I find it's the part that most annoys those folks otherwise supportive of my thesis. After all, they point out from various corners of the planet, without the Internet they'd never have heard of me. Fair enough—if your measure of societal progress is more efficient means of Steyn distribution. But I can't help feeling there ought to be more to it than that.

Imagine that Vermont class a century ago, the summer of 1911. The Model T had just gone into production a couple of years earlier, the age of manned flight had gotten off the ground. And they had their version of Justin Bieber downloads, too: Do you know Lady Gaga's smash hit "Telephone"? It was the latest thing for ten minutes a year or so back. But they had telephone songs at the turn of the 20th century, too! "Hello, Ma Baby!" "Hello, Central, Give Me Heaven." They had lots of songs about other exciting new inventions, too: There were telegraph numbers ("There's a Wireless Station Down in My Heart"), automobile numbers ("Come Away with Me, Lucille, in My Merry Oldsmobile"), aeroplane numbers ("Come, Josephine, in My Flying Machine"). There were so many inventions for singers to sing about, they had no time left to sing about the novelties of their own industry, in which the wax cylinder was about to be superseded by the 78-rpm phonograph record. In the years that that Vermont Class of 1911 had been in college, the Nickelodeon had led to a boom in what we would soon call motion pictures. And yet, what with all the other things going on—with electrification and the internal-combustion engine enabling man to conquer both night and distance, time and space, and other footling stuff—these exciting showbiz novelties were generally regarded as peripheral to progress. Instead of the be-all and end-all of it.

In the second decade of the 21st century, technological innovation means we're thrilled if Apple invents a device for downloading Katy Perry that's an eighth of an inch slimmer than the previous model. So today, instead of songs for the age of invention, we have inventions for an age of songs.

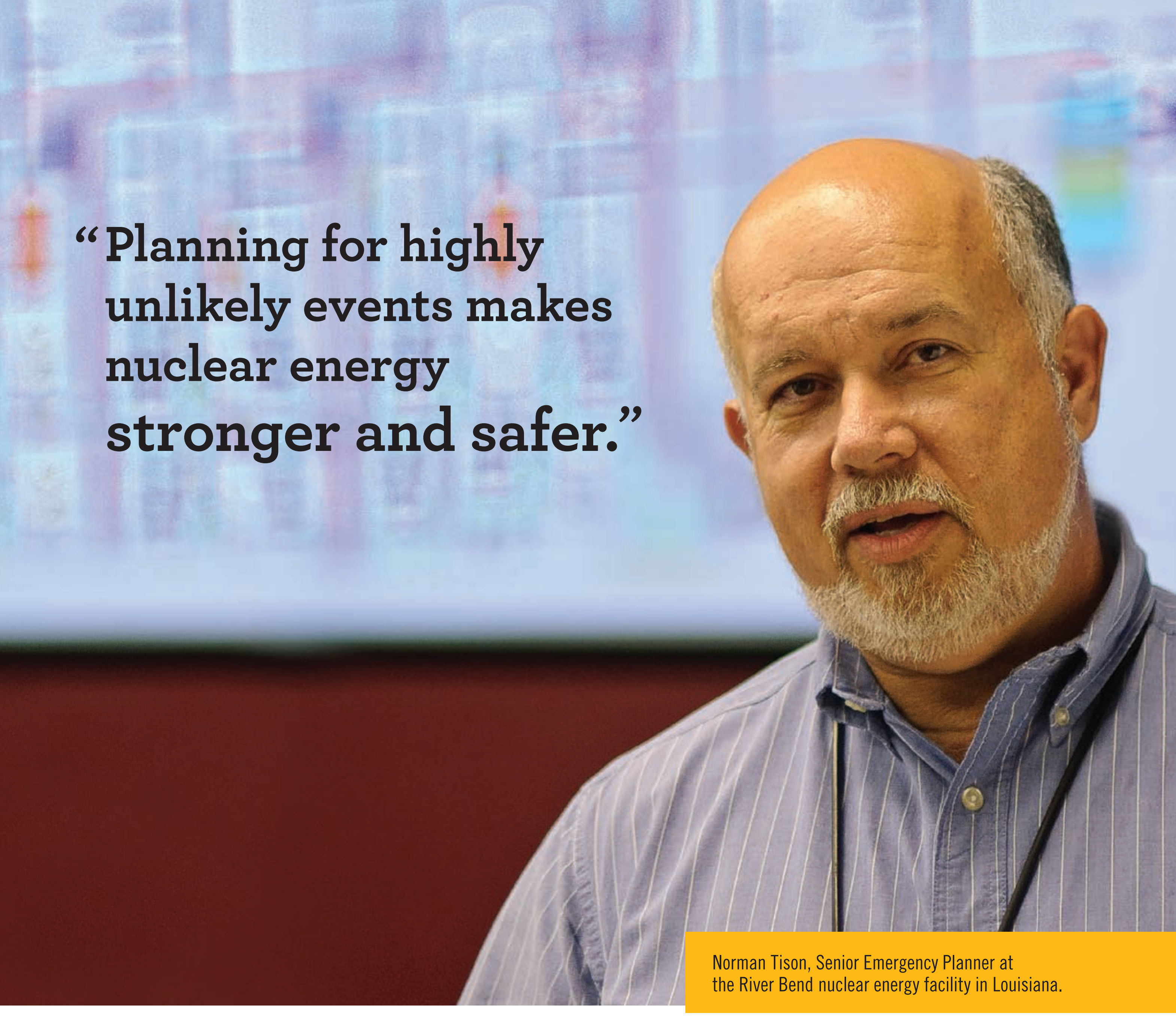
> Instead of songs for the age of invention, we have inventions for an age of songs.

Most of what we mean by progress in our "fast moving" world falls into a kind of James Bond gizmo category. Things that half a century back were issued to 007 by Q at the start of his mission are now available for $19.95 at Wal-Mart: A device no bigger than a cigarette lighter enables you to take top-secret photographs and then communicate directly with HQ as you're escaping through the air duct. Alas, most of us aren't secret agents, rappelling into the top-security Soviet facility and then skiing off the cliff and hoping the Union Jack parachute opens before the pursuing Russkies' machine-gun ski poles gun you down. It would be exciting to see Anthony Weiner doing that. But instead he uses his super-secret spy camera to photograph his private parts and Tweet them to coeds.

Great! What else can it do? We were told the toppling of Mubarak in Egypt was the "Facebook Revolution." It sounds so cool when you put it like that! But the old pharaoh's gone, and his generals are in charge, as they have been to one degree or another since 1952, and the only difference is that this time round they've reached a modus vivendi with the Muslim Brotherhood on various issues from storming the Zionist embassy to female genital mutilation. A new Facebook on old-school clitoridectomy: That's cutting edge, for sure.

In my book, I take an H. G. Wells time traveler, propel him forward from his home in 1890 to 1950, and then again from 1950 to our time. He would conclude, fairly rapidly, that the first half of the 20th century was the "fast moving" bit. Air travel went from Wilbur and Orville to biplanes to flying boats to transatlantic jetliners in its first 50 years, and then for the next 50 it just sat there, like a commuter twin-prop parked off Gate 27B at LaGuardia waiting for the gate agent to turn up. Yet that graduation ceremony in Vermont caused me to wonder if we're not stuck in mid-century in a more profound sense: We have the attitudes not of the young capitalist who builds the assembly line for the mass-production automobile but of the elderly titan half a century later preoccupied with his memorial foundation to "effect social change worldwide." Indeed, in its attitude to both foreign policy and domestic priorities, America operates less like a nation-state prosecuting its interests and more like one of those non-profit foundations funding various unwatchable offerings on PBS. A great nation can coast for a while on the accumulated inheritance of a glorious past. But, as the Wright brothers could have explained, gliding doesn't really meet the definition of "fast moving." **NR**

Mr. Steyn blogs at SteynOnline. (www.steynonline.com).



Norman Tison, Senior Emergency Planner at the River Bend nuclear energy facility in Louisiana.

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