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Letters

Don't Forget Payroll Taxes

I was happily reading Arthur C. Brooks's article in the May 28 edition, agreeing all the way, until I hit the point at which he picks up what I will call the Rush Limbaugh line of argument on federal taxes: "In America today, the top 5 percent of earners pay 59 percent of federal income taxes while earning 35 percent of the income."

The math is, while technically correct, misleading. "Federal income taxes" do not include payroll taxes, which, despite the recent cut in them, still accounted for 40 percent of all federal revenue in 2010—just shy of the 42 percent that federal income taxes produced. Further, an employee earning up to $110,100 per year is paying payroll taxes on every dollar he earns, whereas deductions can be taken against federal income taxes. And after $110,100, payroll taxes disappear completely: A $220,200-per-year earner is paying payroll taxes on only half his income.

In addition, a $50,000-per-year worker is told that only half his payment for Social Security and Medicare counts. The other portion is called the employer's share. I would submit that the $50,000 earner would be earning more if his employer didn't have to pay these taxes, so the whole total should be counted toward his tax burden, but that wouldn't serve the "half the nation is on welfare" argument that conservatives seem to like so much.

I have never in my life voted for a Democrat. I cannot vote for a party that supports abortion, and I am disinclined to back a party that wants wholesale redistribution of wealth. But, sadly, I am becoming equally disinclined to side with folks who make arguments like this one.

Joe Hainthaler
Lancaster, Pa.

ARTHUR C. BROOKS REPLIES: It is quite correct that low-income earners pay payroll taxes, and it is true that they pay a higher percentage than the rich do, given that the system is capped and the tax is flat. The system was designed this way precisely because it was intended not as a pay-as-you-go arrangement, but rather as a forced-savings plan. The fact is, however, that Social Security and Medicare have become middle-class welfare programs, entailing large transfers to the median, middle-class retiree, as my American Enterprise Institute colleague Andrew Biggs has argued. This is one of the forces driving America in the direction of a European-style debt crisis.

We should not compare payroll taxes with federal income taxes, which are designed to pay not for private retirement, but for public goods. Today, according to the Heritage Foundation's William Beach and Patrick Tyrrell, 49.5 percent of non-dependent Americans pay no federal income tax. It is dangerous when half our citizens have effectively no "skin in the game" in paying for national defense, for our nation's infrastructure, or for programs for the truly needy. Two-thirds believe everybody should pay something in federal income taxes, according to the Tax Foundation. There is a tipping point between being a society of makers and being one of takers, beyond which, we rightly sense, our nation will no longer be the same.

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The Week

■ Why is Wisconsin like Eric Holder testifying before Congress? They both said, "I don't recall."

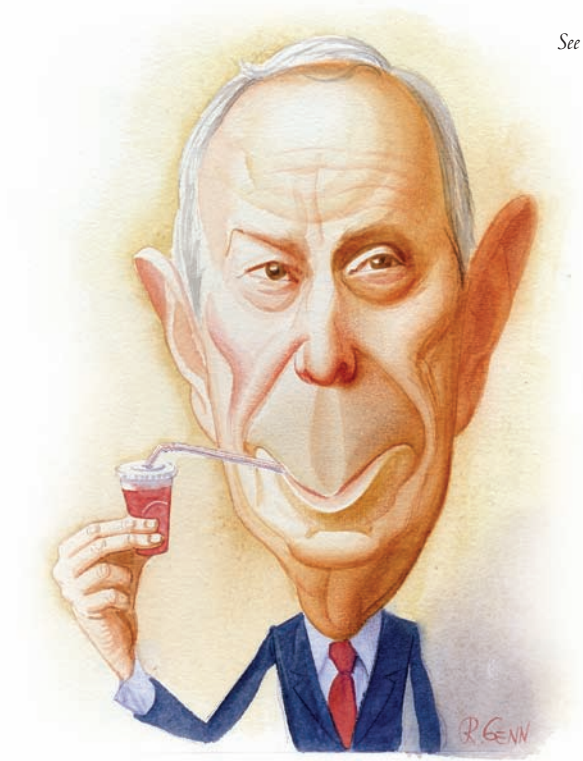
■ The May job numbers were even worse than April's, and came with a downward revision of those (and March's). The political implications were immediately obvious: The Obama administration cannot run on its record. The economic implications are alarming, unless you believe that the worst has already happened in Europe or that the U.S. will be unaffected by it. Perhaps it is time to try lower tax rates, lower spending, less regulation, and a predictable monetary policy.

■ Mitt Romney played to an empty house in California's Bay Area—in front of one, actually: the headquarters of Solyndra, the solar-energy company that got half a billion dollars in federal money, then went bankrupt. He hit it as an instance of waste, "the Taj Mahal of corporate headquarters." He hit it as an instance of corruption, Obama having funneled "taxpayer money . . . to an enterprise that was owned in large measure by his campaign contributors." But these were secondary defects, consequences of Solyndra's fatal flaw, and Romney hit that head-on. "I'm afraid the reason . . . that the recovery has been so tepid is that the president fails to understand the basic nature of free enterprise in America. He thinks that government-dominated decisions like this make America stronger. They make us weaker." Romney identified the guiding philosophy of the Obama administration, from bailouts to stimulus to health care. And that guiding philosophy points toward a bankruptcy more painful than Solyndra's.

■ "Obama longs for GOP rival like McCain," read the headline over an Associated Press report. The president told a group of his donors, "John McCain believed in climate change. John believed in campaign-finance reform. He believed in immigration reform. I mean, there were some areas where you saw some overlap. In this election, the Republican party has moved in a fundamentally different direction." Toward victory, let's hope.

■ Ann Davies was born into a wealthy family. She married Mitt Romney, who came from another wealthy family, and who became wealthier still over the course of their life together. She rides horses, especially in the sport known as dressage (which highlights precise, almost balletic movements, emphasizing the rider's control). Expect to hear more about it as the campaign unfolds. The *New York Times* is on the story ("In Rarefied Sport, a View of the Romneys' World"—not yours, sucker). Americans have had conflicted feelings about presidential wealth since George Washington. On the one hand, as John Adams wrote, "there is nothing . . . to which mankind bow down with more reverence than to great fortune." On the other hand, mankind (including Adams) resents great fortunes. Thanks to the royalties from his memoirs, Barack Obama is by now a millionaire.

See page 10.



ROMAN GENN

Mitt Romney could buy and sell him. Could the Kennedys, in their prime, have bought and sold Mitt Romney? Leave such considerations to the gimlet eye of envy, and ask, rather, What can these men do for their country?

■ *In the summertime when the weather is high / You can stretch right up and touch the sky* . . . The weather wasn't the only thing that was high at Punahou School in the Seventies, according to *Barack Obama: The Story*, by David Maraniss. Young Obama hung with a set called the Choom Gang, "choom" meaning to smoke marijuana—and that they did, in cars with the windows rolled up (so as not to waste any smoke), and in the Choom Wagon, a VW bus. Writes Maraniss: "When a joint was making the rounds, [Obama] often elbowed his way in, out of turn, shouted 'Intercepted!' and took an extra hit." If you were there it was funny, if you were high. We have no doubt that as Obama matured he put away childish things. But, in memory of those days, and to console poor David Axelrod, who has had a rough spring, cue that tinkly music one more time. *Sing along with us, dee dee dee dee dee* . . .

■ According to *Haaretz*, the *New York Times* of Israel, President Obama told a group of American Jewish leaders some interesting things. He "stressed he probably knows about Judaism more than any other president, because he read about it." He also said "he had so many Jewish friends in Chicago at the beginning of his political career that he was accused of

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being a puppet of the Israel lobby." He has also been accused of having a self-regard that knows no bounds. One of those charges has proven more enduring than the other.

■ Liberals—Senator Patrick Leahy (D., Vt.), assorted scribblers—are trying to exert pressure on Chief Justice John Roberts in the Obamacare case, warning him that he will be seen as a partisan if the Court strikes down its individual mandate. He will, they say, be labeled a right-wing activist who is threatening to undo the New Deal from the federal bench. He will know better: The issue in Obamacare is unprecedented, the federal government never having tried to make the purchase of a product compulsory without specific constitutional warrant, and therefore the Court has no need to overturn any precedents to rule that the legislation exceeds the legitimate powers of Congress. In any event, public confidence in the Court has survived previous fits of liberal rage at alleged conservative activism, and seems likely to do so in a case where all polls suggest that the public wants the Court to side with conservatives. We're sure that the chief justice is touched by liberals' newfound concern for his reputation. We're also pretty sure he will give their advice the brush-off it deserves.

■ Forty-three Catholic institutions filed twelve lawsuits against the Obama administration's attempt to force them, and nearly all other employers, to provide insurance that covers contraception, surgical sterilization, and abortion drugs. The editors of the *New York Times* describe the suits as a "dramatic stunt" and a "partisan play." This is not, needless to say, the *Times*'s usual reaction when groups that believe their rights have been violated seek a judicial determination of the question. Evidently we are to believe that the administrators of the University of Notre Dame, one of the plaintiffs, went from giving President Obama an honorary degree and a chance to address its students at commencement to being a willing cog in Karl Rove's machine. In the real world, there is a law called the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, and it requires the federal government, when it infringes on religious conscience, to act in the "least restrictive" manner needed to pursue a "compelling interest." Forcing employers to violate their consciences in order to effect a marginal increase in access to contraception cannot meet any fair reading of that test. Expect more hyperventilation from the *Times* as courts, and voters, reject the administration's diktat.

■ A federal court struck down a portion of the Defense of Marriage Act, in part by invoking an opportunistic and incoherent theory of federalism increasingly favored by proponents of same-sex marriage. The act defines marriage, for purposes of federal law, as the union of a man and a woman. A state may choose to recognize other types of union as marriages in its own law. But a state may not force taxpayers everywhere else to give the parties to same-sex unions the Social Security benefits federal law reserves to spouses. The court claims that the act "intrudes extensively" into a state domain. But all the federal government is doing is defining the terms of its own laws. The absurd result of the court's argument would be that the Constitution grants states a right to determine the flow of federal benefits to their citizens. Nobody can seriously believe that, and nobody will once this claim has finished being useful to the cause of redefining marriage.

■ If sleaziness, dishonesty, and egomania were criminal offenses, John Edwards would deserve a life sentence. But they are not. Neither is giving a lot of money to your mistress. Edwards walked in a trial that never should have happened. Prosecutors relied on a creative interpretation of campaign-finance law to argue that the woman with whom he had a daughter, the star-struck hanger-on Rielle Hunter, was a campaign expense, and therefore the Edwards donors who paid to keep her happy had, in effect, made donations to his campaign above the legal limit. But the money didn't go to his campaign and wasn't spent by his campaign. Edwards would have had an incentive to keep Hunter on board even if he hadn't been running for president—to avoid the obloquy of public exposure. The jury acquitted Edwards on one charge and deadlocked on the rest. "Not a criminal" is about the best thing anyone can say of John Edwards.

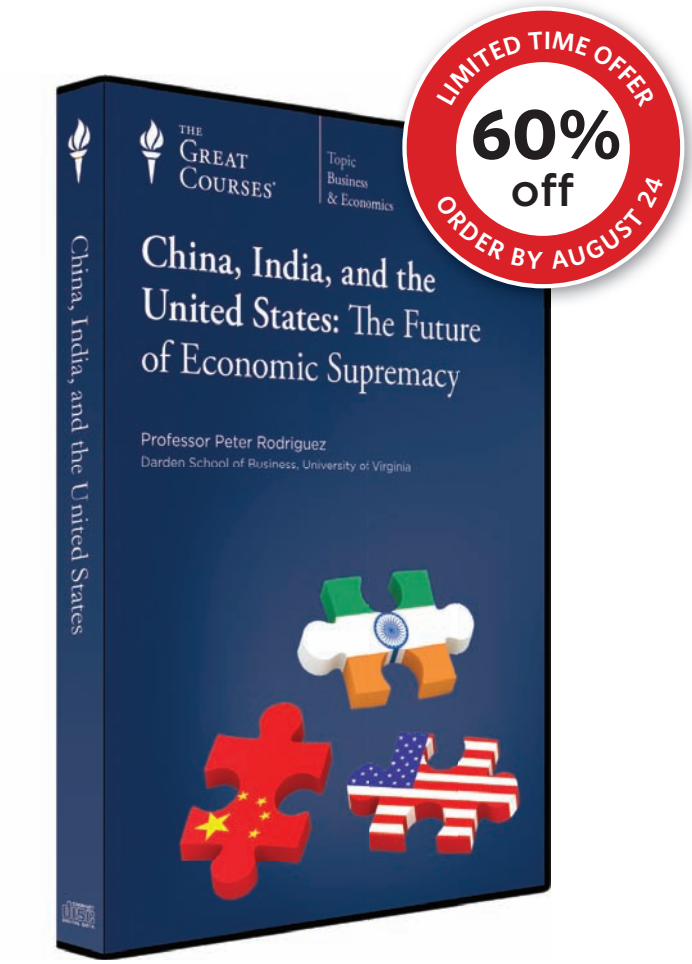


JERRY McJUNKIN/AP

■ Florida governor Rick Scott has launched an effort to identify and remove ineligible voters from the state's voter rolls. But Janet Napolitano's Homeland Security Department has refused to provide Florida access to federal databases that would aid its efforts—ignoring nine months of petitions—and Eric Holder's Justice Department has ordered the initiative halted, contending that it violates federal law, which prohibits voter-roll maintenance within 90 days of an election (Florida's primary is August 14), and discriminates against Hispanic voters. The Florida department of state's initial search, conducted in 2011, indicated that more than 180,000 registered voters may not be U.S. citizens. Since April, Florida officials have flagged 2,700 voters for removal. In addition to accusations of racism (58 percent of the flagged voters are Hispanic), state Democrats have toted out bathetic examples of "flaws" in the program, including the flagging of a 91-year-old World War II veteran. But those who receive letters need only supply valid proof of citizenship within 30 days—which several hundred people, including the veteran, have done. Some Floridians have even admitted to being ineligible or have requested removal from the rolls. So the program is working, though perhaps not to the advantage of the administration.

■ When Gallup began asking Americans in 1995 whether they identified as "pro-life" or "pro-choice," respondents called themselves "pro-choice" by a margin of 56 percent to 33 percent. Since then, despite handwringing from some quarters over the futility of the "culture wars," the country has been moving in a decidedly pro-life direction. According to the latest results released in late May, only 41 percent of Americans now identify as "pro-choice"—a record low—while 50 percent call themselves "pro-life." Just 25 percent believe that abortion should be "legal under any circumstances," which is the position held by President Obama and the Nancy Pelosi wing of the Democratic party. Obama might want to keep this number in mind the next time he's tempted to decry legislative attempts to restrict abortion as "extremism."

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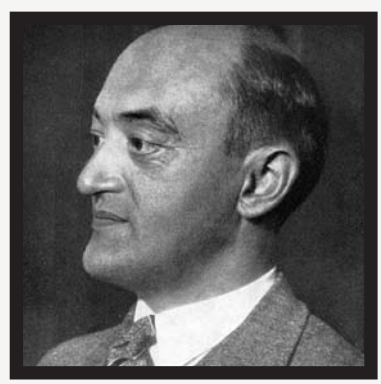
■ The House voted on a bill to prohibit abortionists from knowingly performing abortions to select for sex. The vast majority of Republicans voted for the bill, while the vast majority of Democrats voted against it. The White House weighed in with Obama's disapproval, on the specious ground that abortionists ("doctors," to use the White House term) would be subject to prosecution for not determining the motive behind an abortion. Even if successful, the bill would save few unborn children, but the administration's open opposition to it is nonetheless clarifying—as, in a different way, is its dissembling about its motives.

■ The Commerce Department is considering a petition to name Arab Americans a "minority group that is socially or economically disadvantaged" and thus eligible for special assistance from the Minority Business Development Agency. The petition is the handiwork of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, which has previously supported such causes as the Palestinian "right of return," the divestment movement against Israel, a boycott against Lowe's for canceling an ad on the show *All-American Muslim*, and censorship of the film *Aladdin*. The preferential treatment it seeks is unjustified: Arab Americans are quite successful in small

New Class Dismissed

Wisconsinites have gone to the polls and decided the political fate of Governor Scott Walker and perhaps, one could say with only modest exaggeration, the fate of the country as well. Walker's retention means that his reforms will be kept on the books, which in turn means that the stranglehold of public-sector unions will be broken. No one knows all of the national repercussions that will flow from Walker's win, but few doubt that they will be profound.

In all of the punditry about the aftermath of the Wisconsin recall, it's unlikely you'll hear much about Joseph Schumpeter. So let me remedy that here.



Joseph Schumpeter

Schumpeter is most famous for updating and popularizing the concept of "creative destruction" found in Marx's writing. The basic idea of this version of creative destruction, also known as Schumpeter's Gale, is that capitalism is constantly breaking down inefficient means of production and creating new and better ones. Creative destruction describes how candlemakers got replaced by light-bulb manufacturers. Creative destruction is why there's so much churn in the list of the top 50 companies. Firms grow big, are challenged by more innovative and nimble firms, and eventually die (or adapt). Schumpeter (and Marx) recognized that creative destruction generated enormous amounts of productivity and wealth.

So far, so good. But Schumpeter also had a gloomy side. He predicted that capitalism was doomed in the long run because the very wealth it created would produce a new class of workers who would undermine it from within. This new class of managers, lawyers, social workers, and intellectuals, despite benefiting enormously from the prosperity capitalism makes possible, would personify values hostile to capitalism. It would advocate policies of social democracy and technocracy, policies that would further empower the new class and enfeeble capitalism. Like a parasitic infection that wears down the host over time, the new class would ensure the demise of capitalism and the birth of corporatism (not socialism, as Marx had predicted).

Anyone looking at what has happened to Europe and the United States over the last few decades can acknowledge that Schumpeter was at least on to something. Just look at the role public-sector unions are playing in California. A diverse coalition of new-class activists has driven that state to the brink of oblivion. Or look at the relationship between Obama and Wall Street, GE, the insurance companies, and the auto industry.

What Schumpeter didn't fully appreciate was the capacity for democratic societies to self-correct. In Wisconsin, the first state to legalize public-sector unions and the intellectual birthplace of the corporatist-progressive project, the election results dealt the new class a terrible blow

That's the great flaw in Schumpeter's theory. While the new class may be perfectly happy to feed parasitically off the host until it dies, the host has a say in things, too. The tea parties represent an antibody counterstrike to the new-class infection. Of course, there's no guarantee that this immune response will succeed. One doesn't get the sense that the Europeans have as strong an immune system (which points to the huge importance of culture). Democracy has merely a capacity for self-correction. It also has a capacity to fail.

Still, the self-correcting is blowing strong in the Badger State, and that is cause for hope.

—JONAH GOLDBERG

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>
> – Johnnie E., Ellijay, Ga

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business, and their incomes are, on average, 10 to 20 percent higher than the national median. According to data from the Arab American Institute, 45 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 28 percent of Americans at large. Unless not being designated as a "disadvantaged group" constitutes a disadvantage in modern America, Arab Americans do not count as one.

■ Ted Cruz, the conservative running for the U.S. Senate in Texas, has just finished second in a nine-way primary. Finishing first was the lieutenant governor, David Dewhurst, with 45 percent of the vote. Cruz received 34 percent. Because the top man received less than 50 percent, the two leading candidates will compete in a run-off election, to be held on July 31. Dewhurst is running a campaign devoid of ideas, but he is the front-runner and is rich enough to finance his own ads. Cruz has the time and talent to catch him. If Texas Republicans choose Cruz, they will be promoting an advocate of conservative principles who could help their cause for many years to come.

■ Democrats have been crossing over to the Republican party for many years; traffic goes the other way less often. But Artur Davis is a particularly nice catch for the Republicans. Like Barack Obama, he is black, savvy, and a graduate of Harvard Law. (He is also a graduate of Harvard College.) He represented Alabama in the U.S. House for four terms. He was the first congressman outside Illinois, Obama's home state, to endorse Obama for president. Davis lost in a gubernatorial primary two years ago. Is there opportunism in his party switch? If so, that would be typical. But there also is principle: Davis has become increasingly disenchanted with the Democrats and their non-solutions to serious problems. There is bravery, too: Black Democrats, and white ones, can be very unkind to black Republicans. Probably the most famous Democrat-turned-Republican was a charter subscriber to National Review and the 40th president of the United States. Davis, who has written for National Review Online, may not go that far. But he has much to say and offer, and we look forward to this new chapter in his career.



ARTUR DAVIS: AP

■ Mayor Michael Bloomberg's latest initiative is to ban big sugary drinks, because he thinks New Yorkers are too big. "Obesity is a nationwide problem," said the mayor, "and all over the United States, public-health officials are wringing their hands, saying, 'Oh, this is terrible.' New York City is not about wringing your hands; it's about doing something." Under federalism, states and localities have latitude to do something about all manner of behavior (there are still dry counties here and there). But what regulations are sensible—especially in a city-state like New York? As he so often does, Bloomberg seeks to impose his personal notion of the good life, this time not even effectively (citizens with sweet teeth can buy multiple small drinks or doughnuts). The zeal of the busybody can be its own form of gluttony.



■ In January 2010, after the Fort Hood murders and the too-close-for-comfort failure of the Underwear Bomber, the Obama administration inaugurated a new procedure—drone strikes on al-Qaeda terrorists, approved by the president after he consults a "kill list" of potential targets. Drones have picked off terrorists (including al-Qaeda cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen) in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia. Obama approves each strike because "he's determined to keep the tether pretty short," as Thomas Donilon, his national-security adviser, put it. Good for him. After years of banging on the Bush administration for its cowboy policies, Obama has retained and expanded a vital tactic in a dark conflict. Is he micromanaging? Do drone strikes create enemies on the ground? Time will tell. But the commander-in-chief does not always have time to wait. President Obama has shouldered the responsibilities that Candidate Obama and his party could not, or would not, understand.

■ Things sure are different when they're trying to get their guy reelected. Remember the media outrage over Scooter Libby's leaking of information from a National Intelligence Estimate to journalist Judith Miller—which was not a leak of classified material, since President Bush authorized its disclosure? Libby turns out to be a piker compared with the Obama administration, which has thrown the NSA vault open for the *New York Times*. *Times* reporter David Sanger has thus obligingly written a book on the boss's brilliant, daring cyber war against the Iranians. (We refer to the Obama administration's boss, not Sanger's—although any confusion is understandable.) The Gray Lady published a mammoth account of Obama's authorization of the "Stuxnet" computer "worm," which may have set the Iranian nuclear program back by more than a year. The most interesting aspect of the account is that the cyber strike is yet another Bush national-security program that Obama maintained (even as he publicly criticized Bush's handling of Iran). Bush officials never leaked it. That was left to Obama, whose minions have compromised operational details. We wish we could be sure that the administration has given as much thought to its Iran strategy as to its campaign strategy.

■ After Egypt's parliamentary elections gave the Muslim Brothers and other Islamic extremists a majority, moderates hoped a presidential election would provide some checks and balances, however imperfect. When the votes were counted, though, Mohammed Morsi, the Brothers' candidate, and Ahmed Shafiq, a former prime minister and general from Hosni Mubarak's inner circle, had about a quarter of the vote apiece. Next week's run-off between them will decide what kind of country Egypt is going to be. For 30 years, Mubarak was an arbitrary ruler imposing a stultifying hand on his people, but his politics were at least stable and predictable. The

Did you ever consider that when people keep their balance, it is not by their intent? Instead, they are acting on the intent of a natural law we call gravity.

Extend that concept to all the laws of physics and realize that to be safe, people must act on the intent of all applicable laws of physics, as each law's intent dictates what people should do.

Decades ago the late Richard W. Wetherill identified a natural law that defines its intent for the behavior of the human race, and he called it the Law of Absolute Right. Lacking knowledge of that law caused the ancients and all following generations to live by their own intent, routinely causing their extinction.

The intent of nature's behavioral Law of Absolute Right is defined as rational and honest responses to all aspects of life.



Richard W. Wetherill
1906-1989

Thanks to Wetherill's insight, this generation has the opportunity to change their flawed thinking and behavior to the intent of an inviolable, self-enforcing natural law, calling for the same compliance as with the laws of physics.

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revolution his misrule did so much to foster has wrecked the economy, blighted tourism, and led to such widespread crime that the police no longer try to contain it. Now there are frightening uncertainties of the kind that carry seeds of violence: The military can call out the tanks; the Muslim Brothers can call out the street. The Brothers also dominate a parliamentary committee set up to draft the a constitution. The strange situation arises that Egypt is almost sure to choose a president before his powers have been defined. Conditions look ripe for an imminent test of strength, and the electoral process offers flimsy protection.

■ In Abbottabad, the town where Osama bin Laden hid out, one of bin Laden's neighbors was Shakil Afridi. A doctor with a surgical practice, Afridi ran a vaccination program that he used as a cover to establish the identity of bin Laden and his family by means of swabs and DNA. Three weeks after Navy SEALs had shot bin Laden dead, Afridi was arrested by Pakistani intelligence. Officials at all levels felt humiliated by the discovery that bin Laden had found shelter in Abbottabad, almost certainly with some connivance. Their intention could only have been to punish Afridi for presumed connections to the CIA. After a year's delay, Afridi was brought to trial before a four-man council of tribal elders who could obviously be relied on to pass whatever judgment the Pakistani authorities wanted. Afridi was thought to be facing charges of treason, but instead he was accused of links to an Islamist warlord. For this fiction, he was sentenced to 33 years in prison. Rumors about his supposed bad character then blackened him. The outraged U.S. Senate has voted to cut the symbolic sum of $33 million from aid to Pakistan. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta points out that Afridi was working against al-Qaeda, not Pakistan. The one very clear aspect of this murky case is that a monstrous injustice has been done—is being done—to Afridi.

■ In late May, a video surfaced on YouTube showing a Saudi Arabian woman refusing to leave a mall in Riyadh. "I'm staying and I want to know what you're going to do about it," she told an officer who had instructed her to go home. Her crime? Wearing nail polish. Although its grip has been slightly lightened in recent months, the law in Saudi Arabia still commands women to cover themselves with a full abaya and hide their hair when in public. This woman was having none of it: "It's none of your business if I wear nail polish," she shouted, adding, "You are not in charge of me." Unfortunately, the authorities in Riyadh are still very much in charge of her.

■ Greece will hold a second round of national elections in late June, in essence a referendum on whether to remain in the European Monetary Union or attempt an exit from the euro zone and a return to the drachma. If the election were being held in Germany, the Greek exit would stand an excellent chance of winning: Half of Germans want Greece gone. Since the first, inconclusive election on May 6, Greece's stock market has declined by 27 percent, its banks have suffered credit downgrades, and speculation has increased that it will leave the euro—voluntarily or otherwise. But there is no easy way out: With its government finances in disarray and its banking system on the verge of collapse, Greece is in no position to start from scratch with a new currency. At the same time, export-driven Germany is in no position to weather the economic disintegration of southern Europe and the bankruptcy of its trading partners there. A northern bailout of Europe's south would probably entail the loss of the last vestiges of national sovereignty in Greece, Spain, Portugal, and possibly Italy—an outcome not entirely abhorrent to the powers that be in Brussels. Come what may, the Greek tragedy has shown the dream of a semi-federal Europe to be a folly, and an expensive one.

■ Queen Elizabeth has spent 60 years on the throne, and the British partied for four days to celebrate it. Who says they're reserved? The country treated this Diamond Jubilee as a carnival of patriotism. Thousands of street parties were held. There were balloons, fireworks, bell-ringing, and beacons set on fire throughout England and the 16 other countries of which the Queen is head of state. Picked at random out of an immense and enthusiastic crowd for an interview on television, an unidentified woman with a Union Jack in her hand said, "This is who we are, this is what we do"; she spoke for millions. History was acknowledged by a flotilla of a thousand small boats on the Thames, led by the Queen, a person and a figurehead all in one, as she stood in the prow of an ornate and stately barge. Then, in acknowledgement of the present, with the entire royal family in attendance and Buckingham Palace as a backdrop, pop stars and other celebrities staged a huge concert. Addressing his mother at the end of it, Prince Charles thanked her "for making us proud to be British." Britain may have changed almost beyond recognition during the Queen's reign, but the Diamond Jubilee seems to show that the British remain the people they always were.

Britain may have changed almost beyond recognition during the Queen's reign, but the Diamond Jubilee seems to show that the British remain the people they always were.

■ Awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom to the late Jan Karski, a hero of the Polish resistance in World War II who later became a professor at Georgetown, was meant to honor a great man, show respect for a NATO ally, and woo Polish-American voters in Pennsylvania and Ohio. It all blew up when President Obama referred, in his remarks, to Karski's having been smuggled into a "Polish death camp." The death camps in Poland were built and run by Nazis; Polish

Catholics joined Polish Jews among their victims. This was no impromptu blunder: Obama was reading off a teleprompter, so numerous sets of eyes had seen his words. After matters were made worse by a mere expression of regret from a White House spokesman, Obama himself wrote a letter to the Polish government. It's either the jitters of an administration that fears its time is short, or the tone-deafness of one that is little interested in European affairs. Take your pick, and may we soon be spared the choice.

■ Why do women's haircuts cost more than men's? Well, women's hair tends to be longer, and is more likely to have been dyed, making it fragile; also, women actually care how it looks, and they know what things like conditioner are for. That's why, according to one stylist, it takes twice as long to cut a woman's hair as a man's. These simple truths are lost on New York City's gender police, who recently fined 200-odd barbershops and salons for charging women more than men. Such raids have been occurring sporadically since the mid-1990s, yet the pricing differential stubbornly persists. If forced to charge men and women the same, most shops would have to boost the men's price—which is why the law is enforced only now and then, when the relevant bureaucrats are feeling neglected. So barbershops and salons will continue to charge sensible prices, and to pay the occasional fine for violating liberal pieties.

■ An anthology of fiction and other writing by Middle Eastern women was to be published by the University of Texas. Of the 29 authors who signed on, 13 refused to participate when they learned that two of the contributors were Israeli. Kamran Scot Aghaie, the director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at UT, was now faced with a choice: Drop the two, or lose the 13 and with them the whole project. He refused to drop the two, and the book has been canceled. "As an academic institution, we cannot censor people for the country they are from," he said. "To do so is simply discrimination, and it's wrong." For those who worry that tolerance is honored at our universities more in the breach than the observance, this is good news.

■ An *Atlantic* blogger points to poll results showing that the average adult thinks 25 percent of America's population is gay. This is a considerable overestimate, perhaps by an order of magnitude; while definitions can be a bit fuzzy, most informed estimates of the gay population are somewhere in the low single digits. What accounts for the discrepancy? After all, the poll was not taken in San Francisco, or at a Judy Garland retrospective, or among frustrated Internet daters, but of a random sample of American adults. Some attribute it to television and movies; between gay characters in series and films and gay issues in the news, gay people do seem to be everywhere (especially if you believe the Hollywood convention that every opponent of the gay agenda is secretly gay himself). Yet there may be a simpler explanation. The *Atlantic* blogger and others have noted that Americans tend to overestimate the size of just about every minority population group—blacks, Hispanics, foreign-born, illegal aliens, and so forth. Perhaps what the poll results show is that we just aren't very good at math.

■ The unveiling of Green Lantern, a comic-book superhero, as gay is less path-breaking than it seems. There are about half a dozen different Green Lanterns, each with his own name and separate universe (though they occasionally get together in the fourth dimension). Each Green Lantern wears a magic ring that is the source of his power. So let's see: He wears a form-fitting suit with tights and fancy boots, plus a cape, and a fabulous piece of jewelry is the centerpiece of his outfit . . . you know, in retrospect, all the signs were there.



■ Which is more improbable, a no-hitter or a team that has played 8,019 games without ever pitching one? We'll leave it to the statisticians at Baseball Prospectus to answer that. Suffice it to say that under a waxing gibbous moon at Citi Field in Flushing, Queens, on the first day of June, the two improbabilities coincided as Johan Santana threw nine hitless innings, the first time in the half century of New York Mets baseball that the Amazins found themselves on the winning side of such a feat. True, the 33-year-old southpaw had help, most notably from batterymate Josh Thole, who called a good game, and from third-base umpire Adrian Johnson, who called a fair ball foul. Outfielder Mike Baxter kept a monster fly to left from dropping in. Meet the Mets, whose streak of no no-hitters, which began during the Kennedy administration, is finally broken. New York 8, St. Louis 0. Ya gotta believe.

■ The Nicaraguan contras, much lauded in the 1980s by this magazine and American conservatives for their struggle against Marxists, were habitually derided by the Left as fascists and authoritarians. Adolfo Calero Portocarrero's example belied such slander. He was the epitome of the men President Reagan called "the moral equal of our Founding Fathers"—a graduate of Notre Dame and Syracuse; a Coca-Cola executive who stood up to the Somoza dictatorship; then a contra military leader; then a politician and lawyer in a more democratic Nicaragua. Calero was one of the few contras well-known in the U.S., making him a favorite target for Lenin-loving liberals. At a speech Calero gave about Sandinista censorship at Northwestern, a professor charged on stage to assert that "fascists have no right to speak." National Review noted that these incidents evinced the "zeitgeist" of a time when men like Calero were castigated by much of this country because they fought and died for others' freedoms. But Calero was a true democrat, and a hero. R.I.P.

■ Paul Fussell was a distinguished historian, best known for his National Book Award–winning 1975 work *The Great War and Modern Memory.* He was renowned as a literary critic, and was elected, in 1977, a fellow of Britain's Royal Society of Literature. But he was also one of the most

insightful—and caustic—critics of American culture. His portrayal of the different strata of American society in his 1983 book *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System* was wince-inducingly accurate, but rather unsparing; his 1991 book *BAD: The Dumbing of America* was less penetrating, but more passionately argued. He had evidently come to relish the role of national curmudgeon. Dead at 88. R.I.P.

POLITICS

Walker, Unbowed

The year-long saga of the Wisconsin recall is, at long last, over, and Scott Walker is still standing. The low-key Republican governor has withstood a sustained (and expensive) onslaught from the forces of Big Labor and its allies on the left, an onslaught that featured everything from the coordinated cross-border retreat of intransigent Democratic lawmakers, to the occupation of the statehouse by a band of radicals, bongo drummers, and high-school truants, to ill-fated attempts to nullify Republican legislative majorities and pick off uncooperative judges. Walker's enemies did everything but release the kraken.

Yet he won. Throughout, Walker has stayed even-keeled, evincing, if not exactly cockiness, then something like the fatalism and serenity of an innocent man in the middle of a trial for his life. An equanimity, and a faith that his reforms would be embraced by Wisconsin voters, that turns out to have been fully warranted.

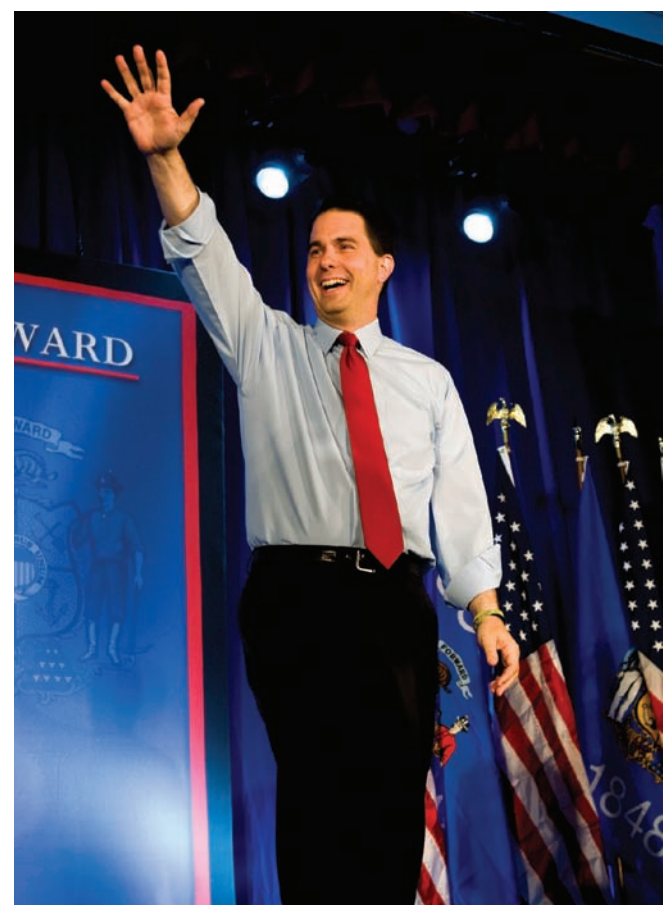
Walker won because his reform program is popular, and because it is working. The governor's approval numbers in Wisconsin hover around 50 percent—not bad for a man onto whom most Wisconsinites have at least once in the last year seen a Hitler mustache and Nazi regalia photoshopped. But more telling is the popularity of Walker's reforms. According to one recent *Reason*-Rupe poll, 72 percent of Wisconsinites favor the requirement that public-sector workers increase their pension contributions to 6 percent of their salaries. And 71 percent favor making government employees pay 12 percent instead of 6 percent of their health-care premiums.

Such commonsense measures, which put public-sector employees on a more even footing with the taxpayers who pay their salaries, have already led to over $1 billion in savings across the state, sparing public-sector workers from layoffs in the bargain. The reforms' success has also neutralized them as campaign issues for Walker's opponents, who were forced to turn away from the very *raison d'être* of the recall and emphasize instead a grab bag of non-issues (Walker's record on women's rights) and non-controversies (vague and discredited whispers about a pending Walker indictment and a secret college love child) in the final weeks of the race.

Walker won because he represented the taxpayer, while his opponent represented the groups whose livelihoods depend on bilking the taxpayer. Milwaukee mayor Tom Barrett served less as an alternative than as a vessel for Big Labor's unmoored wrath. He raised a mere $4 million on his own, while outside PACs did the heavy lifting—We Are Wisconsin raised more than $5.5 million in the last month alone, including seven-figure donations from AFSCME and the AFL-CIO, six-figure donations from the NEA and the AFT, and a mere $720 from its three (that's *three*) individual donors. The Left will complain that Walker outspent Barrett handily, but this is no sin, considering Walker also handily outraised Barrett in individual donations, about three-quarters of which were of less than $50. It was Walker's strength, after all, that convinced national Democrats to stop spending on a race they didn't think they could win.

Scott Walker saved his job by, above all, being the adult in the room. While Democrats in Washington seem to be relying on their belief that the U.S. government is "too big to fail" to justify a program of taxing and spending our way out of debt, the states have no such luxury. And so, across the country, in states red, blue, and purple, they have turned to men such as Scott Walker—and Chris Christie, and Mitch Daniels, and others—to close structural deficits, stabilize out-of-control spending, and break the death embrace between Big Labor and Big Government. In taking this toxic partnership on, in a state with a rich progressive history, no less, Walker became its biggest target. His enemies spent a year and $100 million, give or take, preparing to take their best shot at him. Then they missed. They missed because voters are starting to understand that governing through crisis requires someone willing to make unpopular choices, stand up to entrenched interests, and hold the line against loud and determined opposition.

Quite simply, Wisconsin voters realized that if they no longer had Scott Walker, they would have to invent him.



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A Real Race

Why President Obama is in trouble

BY RAMESH PONNURU

"We've gotta wake up," James Carville wrote in a May 31 fundraising e-mail. "Everywhere I go, people are telling me that 'Obama has it in the bag.' Newsflash: nothing is in the bag." He's right: Democrats have been overconfident about President Obama's chances this fall. Only slowly, if at all, is it dawning on them that Mitt Romney poses a serious challenge.

For months now, the polls have suggested that Obama, while not a sure loser, is in trouble. In the Real Clear Politics average of polls, the president has not cracked a 50 percent approval rating so far in 2012. In both its average and Pollster.com's, the candidates have since the first week of May been consistently less than three points apart.

There are several reasons Romney is giving Obama a tough race.

The primary campaign distorted perceptions of the general-election campaign. It seemed to take forever for Romney to win the Republican nomination, and his poll numbers sank during the long slog. (Except for his "negatives": the percentage of people who told pollsters they had an unfavorable impression of him. That number rose.) Plenty of coverage suggested that Romney was going to have trouble unifying the party. Republicans grew pessimistic.

But it should have been obvious that these perceptions were dependent on circumstances that were already changing. The primary highlighted Romney's deficiencies from the point of view of conservatives. In the general election, Republicans were never going to be choosing between Romney and Santorum or Gingrich. They were going to face a choice between Romney and a candidate who favors higher taxes, took health care farther down the road to government control, and will continue to appoint liberal judges as long as he can. On each of these issues Republicans strongly prefer Romney's position. That is why they quickly consolidated behind him once he wrapped up the nomination.

While Romney has his weaknesses as a candidate, the arduousness of the primary campaign made them look more fatal than they are. The timing of the elections worked against him. Jay Cost, a writer for *The Weekly Standard*, points out that winning the Florida primary in 2008 gave John McCain the momentum to do well on Super Tuesday. This time around, Romney won Florida, his poll numbers improved, and then . . . and then the next actual primary was held four weeks later, and Super Tuesday a week after that. Momentum dissipated.

Some of Romney's vulnerabilities in the primary won't matter much in the general election. His primary opponents had an incentive to use his record of flip-flops to portray him as unconservative and untrustworthy, but Obama can't simultaneously portray him as a right-wing extremist and a flip-flopper. All signs point to his deploying the right-wing-extremist attack, since it's scarier.

The country is closely divided. After the 2006 and 2008 elections, some analysts decided that the country now had a natural Democratic majority. In retrospect—and again, this should have been obvious at the time—those seem like abnormally Democratic years (as 2010 seems like an abnormally Republican one).

Even if 2008 had been a happy year for our nation, Republicans would have had to contend with the public's instinct that it was time for a change after eight years of their party in the White House. But there was also an economic crisis, which hit just weeks before the election. The Republican presidential nominee nonetheless won 46 percent of the vote. Republicans were always likely to do significantly better in 2012, simply because the odds of their facing similarly awful circumstances again were so low.

You can't make history twice. There's another reason the Republicans' 2008 performance was likely to represent a floor for the next election. Strong turnout among voters who were young, black, or both swelled Obama's totals. Both black voters and young white voters are likely to vote for Obama again, but probably not in the same numbers, because the excitement of voting in the first black president has faded.

Obama didn't change the map. Because his 2008 victory reached deep into "Republican territory"—that is, he carried seven states that had gone for George W. Bush twice—some analysts

ROMAN GENN

thought Obama had made assembling an Electoral College majority harder for the Republicans. But his sweep was a function of a national Democratic wave, not a permanent geographic realignment.

As Sean Trende points out in his book, *The Lost Majority*, Obama's winning coalition was actually narrower geographically than Bill Clinton's. Missouri, which was very recently a swing state, seems now to be a lost cause for the Democrats. And Obama's hold on the states he carried in 2008 is weak. Florida seems to have become more Republican over the last decade, too. The Democrats have written off Indiana, and are surely ruing their decision to hold their national convention in North Carolina, not least because its state Democratic party is immersed in scandal. Even some states long in the Democratic fold look iffy. Wisconsin, which has not voted for a Republican presidential candidate since 1984, seems to be in play. Minnesota last voted for a Republican in 1972, but its Democratic tilt (compared with the national electorate) declined a little in the 2008 election, and a solid Romney victory nationally could well sweep it in.

The economy hasn't cooperated. We haven't had a strong recovery, or one that most people trust will last. Democratic optimism about Obama has been tied not only to Romney's primary struggle but also to a few months of data suggesting the economy was picking up. But we have now had a few months of more recent, ominous data—and the continuing crisis in Europe, or heightened tension in the Middle East, could tip us back into recession.

The president's political talents are overrated. Obama has no instinctive feel for voters in the middle of the political spectrum, let alone those on the right. He has never had to develop one. Before 2008, he had run one statewide general-election campaign—against Alan Keyes, a fringe candidate from out of state. In 2008, he defeated Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primaries: a stunning achievement, but one that took place within a liberal universe. In the general election, the economic crisis delivered swing voters to him. George W. Bush, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton won competitive statewide elections before they ran for president, and had to fight for votes in their first presidential races, too. Obama's political history is closer to that of George H. W. Bush and Gerald Ford, both of whom lost their bids to keep office.

The president is showing his lack of connection to the American center as he flails about for a campaign theme. In the fall he suggested that inequality is the challenge of our time. But Americans aren't especially concerned about inequality per se—a dominant passion only for the Left. They worry much more about subpar growth. In recent weeks, Obama adviser David Plouffe has said that the president's campaign will try to portray Romney as a throwback to the 1950s. But most Americans do not interpret our nation's recent history in terms of liberation from the oppression of that decade, and do not fear that its mores are about to return and engulf us. Again, such emotions are widespread only on the left.

* * *

Romney is still being underestimated. Even James Carville, in a recent op-ed on his "wake up" theme, wrote, "Pathetic is a kind word for Romney and this campaign." But Romney is a disciplined and intelligent politician, and he may turn out to be a reassuring figure in a time of turbulence.

Every president who has won reelection since Andrew Jackson has gotten a higher percentage in his second election than in his first. This race might be tight until the end, or Romney might pull away for a big victory. But a big Obama win, in line with the historical pattern of reelected presidents, does not seem likely to repeat itself. **NR**

Obama has no instinctive feel for voters in the middle of the political spectrum, let alone those on the right. He has never had to develop one.

Conventional Unwisdom

North Carolina's Democratic party descends into chaos

BY JOHN HOOD

Raleigh, N.C.

'Well you crazy people, is this the Democratic party or what?" That was David Parker, the embattled chairman of the North Carolina Democratic party, announcing on May 12 that he would continue to lead the state's Democrats through the rest of the 2012 election cycle despite widespread criticism for his handling of a sexual-harassment scandal at party headquarters in Raleigh. Parker was using "crazy people" as a term of endearment

Mr. Hood is the president of the John Locke Foundation, a public-policy think tank in Raleigh, N.C., and the author, most recently, of Our Best Foot Forward.

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David Parker, chairman of the North Carolina Democratic party

for the hundreds of Democratic activists in the room. But many state and national Democrats—including those managing President Obama's reelection campaign—think Parker is nuts, that any Democrats who would vote to keep him in power are nuts, and that the decision to hold the Democratic national convention in North Carolina may prove to be catastrophically nuts.

Political parties have to hold their nominating conventions somewhere, and it makes sense to try to leverage them to political benefit in a battleground state. North Carolina certainly qualifies; in 2008, the Tar Heel State voted Democratic for president for the first time since 1976, albeit by only 14,000 votes out of 4.3 million cast. This year, the battle for North Carolina's 15 electoral votes will be fierce. If you average the results of the last three statewide polls, President Obama and Mitt Romney can each claim about 46 percent support.

The problem for Obama is that North Carolina's Democratic party is an utter mess. Most of its recent leaders are either in trouble with voters, in trouble with the law, or both. It would be in President Obama's political interest to stay as far away from the North Carolina party as he can, campaigning there via broadcast ads, social media, and appearances that do not include unpopular state Democrats. But with the national convention scheduled to begin on September 3 in Charlotte, the Obama campaign is finding it hard to disassociate itself completely from the host state's Democratic infrastructure.

To illustrate the scope of the problem, let's jump in the Wayback Machine and travel ten years into the past. In 2002, North Carolina Democrats could claim to have built one of the strongest records of electoral success in modern American politics. While other southern states were moving steadily toward the Republicans, not just in presidential elections but in key races down the ballot, North Carolina had continued to elect Democrats to most of the state's top jobs. Republicans had gotten just two governors elected in the past century—Jim Holshouser (1973–77) and Jim Martin (1985–93). Democrats had controlled both houses of the state legislature since Reconstruction, except for a brief period of GOP rule in the state house in the mid-1990s. In 2002, Democrat Mike Easley was in his second year as governor, after eight years as state attorney general. Democrat John Edwards was in the U.S. Senate. The lieutenant governor, Beverly Perdue, other statewide executive officers, the leadership of both legislative chambers—all were Democrats. The only major exception to the trend was longtime conservative U.S. senator Jesse Helms, and he was about to retire.

Here's what happened next: Governor Easley fell out of favor, immersed himself in scandal, ended his second term under a cloud of ethics violations, and then pled guilty to a felony. Senator Edwards—well, you know what he did. The Democratic speaker of the state house and majority whip of the state senate were indicted, convicted, and incarcerated on separate corruption charges. The lieutenant governor, Perdue, waged a successful campaign for governor in 2008 that happened to include a variety of illegal campaign contributions and expenditures. In the midst of a painful recession, in a state with one of the nation's highest unemployment rates, Perdue and the Democratic legislature enacted a massive tax increase in 2009. Voters punished them in 2010 by delivering both houses of the state legislature to Republicans. By early 2012, several of Perdue's aides and donors were either indicted on criminal charges or about to be, and she had become one of the most unpopular governors in the country.

In late January, Perdue announced that she wouldn't seek a second term—perhaps the only major decision she made as governor that actually boosted her party's prospects. But because she announced her retirement so late in the cycle, the Democratic primary for governor turned into a mad scramble. Lieutenant governor Walter Dalton ended up with the nomination, defeating former U.S. representative Bob Etheridge. But Dalton's coffers were depleted. And for the first time in North Carolina history, polls showed that a non-incumbent Republican, former Charlotte mayor Pat McCrory, would enter the governor's race as the front-runner.

Just when it looked like things couldn't get much worse for North Carolina Democrats, news broke that a young man, a former staffer at party headquarters, had made sexual-harassment charges against the party's executive director, Jay Parmley, who had previously run the state party in neighboring South Carolina. It further came to light that longtime party activist and attorney David Parker, who hired Parmley as executive director in 2011, had responded to the harassment allegations by keeping Parmley on the job and authorizing a late-2011 financial settlement with the staffer, whose grievance had expanded

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to include a claim of wrongful termination after Parmley fired him.

Party officials managed to keep the story under wraps for several months. Reporters heard rumors but couldn't confirm them. In early April, however, someone leaked internal party e-mails to the *Daily Caller*, which broke the story. North Carolina newspapers and broadcast stations quickly picked it up and fleshed out the details. It turned out that Governor Perdue and other prominent Democrats had long known about the sexual-harassment allegations. "Get over it," Perdue snapped to a reporter asking her about the settlement, exhibiting the touch for public relations that denied her a second term. Parmley resigned his job as executive director of the party, inducing a mixture of snorts and giggles by stridently protesting his innocence and blaming conservative bloggers for his demise.

Attention next turned to the future of David Parker. State and national Democrats urged him to resign. Obama-campaign operatives put out the word that if he didn't, their North Carolina operation would bypass the state party altogether rather than manage a separate but complementary effort alongside other Democratic campaigns, as originally planned. And DNC officials hoped that Parker would save them the trouble of disinviting him from the Charlotte convention.

But it was not to be. On April 19, Parker held a bizarre Raleigh press conference at which he defended both his handling of the case and Parmley himself. Allegations of Parmley's improper touching and comments simply reflected the fact that he was "a friendly guy," Parker said. He compared Parmley's contact with the male staffer to Mitt Romney's patting Rick Perry's shoulder at a GOP presidential debate. He even described his former executive director as "a close talker," prompting late-night comedians such as Comedy Central's Jon Stewart to riff on the party leader's "*Seinfeld* defense." While Democrats were appalled at Parker's press conference and annoyed at his refusal to submit an immediate resignation, they were at least comforted by his announcement that he would step aside in May and let the Democratic party's executive committee elect a new leader for the 2012 cycle.

As the election approached, however, it became clear that some Democratic activists were not convinced Parker needed to go. They blamed the Obama team and the governor for staging a power play to get control of the state party. Some in the Parker faction even suggested that the sexual-harassment claim had been a financial shakedown by a disgruntled staffer who had fabricated or exaggerated what occurred between the two men, or that the dispute went public only because greedy Democratic operatives wanted to overthrow Parker so they could get lucrative consulting contracts from a new leader. E-mail inboxes, comment threads, and Facebook pages filled up with conspiracy theories and personal attacks.

The morning of the May 12 vote, the new Democratic nominee for governor, Walter Dalton, appeared before the executive committee at its meeting in Greensboro and sought to bring the splintered North Carolina party together. "As you know, David is resigning as the chair of the party," Dalton said. "And he says he is committed—he's indicated he's committed to a smooth transition. I want you to know that this is a very selfless act." Shortly afterward, Parker offered another spirited defense of his conduct, left the room to applause, and began the 90-minute drive east to Raleigh to clean out his desk. The executive committee deliberated, voted, argued, voted again, and by late afternoon had decided to reject Parker's resignation. Parker headed back down Interstate 40, entered the room in triumph, and pledged to remain the Democratic chairman until Election Day. Dalton and his team were aghast.

Whether it was all a theatrical production, a spontaneous revolt against the party establishment, or some combination, I don't know. What I do know is that Democratic pros in North Carolina and beyond see Parker's retention as capping off a disastrous series of events. The host state of the national convention now has a barely functioning party organization, one that faces the prospect of losing both the governor's office and the legislature to the Republicans for the first time since General Sherman's troops were camped outside the state capital.

For its part, the Obama campaign is pretending that the North Carolina Democratic party doesn't exist. Wouldn't you? **NR**

Black Studies 101

A newcomer discovers what he's been missing

BY ROBERT VERBRUGGEN

Back in May, conservative writer Naomi Schaefer Riley managed to get herself fired from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. The *Chronicle* had run a cover story about black-studies Ph.D. students at Northwestern University (my alma mater, as it happens). Continuing with that theme, Riley wrote a blog post on the *Chronicle*'s website entitled "The Most Persuasive Case for Eliminating Black Studies? Just Read the Dissertations"—though as critics soon pointed out, she had not, in fact, read the dissertations.

Instead, she dismissed their topics as self-evidently absurd, much the way a judge might throw out a weak case before the trial starts. She briefly described the students' essays, including one about how black experiences are neglected in the natural-birth literature, one about how black conservatives are betraying the civil-rights movement, and one about how the federal government's subsidizing of single-family homes for blacks in the 1970s was secretly racist. Riley found these ideas to range from "irrelevant" to "liberal hackery": "What a collection of left-wing victimization claptrap." In the resulting outcry, thousands signed a petition to get Riley fired, and the *Chronicle* obliged.

As Riley later noted, the offending post totaled a mere 500 words, and was meant mostly as a conversation-starter. But was she right? Should black studies be eliminated?

It would be impossible to make a thorough, convincing case to that effect, and perhaps equally hard to make a case against it. There are hundreds of black-studies departments throughout the country, and they serve a variety of purposes, of varying merit. Then there is the question of whether the work of black-studies departments could or should take place in other fields. Further com-

plicating matters, research has found that students who study their own ethnicity are less likely to interact with members of other racial groups. If college administrators are serious about "diversity," they should see this as a problem, given that a clear majority of the field's students are themselves black. How should schools weigh this factor against the academic value of black studies?

But one thing is clear: Most black-studies departments could be much better than they are. Whatever the merits of the particular dissertations Riley criticized—I wasn't able to read them either, because they are not finished yet—she was correct in her two main assertions: There isn't much useful work coming out of black-studies departments, and the discipline is fixated on proving that everything and everyone is racist. Black studies is nominally a multidisciplinary field—it's supposed to be combining the methods of economics, sociology, criminology, history, literature, and other subjects, and using them to explain black life. Instead, for the most part, it's wallowing in its own obsessions.

When I first encountered Riley's claim that black studies is not producing valuable work, it rang true. I've been closely following academic debates over race and racism for about a decade, first as a college student and then as a journalist. I've read countless studies, I've reviewed books about race for National Review and other publications, and I spent a year-long journalism fellowship looking at race. Yet as I set out to write this piece, I struggled to think of a single black-studies professor whose academic work I paid attention to.

It's not as though I keep myself in some kind of conservative bubble or refuse to read black-studies work simply because it's black studies. In fact, I've read lots of liberal-leaning academic material on race, much of which I find convincing. Ian Ayres (economics and law), Devah Pager (sociology), and Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan (economics) have conducted experiments showing that racial bias still exists when Americans do things such as hail cabs, buy cars, and apply for jobs. Bruce Western (sociology) and Glenn C. Loury (economics) have written insightfully about the overrepresentation of black defendants in the criminal-justice system. Claude Steele (psychology) has made a valiant attempt, with debatable success, to show that standardized tests are racially biased. Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald (psychology) have developed a test that, in my opinion, establishes that most white people subconsciously harbor negative thoughts about blacks. Thomas J. Espenshade (sociology) has rigorously analyzed the effects of affirmative action.



John McWhorter

Not a black-studies professor in the bunch. If I wanted to cheat a little I could have counted the famed William Julius Wilson, who today is affiliated with the black-studies department at Harvard in addition to the sociology one. Otherwise, I have encountered black-studies professors primarily through the popular media—Harvard's Henry Louis Gates Jr. writes opinion articles on a regular basis and hosts TV shows in which he uses DNA tests to track people's ancestry; Princeton's Cornel West was in two of the *Matrix* movies, released a notoriously awful spoken-word album a few years back, and recently had a cameo on *30 Rock*.

So I made an effort to see what black studies has to offer. And in fairness, there is good work to be found. *The Condemnation of Blackness*, by Khalil Gibran Muhammad, director of the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, is an in-depth study of how social scientists analyzed racial crime statistics after the Civil War. (High crime rates among European immigrants were seen as a result of economic pressures; high crime rates among blacks were seen as a racial problem.) *The New Welfare Bureaucrats*, by Northwestern's Celeste Watkins-Hayes, is a fascinating account of how welfare caseworkers interact with their clients, and in particular of how the race and class of the caseworkers influence the decisions they make. The *Journal of Black Studies* and the *Journal of African American Studies* often include useful material; recent issues have featured an analysis of why black males drop out of two-year colleges, a look at how the media covered the court case that overturned anti-miscegenation laws, and an essay about what members of black sororities think about homosexuality. A conservative reader will find much to disagree with in these works. Some are weighed down by ridiculous jargon and unstated leftist assumptions, but there's no denying that they provide interesting perspectives and introduce new facts into the discussion.

But it's also not hard to see where Riley was coming from when she dismissed some black-studies work as irrelevant without reading it—when I went through journals looking for the best papers to read, I skipped over an awful lot without thinking twice, simply because they were about topics that almost no one cares about. To pick just one example, the ways in which Africans resisted white colonialism are

undoubtedly worthy of study, and I would have no objection if an essay mentioned that Zimbabweans came up with derogatory nicknames for whites—but I have no interest whatsoever in reading an entire paper called "Nicknaming as a Mode of Black Resistance: Reflections on Black Indigenous People's Nicknaming of Colonial White Farmers in Zimbabwe."

Then there's what Loury, in an online discussion of black studies with the linguist and right-of-center political commentator John McWhorter, called "this racism, racism, racism stuff." In *Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch*, a Northwestern black-studies scholar makes the case that Abercrombie—the famous maker of preppy, expensive clothing—is not merely a company that serves a primarily white customer base, but an oppressor of blacks. Also racist, according to various black-studies journals, are "limited government values," which are a way for whites to enact anti-black policies; the media's coverage of Venus and Serena Williams, which constitutes a form of racial "surveillance"; and race-neutral policies in public contracting, which are actually "colorblind racism."

The racism obsession extends beyond research and into teaching. Several years ago, McWhorter (who's black) went through the curricula and syllabi used in numerous black-studies departments, the central message of which he found to be that "racism and disadvantage are the most important things to note and study about being black." An astounding number of courses focus solely on how racism affects this or that corner of American life, and many of the curricula teach students the details of black radical politics without touching on black conservative thinkers. McWhorter suggested a curriculum that includes a more diverse set of perspectives—adding not just conservative ideas, but also analysis of non-political aspects of life, such as music.

McWhorter's goal is worth pursuing. Black studies is unlikely to be eliminated as an academic discipline, but black-studies scholars might be persuaded to broaden their field of inquiry. Their departments do not need more professors crying racism. They need professors who make a more thorough effort to study black life. **NR**

When the Good Cop Was Bad

What Ali Soufan does not teach us about the interrogation of Abu Zubaydah

BY MARC A. THIESSEN

After Barack Obama shut down the CIA's terrorist-interrogation program, the FBI retook the lead in the interrogation business. They have not had many subjects to work on in the last three years, since the Obama administration kills virtually every high-value terrorist it finds. But if Mitt Romney is elected this fall, chances are America will again be capturing and interrogating senior terrorist leaders—and the debate between the FBI's "rapport building" techniques and the CIA's "enhanced interrogation" techniques will come roaring back.

The most vocal advocate of the rapport-building approach has been former FBI agent Ali Soufan. In 2009, Soufan came to public attention when he testified before Congress from behind a black curtain to declare the CIA's techniques useless and say he could have extracted the same intelligence from al-Qaeda terrorists using the FBI's traditional, non-coercive methods. Since then, Soufan has traded the black curtain for a book deal and appearances on Colbert and Jon Stewart—but his story remains the same.

To support his claims, he regularly cites his purported success questioning a senior al-Qaeda facilitator named Abu Zubaydah in 2002. In a *Newsweek* story subtitled "How Ali Soufan, an FBI agent, got Abu Zubaydah to talk without torture," Soufan described how he used rapport-building techniques—nursing the wounds Zubaydah had sustained during his capture and debating Islamic theory with him—to win Zubaydah over and get him to provide actionable intelligence. "As the sessions continued," the *Newsweek* story recounted, "Soufan engaged Abu Zubaydah in long discussions about his world view, which included a tinge of socialism. After Abu Zubaydah railed one day about the influence of American imperialist corporations, he asked Soufan to get him a Coca-Cola—a request that prompted the two of them to laugh." In Soufan's telling, Zubaydah gave Soufan information that led to the arrest of American al-Qaeda operative Jose Padilla as he arrived in Chicago to carry out a terrorist attack. Then, just as Zubaydah was opening up to him, Soufan claims, the CIA took over his interrogation—with disastrous results.

In his new book, *Hard Measures*, Jose Rodriguez—the man who ran the CIA's interrogation program—breaks his silence and offers an inside account of the interrogation of Abu Zubaydah. It is starkly different from the one Soufan has been peddling for years.

While Rodriguez does not mention Soufan by name (referring to him simply as a "Muslim FBI agent"), he makes clear that Soufan has left out a lot of unflattering details about the FBI's interactions with Zubaydah. "Despite the current claims by former FBI agents that they had bonded with AZ [Abu Zubaydah] and were able to charm information out of him," Rodriguez writes, "the facts are quite different."

Far from opening up, Zubaydah stopped talking after repeated missteps by the Soufan-led interrogators. "AZ told CIA interrogators that he respected all of our team, especially the female chief of base (whom he called 'the Emira,' Arabic for 'princess' or 'leader') of the black site. He respected them all, he said, except for a Muslim FBI agent, who had offended him early on." That would be Soufan.

What had the Muslim agent done to anger Zubaydah? "The agent, it turned out, had tried to debate Islamic theory with AZ, who thought the agent had insufficient grounding in the facts," Rodriguez writes. He describes an interrogation session in which "the Bureau guys decided to try to 'recruit' AZ. In a meeting with the terrorist, the Arab-American agent told AZ, 'Don't pay attention to those CIA people . . . you work with me,' and he gave him a candy bar. AZ was offended that the agent would think that he could be bought for a Snickers bar."

Later, "the FBI man tried to use his Arab heritage as an opening to get AZ to talk, but it turned out to be counterproductive. 'You are the worst kind of Arab,' AZ told him, 'you are a traitor!'"

Mr. Thiessen is a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, a columnist for the Washington Post, *and the author of* Courting Disaster: How the CIA Kept America Safe and How Barack Obama Is Inviting the Next Attack.

Then the FBI agent tried to bribe Zubaydah. "The FBI agent told him, 'America knows who its friends and who its enemies are. Work with us and we can make you a wealthy man.' AZ responded, 'What makes you think I would turn my back on Allah for money?'"

During the raid that brought Zubaydah to justice, the CIA had captured the terrorist's personal diary and was using it to create the illusion of omniscience—shocking Zubaydah with details about his life that he thought were secret—until one day the FBI blew the ruse. "That cost us the benefit of surprise."

When the FBI's rapport-building techniques failed, the Bureau turned to more aggressive measures. One day, Rodriguez writes, an FBI agent told CIA officers before going into an interrogation session that he "planned to 'go Sipowicz' on Abu Zubaydah"—a reference to Andy Sipowicz, a rogue police detective from the 1980s show *NYPD Blue*. "The FBI man entered AZ's holding cell and started screaming at him, calling him a 'motherf***er' and a 'son of a bitch.' Abu Zubaydah, who speaks decent English, apparently mentally translated the slurs literally and later said that the agent was calling his mother 'a dog.'" Another FBI agent, writes Rodriguez, told Zubaydah "that if he cooperated we would make sure his mother was well taken care of. 'Stay away from my mother,' he said; 'if she thought I was cooperating with you she would be ashamed of me.'"

Zubaydah did eventually reconsider his decision to clam up, Rodriguez says—after the CIA began to employ some initial enhanced-interrogation techniques designed in consultation with a psychologist contractor, "such as limited sleep deprivation, isolation, bombarding his cell with noise, and the like." These actions "seemed to upset at least one of our FBI colleagues [Soufan], who made a play to take control of the interrogation. He got very confrontational and seemed to blame our contractor for everything."

Soufan told *Newsweek* that the contractor "[had taken] charge of the questioning," but Rodriguez says this is false. "At the time the contractor was still just an advisor. He was not in charge of the interrogation and hadn't even received all the security clearances to allow him to read the most highly classified cable traffic flowing to and from the black site."

No matter, Rodriguez writes. "At one point, after being rebuffed at an interrogation attempt with AZ, [Soufan] threatened violence, not against Abu Zubaydah but against the contractor. He eventually calmed down and apologized, blaming his outburst on being 'hot-blooded.' He didn't stay calm for long, however, and eventually departed the black site, saying he did not want to be part of such procedures."

Eventually, the CIA employed the panoply of enhanced-interrogation techniques on Zubaydah, including waterboarding. It worked. "After Abu Zubaydah broke under waterboarding," Rodriguez writes, "he told our officers something remarkable. 'You must do this for all the brothers,' he said. AZ explained to them that Allah knew that they were only human and once they had been tested to their limits there was no shame in their cooperating with us." Indeed, Zubaydah said that waterboarding (which he underwent five times, not 83, as is commonly asserted) was a relief because it finally lifted a great moral burden from his shoulders: the burden of resistance.

So he spilled his guts. The information that came from Zubaydah, and later from other CIA detainees such as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, was a treasure trove that led to the capture of dozens of al-Qaeda operatives and the disruption of numerous planned terrorist attacks. Intelligence from detainees in CIA custody also became the basis for the final report of the 9/11 commission.

"The windfall reported in the intelligence reports coming out of KSM's interrogation was so dramatic," writes Rodriguez, "that FBI officials petitioned the CIA to get back into the interrogation program, which they had abandoned during the early days at the first black site. At the time they said they didn't want to be party to enhanced interrogation. Now they wanted back in." In the end, however, the CIA turned down the FBI's request to be readmitted. "In part we were afraid that FBI special agents would only disrupt the program," Rodriguez writes. "But another factor was that the location of the new sites was not known to them and we didn't want to expand the circle of witting officials for fear that knowledge of the sites would leak and their effectiveness would be compromised if not ended."

That eventually happened anyway. And in 2009, President Obama shut down the CIA's interrogation program and put the FBI back in charge of questioning terrorist "suspects." It was then that Soufan launched his career as the "good interrogator" who could have gotten the same information without the CIA's techniques.

So who is right? One eyewitness for the CIA is none other than Soufan's FBI partner. In 2009 the Department of Justice released an inspector general's report on the FBI's involvement in detainee interrogations. In that report, Soufan's partner (referred to by the alias "Agent Gibson") said it was the CIA—not Soufan—that got the information on Jose Padilla. According to the inspector general, Gibson told him that "CIA personnel assured him that the procedures being used on Zubaydah had been approved 'at the highest levels' and that Gibson would not get in any trouble. Gibson stated that *during the CIA interrogations Zubaydah 'gave up' Jose Padilla* and identified several targets for future al-Qaeda attacks" (emphasis added).

Agent Gibson further told the inspector general that he "did not have a 'moral objection' to being present for the CIA techniques because the CIA was acting professionally and [Gibson] himself had undergone comparable harsh interrogation techniques as part of U.S. Army Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) training."

Soufan told *Newsweek*: "We didn't have to do any of this. We could have done this the right way." But if Rodriguez and Gibson are right, we did try it Soufan's way—and he failed. **NR**

Zubaydah said that waterboarding was a relief because it finally lifted a great moral burden from his shoulders: the burden of resistance.

The Sticky Slope

Hands off my soda, Mayor Bloomberg

BY ROB LONG

THE best way to give somebody bad news is, first, give him a doughnut. This is basically the idea behind what we in Hollywood call "craft services."

Craft services—also known as "Holy cow! Look at that huge table of snacks!"—is, well, a huge table of snacks, originally designed to feed, water, and otherwise satisfy the between-meal cravings of the various craft guilds that populate the business. Following the principle that hungry people are cranky people, and that cranky, hungry people are the last people you want handling six-ton pieces of equipment and million-dollar sets and wires with 18 zillion volts of electricity crackling through them inches from the neck and face of America's beloved TV and film stars, free Snapple and unlimited Cool Ranch Doritos look like a pretty bargain way to deliver a safe and sane workplace.

But that simple calculation has morphed, over time, to include the need to placate everyone involved in a production. I had a show on the air, years ago, that involved a lot of complicated location filming. We had weather trouble and airplane-noise trouble and crowd-control trouble and all sorts of trouble that could really be solved, it turned out, only by an enterprising craft-service guy passing out a tray of mini egg-salad sandwiches at ten o'clock in the morning.

An egg-salad sandwich doesn't solve production problems, of course, but it's soothing and eggy and pleasantly bland, and doesn't take much energy to chew, so eating one—or, in my case, eating a fistful—is a little like sucking on a mayonnaise lollipop. You forget what you're supposed to be upset about.

I know of a major television showrunner who had the craft-service person whip up, at the end of a long shoot, a mini chocolate soufflé. As they were shooting pickup shots and retakes, the showrunner would sit in a director's chair, face and lips smeared with gooey chocolate, staring slack-jawed and glassy-eyed at the monitors. "They're just mini soufflés," he would say, as if that somehow made it less elaborate. But the truth was, they weren't mini at all. They were served in one-quart ramekins with a double-big spoon. Like a big chocolate pacifier.

So when New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg announced that he was thinking about banning, within the city limits, large sugary drinks—you know what I'm talking about, right? those giant sodas people cart around? with the tapered bottoms (because the cups are too huge to fit into a normal car-seat cupholder) and those super-wide straws?—people naturally reacted with unhappy surprise.

We *like* our fat cups of sugar and fizz. It's a little lift in an otherwise stressful day to step up to the fill-'er-up dispenser and get yourself a tankard of Type 2 Diabetes. And we know that this is just the beginning. It's a sticky slope: From sodas we'll get to french fries, and then to pretty much every large-sized carbohydrate ever invented, until we're all walking around in sour moods with tripwire tempers wondering how to get through the day on carrot sticks and fair-trade iced tea.



This has happened on every show or film set I've ever been on. Eventually, somebody gets all up in the craft-service table, somebody with clout and an obsession with health, and suddenly the chips and M&Ms and Double Stuf Oreos get replaced by good stuff, healthy stuff, like rice cakes and power bars and things with carob and antioxidants.

And then, suddenly, people start to lose a little of that extra flab. They have more energy. Things happen faster. Pants button. Polo shirts get tucked in again.

But before you know it, the entire production is at each other's throats. The network is feuding with the studio, the studio is trying to fire the producer, and craft guilds—the whole reason we have craft services in the first place—end up cranky and hungry and a little careless with the 80-pound lights dangling above the head of the million-dollar star.

In other words, there's a place for junk food in our lives. It's the grease—in many cases, literally—that keeps us all a little more emotionally stable. Unfortunately, in excess, junk food also makes us fat.

So Bloomberg's logic is pretty airtight. Sugary drinks make us fat, and fat people get sick a lot, and since we're all responsible for each other's health-care costs—you remember when we decided that, don't you, a year or so ago?—banning those sodas makes economic and social sense. Fewer fat people, lower costs. Think they'll pass the savings on to us?

Fat chance.

For liberals, what you do with your body turns out not to be such a private matter after all, which is a bit of a switcheroo. I guess the rule is this: If a woman has a big fat stomach that's filled with a fetus, it's her body and her choice. If it's filled with pizza and soda and Ben & Jerry's, it's time for Mayor Bloomberg to step in.

They make the same argument about smokers—raise the price! punish the bastards!—though for some reason they rarely make it about cycling—that's a pretty upscale sport, with its tight-panted riders and DayGlo helmets, but there are an awful lot of gruesome accidents—and they almost *never* make it about sexually transmitted diseases, especially those that are transmitted in currently chic ways, like between two guys who are about to get married.

No one's trying to ban extreme sports. No one's trying to outlaw Grindr, the smartphone app that helps homosexual gentlemen find each other quickly via satellite technology. No, it's all about tacky fat people just trying to get through the day, trying to give themselves a little mood bump in the face of a dismal job picture, a faltering world economy, and an uncertain future for their children. It's been a non-stop cascade of bad news for them, and now the liberals are begrudging them their doughnut. Well, not the doughnut, but the super-size drink it comes with. **NR**



Campaigning in Illinois in 1995

Obama on the Fringe

The president belonged to a social-democratic third party

BY STANLEY KURTZ

In 1996, during his first run for public office, Barack Obama formally joined a leftist third party called the New Party. Its Chicago chapter served as the de facto political arm of the now-defunct group ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now). Ideologically, the New Party sharply differentiated itself from what it took to be the business-dominated Democratic party of Bill Clinton, identifying instead with the social-democratic movements of Europe.

The claim that Obama had been a member of the New Party gained attention from conservatives during the final two weeks of the 2008 campaign, but—even though it rested on considerable evidence—it was never widely reported or discussed in the mainstream press. When I asserted on National Review Online in late October 2008 that Obama had indeed been a member of the New Party, the Obama campaign called my charge a "crackpot smear." Through its Fight the Smears website, it insisted that its candidate had never been a member, and had "never solicited" the New Party's endorsement.

Documentary evidence—obtained from ACORN files recently donated to the Wisconsin Historical Society—now contradicts this claim, and establishes beyond any reasonable doubt that Barack Obama did solicit the endorsement, and become a member, of the New Party. Like other candidates who received its endorsement, Obama signed a "contract" in which he promised not only to join the group but also to publicly support and associate himself with it while in office.

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The minutes of the public meeting of Chicago's New Party on January 11, 1996, read as follows: "Barack Obama, candidate for State Senate in the 13th Legislative District, gave a statement to the membership and answered questions. He signed the New Party 'Candidate Contract' and requested an endorsement from the New Party. He also joined the New Party." Consistent with these minutes, a roster of the Chicago chapter of the New Party from early 1997 lists Obama as a member, giving January 11, 1996, as the date he joined. All evidence now points to an attempt by Obama in 2008 to deceive the American public about this important political affiliation in his past.

Obama's New Party problem must be seen as part and parcel of his attempts to distance himself from ACORN. During his third debate with John McCain, Obama claimed that the "only" involvement he'd had with ACORN was to represent the group in a lawsuit compelling Illinois to implement the motor-voter law. The ACORN archives clearly contradict him, and provide evidence that he had dealings with ACORN well beyond representing it in a single lawsuit.

Why did Obama falsely deny his ties to ACORN? His support for its voter-registration efforts in Chicago and his participation in its training seminars doubtless would have been embarrassing, given its thuggish tactics, its fraudulent voter registrations, and its role in abetting the subprime-loan fiasco at

MARC POKEMPNER

the root of the 2008 financial crisis. But they would not likely have been seriously damaging for him to confess, especially in 2008, when the press was treating him with kid gloves. Admitting to having joined a leftist third party controlled by ACORN, on the other hand, could have been damaging indeed.

The records of ACORN's national office, as well as those of several local affiliates, including Illinois ACORN and the ACORN-controlled Chicago Local 880 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), can be found in the archives of the Wisconsin Historical Society. Until recently, these records did not include material more recent than about 1994. My political biography of President Obama, *Radical-in-Chief: Barack Obama and the Untold Story of American Socialism*, made use of these records to sketch a detailed picture of ACORN's operations in Chicago and beyond, and of Obama's ties to the group. Then, apparently sometime around 2010, the records of Illinois ACORN were updated, with especially strong coverage of the mid to late 1990s, and some records extending well into the 2000s. In what follows, I will concentrate on information in the updated Illinois ACORN records about Obama's ties to the New Party, drawing on older archival material when necessary to fill out the picture.

THE Chicago New Party was founded in 1992. Not much later, in February 1993, a New Party memo identified Obama as someone worth recruiting, and made special note of his desire to run for office. The early New Party was run jointly by Madeline Talbott, the leader of Illinois ACORN, and Keith Kelleher, the head of SEIU Local 880. In July 1993, Kelleher met with Obama to interest him in working with the New Party, and with a New Party–controlled front group called Progressive Chicago. Since many Chicago leftists were reluctant to alienate the Democrats by joining a third party, working with Progressive Chicago gave them a way to help the New Party indirectly. Progressive Chicago also served as a base for eventual recruitment to the New Party itself.

Obama told Kelleher that he was "more than happy to be involved" in New Party and Progressive Chicago affairs, while also saying that he would be cautious about anything that might offend regular Democrats. Since the New Party intended to make frequent use of the tactic of "fusion" (endorsement of select progressive candidates running on the Democratic-party line), it was perfectly content to allow its members to be Democrats as well. Yet many Democrats looked on the New Party with suspicion, and it took real courage—and commitment to hard leftism—to have dealings with the group.

True to his word, Obama became a regular signatory on letters Progressive Chicago sent out reporting on its meetings. The central task of Progressive Chicago was to identify local races that could be won by candidates standing to the left of the mainstream Democratic party, and to suggest such candidates.

The Obama campaign's claim in 2008 that Obama "never solicited" the New Party's endorsement is doubly false. Not only did he publicly request New Party endorsement on the day he joined, he also worked for nearly four straight years with the leaders of the New Party (who were also the leaders of ACORN and Progressive Chicago) in an unmistakable effort to garner support for an eventual political run. We know that members of ACORN served as Obama's on-the-ground volunteers in all his early runs for office. Cultivating the New Party and Progressive Chicago was a way of ensuring that support.

In 1996, Obama ran as state senator Alice Palmer's handpicked successor. She had abandoned her seat in hopes of winning a special election to Congress; while she had promised to support Obama even if she lost her bid, once defeated for the Democratic congressional nomination she turned around and challenged Obama for her old state-senate seat. Obama eventually had Palmer knocked off the ballot for having too few valid signatures to reenter the race, but on January 11, 1996—the day Obama joined the New Party, requested its endorsement, and signed its Candidate Contract—Palmer's ballot disqualification had not yet been officially confirmed. The New Party had strongly backed Palmer (a true hard leftist) in her congressional campaign. At the January 11 meeting, New Party leader Madeline Talbott spoke to the assembled members about her disappointment that the party had not been able to push Palmer over the top. Because of the party's ties to Palmer, the question of whether to endorse Obama was not predetermined by a decision of the leadership, but was thrown open to the membership for a vote, without recommendation.

Obama won, and beat back an attempt by Palmer's supporters to make the New Party's endorsement of him contingent on Palmer's official disqualification from the state-senate race. (There was even a vote on whether to send a letter to Palmer explaining the decision; Obama won on that, too, and no letter was sent.) Obama's victory over the far more established Palmer can be attributed to his long and close working relationship with ACORN, whose supporters made up by far the largest contingent within the New Party. Talbott wrote in her 1996 year-end report: "We endorsed Barack before the decision was final on whether he would have opposition in his campaign for State Senate. As it happened, he had none, but he remembers and appreciates our role." The foundation of a strong relationship had been laid. Another New Party document, seemingly from around 1997, describes State Senator Obama as a "good ally."

At just about this time, however, the fate of the New Party was sealed. The 1997 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Timmons v. Twin Cities Area New Party*, which upheld the permissibility of states' banning cross-party "fusion" endorsements, weakened the New Party's prospects of influencing elections, and thus resulted in its rapid decline. An undated "Transition Plan" in a folder containing items from 1999 classifies Obama as a politician friendly to the party and recommends sounding him out for membership on the steering committee of a revamped leadership. Yet it was not to be. The Chicago chapter of the New Party dwindled.

WHAT was the New Party's ideology? National cofounders Daniel Cantor and Joel Rogers saw the group as a "social democratic" party, roughly modeled on the Swedish labor movement. A party standing on the left side of even Sweden's political spectrum would clearly be radical by American standards. While Cantor and Rogers initially hoped to make the New Party's social-democratic stance explicit, other party leaders saw such openness as too risky. An early New Party document, however, makes the party's social-democratic stance very clear. This manifesto, "The New Party: 'Building the New Majority,'" is dated April 1992, the very

beginning of the party's existence, just before formal membership sign-up began. It calls New Party members "not just liberal" democrats but "social democrats." It dismisses the current American political system as "a sewer of privilege and exclusion," and condemns the Democratic party as "dominated by business, or business-backed candidates, or upper middle class liberal elites searching for a candidate acceptable to business."

The manifesto rejects the theory that the Democratic party was weakened when a Sixties-inflected McGovernite wing took control of it. Instead, it argues, the failure of the Democratic party to root itself in community organizing is the true source of its weakness. It repeatedly compares America's Democratic party unfavorably with Europe's social-democratic parties. Yes, there are "good Democrats" who deserve endorsement, the manifesto concedes—but they are really social democrats, and merit New Party support for precisely that reason. The document ends by describing the New Party platform as an attempt to enact authentic social democracy to the extent possible given "the constraints on such an order imposed by capitalism." The unmistakable implication is that the founders of the New Party would prefer to throw off the shackles of capitalism entirely.

ACORN's records show that prior to joining the New Party, Obama was invited to personally confer with party founder Joel Rogers, who would have either authored or approved that early manifesto. Candidates for New Party endorsement in Chicago were also regularly asked whether they agreed with the party's "Statement of Principles," which had been approved by the national Interim Executive Council headed by Rogers. The Statement of Principles contains concrete proposals that bring the New Party's "social democratic" stance to life. There are, for example, proposals to hand substantial control of the banking and financial systems over to community groups (such as ACORN). The Statement of Principles also demands a guaranteed minimum income for all adults, and a universal "social wage," defined as cradle-to-grave state provision of health care, child care, education, and the like.

If there is a difference between the New Party's Statement of Principles and the program of the Democratic Socialists of America, many of whose members also joined the New Party, I cannot find it. But while the question of whether the New Party was socialist can be argued, the party's support for a version of social democracy far to the left of the American Democratic party cannot. And Obama would almost certainly have had to express some level of support for the Statement of Principles before receiving the New Party's endorsement and joining up.

So in 1996, while Mitt Romney was running Bain Capital, Barack Obama threw in his lot with a leftist third party hostile to both American capitalism and the mainstream Democratic party. Surely if Bain sheds light on Romney's views, Obama's New Party membership ought to be a topic of discussion as well, as should Obama's efforts to disguise this episode of his life. Does Obama's "Julia" ad betray a cradle-to-grave welfare-state mentality? That would certainly be consistent with his New Party membership. Romney's allegation that the president's true goal is to move America by degrees toward being a European-style welfare state also grows more convincing in light of Obama's New Party days. These matters are newsworthy—far more so than the youthful love letters of Obama and the childhood pranks of Romney, each of which has drawn buckets of real and virtual media ink. If only the press agreed. **NR**

FALLING BRICKS

The proverb that murdered the Spanish economy

BY KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON

Madrid

Just off the Plaza Mayor in the Spanish capital, there stands an abandoned Santander bank branch, shuttered, vandalized, and covered in graffiti. "MURDERERS!" is spray-painted on the edifice in foot-high, blood-red script. The Spanish are not shy about sharing their low opinion of bankers. Down the street is a smaller square upon which weathered Romanian whores hawk their services with the sort of dogged fervor usually associated with door-to-door evangelists. A flyer sternly warns against soliciting sex on the square, and it is supplemented by more graffiti commentary: "Here, only the banks are allowed to screw us."

Greece was an appetizer, but Spain is Europe's heaping helping of poison paella: Standard & Poor's recently handed down another round of credit downgrades to the country's biggest banks and to the government itself. Many of the banks are now well into junk territory, and the credit-rating firm Egan Jones, which is known to be a bit more skeptical of sovereign finances than the Big Three (it was the first to downgrade U.S. Treasury debt), already has consigned the Spanish government's debt to junk-bond status. Borrowing costs are skyrocketing. Many forecasters believe that Spain is on the downward slope into the second half of a double-dip recession, and the quality of bank assets is deteriorating rapidly. The Spanish government does not have anything like sufficient resources to recapitalize the banks. Capital equivalent to a tenth of GDP fled the country in the last quarter alone.

But while Spain's credit rating and economic confidence may remind some observers of conditions on the ground in Greece, the underlying economics are not the same. Greece is exactly what it appears to be: an economic, fiscal, political, and moral basket case that never should have been admitted to the European Monetary Union in the first place. It is a profligate spender, a prodigal waster, and a pitiable tax man, a country with no desire to set itself right. It is the suicide bomber of European economies, one that has managed to command the attention of all Europe and the financial world by engaging in a hostage-taking exercise in which the hostage is itself. The only reason to keep Greece in the union is that it will hurt just as much to kick it out.

Spain's situation is fundamentally different. Though Madrid has trouble policing fiscal affairs in its highly decentralized system of government, Spain has not been a particularly ambitious spender or borrower by European standards, or indeed by North American standards: Before its present crisis, Spain's ratio of government debt to GDP was 42 percent, compared

with 62 percent in the United States. And it was on the way down, having been reduced by four percentage points from the year before, while U.S. government debt was climbing. In 2007, Spain's public debt was not only lower than the OECD average but lower than that of Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria, and—take note—Germany, where the government debt level was half again as large as in Spain. The level of public debt in Italy and Greece was more than two and a half times that of Spain. There is much to lament in Spanish public finances and in European public finances in general, but those looking for a morality tale in which spending and borrowing are the villains and thrift the potential hero would do better to look elsewhere, say to the relative spendthrifts up in sober Canada (2007 debt-to-GDP ratio of 66.5 percent). Spain's debt-to-GDP ratio has skyrocketed since the crisis, but that is mostly the result of a collapsing denominator, not a spending spree.

It is just barely plausible that Greece could leave the monetary union without nuking the entire euro zone. For Spain, a much larger and more integrated economy, no such exit strategy exists. No Spain, no euro.

'El ladrillo nunca baja"—"The brick never comes down." For years, that proverb expressed the conventional wisdom about real estate in Spain: If it's built of bricks and mortar, it's a solid investment, and the price will never really fall. There were plenty of bad political decisions to go around, both from Spanish authorities and from the European Central Bank, but Spain's housing bubble seems to have been particularly severe because of national psychological factors exogenous to policy. As one longtime Madrid resident tells the story, the boom sent so much money sloshing around the Spanish real-estate market that a kind of stigma developed around renting: Of *course* you owned—only losers rented. Banks were getting it wrong on both sides of the real-estate game, financing ridiculous levels of housing development—three houses built for every one sold at the bubble's peak—and offering subprime loans to borrowers so dodgy that they'd have had to be elected officials and "Friends of Angelo" to get a decent mortgage in the United States. This in a country that already had one of Europe's highest rates of homeownership.

The relatively high demand for purchasing properties and the relatively low demand for renting them produced its own set of perverse effects as landlords allowed their holdings to go untenanted rather than let them out for little money. So long as the on-paper price was climbing, landlords regarded their vacant properties as assets producing returns. Rents declined or stagnated, but sales prices leapt ever higher—so while the total stock of Spanish housing was growing at an unprecedented rate, the active inventory was restricted by owners' sitting on their hands waiting for soaring prices to soar even higher. "You could rent an apartment for five years for less than half of the closing costs to buy it," a Madrid-based banker says. "Plus, Spain is one of the best places in the world to be a renter: Landlords are forced to renew your lease for up to five years. But nobody wanted to rent. It was insane." Renting, he says, was "almost socially taboo." As a result, "the distortion between salary and price point was more pronounced than anything I'd seen. Florida was nothing by comparison."

In the United States, the rule of thumb holds that a prudent borrower (and a prudent lender) will agree to a mortgage no more than approximately 2.5 times the homebuyer's income. In some Spanish cities, the mortgage-to-income ratio was running 8:1. And a lot of those mortgages were zero- or negative-equity from Day One, with loans exceeding even the inflated nominal values of the properties. Those who argue that European-style banking regulation would have prevented the U.S. bubble and crash cannot account for Spain.

As for *los ladrillos*, they began to fall, literal bricks bringing down the Spanish economy like so many countless tons of metaphorical ones.

WHICH is to say, Spain's situation is analogous to that of the United States, except with less government debt and fewer policy options: a housing bubble, the inevitable bust, and a banking system inadequate to dealing with the fallout. There are a million good reasons to hate the 2008–09 bailouts of U.S. banks and financial institutions, and one good reason not to: The U.S. banking system did not collapse. Spain is what happens when you can't do TARP—or at least cannot do it on your own terms. Spain was able to secure help in maintaining temporary liquidity in its financial system, but at a very high price.

"In a normal economic crisis, you have fiscal or monetary tools available, or a flexible currency that you can depreciate and allow yourself some respite," says one Spain specialist at a household-name global bank. "But if you take away the key macro tools that you have to adjust demand, your hands are completely tied. Spain cannot do anything—there is absolutely nothing they can do." Except follow orders—orders that are coming in German.

That Germany has emerged as Europe's fiscal disciplinarian is not lost on the young and unemployed in Spain, where Angela Merkel routinely is compared unfavorably with another famous German chancellor from some years back. Neither has Spain failed to appreciate that the No. 1 beneficiary of European monetary policy has been Germany. Germany's impressive productivity gains and its enormous current-account surplus both owe as much to the adoption of the euro as to any macroeconomic policy emanating from Berlin. Replacing a relatively strong currency (the Deutschmark) with a relatively weak one (the euro) gave the Germans a critical edge in the export market. Professor John Doukas, a financial economist at Old Dominion University, argues that Germany may have been the only country to experience significant economic gain from the adoption of the euro: "Germany experienced a depreciating real exchange rate, while the GIIPS countries experienced an appreciating real exchange rate by adopting the euro. This, in turn, induced a current-account deficit for the GIIPS financed by capital inflows (net borrowing), which led to their external debt burden. Germany, on the other hand, with a rising current-account surplus, became a net-creditor country. In brief, Germany is, perhaps, the only EU country that benefited."

That being the case, it is not surprising that there is a distinct sense among the Spanish economic laity that this is all some sort of Teutonic plot. "The Germans have always dreamed of conquering all of Europe," says one young Spaniard in a

Madrid café. "Now they are." And Frau Merkel? "Hitler in a dress."

But Berlin has as much to lose from a Spanish collapse as Madrid does. Its banks are exposed to Spanish risks, and the streets of Madrid are filled with BMWs and Audis, even if a great many of them are running on visibly bald spare tires these days. Germany cannot write off southern Europe without writing off a very large chunk of its own export-driven economy. It's a Quentin Tarantino–style Mexican standoff, everybody holding a gun to everybody else's head.

"THANK God for the termites, eh?" Pablo is taking a long, long lunch break from his job as an exterminator, drinking an espresso and smoking Marlboros at a table on the sidewalk next to his death van. (The Spanish may not be the fun-in-the-sun Euro-layabouts of Anglo-Saxon imagination, but this is still not the place to be if you detest a siesta.) "I thought I would be an architect or an engineer, but then I went into this business. Now, I am the only one of my friends making any money. Lawyer, banker, teacher—nothing, nothing, nothing. But always we have termites. I buy all the drinks." He hears that New York City is suffering from a bedbug epidemic, and he looks a little envious. "Bedbugs are very good."

The visual effects of mass joblessness are somewhat camouflaged in Spain. There may have been a stigma attached to renting, but there is not one attached to living at home with one's parents well into one's thirties, and that's what Pablo and a lot of young Spaniards are doing. Unemployment in Spain is running around 23 percent, and outside the relatively wealthy urban centers it is estimated to be more like 35 percent. The numbers are higher for the young and the less educated—and for immigrants, who tend to be both young and less educated.

Nowhere is that contrast more pronounced than in Cañada Real Galiana, a sprawling illegal slum that has grown up on the outskirts of Madrid, about a half hour's drive from the *cervecerias* and discos of the city center. Tens of thousands of immigrants and a growing number of native Spaniards live in squalor in this sliver of the Third World abutting the continent's second-largest city. The driver I hire to take me there requires some serious persuasion before he will agree to make the trip. He asks if I am looking to buy drugs, and does so in that subtle way that suggests he knows a better place to score some heroin, if that's my thing. Indeed, drugs seem to be not only the largest business in Cañada Real Galiana but the only business—there is not a gas station or food stand to be seen, and hardly a shop of any kind. There is knee-high garbage, smoke from open fires, scrofulous dogs, women in chadors, and young men who squat between cars to transact their narcotics business. Occasionally, the government sends through bulldozers to level the squatters' shacks and inspectors to hand out hilariously large fines that never will be paid.

If Spain ever had much of a chance of assimilating its large population of Muslim immigrants from Morocco, the downturn has made it a remote one indeed. The black-market economy is their only economy. A bust in the slum two years ago found 120 people transacting business in a single building—and €12,000 in cash, thought to be a single morning's take. Spain has been a regular target of Islamist terror attacks, and the national police worry that Cañada Real Galiana has become a recruiting center for al-Qaeda or other terrorist elements. There is more to an economic collapse than economics.

AND yet . . . it doesn't seem so bad. At 9:30 P.M., the beautiful people are still wearing their Prada sunglasses at the Cerveceria Santa Ana, and not just to pose: There is still plenty of sun as the afternoon stretches out, impossibly long. They lounge under umbrellas at the tables on the square and at the sidewalk cafés, picking at Russian salads, smoking cigarettes, and sipping blond beer. A well-built young man wearing flip-flops and a pink tutu, and nothing else, dances artfully with a life-sized stuffed ape as a flamenco singer wails about the state of his *corazón*. A beautiful young woman joins a party in progress at one of the tables, fair and slender and a perfect explanation of why Europhilia persists in the United States and elsewhere. She is wearing a T-shirt that reads: "We Still Have Time Left. Let's Make the Most of What We Have." Still time, indeed—but how much? Parties end, and tabs must be settled. Even the seemingly endless Spanish afternoon does not last forever. Nightfall is coming.

What will the darkness bring? The two most likely possibilities are total economic collapse or total loss of economic sovereignty. It has long been remarked that a European monetary union without a European fiscal union is a guarantee of disaster, and now the disaster is upon us. If an anarchic meltdown of southern Europe is going to be averted, northern Europe, Germany above all, is going to have to put up the money. That idea is wildly unpopular in the north, but for Berlin, the real choice seems to be to take a hit up front and calm the waters or to let the storm rage and take a hit, possibly a more severe one, on the backside as its trading partners go under and the debt tsunami rolls over European finances. There is talk of the issuance of Europe-wide bonds or, short of that, Europe-wide short-term bills. It is not clear whether even that will be enough.

The distance between the slum of Cañada Real Galiana and the charming squares of Madrid, only a few miles, is very much on my mind as I depart, making my way through the massive labyrinth of Barajas Airport. Between the Iberia airline check-in and the Iberian jet there are: seven escalators; about a mile of corridors, each impressive expanse covered with about as many square feet of marble as the floor of the Taj Mahal; five of those moving-sidewalk contraptions; a subway ride about as long as my morning commute in New York; a short bus trip; and, finally, a run up the stairs—connecting the jets to the jetways apparently is beyond Iberian powers. Like the trip from Madrid to Cañada Real Galiana, it's about a half hour's journey, not counting the inevitable delays at security and customs. The security screenings are handled with dispatch—the problem with the airport is not bureaucracy or personnel, but the scale of the thing: It is a pointless and counterproductive exercise in high-modernist aesthetic giganticism built by a government-run airport authority facing billions of euros in debt that it cannot pay, with a million signs marked "SALIDA" but no easy way out. Cervantes himself could not have imagined a more perfect metaphor for the European Union. But Spain is very old, while this new thing called "Europe" is a postmodern phenomenon. Only one of them is going to survive. **NR**

What to Do About Syria?

Thoughts toward a strategy

BY JOHN R. BOLTON

As hostilities in Syria roll on unabated, the civilian casualties rise because of combat operations in urban areas and execution-style killings. In response, calls for U.S. military intervention of one sort or another to aid the opposition increase, while the Obama administration dithers over whether to continue relying on the United Nations Security Council and former U.N. secretary general Kofi Annan.

But what are the American interests at stake, and what is the best way to protect them? Although it is easy to concentrate on the stomach-churning television images, we should operate on the basis of strategy, not emotion. That does not mean doing nothing. But neither does it mean knee-jerk reactions instead of careful analysis.

Syria's Assad family–Baath party dictatorship had nothing to recommend it before the current conflict, other than its being the devil we knew. Now, it is increasingly an Iranian satellite under Tehran's growing regional influence. Syria remains a threat to Israel; has continuing aspirations to control Lebanon while serving as a conduit to supply and support the terrorist group Hezbollah; provides a base of operations for Russian military activity in the Middle East; and is quite possibly the site of ongoing, illicit nuclear-weapons activity by Iran and North Korea, despite Israel's destruction of a Syrian nuclear reactor in September 2007.

Accordingly, regime change in Syria is prima facie in America's interest as well as the interests of Israel and our Arab friends in the region, who see nothing but danger for themselves if Iran's hegemonic ambitions unfold successfully. Why Republicans and Democrats alike have coddled Syria's tyrants over the years is extraordinarily difficult to understand. Of course, as with overthrowing Saddam Hussein and Mo - ammar Qaddafi, there is the question of what will replace a concededly distasteful regime. And today, that uncertainty is a major factor constraining our options for dealing with Syria's conflict.

It would have been one thing to work with the Syrian diaspora to remove Assad and the Baath party when we had a massive military presence in Iraq, right on Syria's border. In the days just after Saddam's ouster in 2003, conditions were optimal (if nonetheless imperfect) for overthrowing Assad and replacing his regime with something compatible with American interests. We would not have needed to use U.S. ground forces. Our mere presence in Iraq could have precluded Iran—or, what we see today, an Iraq under Iran's influence—from trying to protect Assad.

That possibility is now much more remote, given the widespread infiltration of the anti-Assad forces by al-Qaeda and other terrorists. In truth, we do not know enough about the opposition's political or military leadership (which currently, at least, appears confused and divided) to predict who would prevail in the immediate aftermath of Assad's overthrow. In such circumstances, the risk of a radical Islamist regime's replacing Assad is considerably higher than it would have been if we had moved to oust him years ago. A relatively orderly exit by Assad is one thing. A disorderly, indeed chaotic exit is quite another, especially given the risk that Syria's chemical- and biological-weapons assets, and possibly nuclear assets, might fall into hands even worse than Assad's.

There is one other important consideration. Assad and his father routinely butchered their Sunni political opponents to protect their political base in the Alawi sect, an offshoot of Shia Islam. If the civilians whose bodies we have seen recently on television were the victims of Alawite militias or Syrian government forces, it is, sadly, more of the same. There is little doubt that the Sunni desire for revenge is strong. After years of oppression and brutality, how could it not be? Accordingly, we are blinking at reality if we do not recognize that, following Assad's ouster, especially if the violence grew, the bloodlust would be high and the risk of large-scale massacres of Alawites all too real. How would we feel if U.S. weapons were used in such massacres? Without a substantial on-the-ground troop presence, we could no more prevent them than we can prevent the current killings of civilians.

Advocates of U.S. intervention argue that, if we are unwilling to supply weapons to the opposition, we can at least declare a no-fly zone along the Turkish border and continue to supply non-lethal assistance. This less visible approach implicitly acknowledges that Arab states determined to prevent Iran from consolidating its hold over Syria are now arming the rebels and will continue to do so. Of course, they will arm factions they believe are congenial to their interests, and not necessarily those congenial to ours, a fact we can do little to change. Indeed, any level of U.S. support, if it turns out to be effective, implies the same potential political and humanitarian problems as does U.S. support that is truly robust. The more effective our aid is, the more likely the opposition is to prevail. The issue is whether we want that to happen when we have so little understanding of, let alone influence over, what a successor regime would be like.

Assad remains in power because of Russia and Iran, with China supporting him in the background. Russia has been providing arms, economic and financial assistance, and full political backing to the Syrian government. Iran has done the same and more. According to credible reports, officers of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards are aiding Syrian-government forces and even directing them in combat. While China has no significant direct stake in Assad's future, it does have a stake in staying close to Russia, in hopes that Moscow will support Beijing on issues where China's interests are much stronger, such as North Korea and, poten-

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A poster of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, January 2012

LOUAI BESHARA/AFP/GETTY

tially, China's assertive territorial claims in the South and East China Seas. On June 1, the U.N. Human Rights Council voted to condemn the violence against Syria's civilians, and only three countries voted no: Russia, China, and Cuba.

Both Russia and Iran are prepared to shed a lot of Syrian blood, civilian or otherwise, to keep Assad in power, because it is in their interests, as they perceive them, to do so. And neither Moscow nor Tehran is much swayed by emotional arguments or by that perennial bugaboo for Western diplomats: "isolation" from the international community. Consider the expulsion of Syrian diplomats from Western capitals at the end of May. Does anyone seriously think Assad will change course because his diplomats now have to return to Damascus? Do any of us doubt that the Europeans (and Obama) will quietly welcome those Syrian diplomats back in due course if Assad prevails?

Significantly, U.S. intervention could not be confined to Syria and would inevitably entail confronting Iran and possibly Russia. This the Obama administration is unwilling to do, although it should.

In the case of Russia, such a confrontation would likely break the famous "reset" button beyond repair. As a president waiting for reelection so he can be more "flexible" toward Moscow, Obama is simply incapable of contemplating this step.

In the case of Iran, U.S. military assistance to Syrian rebels would almost certainly end any prospect of further negotiations over Iran's nuclear-weapons program. In fact, that would be no great loss, since Iran was never going to negotiate away its longstanding nuclear-weapons aspirations, a reality that Obama is congenitally unable to acknowledge. Syria today is the focal point of the ancient Sunni–Shia conflict, which is well beyond America's power to resolve. Rather than encourage more fighting in Syria, we should concentrate on eliminating Tehran's nuclear-weapons program. So doing would make our Arab friends less worried by, and more able on their own to rebuff, Iran's politico-military adventurism around the region.

Unsurprisingly, the United Nations has failed, is failing, and will continue to fail to resolve the Syria conflict. The Security Council is and will remain hopelessly divided, given Russian and Chinese intransigence. Kofi Annan's ill-fated ceasefire plan and his overall approach prove beyond dispute that negotiations require a negotiator with something in his back pocket other than a white handkerchief. So long as the various Syrian factions believe they can prevail militarily, they have no incentive to negotiate or compromise. Even the Obama administration now seems to recognize that the U.N. is an empty vessel.

Obama is not up to the job in Syria. The gravest risk of American involvement is that his administration and Iran might find common ground in the Middle East chess game: Iran would allow Assad to fall, losing its pawn, and in exchange Obama would agree to do even less than he is doing now to stop Iran's nuclear-weapons program, allowing Iran to protect its queen. The prospect of such a nightmare scenario, which the Europeans could well accept, is palpable.

The case of Libya provides no encouragement. Unlike Assad, Qaddafi had zero outside support. In any event, post-Qaddafi Libya is hardly something to boast about. Indeed, Libya's prospects themselves demonstrate that the chimerical "responsibility to protect" doctrine under which Obama justified U.S. intervention is not tethered either to reality or to American interests. To extend "responsibility to protect" to Syria without contemplating the larger consequences for our interests worldwide would simply be irresponsible. Advancing those interests sensibly might make it possible to ameliorate the situation in Syria, but we must first set our logic and priorities in order.

THUS, neither U.S. military assistance to the opposition nor current administration policy, which has stumbled from failure to failure over the past year, will advance legitimate American interests. If we assume, however, that Obama wakes up to reality—or, more likely, that the conflict in Syria drags on until Governor Romney's January 20, 2013,

inauguration—what should we conclude the United States ought to do? Or must we simply watch the killing continue?

First and foremost, we should cut Syria off from its major supporters. The television images from Syria will not change permanently until the underlying strategic terrain changes permanently. Russia should be told in no uncertain terms that it can forget about sustained good relations with the United States as long as it continues to back Assad. We should resume full-scale, indeed accelerated, efforts to construct the limited missile-defense system designed by George W. Bush to protect American territory not against Russia but against rogue states such as Iran and North Korea. But we should immediately make it clear to Moscow that we will begin to consider broadening our missile-defense program to deal with Russian and Chinese ballistic-missile capabilities. We should also announce our withdrawal from the New START arms-control treaty, and our utter disinterest in negotiations to prevent an "arms race" in space. Let Moscow and Beijing think about all that for a while.

The magnitude of such a shift as a response to the conflict in Syria may seem startling, but each of these proposals is meritorious on its own terms. Wrapping several major policy redirections around the Syria problem thus advances multiple objectives simultaneously. Both Russia and China think Obama is weak, that America is declining, and that they can ignore our views on Syria and many other issues with complete impunity. It is time for a wake-up call to the Kremlin and Zhongnanhai.

Next, we should tell Iran that our patience with their decade-long ploy of using diplomacy to gain time to advance their nuclear-weapons program has ended. Tehran should face a stark choice, and we can leave to their imagination what will happen if they fail immediately to dismantle all aspects of their existing nuclear effort. We should also reverse the fantasy still trumpeted by Obama that, despite its repeated violations of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty over 20 years, Iran is somehow entitled to a "peaceful" nuclear program. Until there is a new, trustworthy regime in Tehran, there can be no claim to benefits or "rights" under a treaty Iran has grossly abused. We should introduce this new reality to our European friends as well, perhaps by simply being unambiguous with them.

Finally, in Syria itself, we should do now what we could have begun to do ten years ago (and what the Obama White House at least says it is doing now): find Syrian rebel leaders who are truly secular and who oppose radical Islam; who will disavow al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, and other terrorist groups; and who will reject Russian and Iranian hegemony over their country. We will need some reason to believe that this opposition can prevail against not only the Assad regime but also the terrorists and fanatics who also oppose Assad. This must be not a faith-based judgment but a clear-eyed assessment of reality. Such is the kind of opposition that, assuming it exists, we should support, aiming for regime change in Damascus when—and only when—it becomes feasible on our terms. On this matter, too, we should tell our European allies that we want their support for something other than semiotic diplomacy.

If we had pursued these kinds of policies after Saddam Hussein's overthrow in 2003, we might today be in a very different place in the Middle East and have avoided much of the ongoing bloodshed. Better late than never. **NR**

On Deterring IRAN

Why it's complicated, why it matters

BY ROBERT G. JOSEPH & KEITH B. PAYNE

As a determined Tehran pursues a nuclear-weapons capability, and develops and deploys increasingly long-range ballistic missiles, a debate on the prospective role of deterrence begins to take shape. On one side is the assertion that Iranian leaders are "rational"; on the other, the fear that, when it comes to the use of nuclear weapons, they may not be. Their frequent calls for the destruction of Israel raise particular concerns in this regard.

In both policy and academic debates about deterrence, to label leaderships rational is often tantamount to declaring them deterrable. And if a leadership is deemed irrational, this is a coded way of saying that it likely cannot be deterred. But while equating "rational" with "deterrable" may make for a convenient shorthand, it is not particularly helpful in determining whether the Iranian leadership, or any other regime, is deterrable in fact.

It is a common assumption that a nuclear-armed Iran would not be a nightmare scenario because, while Iranian leaders may be eccentric, they are not suicidal. In this narrative, their fear of the consequences would deter them from using nuclear weapons or engaging in other severe provocations likely to incite Western retaliation.

This view is often backed up by the observation that even Stalin and Mao, who were considered highly eccentric, ultimately proved to be rational and deterrable. There is no reason to believe that Iran's leaders are any more eccentric, the argument goes. Even their pursuit of nuclear weapons is explained on the basis of a rational calculation: Such weapons would give Iran both prestige and a means of deterring attacks from the West.

Confidence that Iranian leaders are rational does not directly translate into acquiescence to Iran's goal of obtaining nuclear weapons. But, according to those who hold this view, the United States should be careful not to overreact to Iran's nuclear program. In particular, it should avoid the use of military force. Since a nuclear-armed Iran could be deterred, why risk the consequences of using force—Iranian-sponsored acts of terror, for example, or missile attacks on U.S. military forces and U.S. allies in the region, or economic disruptions in the oil market?

The alternative narrative is that Iranian leaders have such eccentric views that they are effectively irrational. If Iranian

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leaders lack the good sense to fear widespread devastation and their own destruction, they might undertake extreme provocations, even in the face of possible nuclear retaliation. This description of Iranian decision-making generally accompanies the conclusion that the United States should be prepared to take great risks—and to use military force, if necessary—to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

The typical presumption is that any state leader sound enough to be in a position of authority must be rational, and that rational leaders can be counted on to calculate the costs of nuclear war properly. This presumption yields the comforting conclusion that deterrence will always work. It is additionally comforting in its suggestion that the United States is under little pressure to take military action, since its nuclear and conventional superiority make deterrence relatively easy. During the Cold War, this logic was one reason for the U.S. decision to forgo most strategic defenses against the Soviet nuclear threat. Why undertake the challenge of defending the American population when deterrence alone would suffice?

That Cold War line of thought can be seen in contemporary commentary on Iran and other rogue states. To wit, Iranian leaders are rational or they could not function at the level required to lead a state, and so they will be deterrable even if they acquire nuclear arms.

It is true that leaders are unlikely to be predictably deterrable if they are irrational in the sense that they suffer from a breakdown of cognition and display symptoms such as hallucinations. If Iranian leaders are so afflicted, or are eccentric enough to challenge the boundaries of reason, then the prudent course for the United States is to make deterrence, by means of both nuclear and conventional capabilities, as effective as possible, and to prepare seriously for the possibility of its failure. To do so, the U.S. should also strengthen its defensive capabilities and those of its allies, particularly its capabilities against the primary Iranian means of attack: missiles. These steps may be a hard sell in the context of austere U.S. defense budgets and the administration's defense "pivot" toward Asia.

The alternative is to hope that Iranian leaders will be reliably deterrable or that they will decide to forgo nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, high confidence in either hope is unwarranted. We should recognize that even leaders who do not suffer from psychopathologies are often not predictably deterrable. Deterrence is a complex process that can fail for a variety of reasons. Leaders may have overriding goals—political, military, religious, ideological, or even personal—that compel them to take high-risk actions. And they may recognize the risks of provoking a powerful opponent but consider the risks of not acting to be even greater.

History offers many occasions on which deterrence failed when it was expected to work. For example, in 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a massive armored attack against Israel, even though Israel was widely suspected of having nuclear weapons. Henry Kissinger, secretary of state at the time, later said that the U.S. was surprised by the attack because no one considered Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat to be so irrational. But Sadat had powerful reasons for launching the war despite the apparent risks. Specifically, he believed the restoration of Egyptian honor following earlier losses to Israel demanded taking such action, and he hoped thereby to compel superpower intervention that would move Israel toward concessions in its dealings with Egypt. It is possible to question Sadat's prudence in launching the attack for these reasons, but not his rationality. Rationality held, but deterrence failed.

Earlier, during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the Cuban leadership lobbied hard for a Soviet nuclear strike from Cuba against the United States, according to Soviet leaders. The Cuban leaders apparently perceived a moment when socialism could attack capitalism and prevail, despite the obvious risks that such an attack would pose to Cuba and the world. Fortunately, the Soviet leadership calculated the risks and costs differently, as indicated by the response of Soviet vice premier Anastas Mikoyan. "We see your willingness to die beautifully," he said, "but we do not believe it is worth dying beautifully."

What motivations, hidden or explicit, might inspire Iranian leaders to make high-risk decisions? One possibility is their oft-expressed goal of eliminating Israel. Some have suggested that they may even be eager for the chaos and martyrdom that their use of nuclear weapons would produce, because that outcome is consistent with their apocalyptic religious vision of the future. Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has publicly expressed his belief that he is supernaturally guided in his decision-making and therefore protected against long odds and high risks. (Hitler held similar views.) Do we therefore know that Iran's leaders would take high-risk actions? Of course not. Neither, however, do we know with confidence that they would not.

One prediction, however, can be made with some confidence: Iran would consider it less risky to promote its aggressive agenda in the Gulf and beyond if it had nuclear weapons. That agenda includes elevating Iran to the position of regional hegemon. Nuclear weapons would give it security cover as it maneuvered in ways that could lead to an escalation of tensions and outright conflict. This could involve, for example, sponsoring terrorist acts against Israel and other



DARREN GYGI

nations, fomenting political unrest in the Middle East, and undercutting the U.S. position in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This conclusion has enormous implications for U.S. policy. It suggests that, if Iran achieves nuclear capability, effective deterrence strategies will be particularly important but also potentially difficult to put into practice.

During the Cold War, Jimmy Carter's secretary of defense, Harold Brown, concluded that effective deterrence requires a credible threat to what the enemy "considers most important." The application of that conclusion to Iran leads to two fundamental questions. What is it that the Iranian leadership considers most important? And can the United States credibly put it at risk?

There is some evidence that what Iranian leaders hold dearest is the Islamic Republic itself and their autocratic leadership of it. For example, the founding leader of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, decided in 1988 to accept a ceasefire in his nation's long war with Iraq—a ceasefire that essentially had been available since 1982—because the war had come to pose a threat to his regime. He did this even though he regarded it as drinking "the cup of poison." In addition, he established as a governing axiom that the supreme religious value is the preservation of the Islamic Republic and by extension revolutionary Islam, and that virtually any act may be condoned if undertaken for that purpose.

Indeed, this *raison d'état* likely underlies Iran's apparent commitment to acquiring nuclear weapons, despite repeated declarations by the U.S. and other powers that such an outcome would be "unacceptable." The regime may believe that nuclear weapons will protect the survival of the Islamic Republic and the leadership's position in it both from external threats and from foreign military support for its democratic opposition, possibly supported by foreign governments. The world's patient and relatively benign treatment of North Korea is likely to have demonstrated to Iranian leaders that nuclear weapons would enable them to hold their opponents at bay, just as the fates of Saddam Hussein and Moammar Qaddafi demonstrated that the cost of challenging the West with only conventional forces can be prohibitively high.

Will the United States be able to establish credible strategies for deterring Iran's leadership? Perhaps, but the policies of the Obama administration with respect to Iran are not encouraging. To date, they likely have reduced the credibility of U.S. deterrence strategies. How so?

A central theme of the administration's national-security policy has been an almost unshakable faith in engagement. President Obama came to office promising an open hand to the mullahs in Tehran. In practice, this has meant that for almost three years the administration opposed—actually opposed—the imposition of effective sanctions on the regime in order not to reduce prospects for nuclear talks. By placing engagement at the center of its Iran policy, the administration has not only failed to achieve its objective, but has also bought time for Tehran to continue work on its nuclear program.

If the sanctions to which Iran is now subject had been imposed earlier, perhaps they would have been more effective. As things stand, they are causing economic pain, but there is no apparent evidence that they are slowing Iran's nuclear program. One can only speculate about what the leadership in Tehran is thinking. Will the sanctions perversely lead to an acceleration of the program now that its completion may be near? Former CIA director Leon Panetta estimated in December 2011 that it would take Iran "about a year" to build a nuclear weapon following a decision to do so. Would it not be rational for Iran's leaders to calculate that, once they have achieved their goal of becoming a nuclear power, the international community would, after a decent interval, forget and forgive, as it has done with India, Pakistan, and other states?

While the Obama administration has asserted that all options are on the table, it has also been explicit in saying that it does not want to threaten or use force. Indeed, former secretary of defense Robert Gates called the use of force "insane." More recently, President Obama has reportedly sought to constrain Israel from threatening or using force. The irony is that the most effective way to improve the prospects for a peaceful diplomatic settlement would be to make it clear to Tehran that force is a credible option. What was the case with Libya in 2003—that it preferred abandoning its nuclear-weapons program to risking the military strike it believed the United States was prepared to launch against it—is likely the case with Iran today.

In a similarly unhelpful vein, the Obama administration has promoted its vision of "global nuclear zero," according to which the U.S. should take steps toward unilateral nuclear reductions. The argument, unsupported by evidence, is that such measures would rally the international community in support of nonproliferation and, in the process, of sanctions against proliferators. This is expected in turn to serve the cause of keeping nuclear weapons out of the hands of terrorists. It's all very neat. It's all very logical. But just think about how the international community has responded to the Iranian nuclear challenge, and the conclusion seems inescapable: The proposition is without merit.

The ultimate question is how to effect or encourage political change in Iran. Here, again, we are handicapped by a history of seeking accommodation with the mullahs. In 2009, the U.S. response to protests in the streets of Tehran and other Iranian cities was to sit quietly and wait, out of concern that support for the protesters would derail the prospects for engagement with the Iranian government.

We need to devise our policies and adjust our capabilities in a way that will deter and defend against threats to our country and our allies. The underlying problem, the real danger, is when our government pursues that goal in a way that produces effects that are the opposite of what it intends. That is what we did in the aftermath of the First World War, with the promotion of first the Wilsonian League of Nations and then the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928. Both contributed to a failure of deterrence that helped create the conditions that brought about the Second World War. The flaw of those two measures was not in their vision. It was, as George Kennan has argued, in their implementation—in the naïveté and wishful thinking that, combined, increased the likelihood of war, through bad policy and self-deluding complacency.

The hope that Iranian leaders will ultimately choose to forgo nuclear weapons, or that they will be reliably deterrable, should not be a source of comparable wishful thinking and complacency today. A realistic assessment can only end in the conclusion that Iran might continue on its path to a nuclear weapon, and that, if so, strengthened U.S. deterrence strategies will be critically important but not foolproof. **NR**

Athwart

BY JAMES LILEKS

Agent Obama

EVERY so often you find yourself reading a gripping account of a super-secret government program designed to foil the plots of our foes, and you think: Why am I reading a gripping account of a super-secret government program designed to foil the plots of our foes? During the Bush years you could count on the *New York Times* to reveal any stealthy scheme, just to embarrass the cowboy-in-chief; now, during the tenure of Professor Wonderful, we get secret details to remind us what an awesome war he's running. That Yemeni bomb-plot we foiled? Oh, we totally had a secret double agent in there, working with Saudi and Israeli intelligence! His name was Bob, and he lives with his family in Silver Spring now. Here's his address, if you want to see the house on Google Street View.

Shut up! Shut up already! Stop telling me secret things!

Now we have details about Stuxnet, the worm that wreaked havoc on the Iranian nuclear program. The *New York Times* ran an excerpt of a tell-all book that says Obama approved the Stuxnet program, inasmuch as Bush started it and Obama didn't stop it. At one point, the worm spilled into the wild and the project threatened to unravel. The story's first quote is telling: The president frowned, looked around the room, told everyone they had 48 hours to engineer a kill switch, and said, "Gentlemen, failure is not an option."

Just kidding! "'Should we shut this thing down?' Mr. Obama asked, according to members of the president's national security team who were in the room."

It could be worse. Given the hagiography that infuses the Left's view of President Obama, nowadays you expect to read something like this:

> The president, who has frequently cited his high-school habit of getting baked on reefer and watching *Star Trek* as instrumental in his intuitive understanding of computers and the complex codes that make them run, strode into the room with an unmistakable air of purpose and concern. He had found an error in line 27,394 of the code.
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> "There are those who say the value of this container should be two or four," he said, "but I reject these false choices. I say it is time we try three." The change was made, the program was recompiled, and it ran perfectly. Within a week, it had not only found Osama bin Laden by analyzing Pakistani credit-card transactions for purchases of moisturizer (bin Laden was rumored to suffer from chapped hands), it had also identified millions in savings to be had in the drone-manufacturing process, mostly by expanding the "kill list" to include workers taking a smoke break outside.
>
> Behind the scenes, aides are often frustrated by the public's inability to understand the president's technical mastery. "You got Fox News out there 24/7 telling people he's a Muslim, and people understand that Islamic mathematicians invented algebra, and they hated algebra."

The long twilight struggle has turned into standing in front of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue with a megaphone.

You would not be surprised to learn that the president met with Bill Gates and said he probably knew more about computers than any other president in history and his experience in Chicago gave him a keen appreciation of their strategic applications. (He played a lot of Space Invaders.) Nor would you be surprised if he told aides to let it be known he personally approved the nose-cone art for the drones, to make sure it was inclusive of all genders and body types. There might be some Pakistani villager with binoculars who suffered from poor self-image if she saw some classic cheesecake on a drone in the sky right before it blew her legs off.

You would, however, be surprised if they kept their mouths shut about these things. Key terms in the quote from the *Times*: "According to members of the president's national security team who were in the room . . ." Unless a clown car pulled up and 15 guys in makeup got out, it should have been a fairly small team. So someone should be quaking about his job, right? You assume they cover this on your first day at work:

> "Okay, this is a covert op. We're in a race against time to stop Iran from getting the bomb, and in this shadow war we must never let the other side grasp the extent of our capabilities. Uh—question? There, in the back?"
>
> "So if things go wrong and the program is discovered, can I tell a reporter about it a few years later, with gripping details about meetings with the president? I promise not to use my full name."
>
> "You can, but you will be stuck with a poison dart in your shin on a trip to Disney World, and we'll make sure the death report blames 'tertiary syphilis.' Anyone else? Okay then."

So you'd like to think. But the long twilight struggle has turned into standing in front of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue with a megaphone, apparently. CNN recently reported: "The president himself became the first administration official to acknowledge U.S. drones were conducting attacks in Pakistan when he made a comment to a supporter in an online chat, even though officials through all the years of the program had never said publicly they were being conducted." A comment. To a supporter. In a chat room. It's not quite like FDR having lunch at Rudy's Haus of Schnitzels and talking about D-day planning in a loud, confident voice, but it's not exactly discreet.

Perhaps aides will make it easier in the future; when the president gets an online message about national security, there will be a little blue button at the bottom of the screen that says "share this on Twitter." NR

Mr. Lileks blogs at www.lileks.com.



The Long View

BY ROB LONG

Wilson & Sterling

A professional corporation

IN RE: CLINTON/CLINTON CONTINUATION OF MARRIAGE AGREEMENT 2000, AND ADDENDA, UPDATED JUNE 2012

Dear Steve:

Many thanks for the phone call yesterday. I have received your e-mail and have discussed it with my client, Secretary Clinton.

My client is of course very grateful for the work your client has done to further the idea that a Hillary '16 campaign isn't such a far-fetched notion. Further, she is grateful to your client for his willingness to make recent public statements defending and supporting the current Republican nominee, Mitt Romney, especially as regards his work at Bain Capital.

All of this, as we have discussed, comes under the agreements in Appendix XXIX to the CONTINUATION OF MARRIAGE AGREEMENT with special reference to the paragraphs initialed by your client that agree to make "such statements and public utterances as shall be necessary for the continuation of the signature party and her political viability."

So, in conclusion, while we remain pleased with your client's consistent and material compliance with our stated agreement(s), such actions do not warrant a reopening of the agreement itself, nor additional compensation in the form of increased lady-time/pornographic-actress/female-companion allowances. Your client has been fairly compensated in that regard with seven (7) lady-time/pornographic-actress/female-companion events per annum. As we discussed and agreed, he is currently at his ceiling for 2012. And while I agree that, in your words, "it's only June," I'm not sure why my client needs to adjust her end of the agreement to suit your client's appetites. As stated, my client agreed to allow seven (7) lady-time/pornographic-actress/female-companion events of your client's exploding onto the front pages, in exchange for the delineated political assistance your client is obligated to render.

Please confer with your client and respond as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely &c.

Greg
(DICTATED BUT NOT READ)

Wilmer, Patton

A professional corporation

IN RE: CLINTON/CLINTON CONTINUATION OF MARRIAGE AGREEMENT 2000, AND ADDENDA, UPDATED JUNE 2012

Dear Greg:

Many thanks for your letter, and for your timely response to my client's request.

As you know, my client has tried many times to contact your client directly—something he is allowed to do under the JOINT AGREEMENT 11/2008 ADDENDUM TO CONTINUATION OF MARRIAGE AGREEMENT, PARAGRAPH iv.

Your client was stated to have been unavailable because of "travel," which is of course understandable for the sitting secretary of state. But my client is a former president of the United States and also has a busy travel schedule, and it was only natural that he would want to contact your client directly. As part of their healthy and strong marriage, both parties have negotiated through their attorneys a certain number of direct contacts (DCs) that are not required to be vetted for legal and compliance issues, and this certainly seemed to come under the agreed-upon definition of a DC.

That said, it's simply onerous to expect my client to pay for and maintain the kind of personal security force required to ensure, as you and your client seem to demand, that no pornographic actress ever be photographed embracing the former president and current husband of your client. His travel and public events are simply too numerous and too varied for this to be possible. As such, my client was merely trying to come to some more flexible—and realistic—definition of lady-time/pornographic-actress/female-companion event, which, as you admitted to me on the phone, is a "murky legal area."

In addition, my client feels that each event should be treated as a single event, irrespective of how many females there are in the photograph or encounter.

Finally, while we all agree that political advice, public messaging, and sudden disruptive for-attribution quotes are all part of the umbrella agreement on my client's responsibilities and deliverables, it must be said that his recent work in re: the Romney campaign, and his clearly articulated criticism of the current occupant of the White House, go far beyond the outlines of the CONTINUATION OF MARRIAGE AGREEMENT, both in its original form and in its amended and extended form, with special regard for the 2011 ADDENDUM "NEUTRALIZING BIDEN" PROTOCOLS. All of his recent work inures to the benefit of your client, the secretary of state, and to her eventual presidential campaign in 2016. It is churlish and operating in bad faith to deny my client the full extent of the lady-time/pornographic-actress/female-companion events to which he is entitled, and to the most flexible definition of same.

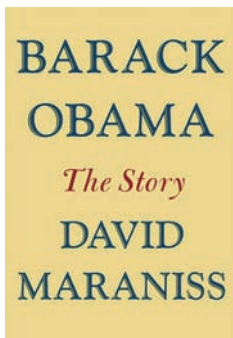
I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Steve
(DICTATED BUT NOT READ)

Came the Hero

MICHAEL KNOX BERAN



Barack Obama: The Story, by David Maraniss (Simon & Schuster, 641 pp., $32.50)

WHAT saves this narrative of Barack Obama's early life from being a data dump (it is very long and marred by superfluous detail) is its account of how the future president recast himself, in his college and post-college years, as a biracial outsider, an exotic golden child tormented by the perplexities of racial allegiance. *Washington Post* writer David Maraniss shows that long before Obama entered politics, he fashioned a heroic myth of himself. It went something like this: Only by solving the riddle of his racial identity could he take up the struggle that was to be his life's work.

Obama's boyish exposure to different cultures had little to do with the conversion he experienced in his twenties, when he first felt himself called to be a biracial superhero. To be sure, his mother, Stanley Ann Dunham, told him stories about Africa, but he never saw the continent with his own eyes until he was 26, and his Kenyan father had almost no personal influence on him. Stanley Ann left Obama *père* in August 1961, shortly after the birth of Barack: The child would not see his father again for ten years, when the older man came to Honolulu for a few weeks. The visit, Maraniss writes, "turned out to be the only time" in the future president's "conscious life that he would see his father in the flesh."

Nor did the four years Obama spent as a boy in Indonesia play much of a part in his reinvention of himself in the 1980s. Obama returned to America from Jakarta in 1971 and never afterwards resided outside the United States for any considerable length of time. When, in 1975, his mother returned to Indonesia to pursue her anthropological researches, Obama did not accompany her. "No way was he going to drop his buddies and his American existence to live in that strange country again," Maraniss writes.

Because his mother was often absent, Obama was to a great extent raised by his maternal grandparents, Stanley Armour Dunham and Madelyn Payne Dunham. They are perhaps the most appealing characters in the book, and were devoted to their grandson, but they were not likely to inspire an odyssey of racial self-discovery. Stanley, the son of Ralph Waldo Emerson Dunham and Ruth Lucille Armour, was born in Wichita in 1918; he served in the Army in World War II and later sold—or more often failed to sell—furniture and insurance. Madelyn, born in Peru, Kansas, in 1922, also contributed to the war effort, working long hours in the Boeing B-29 plant in Wichita; later, in Honolulu, she rose to be a vice president of the Bank of Hawaii, and was the breadwinner of the family.

"If there is a representative teenager's life," Maraniss writes, "Barry Obama lived a version of it in Hawaii in the 1970s." He loved basketball and dreamed of becoming a professional player. He had lots of friends, was always, a contemporary remembered, "in the mix, never on the sidelines." True, he later said that when he was 15 he often felt sorry for himself, but self-pity is hardly unusual in an adolescent. Schoolmates remember him as "happy-go-lucky," "always smiling," "the kind of guy who kept people in a good mood." He grew up playing the same games, watching the same TV shows, and hacking around in the same ways countless other Americans who came of age in that era did. If as president he sometimes gives the impression of being "a stranger in a strange land," it is because he decided, at a later stage in his life, to see himself in that light.

Obama has said that, in his memoir *Dreams from My Father*, he created "composite" characters and rearranged the chronological order of the events. But there "is more to it than that," Maraniss writes:

> The character creations and rearrangements of the book are not merely a matter of style, devices of compression, but are also substantive. The themes of the book control character and chronology. Time and again the narrative accentuates characters drawn from black acquaintances who played lesser roles in his real life but could be used to advance a line of thought, while leaving out or distorting the actions of friends who happened to be white. Sometimes the composites are even more complex; there are a few instances where black figures in the book have characteristics and histories that Obama took from white friends. The racial scene in his family history that is most familiar to the public, the time when he heard his grandparents in Hawaii argue because his grandmother was afraid of a black man at the bus stop, also happens to be among those pulled out of its real chronology and fit into a place where it might have more literary resonance.

In fact, Obama imposed on his boyish self a point of view he attained only when he was in his twenties, and he "focused the narrative through that racial lens." "The tendency in his self-portrait," Maraniss writes, is "to present himself as blacker and more disaffected than he was, if only slightly so." In truth, more than slightly. Obama's high-school classmate Tom Topolinski, of Polish and Chinese ancestry, never sensed "any bitterness, identity crisis, or internal strife" in the pre-1980 Obama. "He never appeared distraught, even after a lot of pot smoking and beer drinking." "In Hawaii we are all of mixed races and backgrounds," Topolinski told Maraniss. If on one or two occasions Obama was treated uncivilly on account of his race, such incidents were exceptional; in Hawaii in the Seventies it was arguably more

Mr. Beran is a contributing editor of City Journal *and the author, most recently, of* Pathology of the Elites.

difficult to be a young white man than a young black man. "I experienced a lot of racism growing up," Dan Hale, one of Obama's schoolmates, said to Maraniss. "If you're a *haole* [white outsider] here you're a minority most places. There was a lot of anti-*haole* stuff going on, and I caught a lot of that."

It was during his college years at Occidental and more especially at Columbia that Obama underwent an existential crisis. In New York he lived an eremitic existence in tiny apartments, reading, writing, and thinking. He dropped the name "Barry" and became "Barack," and withdrew into a mental wilderness. He seemed at times less like an American college student than like a character in a Russian novel—Pasha Antipov (Strelnikov) in Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* or Rakhmetov in Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*

It was during these years of ascetic introspection that Obama fashioned his myth of "the struggle." The most articulate witness to this phase of his life is Genevieve Cook, daughter of Australian diplomat Michael J. Cook. She is the unnamed white girlfriend in *Dreams from My Father* who, after going with Obama to a play by a black playwright, wonders "why black people [are] so angry all the time." In an interview with Maraniss, Obama "acknowledged that the scene did not happen with Genevieve." More revealing than this admission are the insights of Genevieve's diary: "Barack frets about the continual comfort I am always willing to offer—recognizing it as feeling good, but also chafing against the threat of its impeding a rawer sense of 'the struggle' (Mythology of the heroic struggle . . .)."

Describing a particular kind of hero, Lionel Trilling said that "his motive is the legendary one of setting out to seek his fortune, which is what the folktale says when it means that the hero is seeking himself." The hero believes "that there is some mystery about his birth; his parents, if truth were known, are of great and even royal estate." Obama told classmates in Hawaii that he was the son of an African prince, and later he would make much of the improbable union of Kansas and Kenya that produced him and seemed to mark him out as the healer of a fractured people.

There is another element in the romance: The aspiring hero, Trilling said, "understands everything to be a 'test.'" Obama found his tests in resisting his privileged whiteness (the badge of the insider) and cultivating in its stead an alienated blackness (the mark of the outsider, the stranger). For biracial though he was, he did not feel himself to be black. His own experiences were quite different from those of the writers to whom he looked for guidance—James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, and W. E. B. DuBois. His father's people in British Kenya were not slaves, and if they suffered under colonial rule they also benefited from it—Obama's father was taught by English schoolmasters and helped by American missionaries.

Obama could never believe in Malcolm X's "white devil." The white people to whom he was closest, his mother and his maternal grandparents, loved him and sacrificed for him. To Genevieve, he said "he felt like an impostor. Because he was so white. There was hardly a black bone in his body." He took to carrying a tattered copy of Ellison's *Invisible Man*, to remind him of what he wanted to be.

Genevieve was another test, a temptation to be overcome. "Somehow splitting himself off from people," she wrote, "is necessary to his feeling of following some chosen route? which basically remains undefined. And am I to be left behind also?" She knew the answer. He "wants to fly," she wrote in May 1984, "and hasn't yet started to take off, so resents extra weight."

Other prerogatives of whiteness had also to be rejected, and here, too, recalcitrant facts had to be reworked to fit a narrative of heroic overcoming. In *Dreams from My Father* Obama exaggerated the glamour of his first job, an entry-level position in a midtown research firm. He described how, coming "out of an interview with Japanese financiers or German bond traders, I would catch my reflection in the elevator doors—see myself in a suit and tie, a briefcase in my hand—and for a split second, I would imagine myself as a captain of industry, barking out orders, closing the deal, before I remembered who it was that I wanted to be." This picture of the lowly researcher rubbing shoulders with Swiss bankers amused former coworkers whom Maraniss interviewed. Obama reworked his experiences, one of them thought, "as the temptation of Christ . . . the young idealistic would-be community organizer who gets a nice suit and barely escapes moving into the big mansion with the white folks."

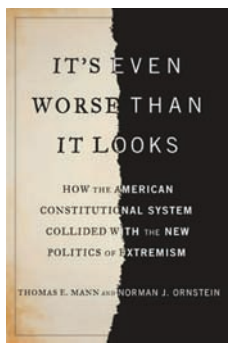
The Story ends with Obama, having passed his tests and found the black outsider within, about to enter Harvard Law School and devote himself to "the struggle." But if inwardly he subordinated his white self to his black one, he preserved outwardly many of the characteristics of plain-vanilla whiteness—characteristics that would enable him, he believed, to be a new kind of leader, one who could rise higher than previous minority politicians and do more in the struggle to raise up those who (in his view) are victims of an unfair racial and economic order. Although Obama had not yet composed his gospels, *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*, the myths that would make his ascent possible had taken shape. **NR**



Genevieve Cook and Barack Obama

Extremely Non-Partisan

JOSEPH POSTELL



It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism, by Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein (Basic, 240 pp., $26)

THE impulse for harmony in politics is understandable. All else being equal, most of us would prefer civility to narrow-minded partisanship and petty bickering. The difficulty is, of course, that all else is *not* equal. Most of us would accept partisanship and bickering if it meant the enactment of better policy.

This is the problem with facile appeals to comity and non-partisanship. When people innocently ask why the parties can't get along, there is often a veiled assumption: The other side needs to stop dragging their feet and get with the program—*our* program. They would be perfectly willing to fight (rather than get along) if it meant that their vision of justice would be enacted. Thus they display bumper stickers proclaiming "Dissent is the highest form of patriotism" when in the opposition, and denounce partisanship when in the majority.

This problem has afflicted political parties since the birth of our republic. The Founders embodied this tension between the desire for political harmony and the necessity of political conflict. George Washington denounced the "baneful effects of the spirit of party" in his farewell address, and Thomas Jefferson famously declared that "we are all Republicans, we are all Federalists" in his first inaugural address. But at the same time, the Founders engaged in bitter squabbling, using partisan newspapers to spread slanderous rumors about political opponents. And these petty tactics resulted in an infamous set of laws passed in the name of preserving political harmony: the Alien and Sedition Acts.

This tension between political harmony and political conflict has produced total confusion and hypocrisy in many of today's commentators. In this new book, two longtime Beltway political analysts lecture readers on how dysfunctional Washington has become, and how the Republicans are responsible for it. They thus produce a book that suffers from exactly the sort of one-sided narrative they denounce.

Their argument is relatively simple: There are "two overriding sources of dysfunction" in today's politics. The first is "the serious mismatch between the political parties . . . and a governing system that, unlike a parliamentary democracy, makes it extremely difficult for majorities to act." The second is "the fact that . . . one of the two major parties, the Republican Party, has become an insurgent outlier."

The first of these two propositions—that our party system has been transformed and polarized over the past several decades—is worthy of serious consideration. This story is familiar to most political scientists: "Political parties today are more internally unified and ideologically distinctive than they have been in over a century." The parties have become essentially nationalized. Republicans tend to hold the same political views as other Republicans, regardless of geography. There is very little difference between a northern and a southern (or western) Republican. The same is true of Democrats. The causes of this trend are numerous (political, migratory, and demographic), and they ultimately came to a head in the 1960s, when Democrats lost their strong hold on the South and Republicans' strength in New England began to wane. Mann and Ornstein's account of this trend, though it spans only ten or so pages, is interesting and readable, and is a good introductory treatment of this important topic.



"There's no such thing as a free lunch, and, by golly, I'm going to Washington to change *that!"*

But the authors devote most of their effort to defending their second proposition—that "the Republican party has become an insurgent outlier," incapable of coexisting with a well-functioning democracy. Their argument bears all of the characteristics, and the subtlety, of a rant. There are conspiracy theories and paranoia, identifying the usual suspects (Newt Gingrich and the Koch brothers) and the not-so-usual suspects (John Roberts). Bizarrely, several pages are dedicated to discussing a chain e-mail about congressional pensions.

The resulting conclusion is that we face an unprecedented situation, in which one major party is so beyond the pale that it threatens the very fabric of the country. Mann and Ornstein are very clear that what happened last summer with the persistent battle over the debt ceiling was evidence of a crisis. But several pieces of anecdotal evidence do not constitute a proof. A book that offered serious discussion of a widening philosophical gap between the two major parties and linked that gap to an increase in partisanship would be a fascinating and important contribution. Unfortunately, that is not what Mann and Ornstein have written.

Anticipating this response, the authors acknowledge that "readers might be struck by a lack of balance in our treatment of the two major parties." In reply, they fall back on bare assertion: "Democrats are hardly blameless and have their own extreme wing and their own predilection to hardball politics. But . . . those tendencies have not generally veered outside the normal boundaries of robust politics. At the same time, Republicans in office have driven both the widening of the ideological gap between the parties and the strategic hyperpartisanship on such crucial issues as financial stabilization, economic

Mr. Postell is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. He is a co-editor of Rediscovering Political Economy.

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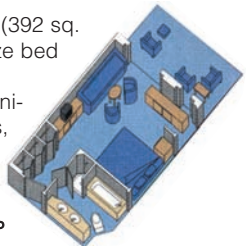
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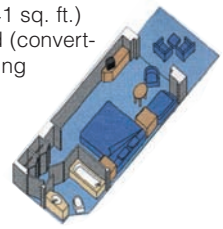
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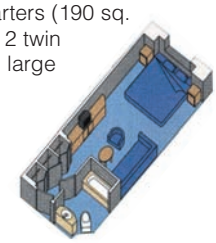
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recovery, deficits and debt, health-care reform, and climate change." In other words, Democrats use hardball politics, but they do so within "the normal boundaries of robust politics"; Republicans do so in pursuit of a radical, ideological, hyperpartisan agenda.

In the end, then, Mann and Ornstein seem to oppose not hardball politics, but hardball politics in the pursuit of certain ends. The tactics aren't the problem. The Democrats can be nasty, because they are *right*. The Republicans cannot be nasty, because they are *wrong*. If the Republicans weren't so damn conservative, there wouldn't be so much partisanship. The implicit premise is that Republicans are radical and partisan because they are conservative, and we'd be much better off if we returned to the days when Republicans were content to go in the direction of progressive liberalism, albeit a little bit more slowly.

To restate the argument in this manner is to demonstrate the problem with it. The authors provide very little argument that the Republicans have crossed an ideological Rubicon in any substantive way. There are a few quotes from Republican dissenters Chuck Hagel and Mike Lofgren, but that is all they offer.

They do note that a couple of prominent commentators (Ramesh Ponnuru and Steven Hayward) have warned against taking a position of avoiding, at all costs, accommodation and compromise. But these statements are not the smoking gun Mann and Ornstein are looking for. They are simply a friendly reminder that opposition is most effective when it offers feasible alternatives—something that the Republicans have arguably been doing, with Paul Ryan's Roadmap on the budget and the repeal-and-replace approach on Obamacare. The book never acknowledges the existence of these alternative ideas.

In tracing the causes of our present discontent back to the 1960s, Mann and Ornstein ultimately miss the bigger picture and fail to address the larger questions. Perhaps Congress was *designed* as a party-based institution in which conflict was resolved through confrontation. In grappling with this question, William F. Connelly Jr.'s 2010 book *James Madison Rules America* is far more helpful and nuanced.

Furthermore, perhaps the specific source of today's partisan conflict is found earlier than Mann and Ornstein think: in the mass democracy introduced during the Progressive Era. With the rise of mass democracy, problems of campaign finance, demagoguery, and media influence inevitably became more acute. Sidney Milkis's *Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive Party, and the Transformation of American Democracy* (2009) provides a good discussion of these issues.

In the end, some of Mann and Ornstein's proposals are interesting and defensible. Some of them are obvious (the media should be more responsible in reporting the truth about Washington politics and policy). Others ought to be given serious consideration (reforming the cloture rule in the Senate).

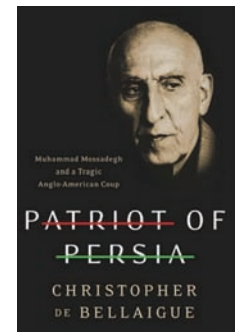
Their closing proposals aim to direct voters in an especially helpful way: "Punish a party for ideological extremism by voting against it. (Today, that means the GOP.) . . . Consider carefully which presidential ticket (the candidates, party, and platform) you prefer to lead the country. Then entrust that party with the majority in the House and Senate. It makes more sense than divided government in these times of partisan polarization." The solution for partisan polarization turns out to be quite simple: Give the Democrats control of the House, the Senate, and the presidency. Voilà! No more partisan opposition!

Mann and Ornstein acknowledge that the idea for *It's Even Worse Than It Looks* was hatched in the wake of the debt-ceiling debate last August, a mere nine months before it hit bookstores. Unfortunately, the haste with which the book was written explains, but does not excuse, the final product. **NR**

Mann and Ornstein provide very little argument that the Republicans have crossed an ideological Rubicon in any substantive way.

Myths of Mossadegh

AMIR TAHERI



Patriot of Persia: Muhammad Mossadegh and a Tragic Anglo-American Coup, by Christopher de Bellaigue (Harper, 300 pp., $27.99)

For decades, the debate on Iran in the United States has been dominated by a legend in which an elderly aristocrat plays the central role. The legend is that in August 1953, a couple of CIA operatives organized a coup d'état that toppled a democratically elected government and paved the way for the seizure of power by the mullahs 26 years later. The hero of the legend is one Muhammad Mossadegh, who had been appointed prime minister by the shah for a second time in 1952.

The legend was born almost a decade after the events, when the CIA, its reputation in tatters after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, was desperately looking for some success story. Since dozens of books have already been written on it, one might wonder why Christopher de Bellaigue, a British journalist, thought it necessary to offer yet another. The answer is that the legend fails to fade away. Right now, it is cited by Obama-administration officials to justify the policy of a "stretched hand of friendship" toward the mullahs in Tehran.

De Bellaigue blames the "tragedy" on Republicans who were in power in Washington at the time of the coup: specifically, President Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers. Under the Republicans, "fair

Mr. Taheri is an Iranian-born journalist based in Europe and the author of The Persian Night: Iran under the Khomeinist Revolution.

play had gone by the board at home, where Senator Joseph McCarthy was directing a persecution of suspected Communists," and Eisenhower's team had concluded that "it was a good moment for a muscular assertion of American values abroad." The president and the Dulles brothers not only plotted against Mossadegh but also organized a propaganda campaign in Iran "to blacken the [Tudeh's] name by showing that it was a creature of the Soviets." (The Tudeh was Iran's Communist party, which, according to its own leaders, was founded by Moscow in 1941 and controlled by the KGB to the very end.)

The point man for the coup was Kermit Roosevelt, who, if de Bellaigue is to be believed, was a genius in black arts: He arrived in Tehran on July 19 and overthrew Mossadegh just a month later. To assist him, the CIA had a few assets, including *New York Times* reporter Kenneth Love and an obscure UPI stringer of Iranian origin.

De Bellaigue's anger is not directed only at the Republicans in Washington: Mossadegh's Iranian opponents also get a thorough thrashing. While Mossadegh's supporters are described as "the people," his opponents are labeled "slum-dwellers."

Our author simply cannot imagine that at least some ordinary Iranians might have disliked Mossadegh. Only "goons" and "mobsters" marched against him. When they burn buildings and shops, Mossadegh's supporters are merely "showing popular anger." But when Mossadegh's opponents do the same thing, de Bellaigue calls their action "sedition."

But what about the underlying truth of the matter? In fact, the Mossadegh legend is full of holes. Let's start with the claim that, prior to the supposed CIA intervention, Iran had been a democracy. The truth is that Iran was not a democracy but a constitutional monarchy in which the king, known as the shah, wielded immense power, including the right to appoint and dismiss the prime minister. By 1953, the shah, who had acceded to the throne in 1941, had appointed and dismissed ten prime ministers, among them Mossadegh. Between 1953 and 1979, when he left for exile, he was to appoint twelve more. None of those changes of prime minister was described as a coup d'état, because, fully constitutional, they did not alter the substance or the form of Iran as a nation-state. Even Mossadegh himself never challenged the shah's right to dismiss him as prime minister: During his trial, he claimed that he had initially doubted the authenticity of the shah's edict dismissing him. Nor did Mossadegh himself claim that the Americans had played a role in ending his tenure as prime minister.

De Bellaigue is at pains to portray Mossadegh as—in the words of the jacket copy—"one of the first liberals of the Middle East, a man whose conception of liberty was as sophisticated as any in Europe or America." But the trouble is, there is nothing in Mossadegh's career—spanning half a century, as provincial governor, cabinet minister, and finally prime minister—to portray him as even remotely a lover of liberty. De Bellaigue quotes Mossadegh as saying that a trusted leader is "that person whose every word is accepted and followed by the people." To which de Bellaigue adds: "His understanding of democracy would always be coloured by traditional ideas of Muslim leadership, whereby the community chooses a man of outstanding virtue and follows him wherever he takes them." Word for word, that could have been the late Ayatollah Khomeini's definition of a true leader.

Mossadegh also made a habit of appearing in his street meetings with a copy of the Koran in hand. According to de Bellaigue, Mossadegh liked to say that "anyone forgetting Islam is base and dishonourable, and should be killed."

During his premiership, Mossadegh demonstrated his dictatorial tendency to the full: Not once did he hold a full meeting of the council of ministers, ignoring the constitutional rule of collective responsibility. He dissolved the senate, the second chamber of the Iranian parliament, and shut down the Majlis, the lower house. He suspended a general election before all the seats had been decided and chose to rule with absolute power. He disbanded the high council of national currency and dismissed the supreme court. During much of his tenure, Tehran lived under a curfew while hundreds of his opponents were imprisoned. Toward the end of his premiership, almost all of his friends and allies had broken with him. Some even wrote to the secretary general of the United Nations to intervene to end Mossadegh's dictatorship.

But was Mossadegh a man of the people, as de Bellaigue portrays him? Again, the author's own account provides a different picture. A landowning prince and the great-great-grandson of a Qajar king, Mossadegh belonged to the so-called thousand families who owned Iran. He and all his children were able to undertake expensive studies in Switzerland and France. The children had French nannies and, when they fell sick, were sent to Paris or Geneva for treatment. (De Bellaigue even insinuates that Mossadegh might have had a French sweet-

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heart, although that is improbable.) On the one occasion when Mossadegh was sent to internal exile, he took with him a whole retinue, including his cook.

Dean Acheson described Mossadegh as "a rich, reactionary, feudal-minded Persian inspired by a fanatical hatred of the British." But even his supposed hatred of the British is open to question: His uncle Farmanfarma was Britain's principal ally in Iran for almost four decades. In his memoirs, Mossadegh says that during his first posting, when he was governor of the province of Fars, he and the British consul "worked hand in hand like brothers."

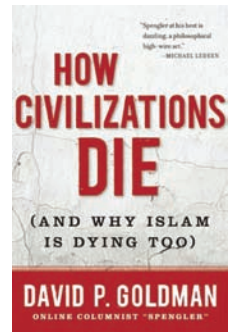
As a model of patriotism, too, Mossadegh is unconvincing. According to his own memoirs, at the end of his law studies in Switzerland, he had decided to stay there and acquire Swiss citizenship. He changed his mind when he was told that he would have to wait ten years for that privilege. At the same time, Farmanfarma secured a "good post" for him in Iran, tempting him back home.

De Bellaigue tries to portray the 1951–53 drama in Iran as a clash of British colonialism and Iranian nationalism. That claim, too, is hard to sustain. Iran was never a British colony. The Anglo-Iranian oil company was present in five remote localities, which did not amount to even half of 1 percent of the country's territory, in one of Iran's provinces. At its peak the company employed 118 British nationals. Thus the overwhelming majority of Iranians had never seen a single Brit in their lives.

Sadly, de Bellaigue seems to know nothing of the hundreds of books and thousands of essays that provide the Iranian narrative of these events. The assumption is that, mere objects in their own history, Iranians cannot offer a valid narrative. It seems that, in the writing of history, scholarly imperialism comes in two versions. In the first, an arrogant "white world" boasts about its historic mission to civilize "the natives," and takes credit for whatever is good in the world. In the second, the "guilt version," the "white world" is portrayed as the aggressor and thus responsible for whatever disaster happens to "the natives." Both of these versions assume that, on their own, "the natives" cannot accomplish anything, right or wrong. The imperialism of arrogance and de Bellaigue's imperialism of guilt are two faces of the same coin. **NR**

Decline All Around

CLAIRE BERLINSKI



How Civilizations Die (And Why Islam Is Dying Too), by David P. Goldman (Regnery, 306 pp., $27.95)

In 1995, on a whim, I answered a help-wanted ad in the back of *The Economist* and landed a job as an editor with a start-up newspaper in Bangkok consecrated to the goal of countering the White Man's neo-imperialist journalism. The newspaper was the original *Asia Times*, and thus I have always been privy to the secret identity of its pseudonymous columnist Spengler, who happened to be a white male neo-imperialist and the only journalist there capable of writing anything interesting—or even grammatical.

In 2009, Spengler publicly revealed himself in the pages of *First Things* as David P. Goldman, a classically trained pianist who had enjoyed a storied career in the New York financial industry. Among the more bizarre details of his autobiography was his confession of a long association with Lyndon LaRouche. "We were all about thirty," he wrote, "and most of us were Jewish. The question, of course, is what were a group of young Jews doing in the company of a cult leader with a paranoid view of the world and a thinly disguised anti-Semitic streak." A good question indeed, particularly since that anti-Semitic streak was about as thinly disguised as a Kiev pogrom. His answer is not entirely satisfying: "We were all long-in-the-tooth student radicals. LaRouche's organization was the flotsam washed up by the wave of the collective madness that had swept through the youth of the world in 1968 and left many of its participants maladapted to ordinary life for years afterward."

He was cured of his maladaptation, he offers, by Norman Bailey, then director of plans at the National Security Council. "My political education began in his lair at the Old Executive Office Building in 1981, when he explained to me that the United States would destroy the Soviet Empire by the end of the 1980s. After I became convinced that the Reagan administration knew what it was doing, my break with LaRouche was inevitable." From Bailey it was a short journey to Franz Rosenzweig, and from Rosenzweig to the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom Spengler so earnestly desired not to meet. At last, he was a devout Jew. And thus had he achieved the only thing in life that matters: immortality.

This is the chief thesis of *How Civilizations Die*: Immortality is all. "The history of the world," Goldman writes, "is the history of humankind's search for immortality," for humankind cannot bear mortality without hope. He proposes that this is the central point neglected by modern political science and contemporary strategic thinking; without this understanding, geopolitical models bear no real resemblance to the world in which we live, a world in which the crucial issue is "the willingness or unwillingness of a people inhabiting a given territory to bring a new generation into the world." Faith and fertility go hand in hand, he argues. In this assertion he is supported by almost every serious demographer, although few demographers are willing to state so forthrightly the conclusions to which their data inexorably lead.

Now, a few observations: Spengler is a weirdo and a crank. His book inadvertently reveals as much about his own existential despair as it does the world's. But he is also—much as Max Weber described Oswald the Ur-Spengler—a "very ingenious and learned dilettante," and a lively and provocative (if occasionally pretentious) writer. I have never missed one of his columns, and this book is one of the few I've read in recent years that bubble with ideas. Not all of them are good, and some are silly, but at least the thing isn't *boring*.

Claire Berlinski is a freelance journalist who lives in Istanbul. She is the author of Menace in Europe: Why the Continent's Crisis Is America's, Too *and* There Is No Alternative: Why Margaret Thatcher Matters.

The most important idea: Contrary to received wisdom, it is not just Europe that is in demographic decline. The Islamic world, too, is on the fast track to demographic senility. To my surprise, it seems he is quite right: All the studies confirm it. Muslim-majority countries are now exhibiting significantly lower fertility levels than non-Muslim ones. (Here I should make my own confession: When, in 2006, I wrote a book treating, among other subjects, the crisis of European demographic decline, I failed completely to notice this parallel trend. Mea culpa. In my defense, at least I never worked for Lyndon LaRouche.)

A particularly interesting point about the fertility plunge in the Islamic world—and it is indeed the *entire* Islamic world—was made recently by Nicholas Eberstadt in *Foreign Policy*. These trends, he writes, "contradict the received wisdom that family planning programs make an important independent contribution to reducing fertility levels in developing countries: strikingly, desired fertility rates and the availability of contraceptives aren't that closely correlated." Exactly how Muslim women are managing to avoid pregnancy sans contraception is a mystery; Eberstadt suggests the answer may be found in Lant Pritchett's puzzling and provocative paper published in 1994 and blandly titled "Desired Fertility and the Impact of Population Policies." The thesis, simplified: When women want children, they have them; when they don't, they don't. They have evidently discovered how to make themselves infertile at will, through a mechanism no one quite understands.

But why might Muslim women be so averse to reproduction? In Goldman's view, the answer is obvious: "The repression of women . . . is part of the warp and woof of Islamic society, the most obvious manifestation of its inextricable roots in tribal life." Upon even the most casual exposure to the possibility of living otherwise—and in the contemporary world, the mere possession of a television provides this exposure—what woman wouldn't say, "To hell with this"?

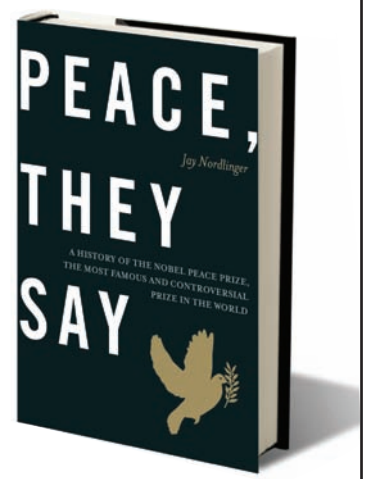
So does this mean we need not worry about the clash of civilizations? No, says Goldman, quite the contrary, for there is nothing more dangerous than a dying civilization. The Islamic world will soon be as elderly as the industrialized world, but it will not be industrialized. "Imminent population collapse," he proposes, "makes radical Islam more dangerous, not less so. For in their despair, radical Muslims who can already taste the ruin of their culture believe that they have nothing to lose."

Perhaps. It is an interesting thesis, at least. But I am not convinced that Muslims are thinking this way, consciously or unconsciously. Europeans and Americans have proven themselves pathologically unable to recognize that, absent a high fertility rate, the cost of caring for their dependent elderly populations will ruin them, so why should we expect the Muslim world to be more foresighted? Demographic projections are remote abstractions, published in unread journals such as *Population and Development Review*—until they become reality. No, it seems to me the Islamic world is brimming with confidence these days, with Islamists in power, or soon to be in power, in Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya—well, no need to continue the list, I'm sure it will be longer by the time this goes to print—and the West sunk in a morass of gloom and despond. As for Iran, its leadership seems positively to be enjoying itself; they must be wiping away tears of laughter after their chummy dinner parties with EU foreign minister Catherine Ashton.

Does Turkey have what it takes to find its way from agrarian backwardness to industrial modernity before its youthful population become wards of the state? I have been living in Turkey for seven years, and I wonder this every day; it is an excellent question. But I am not sure that Goldman's pessimism is warranted. He is off, in some way, in the subtle details. For example, he dismisses the influential Pennsylvania-based cleric Fethullah Gülen as a primitive Anatolian peasant who believes in djinns and lacks the intellectual sophistication to succeed in the modern world. Gülen does believe in

The Islamic world will soon be as elderly as the industrialized world, but it will not be industrialized.

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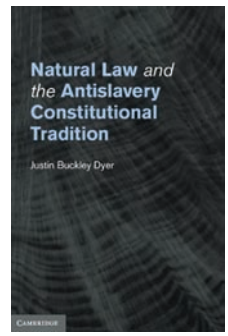
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djinns, to be sure, but his theology is a masterpiece of rigor compared with what most Americans believe—may I remind Mr. Goldman that *The Secret* was an American bestseller?—and only a man crippled by his own snobbery would conclude that Gülen doesn't have what it takes to succeed in the modern world. To say that about the Bernie Madoff of interfaith East-West multicultural dialogue is to ignore the obvious: The man is an entrepreneurial genius.

Goldman is probably right to predict that much of the Islamic world cannot enter modernity fast enough to forestall disaster, but nothing in my experience—and I do have some—suggests to me that anyone in this region is so persuaded of imminent extinction, literal or metaphysical, as to justify Goldman's certainty that it will conform to what he terms his Universal Law #1: "A man or nation at the brink of death does not have a 'rational self-interest.'" Indeed, the Islamists where I live think it is all going swimmingly and according to plan. The sentiment may be very different in ten years or twenty, but as of today, the danger emanating from the Islamic world is an excess, not a deficit, of confidence in its prospects. And thus Berlinski's Universal Law #1, which is no more comforting than Goldman's: "A man or nation on the brink of victory has a very rational self-interest. It just isn't necessarily ours." **NR**

Written on The Mind

RYAN T. ANDERSON



Natural Law and the Antislavery Constitutional Tradition, by Justin Buckley Dyer (Cambridge, 216 pp., $90)

For a nation founded on the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God, much of the past century of American moral and legal thinking has been a denial of our heritage. While we once thought that man, the rational animal, could intelligibly discern transcendent principles of justice, many contemporary figures have downplayed, if not flat-out denied, this possibility. By doing so they have undermined the foundations of our political order.

Justin Dyer's new book explores the natural-law foundations of our constitutional regime. Against scholarly trends that argue that our Constitution was in favor of (or at best neutral on) slavery, Dyer presents a host of early Americans who argued that the principles of the Founding and the logic of the Constitution were undeniably antagonistic to it. Against Whiggish history that views the abolition of slavery as the inevitable result of the march of progress, Dyer argues that nothing was inevitable, and that arguments had to be made in order to secure a just outcome. Against neat and tidy accounts of the relation of principle to practice, Dyer shows how the application of moral principle to concrete cases is frequently convoluted, full of tension and disharmony. And against skeptics who deny the existence of moral truth and political liberals who refuse to allow religious and other "comprehensive doctrines" to influence debates, Dyer insists that the antislavery constitutional tradition demonstrates that moral truths can be known and are vitally important.

Alas, he doesn't make any of these points as effectively as he could, for the book's structure obscures his argument. Without a roadmap, readers may lose their way in the weeds of his case studies. Some of the chapters are previously published journal articles, which helps explain the book's fragmentary feel (along with the abundant repetition, including quotations that appear several times). Only in my second reading did I grasp Dyer's goals, and I fear that many will close the book before finishing it.

And that would be a shame, since the book is a carefully argued, richly sourced study of an important topic. At its heart is the proposition that "if all men were created equal in some relevant moral sense, and if legitimate government authority was both founded on the consent of the governed and circumscribed by inalienable natural rights derived from the laws of nature, then the institution of race-based and hereditary chattel slavery stood out as a gross contradiction of the theoretical foundations of American government."

It was the Declaration's truths, Abraham Lincoln argued, that the Constitution

Mr. Anderson is the editor of Public Discourse: Ethics, Law, and the Common Good, *the online journal of the Witherspoon Institute of Princeton, N.J.*

CONVERSATION

You are a lovely sky of autumn, clear and rose!
But inside me, grief is rising, like the sea,
Leaving as it ebbs upon my lip morose,
Bitter culinary silts of memory.

—Vainly does your hand slide on my swooning breast;
This place it is seeking has been pillaged, friend,
By the woman's tooth-and-claw ferociousness.
My heart was eaten by the beasts. Let searching end.

My heart is like a palace ransacked by a riot;
One gets drunk there, one pulls hair there, one is quiet!
—Around your naked neck is swimming a perfume! . . .

O Beauty, scourge of hearts, this thing you would consume!
With your eyes of fire, akin to brilliant feasts,
Burn to ash these remnants salvaged by the beasts!

—CHARLES BAUDELAIRE
translated by Jennifer Reeser

was meant to serve. The principle it announced was the word "'fitly spoken,' which has proved an 'apple of gold' to us," he said, alluding to Proverbs 25:11; and thus the Constitution was "the picture of silver, subsequently framed around it." Lincoln insisted that "the picture was made, not to conceal, or destroy the apple; but to adorn, and preserve it. The picture was made for the apple—not the apple for the picture." The Constitution's various compromises about slavery that were needed to form a more perfect union, then, should be seen as ultimately putting the country on the path toward abolition. James Madison had insisted it was "wrong to admit in the Constitution the idea that there could be property in men," and so the text never spoke of slavery, but used various circumlocutions.

Moreover, Dyer shows that a generation of antislavery statesmen insisted that "the natural-law principles undergirding the Constitution were antithetical to chattel slavery . . . even though slavery had been protected by the Constitution's various compromises." For these men, natural law gave "the theoretical foundation both for constitutional arguments against slavery and for an antislavery defense of the Constitution's compromises."

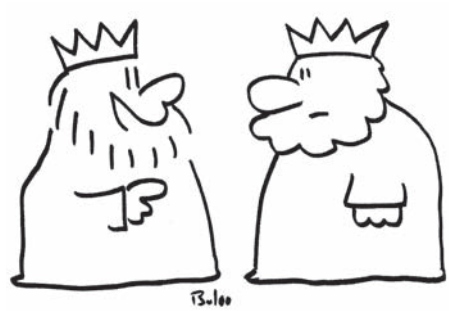
Exploring the thought of figures such as Lord Chief Justice Mansfield, John Quincy Adams, and John McLean, Dyer shows how even jurists who could not champion their antislavery principles owing to contingencies of political life and demands of positive law nonetheless believed that slavery offended the laws of nature and nature's God—and that the opinions they did issue allowed for more daring challenges to slavery, especially those advanced by Adams and Lincoln.

We can group these arguments around four headings: self-government, the morality of slavery, judicial review or supremacy, and the metaphysics of morals. If the Declaration declared the principle of self-government, and if the Constitution was designed to thwart arbitrary rule, then on what ground could one claim to govern another man as property? Dyer notes that the "system of chattel slavery established the private despotism of one man over another; the rule of private human will instead of the rule of law; and the expansion and enlargement of arbitrary power." This put the entire foundation of self-government at risk.

At a speech in Peoria, Lincoln explained that if the slave "is not a man, why in that case, he who is a man may, as a matter of self-government, do just as he pleases with him. But if the negro is a man, is it not to that extent, a total destruction of self-government?" In his debate with Stephen Douglas, Lincoln showed that Douglas's claim to have no position on slavery—and that each locality should decide for itself—amounted to taking a stance on slavery: "When Judge Douglas says that whoever, or whatever community, wants slaves, they have a right to have them, he is perfectly logical if there is nothing wrong in the institution; but if you admit that it is wrong, he cannot logically say that anybody has a right to do wrong."

This forced the question of the morality of slavery. To answer it—and show its relevancy to constitutional debates—both Adams and Lincoln appealed to the Declaration's natural-law truths. Dyer notes that Adams appealed to a "transhistorical basis of right against which the historical practice of slavery was thought to be antithetical." And this source of right "had a metaphysical basis in reality while also having a historical basis in America's founding documents," thus rendering it "relevant to constitutional adjudication." If all men are really created equal and endowed by their Creator with rights, slavery was self-evidently wrong.

After the Supreme Court's decision in *Dred Scott*, Lincoln affirmed judicial review but denied judicial supremacy. The Court's ruling was binding for the parties in that case. Yet while it deserved "very high respect" in similar cases and from other branches of government, Lincoln said, the legislative and executive branches were co-equal with the Court and had a duty to uphold the Constitution as they understood it: To give the Court the final word on what the Constitution meant was to "resign[] their government into the hands of that eminent tribunal." Lincoln further insisted, "If I were in Congress, and a vote should come up on a question whether slavery could be prohibited in a new territory, in spite of the *Dred Scott* decision, I would vote that it should."



"I know!—You nominate me for a Nobel Prize, and I'll nominate you*!"*

These arguments require a certain metaphysics of morals. As Dyer notes, Lincoln's view was that the Constitution "was informed by moral principles, grounded in human nature, which provided the logical basis for republican government." These principles were binding because of God's design. Dyer argues that "in Locke's natural-law theory, as interpreted by the Founders and amalgamated with American Protestant theology, a providential God provided the grounds of moral obligation to obey the laws of nature." Contemporary American legal theorists reject much of this: Vanderbilt law professor Mark Brandon notes that "invoking a standard of human dignity is problematic, not least because of its metaphysical roots. Human dignity evokes natural law and natural rights, which are off limits in the new constitutionalism." But this, Dyer argues, undercuts our entire moral and political order: "If an intelligent, creating and moralistic God has not imbued the natural order with discernible purposes, then it is senseless to talk about morally binding laws accessible to human reason." Dyer quickly adds that one need not start with belief in God and then work toward morality. Instead, the intelligible order of nature, our "grasp of human goods," and the "distinction we draw between right and wrong" are themselves "evidence for the existence of such a providential God."

Dyer closes the book with an assessment of Frederick Douglass's public arguments against slavery. Measuring them, along with Lincoln's, by the standards of Rawlsian public reason, Dyer concludes that Rawls's attempt to find an overlapping consensus based on current political culture rules out appeals from so-called "comprehensive doctrines" and their deeper metaphysical sources. But the arguments of the antislavery constitutional theorists "were notable precisely because they challenged, from foundational premises, important aspects of their own public political culture." This serves as a fitting reminder that the natural-law tradition should help us challenge important aspects of our own political culture as well. **NR**

Happy Warrior

BY MARK STEYN

Gradus ad Narcissum

"How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" "Practice." It's an old line, and perhaps an obsolescent one. I can't recall the last time I heard anyone use it. Americans don't seem to want to get to Carnegie Hall, not if *American Idol* is auditioning round the block. And practice is one of those things, like math, the education system seems to have ceded to the Asians. These days, China not only makes most of the pianos, but plays them. David Goldman (the Internet's "Spengler") likes to point out the correlation between the study of Western classical music and success in science. "There's a difference," he writes, "between an engineer and an engineer who plays Bach." Whenever he makes his case, even those of a conservative disposition fill up the comments section with objections: There's nothing wrong with an engineer who likes rock-'n'-roll, or country, or thrash metal or gangsta rap or grunge . . .

Be that as it may, music has fled our schools: In California and New Jersey, you can reach twelfth grade without having heard a note of Mozart. At the school concert I attended this month, the students contented themselves with insipid group karaoke from the current hit parade:

> 'Cause, baby, you're a firework!
> Come on, show 'em what you're worth
> Make 'em go oh-oh-oh
> As you shoot across the sky . . .

Nobody shot across the sky. The performance barely shot across the footlights. But at the end the parents whooped noisily. A song about how uniquely extraordinary you are is given a pedestrian performance but showered with extravagant praise anyway. To my ears, there's a sad desperation about these numbers, but I seem to be in a minority. And the principal alternative to songs about how extraordinarily extraordinary your sweetheart is are songs about how extraordinarily extraordinary you yourself are:

> Yeah, yeah, when I walk on by
> Girls be lookin' like, "Damn, he fly" . . .

I've got me under my skin. I believe I've noted previously, a propos what a recent survey of contemporary pop lyrics called the "narcissism epidemic," Beyoncé's song about how hot she looks when she's dancing. I wouldn't say she looks *that* hot, not in the sense of Dame Margot Fonteyn dancing *Romeo and Juliet* with Nureyev. But, as the late Whitney Houston observed, learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all. And, if not the greatest, certainly a lot easier.

Ease is the dominant characteristic of our pop culture. The other day, I took my daughter to see *Snow White and the Huntsman*. On balance, I'd have preferred *Snow White and Jon Huntsman*. In the snows of New Hampshire, the latter had way tougher odds than Snow White faces up against a supposedly evil queen of unlimited powers. The *New York Times* critic thought the new film "tries to recapture some of the menace" of old-time fairy tales, but Snow White, having been walled up in the tower for the best part of 20 years, makes her escape and in nothing flat is transformed into a kick-ass heroine à la Keira Knightley in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. She doesn't need a kiss—and, indeed, when she's poisoned by the apple, the prince's kiss fails to wake her. He's firing blanks, like so many chaps in our unmanned culture.

The huntsman chap—Chris Hemsworth—turns up in another blockbuster of the moment, *The Avengers*. Different movie poster, same pose, but, instead of an axe, he has a hammer. He's the mighty Thor. I read Marvel Comics as a boy, and loved them, but Hollywood's dependence on the superhero movie is as sad as those overinflated love songs. *The Avengers* is pretty typical. Thor's evil brother has come to Earth to conquer it, and to do that he has to steal a thingamajig that he hopes to connect to a whatchamacallit that will open up a portal to something or other. The point is, before you know it, Iron Man, the Hulk, and the rest of the gang are zipping around Manhattan trying to prevent the supervillains reducing it to rubble. Humanity is confined to the non-speaking parts in the crowd scenes: "Heroism" is what people who've been bitten by radioactive spiders or born a shape-shifting mutant do. Until that happens to you, best to steer clear. And so a world of superheroes leads to a world without non-super heroes. A world, that is, without heroes.

The stories a society tells itself are not unimportant. Today, we have superhero movies but no westerns with beleaguered loners trying to live up to moral codes against the odds, and few films with amateur adventurers who find themselves caught up in something and forced to see it through because they understand that honor requires it. Perhaps this is because the ever more unreal computer effects require ever more unreal characters. Meanwhile, the supposedly unreal musical is as dead as the western, in part because it requires real human talent and, like Carnegie Hall, practice. The old-timey actors came with specialized skills: James Cagney and Bob Hope were both great dancers—and, as my old pal Sammy Cahn liked to say, that's not even what they do. By comparison, what can Brad Pitt or Leonardo DiCaprio *do*? I notice a big dance solo seems to be about the only effect you can't fake in CGI: If you can't do it, you can't do it, and the computers can't help you.

So instead we have superheroes and vampires and kick-ass fairy-tale characters. We sing pop songs to each other congratulating ourselves on how just being who we are right now is so totally awesome why bother trying anything difficult? And we go to movies that, as the critic James Bowman put it, "isolate and quarantine heroism in fantasy-land." So again, why bother?

Is a culture that communicates complacency and inertia likely to raise a generation of non-super heroes willing to make the sacrifices to, say, roll back our multi-trillion-dollar debt or reform Medicare? At Carnegie Hall and beyond, we are way out of practice. NR

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

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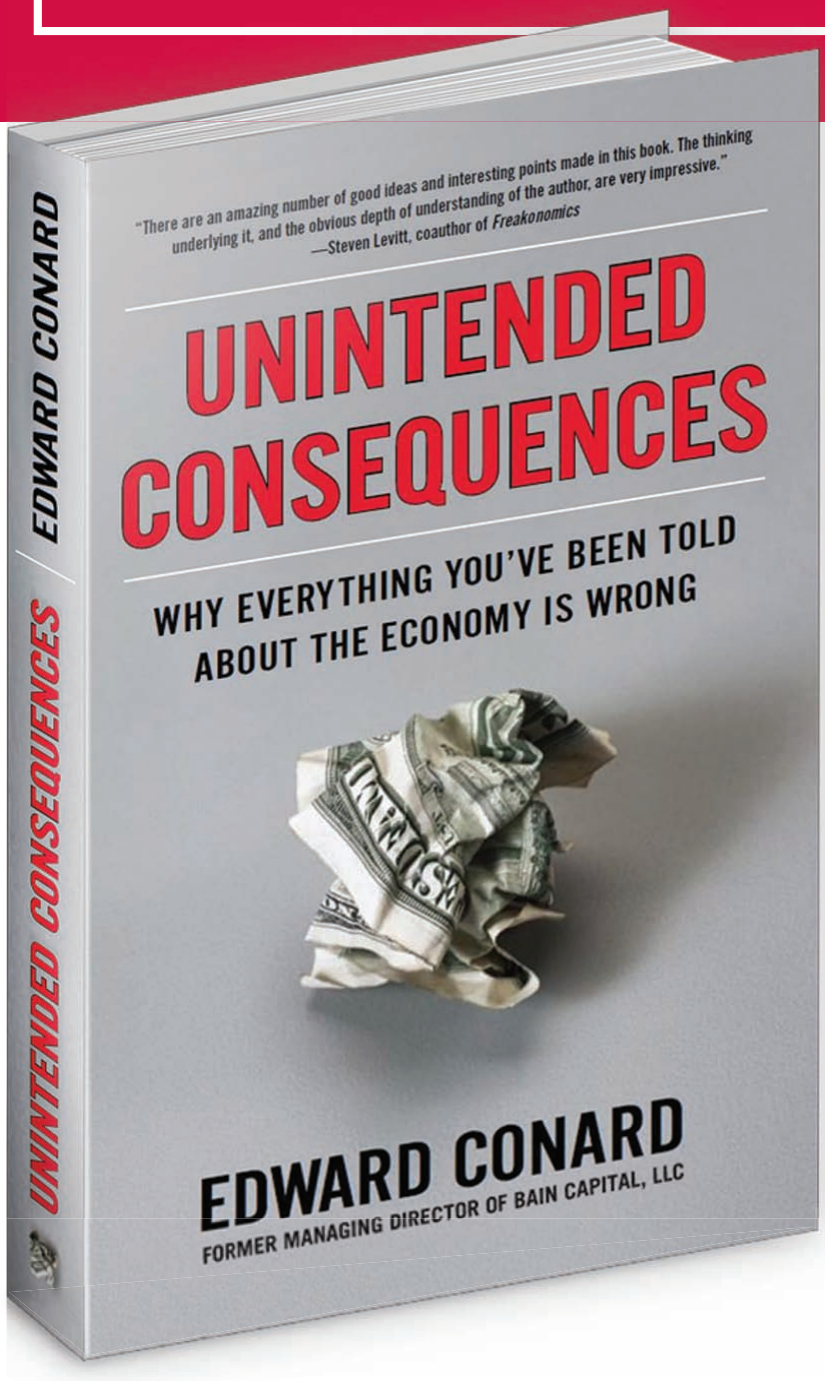
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