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KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON

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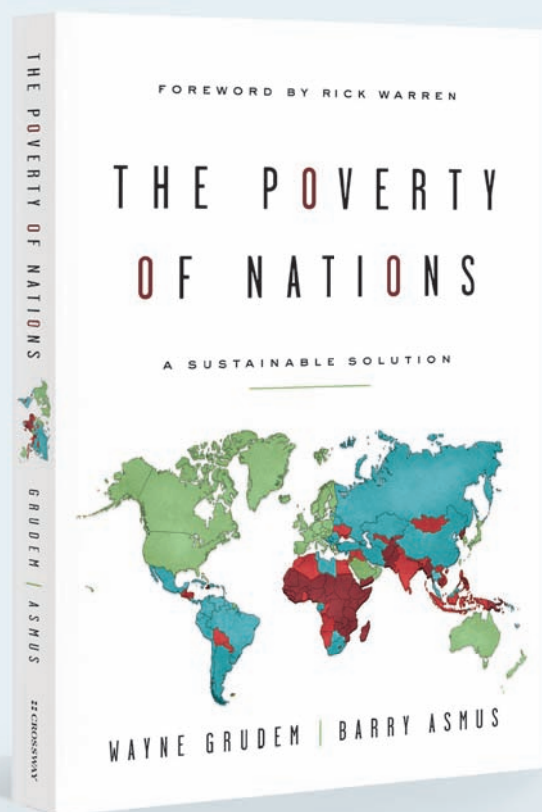
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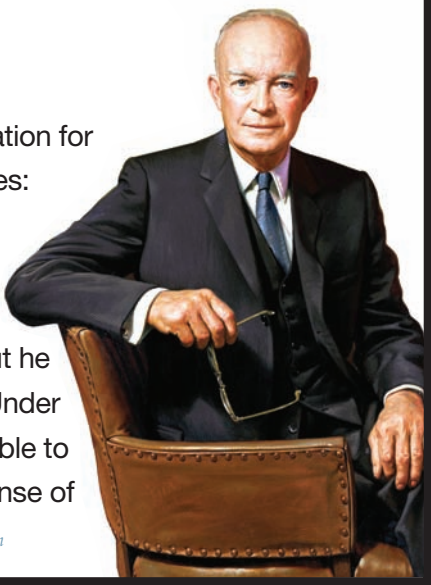
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Eisenhower had a deep appreciation for those most conservative of virtues: steadiness, judgment, predictability, attention to detail. He took courageous stands on everything from Suez to civil rights, but he was never a preening moralist. Under Eisenhower, Republicans were able to communicate to Americans a sense of being on their side. *Kevin D. Williamson*



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A Dissent on Dissenting

I write in response to Arthur Herman's article, "Sensitive SEALs," in the August 5 NATIONAL REVIEW.

I am a former U.S. Army Special Forces officer, and I agree with all but one point Mr. Herman makes in his excellent article. I only take issue with Mr. Herman's call for a senior general or admiral who is not a "complete moral coward" to call a halt to the assault on the military.

Senior military officers provide advice, but they are subordinate to civilian authority. Once the president has set the policy, officers are duty bound to implement it: Public dissent is not part of our tradition. Calling on our military to abandon this tradition, which officers hold as a sacred, most fundamental duty of service to our democracy, is misguided. Calling on Congress and the president to order an about-face is quite sane.

Captain Jeff Curl, U.S. Army (Retired)
Via e-mail

American-History Revisionism

With all due respect to the memory of Edmund S. Morgan (The Week, August 5), I question the statement that "the history of the Founding period has been well taught and well studied in American universities for the last four decades, thanks in great part to" this gentleman. My understanding from all that I have read (including in NATIONAL REVIEW) and heard—e.g., from attending alumni seminars at my alma mater, Williams College—is that most universities approach American history with a revisionist attack that leaves the eventual grads with a quite distorted view of the Declaration/Articles of Confederation/Constitutional Convention/Ratification-era thinking. If it were not for institutions such as Hillsdale College, the "educated" ranks would be bereft of those with a firm grasp on what the Founding Fathers had in mind for America's governance.

Have you ever asked a recent college grad who "studied" American history what his view is of the relevance of the Ninth and Tenth Amendments to today's congressional activity?

Ted Baumgardner
Winter Park, Fla.

Correction

In the August 19 issue, a photograph of former senator George J. Mitchell (D., Maine) that appeared in The Week was misidentified as a photograph of Texas businessman and "father of fracking" George P. Mitchell. Senator Mitchell must have been flattered to have such productivity attributed to him. George P. Mitchell is seen to the right.



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The Week

■ Detroit is dead and al-Qaeda is alive.

■ A group of conservative senators, most prominently including Ted Cruz, hopes to defund Obamacare by forcing a government-shutdown fight over a so-called continuing resolution this fall. They always explain (accurately enough) the imperative of defunding Obamacare, but never get around to explaining how their tactic would actually accomplish it. The public would have to blame President Obama and Democrats for any shutdown so overwhelmingly that they would buckle and abandon their most cherished legislative achievement. This is unlikely to happen, especially since some Republicans are already on record saying that they themselves are the ones who want to force the shutdown. We look forward to the day that Obamacare is defunded (and entirely repealed, for that matter), but a shutdown confrontation is not a magic bullet, or even a plausible weapon.

■ The United States closed 19 embassies and consulates in Africa and the Middle East for a week in response to threats of an al-Qaeda strike, and the impulse to condemn is understandable. Obama's claim to have decimated al-Qaeda's core leadership looks fatuous (unless he was using "decimated" in its correct sense—*reduced by one in ten*, not *wiped out*). The closings seem to be a tacit admission that security at Benghazi was bungled (there has been no other sort of admission). In the dark early days of World War II, Churchill instructed British embassies in neutral countries to show high spirits and bright lights—all very stirring. But the Nazis, though worse than al-Qaeda, were not terrorists in the same way. The administration was right to show reasonable caution. Meanwhile, on to the next decile.

■ On November 5, 2009, Major Nidal Hasan shot and killed 13 adults and an unborn child, wounding 32 others. In carnage, the Fort Hood rampage is surpassed only by 9/11 among Islamic terrorist attacks on U.S. soil, with twice as many Americans killed as in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Yet, in the spectacle that is the ongoing court-martial, which took longer to convene than it took for the U.S. to defeat imperial Japan, the defendant is the only participant willing to say what Hasan is: an anti-American jihadist. Hasan, who carried a "Soldier of Allah" business card, consulted frequently with al-Qaeda operative Anwar al-Awlaki. He screamed "Allahu Akbar" as he mowed down U.S. soldiers, and started the trial by telling the jury, "The evidence will clearly show that I am the shooter." For government officials and the media, though, "Allahu Akbar" is—as Mark Steyn has observed—Arabic for "Nothing to see here."

■ Another entry from the annals of ad-hocracy: The federal government has conjured into existence a new health-care sub-



See page 13.

sidy for congressional staffers, who are wailing about being forced into Obamacare exchanges and losing their cherished federal benefits. The Office of Personnel Management has ruled—on no obvious legal authority—that the 75 percent insurance-premium subsidies Hill staffers currently enjoy will be paid out through the exchanges. This is probably illegal: OPM is authorized to make payments only for services that are contracted through it. Insurance plans bought through the exchanges would not meet that criterion, and there is no guarantee that they would meet OPM contracting requirements. Meanwhile, the union bosses who put Barack Obama in the White House are looking for a way out of Obamacare, and in an especially vexing development, the union that represents IRS employees—the very people who will be seizing your assets if you refuse to comply with the Obamacare mandate—have made it known that its members want a waiver for themselves. That employees of the government should be allowed to abide by one set of rules while everyone else is remanded to another, more stringent set of rules is incompatible with self-government in a democratic republic under the Constitution—as is Obama - care itself.

■ The "phony scandal" at the Internal Revenue Service continues to grow. E-mails unearthed by congressional investiga-

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tors now suggest that, even before the IRS began targeting tea-party groups, at least one agency official was colluding with the Federal Election Commission to discriminate against conservative organizations. The 2009 correspondence was made public by Republican congressman Dave Camp (Mich.), and shows an FEC investigator asking former IRS official Lois Lerner for information about two conservative groups. On a previous occasion, Lerner appears to have been quite useful: The investigator wrote to Lerner, “When we spoke last July, you had told us that the American Future Fund had not received an exemption letter from the IRS.” An IRS agent tells our Eliana Johnson that disclosing that information is, within the agency, considered a violation of federal law. The latest disclosures show that the targeting dates back at least to July 2008, before President Obama took office. Investigators may yet discover a White House link to the scandal; right now, we know with certainty that a bias against conservatives is an endemic feature of the federal bureaucracy.



■ At an American Bar Association meeting in August, Attorney General Eric Holder proposed that federal prosecutors stop charging nonviolent drug offenders who lack connections to more serious wrongdoing with crimes that will incur mandatory minimum sentences. NR has long been a skeptic of the federal war on drugs, and the practical consequences of such a (relatively minor, since such prosecutions are rare) policy shift are therefore welcome. But this is yet another example of this administration’s misuse of prosecutorial discretion, as the new guidelines effectively repeal, in a certain set of cases, the mandatory minima passed by Congress. Such policies, as well as much else about the federal government’s role in drug-law enforcement, should certainly be reexamined, but by the legislature, not the executive. In his proposal—and in his support for other criminal-justice reform efforts undertaken by

Republican governors in states such as Arkansas, Kentucky, and Texas—Holder is on the right track. If only he understood how lawmaking is supposed to work in our republic.

■ On C-SPAN in early August, Vermont senator Patrick Leahy (D.) chastised New York mayor Michael Bloomberg for his gun-control advocacy. Bloomberg’s group, Mayors Against Illegal Guns, complained Leahy, has been more of a hindrance than a help. The outfit’s involvement not only contributed to the demise of the Toomey-Manchin bill, it also made it unlikely that any new legislation will pass. “Unfortunately,” he explained, “you have some on the left, like the mayor of New York City, who actually didn’t help a bit with his ads. He actually turned off some people that we might have gotten for supporters.” Mayors Against Illegal Guns has

not quite been the knight in shining armor that many on the left hoped it would be. Fifty mayors have left the group since February, many of them explaining bluntly that they had discovered since joining that it was full of extremists hiding in the soft cloth of moderation. Who knew?

■ In a recent interview, Senator Rand Paul (R., Ky.) was asked whom he would like to be the chairman of the Federal Reserve. One of his ideal candidates was Milton Friedman. This was odd, since Friedman had views counter to Paul’s on monetary policy. Paul later argued, in a piece on NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE, that he believes Friedman was “famous for monetary restraint,” so he’d oppose the Federal Reserve’s current expansion of the monetary base. In fact, Friedman was an advocate of consistent growth in the money supply, which would sometimes require expansionary policies. His most famous work on monetary policy, which contained some of the most important macroeconomic insights of the 20th century, blamed the Great Depression on the Federal Reserve—for its inaction and overly restrained policies. Senator Paul either misunderstands Friedman’s lessons or knows nothing about them.

■ An implicit message of Paul’s inchoate presidential campaign is that he has his father’s principles without his baggage. The revelation that Jack Hunter, the co-author of his book and his social-media director, had a prior career as a pro-Confederate radio host (“the Southern Avenger”) called that into question, given Ron Paul’s long association with kooky apologists for the Confederacy. Hunter has resigned, and we hope Senator Paul will steer clear of his ilk forevermore.

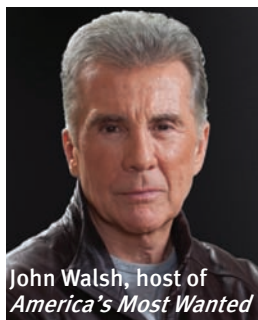
■ In a particularly ludicrous rhetorical gambit, President Obama has attempted to pooh-pooh the economic importance of the Keystone pipeline project, saying that it will create only about 50 permanent jobs. That’s 50 more than can be attributed to the president’s feckless jobs czars, but that figure is dishonest. Much of the economic impact of Keystone will be in construction work, and those jobs are “temporary” inasmuch as construction projects *end*—at least those not managed by government agencies. By President Obama’s standard, practically every construction worker in the country—and every contractor of any sort—is a temp, which obviously is not the case. The energy industry does not just “create jobs,” in the unfortunate Washingtonian phrase; it puts people to work producing real goods, such as natural gas, and real services, such as the engineering and construction work related to extraction. Unlike the president’s fanciful forays into solar power and Terry McAuliffe’s phantom car company, natural gas is a real business, one that makes the country, on net, better off than it was before.

■ According to a recent federal audit, student loans, of which there are \$1.2 trillion worth outstanding, are in serious trouble: One-third of them are either behind in repayment or in outright default. On top of that, some 1.6 million borrowers have enrolled in the federal government’s stealth bailout, which caps payments and forgives unpaid debt under certain conditions. For perspective, those student loans exceed all outstanding credit-card debt, and the total amount of student-loan debt has doubled

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since Barack Obama became president. The Pew Research Center finds far-reaching consequences resulting from the nearly \$35,000 in student-loan debt the typical college graduate acquires: defaulting on or delaying repayment of other debts, delaying the purchase of a home or being unable to buy one at all, and putting off marriage and children. Many acquire the debt but not the degree, and many more acquire the degree but no useful skills or worthy knowledge. Student loans are in the main a racket, the Democrat-dominated education establishment's

version of the used-car salesman's buy-now-pay-later pitch. Reform is in order, but asking Congress to do something about irresponsible borrowing is difficult to do without laughing and crying at the same time.



■ The federal government's Lifeline program is supposed to provide subsidized phone service to the truly needy. The program's costs rose to \$2.189 billion in 2012—a 166 percent increase in the past five years. Much of that is fraud and abuse, as we recently discovered firsthand. NRO reporter Jillian Kay Melchior visited many of New York City's welfare offices in pursuit of Lifeline phones. Her income is reasonably high, and she doesn't receive welfare, rendering her ineligible. She truthfully answered questions asked by wireless-company reps. And in the end, she received three subsidized phones in the mail, even though the Lifeline program allows only one mobile per qualifying household. Lifeline is fatally flawed, in part because big wireless providers that participate have perverse incentives to pass out as many subsidized phones as possible. If you doubt it, give Melchior a call—on any of her government phones.

■ The news that NBC is planning a Hillary Clinton miniseries, and CNN a Hillary Clinton documentary, brought a

It's Always 1963

At the 2012 Democratic Convention, Representative John Lewis (Ga.), a heroic veteran of the civil-rights movement, gave a stirring speech. He recounted the story of how a man from Rock Hill, S.C., came to his office on Capitol Hill and said, "I am one of the people who beat you. I want to apologize. Will you forgive me?" Lewis responded, "I accept your apology." He recounts what happened next: "He started crying. He gave me a hug. I hugged him back, and we both started crying. This man and I don't want to go back; we want to move forward."

Lewis used this emotional tale as an extended theme for his remarks. The Republicans want to "go back" to the world of Jim Crow. The proof? Voter-ID laws and the like. It wasn't subtle. It wasn't fair. It wasn't remotely accurate. The mainstream press didn't care, but if you find that shocking you probably picked up this magazine by accident at your dentist's office.

Also, it was hardly unique. Countless speakers at the convention played similar rhetorical games, about not just race but gender too. From Sandra Fluke in primetime to obscure feminist activists in the 2 P.M. slot, the Democrats assiduously pounded the table with vows that they would not surrender to the Republican war on women.

Meanwhile, at the Republican convention, an objective observer would have had a hard time finding any evidence that the GOP was hostile to minorities. That's probably why so many commentators had to use their imagination, as when MSNBC's Lawrence O'Donnell insisted that Senator Mitch McConnell's joke about Barack Obama's playing too much golf was in fact a nakedly racist effort to link the president's lifestyle with famed dark-skinned sex addict Tiger Woods. As for the Republican war on women,

even O'Donnell found it hard to find misogynist bellicosity in Ann Romney's primetime declaration of "I love you, women!"

What's the point of this trip down memory lane? Simply this: For all of the talk about how the GOP is racially polarizing, the simple, obvious fact is that it is the Democrats who are cavalierly and cynically fueling and then exploiting racial divisions.

In an excellent post for his moonlighting gig at the *New York Times*, NATIONAL REVIEW film critic Ross Douthat notes that the rationale for the Obama coalition in 2012 was to forgo trying to win over working-class whites, as the Clinton machine had, and instead simply limit their losses in that demographic while running up huge totals elsewhere. They've opted for what Douthat and others ironically call "positive polarization." The key to the strategy is to try to convince upscale educated whites that the GOP is the racist and sexist party.

Not surprisingly, the mainstream press makes up the core of that constituency; which is why, in discussions of immigration, gun control, etc., so many leading white liberal pundits glibly and uncritically accept the notion that a GOP strategy of winning over working-class whites is racist. Funny how trying to attract precisely the voters who made up the core of the Democratic party under FDR, Kennedy, Johnson, and Clinton is now cynical and racist.

I don't want to go back to Jim Crow any more than John Lewis does. But I'll be damned if I will let the Democrats be the guides on how to avoid going down that path.

—JONAH GOLDBERG

You deserve a factual look at . . .

Israel: A 65-Year Miracle

One of the proudest accomplishments in world history.

There can be little doubt when, 500 or 1,000 years from now, the history of the world will be written, that the creation and the development of the State of Israel will be considered one of the proudest and most shining successes. Now, as Israel's 65th birthday has just been celebrated, it is a good time, in our own day, to review what has been accomplished.

What are the facts?

The Birth of a Nation: The State of Israel was born out of the ashes of the Nazi Holocaust, probably the most horrible crime in the blood-stained history of mankind. The "*yishuv*," (the Jewish population of the country) consisted of barely 400,000 people. On the very day of its birth Israel was invaded by the armies of five neighboring Arab states. Almost miraculously, the vastly outnumbered and outgunned Jewish forces managed to overcome the combined Arab might. But they paid a horrendous price for their victory.

More than 6,000 combatants and civilians perished in that War of Independence. It was as if the United States were to lose over 6 million people in combat. But the War of Independence was not the only one that Israel's implacable enemies foisted on it. There was, perhaps most importantly, the 1967 Six-Day War, in which Israel gained a spectacular victory, which will be studied and analyzed in military academies of the world until the end of time.

The Jewish People's Renaissance. There is no comparison in history to the Jewish people's renaissance after 2,000 years of persecution, discrimination and exile, and its transformation into a Jewish nation. Jews from all over the globe flooded into the newly established haven of the Jewish nation. All received a brotherly welcome and were seamlessly integrated into the new state. One of the proudest accomplishments of the Jewish State of Israel was the ingathering of the black Jews of Ethiopia. They, also, are now an integral part of their new country. As an aside, the current Miss Israel is a lovely woman of Ethiopian heritage.

Almost one-half of the world's Jews now live in Israel, having immigrated from all corners of the world. These millions are

On its 65th birthday Israel is in very good condition. Congratulations are in order. But all is not yet perfect, and improvements can be made. There are social problems. There still is too much disparity between rich and poor. There is also disparity between the largely secular majority and the ultra-orthodox "*haredim*," and also between the Jewish majority and the over one million Arab citizens who are not yet entirely accepting of their country. The biggest and most intractable problem, however, is the stubborn enmity of the surrounding Muslim countries and those beyond its borders, such as Iran. One can only hope that wise leaders in those Muslim countries will eventually emerge, who will realize that Israel is here to stay and that the welfare of their countries and of their citizens will only be assured by accepting Israel and allowing it to lead the region into a new age of democratic advancement and prosperity.

now fully part of their country, truly an unprecedented accomplishment.

One of Israel's major successes is the revival of the ancient Hebrew language. It had been used only as a religious language for the over 2,000 years of the Jewish diaspora. It has been fully "modernized" and is used as the daily vernacular of Israel for all purposes. There is nothing comparable to it in the history of the world.

To the amazement of all, including perhaps many Jews, Israel, forced by necessity, has emerged as one of the world's important military powers. It has proven more than able to hold its own though surrounded by enemies, who almost singlemindedly are fixated on its annihilation.

An Economic Powerhouse.

Economically, Israel's position at its 65th birthday can only be described as miraculous. It is economically comparable to most European countries and superior to quite a few. It is a font of innovation, a high-tech powerhouse, fueled by the country's world-class universities and technical schools. Most United States high-tech companies have branches and laboratories in Israel. They consider them as a source of creativity and of new development. Next to the U.S. itself and Canada, Israel has more companies listed on U.S. stock exchanges than any other country.

One of the weak parts of Israel's economy is the production of oil and gas. Until now Israel has been almost totally dependent on imports of gas from Egypt, a most unreliable supplier. But discoveries of huge oil and gas fields in its territorial waters in the Mediterranean make it clear that Israel will be independent of oil and gas imports in just a few years and may emerge as a major exporter of such products.

"One can only hope that wise leaders in those Muslim countries will eventually emerge, who will realize that Israel is here to stay ..."

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threat from RNC chairman Reince Priebus to boycott debates conducted by shells for Democratic candidates. NBC News political director Chuck Todd called the miniseries a “total nightmare,” hoping to distinguish between the network’s news and entertainment divisions. Then came a report that the miniseries might be produced by Fox’s entertainment division, which caught Priebus off balance. The Hillary-fest seemed like a good hook for a legitimate gripe, but it is too small. The problem with the debates is that the networks have too much say over them, and that network news and entertainment divisions are equally liberal (except at Fox). The GOP should have been demanding a more seemly process long ago. Suggestion: The parties agree on their own rules and their own moderators, and let whoever will film the debates (C-SPAN would, if no one else).

■ Tom Cotton has announced that he will challenge incumbent Democrat Mark Pryor for his Senate seat from Arkansas in next year’s midterm election. Pryor, who provided a key swing vote for Obamacare, is one of the most vulnerable Democrats in the country. A farm boy from Yell County, Cotton emerged on the national stage in 2006 as the author of a scathing letter to the *New York Times* criticizing the paper’s exposure of the Bush administration’s top-secret program intended to cut off terrorist financing—a letter that was published not by the *Times*, but by the conservative blog *Powerline*. Some on the left immediately questioned his existence, refusing to believe a Harvard-educated lawyer was serving as an infantry officer

in Iraq. Unfortunately for Democrats, Cotton has proved not only real, but a real political threat. He was elected to Congress last year after serving a second tour of duty—this one in Afghanistan—and has in his short time in office become a leading conservative in the House. May he do the same in the Senate.

■ Cory Booker is a man with a stellar reputation and an empty record—another of this generation’s Rorschach tests onto whom the hopes and desires of young people are projected. It should go without saying, then, that the discovery that Booker had been receiving “confidential” payouts from his old law firm while mayor of Newark is no help to his image as an incorruptible man of the people. Booker, the *New York Post* reported in August, “received five checks from the Trenk DiPasquale law firm” over a four-year period during which “the firm raked in more than \$2 million in fees from local agencies over which Booker has influence.” Upon his election in 2006, Booker parted company with Trenk DiPasquale in order to avoid exactly this sort of thing. He wanted to escape “the appearance of impropriety,” he claimed at the time. Someone should have told Booker that one isn’t supposed to avoid only the appearance of impropriety, but real impropriety also.

■ The spectacle of San Diego’s mashing mayor may be coming to an end, as Democratic woman politicians, including Senator Barbara Boxer, call on Bob Filner to step down. The



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narrative of a Republican war on women becomes a bit forced when the high-profile warriors are Dems. (The tipping point for Boxer was when a retired master sergeant testifying about rape in the Air Force and a nurse inquiring about an injured Marine's care claimed to be Filner's victims.) Liberals are not immune from temptation and hubris even when they mouth correct sentiments. The Filner mess exposes another fat target: quickie therapies. Filner grandly announced he was checking himself into a program for sex addicts that lasts—drum roll—two weeks. That's right: Years of compulsion can be undone in less time than it takes to learn conversational French. *Comment dit-on* scam? A pox on dodgy pols and their helpers.

■ Even as Filner crumbles to ash, Eliot Spitzer, running for comptroller of New York City, thrives. Polls show him ahead of his primary rival, Manhattan borough president Scott Stringer. Stringer is a hack, one of a legion of tiny Gotham Democrats. But he never committed crimes that he professed to deplore, unlike Spitzer, the prosecutor of pimps and patron of prostitutes. Spitzer is significant because he hopes to rebuild his career in politics, perhaps one day as mayor of New York. He is wealthy enough to self-finance; his offense is less risible than Anthony Weiner's, though more serious; and his iron-faced focus on winning shows, if possible, even less contrition than Weiner's grotesque help-me theatrics. Neither New Yorkers, Democrats, nor ordinary liberals should be saddled with such a repellent character.

■ In 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt famously defended himself against charges that he had sent a Navy destroyer to Alaska to pick up his Scotch terrier, Fala. Now reports say President Obama, who models himself after FDR, used a Marine Corps Osprey aircraft to bring Bo, his Portuguese water dog, to a family vacation on Martha's Vineyard. (Was SEAL Team Six busy looking for Michelle's lost earrings?) To be sure, Bo did not fly alone; presidential personnel and equipment went with him. Yet while the spiffy and expensive vertical-takeoff, tilt-rotor Osprey can do many things, dog transport should not be among them, particularly when Obama keeps telling the common folk how tight money is for the government since the sequester. Marines should be out fighting terrorists, not holding umbrellas for the president and looking after his pets. Why can't the Obamas just strap their dog to the top of the car like everyone else?

■ On the day of President Obama's visit as part of his latest jobs tour, the editors of a Chattanooga newspaper told the president what they thought of his most recent proposals: "Take Your Jobs Plan and Shove It, Mr. President," the *Times Free Press* titled the editorial. The headline made plenty of headlines, and cost its author his job the next day. "I just became the first person in the history of newspapers to be fired for writing a paper's most-read article," former *Times Free Press* editorial writer Drew Johnson Tweeted the day of his termination. The newspaper claims Johnson broke its policy for approving headlines; Johnson said no such policy existed

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Eric Metaxas is the author of the bestselling books, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* and *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery*. He is also the founder and host of *Socrates in the City*, an ecumenical discussion forum that gets busy professionals in New York City to think about "life, God and other small topics."

Susanne Metaxas is the president and CEO of the Midtown Pregnancy Support Center in New York City, which has been for many years a recipient of the Foundation's "baby-saving" grants. Through Susanne's guidance, MPSC has seen a growing number of clients—women who find the center and stay because of the warmth and compassion they find there.

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and he followed everyday protocol. While Johnson's future employment may still be up in the air, he should feel some sense of validation: He's living proof of job loss associated with President Obama's economic policies.

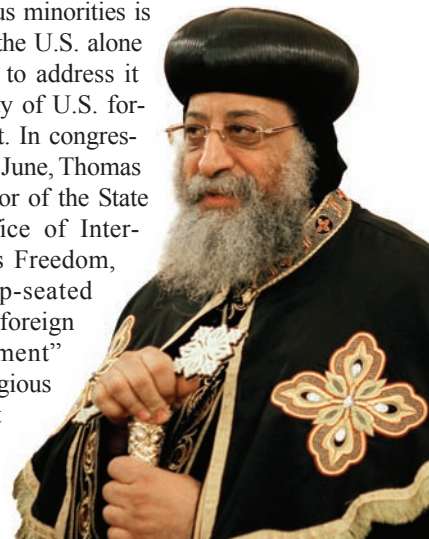
■ An Orlando abortion clinic is offering discounts on abortion services to low-income women. The Orlando Women's Center, which specializes in late-term abortions, recently posted a coupon on its website for \$50 off abortion services and free deep IV sedation, valid for use "on Sundays only." The center is run by the squalid Dr. James Pendergraft, a Gosnell-like figure who has had his medical license revoked five times, the last time for performing a third-trimester abortion. In June, the State of Florida closed Pendergraft's clinic and his equipment was confiscated in a \$36 million medical-malpractice suit. In July, he reopened the clinic with borrowed equipment. Maybe business is slow on Sundays. It deserves to be nonexistent, every day of the week.

■ Jimmy Hoffa is the best thing that ever happened to the Teamsters. His pulp-novel disappearance, and all the subsequent jokes about where and how his body was disposed of, placed the union forever in the comic-gangster mold, when it is really just a bunch of greedy, shady thugs. That could change, though, if the public learns about the latest target of the Teamsters' unique brand of intimidation: grieving families who have lost a loved one. In the Chicago area, striking Teamsters loudly and aggressively picketed non-union funeral homes—laughing at the bereaved, shouting obscenities and threats at them through bullhorns, and blocking their cars—until a judge ordered them to stop. The practice of letting picketers menace customers, employees, and associates of a business simply because its employees are not members of their union is bad enough. By personally confronting and bullying shattered survivors at a time of extreme stress, the Teamsters make themselves as reprehensible as the Westboro Baptist Church's crazies.

■ Anyone who still thinks that elections certify democracy should study how Robert Mugabe operates in Zimbabwe. Eighty-nine now, he came to power 33 years ago on the back of mercenaries from North Korea who killed an estimated 20,000—the victims' fault was belonging to a different tribe from Mugabe. He and his cronies have robbed the country blind. His hatred of the West has been constant. In the latest instance, the London *Sunday Telegraph* reveals that he has a contract to sell uranium to Iran. Power-crazed and money-grubbing as ever, he sprang an election suddenly on his opponent, Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change. Up to a million out of 6.4 million registered voters were disenfranchised. Hundreds of thousands were turned away on Election Day. Voter rolls contained at least 870,000 duplicated names. Two million extra voting cards were printed. The election, Tsvangirai says, has been "a huge farce." An appeal to the courts has no chance, because Mugabe has made sure the judges are his cronies. Elections are supposed to be fair and free; a number of highly placed African politicians have devised a novel formula by which elections are free but not fair. As for critics, "If they cannot stomach it," in Mugabe's words, "they can go and hang." Luckily, it's a boast, not an order.

AP PHOTO/AMR NABEIL

■ Pope Tawadros II, leader of the Egyptian Coptic Church, has canceled his weekly Bible study at St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo, fearing for the safety of those who would assemble there. Egypt's Christian minority, about 10 percent of the population, suffered some violence even during the rule of Hosni Mubarak, and the attacks and threats against them have escalated since the fall of Mohamed Morsi and the installation of the provisional military government in July. While the persecution of religious minorities is not a problem for the U.S. alone to solve, the need to address it should be a priority of U.S. foreign policy. It isn't. In congressional testimony in June, Thomas Farr, former director of the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, described a "deep-seated skepticism in our foreign policy establishment" about whether "religious freedom is in fact important for individuals and societies." It is.



■ Probably killed in a general persecution of Catholics by Communists in 1949, when the regime of Kim Il Sung was inaugurating the North Korean version of the Reign of Terror, Francis Hong Yong-ho was, on paper, the bishop of Pyongyang until August. The Vatican finally removed his name from the *Pontifical Yearbook*, where it had remained on the theory that Hong could still be living in a work camp somewhere. Preserving the memory of him in that fashion was "a gesture by the Holy See to mark the drama that was and still is lived by the Church in Korea," according to Nicholas Cardinal Cheong Jin-suk, archbishop emeritus of Seoul. The Korean bishops are seeking sainthood for Hong and the 80 companions who are believed to have been martyred with him. Hence the acknowledgment of the death of the man who, at a putative 106 years of age, was officially the oldest living Catholic bishop. Although North Korea is one of the few countries with which the Holy See has no diplomatic relations, we trust that, when the time comes, the curial officials in charge of protocol will invite the Kim family to the canonization ceremony in Rome.

■ A new law in Russia bans "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations." It is now illegal even to speak about homosexuality to children. A parliamentary committee is deciding whether the next step is to remove children from same-sex couples. Officials maintain that the legislation is intended only to protect minors. The old Soviet criminalization of homosexuality still conditions public opinion in Russia. More often than not, permission to hold gay-pride rallies is refused, and police mostly stand by when gays are attacked in the street. A poll shows that 88 percent of Russians support the gay-propaganda ban. But next year Russia is due to hold the Winter Olympics at Sochi, and

where does this law leave competitors or visitors who are gay? The Cold War led to boycotts of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, and gay rights could bedevil the Sochi Olympics. Senator Lindsey Graham (R., S.C.) calls for another boycott, while Senator Charles Schumer (D., N.Y.) wants everyone to wave the rainbow flag at Opening Ceremonies. Contrary to his famous “reset” of relations with Russia, President Obama weighs in, feeling “offended” by the anti-gay law. The International Olympic Committee is urging the Russians to ensure that there will be no discrimination against anyone. But Vladimir Putin is no more likely to be swayed by it than by anyone else in the West appalled by the thuggishness of his Russia.

■ August was the cruelest month for old media, as the Graham family sold the *Washington Post* to Amazon *nouveau* Jeff Bezos, and the *New York Times* off-loaded the *Boston Globe* at a huge loss. Print newspapers will probably not disappear, but will shrink to maybe four national brands, half of them high end, half low. All will be the vanity projects of moguls. Printed local news will slip to penny-savers. There will be no substitute in the blogiverse, except in scattered niches, because the problem of payment (and therefore of salaries) has still not been solved. Newspapers had a great run, from John Wilkes to HEADLESS BODY IN TOPLESS BAR. Next up: the afterlife.

■ Everyone thinks his own job is vitally important, even copy editors. The comma jockeys at *Slate*'s hard-hitting sports section have informed the world that they will no longer use the nickname “Redskins” to refer to Washington’s NFL team because, while “only a bit offensive,” the term is “extremely tacky and dated,” and “if *Slate* can do a small part to change the way people talk about the team, that will be enough.” Other gridiron bibles such as *The New Republic* and *Mother Jones* have adopted similar policies, opting for such circumlocutions as “the Washington team.” If progressives get seriously into the business of renaming NFL teams, we will soon hear of the New England Bitter Clingers and the Houston Ignorant Swaggering Racist Rednecks.



■ “They had come by the hundreds,” writes Samuel Freedman in a recent *New York Times* article characterizing an event as an “invasion.” He wasn’t describing a swarm of locusts, but rather a group of Evangelical Christians in Portland, Ore. For the past four summers, they have volunteered to clean, weed, paint, and repair the public Roosevelt High School. Freedman writes in disbelief that the Evangelicals were only there to help. This is the usual attitude of the *Times* toward Christians. In 2011, Nicholas Kristof wrote a backhanded-complimentary article that was headlined “Evangelicals without Blowhards.” That same year saw an op-ed titled “The Evangelical Rejection of Reason,” which said that “when the faith of so many Americans [meaning Evangelicals] becomes an occasion to embrace discredited, ridiculous and even dangerous ideas, we must not be afraid to speak out.” And a recent *Times* article by scholar/author T. M.

Luhmann worries about the danger that people could become “addicted to prayer.” The *Times* examines Evangelicals like an anthropologist studying a newly discovered culture.

■ A Kenyan lawyer has asked the International Court of Justice to overturn Jesus Christ’s death sentence. This effort seems nearly as unnecessary as the ICJ itself. To begin with, there is the question of standing: Since Christ’s death enabled the salvation of all mankind, it is unclear who was harmed by his conviction, however unjust it may have been. Moreover, the Gospels agree that Pontius Pilate thought Christ was innocent, and only reluctantly delivered him up to the mob. If God’s revealed truth says Christ was railroaded, not even Harold Koh could think an ICJ decision will make it any truer. So it seems unlikely that the ICJ will find this case within its jurisdiction—although, since doing so would provide another chance to blame the Jewish state for a human-rights violation, you never know.

■ Alex Rodriguez is truly an athlete for our age—a puffed-up, self-involved cheater for whom honor means nothing so long as he is racking up impressive statistics and contracts. Major League Baseball believes it has caught the Yankee third baseman using performance-enhancing drugs again, even though he became a celebrity spokesman for an anti-steroids organization after he got caught once before. A-Rod is appealing his 211-game suspension. Given his prodigious natural talent, he was destined to be remembered among the game’s greats without help from drugs. Now, he takes his place as first among equals of the great abusers of the steroid era.



■ Of all the Reagan advisers who went back to his days as governor of California—Lyn Nofziger, hirsute spokesman; Ed Meese, policy warrior—William Clark was perhaps the quietest. He was also the one Reagan would call first in a crisis. Clark was Reagan’s cabinet secretary and executive secretary in Sacramento, before being appointed to a variety of state judicial posts (whence his title, “Judge”). In Reagan’s first presidential term he served as deputy secretary of state, national-security adviser, and secretary of the interior. He acted in all these positions as an all-purpose backstop: “Judge,” in his case, also stood for “judgment.” Clark, a devout Catholic, was most concerned with rolling back the Evil Empire and abortion. He and his boss batted .500. “He finished neither college nor law school,” said his son Paul, “but be that as it may he did just fine.” Indeed he did. Dead at 81. R.I.P.

■ Peter Flanigan, a longtime friend of WFB and this magazine, had the youth of an older American upper class—Navy pilot, Princeton. So the Irish Catholic elite blended into the WASPocracy. There followed three careers. On Wall Street, he was a



pillar of Dillon, Read. From 1969 to 1974, he served the Nixon administration as an adviser on commerce and economics. But perhaps his most considerable achievement was offering educational opportunity to poor children, as a patron of Catholic inner-city schools and one-on-one mentoring programs for students. A book and a hand given to an isolated mind is water in a desert. Dead at 90. R.I.P.

■ At the University of Chicago, the home base of an academic career that included visiting professorships at Yale, Oberlin, and Harvard, Jean Bethke Elshtain held joint appointments in political science and at the divinity school, a combination emblematic of her work at the crossroads of religion and politics. Disregarding intellectual fashion, she won the respect of peers who were predisposed to despise her ideas but could not help admiring the case she made for them. “Judging has been in bad odor for quite some time in American culture,” she noted in the middle of an essay in defense of judging—taking care to dodge not her Lord’s injunction to “judge not,” which she explained, persuasively, as hyperbole for the wisdom of not judging before thinking twice. Elshtain thought twice, and more than twice. She leaves behind—in addition to loved ones, and for them, and for the rest of us—more than 600 articles and 21 books. Dead at 72. R.I.P.

CRIME

Stop-and-Frisk Is Fair

U.S. DISTRICT JUDGE Shira Scheindlin has ruled that New York City’s so-called stop-and-frisk approach to crime-fighting is unconstitutional, a form of “indirect racial profiling.” Judge Scheindlin bases this in part on the fact that blacks and Hispanics, who form the majority of New York City’s population, are stopped at rates higher than their share of the general population. If the NYPD were applying stop-and-frisk in a random, race-blind fashion, then one would expect more whites and Asians to be stopped, and fewer blacks and Hispanics. But of course the NYPD is not applying stop-and-frisk in a random or race-blind fashion: The measure is applied more commonly in high-crime areas, which tend to be more heavily black and Hispanic, and it takes into account crime victims’ descriptions of their assailants.

That latter practice is what really is at issue here. Blacks and Hispanics make up 87 percent of stop-and-frisk targets, which is in fact lower than the share of crime suspects who are black and Hispanic, and significantly lower than the share of violent-crime suspects who are black and Hispanic. Heather Mac Donald points to the case of the high-crime neighborhood of Fort Greene, Brooklyn, where 93 percent of criminal suspects are black or Hispanic and 99 percent of violent-crime suspects are black and Hispanic. More than 90 percent of those being sought in New

York City murder cases are black or Hispanic. Police officers incorporating victim reports into their policing practices are in the great majority of cases looking for black and Hispanic suspects. They are also looking mostly for young men—so far, nobody has suggested that 50 percent of stop-and-frisk targets be female.

The caricature of stop-and-frisk has NYPD officers randomly scooping up young black and Hispanic men based on nothing more than their race and turning their pockets out in the hopes of finding something incriminating. Two points must be kept in mind: One, the police are looking for suspects in reported crimes and working from victim descriptions. Two, there is something that comes between the stop and the frisk, namely questioning. If a police officer sees behavior that he believes is suspicious, he may initiate a conversation with the target, especially if that target fits the description of a suspect in a criminal investigation. If, after questioning, the officer believes that he has probable cause to frisk, he may do so. That is a long way from randomly hassling every non-white person within eyesight of a police officer.

There are many reasons that young black and Hispanic men are disproportionately represented among New York City’s crime suspects and criminals. But the NYPD is not planting memories in the heads of crime victims. It is possible that the standards for conducting stops are too loose, but there is no standard that takes into account reality that will not see blacks and Hispanics stopped at rates disproportionate to their share of the population. Judge Scheindlin can declare reality unconstitutional, but that does not change the facts of the case.

New York City has, through intelligent police work and heroic effort, reversed what seemed 20 years ago to be an inescapable descent into lawlessness, indecency, and chaos. For all its troubles, the NYPD is the best-managed big-city police department in the country, and there is little in Judge Scheindlin’s ruling to justify putting it under minders appointed by the same liberal establishment that allowed the city to fall into disorder in the first place. We have our complaints about Mayor Bloomberg, but he is right to back this policy, and he is right to appeal Judge Scheindlin’s ruling, as he has promised to do.



Judge Shira Scheindlin



Obamacare's Achilles' Heel

To defeat it, offer a low-cost alternative

BY AVIK ROY

AT his August 9 press conference, President Obama made this telling claim about his signature health-care law: Americans are “going to be able to . . . sign up for affordable, quality health insurance at a significantly cheaper rate than what they can get right now on the individual market.”

This assertion is telling for two reasons. First, it shows that Obama knows that public support for the law hinges on whether it lives up to its promise of making health care more affordable. Second, it is factually untrue—and you know you’re losing an argument when you have to say untrue things to defend it.

Actually, to call the president’s statement “untrue” might be too restrained. In California, healthy 40-year-olds who shop for coverage on their own will see rate increases approaching 150 percent. In Washington State, most 64-year-olds will see rates increase by an average of 59 percent. Residents of nearly every state will face similar problems.

Mr. Roy is a columnist for NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

Americans with incomes near the poverty line are among the few who won’t experience “rate shock,” because taxpayer subsidies will protect them from increased costs. And a small minority who are already very sick will benefit from forcing healthy people to subsidize their coverage. But everyone else will pay more.

In June, a survey from the Morning Consult, a company focused on health-care policy and research, asked 1,000 likely voters: “In your own personal opinion, which of the following do you see as the biggest problem facing healthcare today?” By far, the most popular answer—attracting 58 percent of respondents—was that health care is “too expensive.” Seventeen percent said that it is “not worth the price,” which is another way of saying the same thing. Only 11 percent said that the biggest problem is “too many uninsured.”

That is, 75 percent of respondents felt that the biggest problem with our health-care system is that care is too costly. And yet Obamacare makes health insurance even more expensive. It is this fact that explains a good deal of why Obamacare is enduringly unpopular with the public, and why the president has to mislead Americans about the law’s true cost.

Ironically, the reason that there are so many Americans without health insurance is precisely that it is too expensive. Rather than address the underlying causes of high premiums, however, Obamacare doubles down on the broken system we already have.

You might think that these poll numbers make clear that the public would back Republicans’ approach to health care. But they don’t. When the Morning Consult asked the same voters, “When it comes to handling healthcare, which political party do you trust more?” respondents favored Democrats over Republicans, 42 percent to 32. Voters are appropriately skeptical that they will benefit from Obamacare, but they give the president credit for expending his political capital on an important policy problem.

Republicans, as a group, have expressed little to no interest in addressing the high cost of health insurance. The GOP appears to have settled on a strategy that involves implacably opposing Obamacare—an approach with maximal appeal to the party base—while studiously avoiding proposals for free-market reforms, reforms that would be highly controversial to those who benefit from the status quo.

It’s this dynamic that explains the effort by Republican senators Mike Lee, Ted Cruz, and others to risk shutting down the government in order to defund Obamacare. Such a strategy would almost certainly backfire, costing Republicans seats in the 2014 elections while failing to derail the law’s implementation. But the shutdown strategy is intensely popular among tea-party conservatives, many of whom are under the false impression that Obamacare represents a government takeover of a private health-care system.

That takeover, in fact, has basically already happened. Prior to the implementation of Obamacare, in 2010, U.S.-government agencies spent \$3,967 per capita on health care, the fourth-highest sum in the world. Those European-style welfare states we’re always mocking? They spent less: \$3,158 per person in Canada, \$3,061 in France, \$3,046 in Sweden, \$2,857 in Britain. The U.S. hospital-industrial complex is, in gross terms, the most heavily government-subsidized industry in the history of the world.

AP PHOTO/JACQUELYN MARTIN

To be sure, Obamacare makes these problems worse. But repealing Obamacare and returning to the status quo ante would do nothing to tackle America's preexisting condition: the trillion dollars a year we already spend on health-care entitlements. And the Morning Consult poll suggests that Americans would rally behind a Republican-led effort to make health insurance more affordable.

In order to reduce the cost of health insurance, we must first appreciate why it is so expensive. The two principal causes predate Obamacare by 68 and 45 years, respectively.

First, wage controls enacted in 1942 did not include limits on health benefits. So employers, prohibited from competing for workers by offering higher salaries, offered richer health benefits instead. In 1943, a federal court held that employer-sponsored health insurance was exempt from income and payroll taxes. Today, this tax exclusion for employer-sponsored health insurance is worth \$300 billion a year. It has made most Americans dependent on their employers for health coverage, and has made individuals highly insensitive to the price and the value of the coverage they receive.

Second, the passage of Medicare in 1965 resulted in the massive enrichment of hospitals and doctors at taxpayers' expense. Medicare gave retirees access to heavily subsidized health care, with little in the way of cost controls. Like people drinking at an open bar, seniors were suddenly in a position to ask for the most expensive care that technology could design. Doctors and hospitals were in a position to get paid handsomely for recommending procedures and services of marginal benefit.

Even if Republicans manage to repeal the president's health-care law, without further reforms the growth of Medicare, Medicaid, and our other health-care entitlements will continue unabated. Those who crusade against Obamacare while de-emphasizing these more consequential problems are complicit in the runaway cost of health care and therefore the growth of government.

To their credit, Republicans have, by and large, gotten behind Representative Paul Ryan's plan to make modest market-oriented changes to Medicare. But fewer Republicans are willing to make substan-

tial changes to the highly popular tax exclusion for employer-sponsored insurance. (Ryan, Senators Tom Coburn and Richard Burr, and a few others are notable exceptions.)

And even fewer Republicans seem to have any stomach for the much-needed fight against the growing power of the hospital industry, which is fully behind the implementation of Obamacare and is lobbying heavily for the law's expansion of Medicaid in the states that remain undecided on that issue.

If Republicans want to draw the greatest contrast between their own ideas for health care and Democrats', they should highlight the degree to which Obamacare is driving up the already high costs of health insurance and articulate a series of proposals that would reduce those costs.

In particular, Republicans should make two policy proposals. The first, a "Plan A," would take the form of "repeal and replace," with an emphasis on the "replace." Plan A would incorporate Paul Ryan's reforms of the Medicare and Medicaid programs or a close facsimile. But its core would be to replace Obamacare and the employer tax exclusion with a universal tax credit that could be used to purchase health insurance or deposited in a health savings account. Such a policy would revolutionize the health-care industry, by forcing insurers and hospitals to offer coverage and care at transparent, low prices.

Plan A, however, will have a critical deficiency. By the time we might next see a GOP president, in 2017, a "repeal and replace" strategy will involve disruption in the health-insurance arrangements of nearly every American: the 34 million who are slated to enroll in Obamacare's exchanges and its Medicaid expansion, and the 160 million or so

in the employer-sponsored system. Only current Medicare beneficiaries, per the current Ryan plan, would be spared any changes. While such a plan is effective as a flagpole for free-market principles, its chances of overcoming a Senate filibuster in 2017 are slim.

This is where Plan B would come in. Plan B would be designed for passage in a Washington where Democrats wield significant power. It would focus on repealing or reshaping the parts of Obamacare, and of our preexisting health-care system, that make coverage so expensive. But it would not be as disruptive to Americans' health-care arrangements.

Such a plan would encourage individual ownership of health coverage by repealing Obamacare's employer mandate and replacing the law's "Cadillac tax" with a cap on the value of the tax exclusion for employer-sponsored insurance. It would repeal "community rating," the feature of the law that drives up premiums for the young. It would repeal the law's benefit and cost-sharing mandates, which increase rates and discriminate against religious institutions. It would expand insurers' flexibility to offer higher deductibles and health savings accounts. And it would restructure Obamacare's subsidies so as to encourage migration to consumer-driven health-care plans.

While Plan B would not itself repeal Obamacare, it would not preclude eventual repeal. And by emphasizing those aspects of Obamacare that increase the cost of health insurance, it would allow Republicans to go on legislative offense. Democrats would feel immense pressure to vote for a cost-oriented reform package precisely because of their responsibility for nationwide rate shock. And success would have a significant impact on the scale and growth of federal spending.

Obamacare is unpopular. But voters still trust Democrats over Republicans, by double digits, on the issue of health-care reform. If Republicans want to take advantage of the former fact to reverse the latter one, they must launch an agenda tailored specifically to the problem of the high cost of health insurance. It is, by far, the public's biggest concern. It is Obamacare's Achilles' heel. But it is, at present, Republicans' weakness too.

NR



"Guess where they've authorized offshore drilling now!"

Legislators With Lightsabers

A secretive few Republicans are shaping budget negotiations

BY JONATHAN STRONG

EVERY week on Representative Steve Scalise's calendar, there's a meeting with an unusual name: "Jedi Council." Scalise, the chairman of the Republican Study Committee (RSC), is the newest member of a group of House Republicans who are helping to craft the GOP's strategy on budget fights.

About two and a half years ago, Paul Ryan, Jeb Hensarling, Tom Price, and Jim Jordan began meeting once a week when Congress was in session, usually in Hensarling's Capitol office—he was then the fourth-ranking member of the House leadership—and usually first thing in the morning. When Scalise was elected RSC chairman in November, they asked him to join the Jedi Council.

This was right after Obama's reelection, and in the following weeks Democrats handed Republicans their hats in the "fiscal cliff" negotiations while the GOP conference nearly came unglued. Looking ahead to the debt-ceiling increase, the Jedi Council worried that taking on Obama at the apex of his political power could end in disaster.

"There was a feeling from the five of them that if they had a debt-limit fight in February, it was inevitable that they were going to lose," says a prominent conservative with knowledge of their deliberations.

The group formed a plan to "re-sequence" the budget fights to give the GOP more leverage. The idea was to punt on the debt ceiling for a while, let the automatic sequester cuts go into effect, pass the GOP's budget, and then gear up for a big debt-ceiling brawl in the summer.

On the morning of the last day of the GOP's January retreat in Williamsburg, Va., the Jedi Council met with Speaker John Boehner and the rest of the House

leadership and struck a deal. The agreement, which rank-and-file Republicans reverently describe as the "Williamsburg Accord," began with re-sequencing: In exchange for allowing a short-term debt-ceiling increase, House Republicans would make the modest demand that the Senate pass a budget for the first time in four years.

But the accord also included surprising new promises to pass a budget that would come into balance within ten years, and to make enacting the reforms in that budget a goal of the debt-ceiling fight. These promises echoed an open letter 40 conservative leaders had just sent to House leadership. But it has not been understood that the Williamsburg Accord was as much an agreement between the Jedi Council and Boehner as it was between the Jedi Council and the conservative movement.

On January 15, the day before the Williamsburg retreat, Michael Needham, the CEO of Heritage Action for America, the lobbying arm of the Heritage Foundation, and Chris Chocola, a former congressman and now president of the Club

for Growth, attended the Jedi Council's weekly meeting on behalf of the outside groups. (Needham was physically present; Chocola was listening on speakerphone.) Ryan did most of the talking, explaining how starting a debt-ceiling fight in February would be suicide. Needham and Chocola weren't thrilled, but they were willing to trust him. They wanted a push to balance the budget in ten years. The Jedi Council agreed, and, with the blessing of the outside groups, took the proposal to Boehner.

According to Wookieepedia, an online encyclopedia of the mythology of the *Star Wars* films, the Jedi Council is "a group of twelve wise and powerful Jedi Masters who were elected to guide the Order"—the Jedi Order being, of course, the "ancient monastic peacekeeping organization unified by its belief [in] and observance of the Force." If the fact that the five lawmakers named their group after an obscure bit of *Star Wars* trivia doesn't convince you they are nerds, you may be interested to learn that they once posed for a photograph wielding toy lightsabers. The author's efforts to obtain

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this image, which is in the possession of petrified Jordan aides, were unsuccessful—for now.

The House's Jedi Council is unusually secretive. No aides are permitted to attend their meetings. At their June 13 meeting, they decided not to give interviews or provide other assistance for this article, amid concerns that doing so could interfere with delicate negotiations. Ryan's office did not respond to a request for comment on the topic at all. In its first two years, almost no one knew the group existed, and nobody could identify anything it did. In the last Congress, both Hensarling and Price were part of the House leadership team, and Jordan was RSC chairman. Their formal positions of power may have obscured any coordination among them.

This Congress, Price and Hensarling are out of the leadership team. Hensarling became a committee chairman. Price lost a bid for conference chairman to Cathy McMorris Rodgers. Ryan and Hensarling backed Price, but McMorris Rodgers had the strong support of Boehner. At one point, Boehner offered Price a largely ceremonial spot at the leadership table if he would drop his candidacy and pledge

not to publicly break with Boehner for two years. Price declined.

Price's ambition provokes far more suspicion from Boehner than it does from his fellow members of the Jedi Council. The two essentially have no relationship, sources close to both men say, and there are perceptions of a broader distrust between the speaker and the Council. Some leadership aides ask whether the Jedi Council is designing the next debt-ceiling fight to culminate in a challenge to Boehner's speakership. One rank-and-file House member told me in March that the Jedi Council pitched re-sequencing to him as a way of giving Boehner the rope he needed to hang himself. A Jedi Council member told me—before the Council's decision not to speak to NATIONAL REVIEW—that this isn't their plan, and several knowledgeable sources agreed that a coup doesn't sound like them. For one thing, trying to take out Boehner in the middle of a Congress could have adverse effects on the 2014 elections.

Ryan has forged a closer relationship with Boehner since being tagged for the Romney presidential ticket. Scalise and Jordan retain good working relationships with the leadership, but Hensarling's is

said to be fraying as he remains away from the leadership table.

Each of the five members of the Jedi Council brings a different strength and reaches a different part of the GOP conference, admirers say. Ryan has star power and deep credibility on budget issues. Hensarling is the elder statesman of the RSC. Price has expertise on health care. Jordan enjoys friendships with some of the most intractable members of the GOP conference. Scalise is coming into his own and has relationships with some cliques that the others know less well.

In the view of some conservative groups, implementation of the Williamsburg Accord has been a mixed bag, and Ryan in particular is in danger of losing his sheen, even if few observers realize it. Some prominent conservatives were shocked, for example, to learn that the Ryan budget achieves balance in ten years mostly thanks to tax increases rather than steep spending cuts. The budget assumes that tax revenues will remain at the current projected level, which includes the fiscal-cliff and Obamacare tax increases. Officially, this is supposed to happen because of increased economic growth from "tax reform," the specifics of which are not described. But the assumed tax revenues are higher than their historic average as a percentage of GDP, which the outside groups find more fundamentally problematic. Both Heritage Action and the Club for Growth have nonetheless stayed neutral on the proposal, avoiding a fight and giving Ryan more room to maneuver.

Observers are also concerned that the improving economy has made it possible to postpone the debt-ceiling fight again and again: As more tax revenue comes in, the Treasury Department can fund the government longer without taking on additional debt. Ryan said in a recent radio interview that debt-ceiling D-Day will now come in November, much later than the summer battle originally planned.

Additionally, there is a fight over legislative procedure. Several top Senate conservatives, led by Ted Cruz and Mike Lee, want to avoid a conference committee on the budget resolution, fearing it could be used to pass a debt-ceiling increase as part of the reconciliation process, which would require 50 votes rather than the normal 60. The Jedi Council is keeping the option of a deal

via conference committee open, unnerving outside groups and the senators. Lee has also called for using an upcoming appropriations bill to defund Obamacare, which does not fit into the Jedi Council's strategy and has caused some angst on the House side.

There are, as well, outstanding questions about the fine print of the Williamsburg Accord. A source familiar with the deal recently told me "the agreement was that it would include cuts or reforms that put us 'on the path to balance' in ten years. The bill wouldn't necessarily have to achieve balance in ten years all by itself."

What, in any case, is putting the budget on a "path to balance"? "You can drive a truck through that loophole," says one senior GOP aide. Scalise has talked about trading parts of the Ryan budget for increases in the debt ceiling—big reforms for bigger debt-ceiling increases, and small reforms for smaller ones. Boehner would negotiate the details with President Obama, in theory producing some middle-ground deal.

It's also a pressing question how closely House leaders will stick to the Williamsburg Accord once the going gets tough. In public remarks, Boehner has said several different things, including that the debt ceiling will be raised only if, "dollar for dollar," cuts are also enacted; that "our goal here is to get this country on a path to balance the budget over ten years"; and, through a spokesman, that no decisions have been made.

House majority leader Eric Cantor says he is on board with tying the debt-ceiling increase to reforms that balance the budget in ten years, calling such an approach "sensible." He adds: "We have a demographic reality of 10,000 Americans turning 65 every day, and a programmatic reality of Medicare being almost 50 percent underfunded. So that's 50 percent underfunded times 10,000 every day."

Although Boehner and Cantor will be making the final decisions when the debt-ceiling fight finally gets here, it's Ryan for whom the expectations are high. "I think the whole episode puts a lot of burden on Ryan—and the rest of the gang, but especially Paul, who got the exact sequencing he wanted to have," Needham says.

When the debt-ceiling fight comes in the fall, conservatives will learn whether the Jedi Council has been as sage as its movie-screen counterpart. **NR**

Freedom From Fear, For Now

A personal reflection on living in New York

BY JAY NORDLINGER

HERE is a stunning fact: In 15 years of living in New York, I've just about never looked over my shoulder. Never crossed the street out of apprehension, never feared crime at all. I'm not cloistered, either. I'm in the streets for a couple of hours a day, and I'm out late most nights, or many nights.

"Well," you might say, "you wander in the nicer parts of New York—of Manhattan, specifically." True. But, not very long ago, some of those parts were not so nice. You wouldn't have wanted to wander in them, and you definitely wouldn't have wanted to linger in them.

Why am I aware of not looking over my shoulder? How do I hear a dog not barking? Because from time to time, I visit other cities, and then I hear the dog bark, loudly. This happened to me in San Francisco about a week ago. I took an apparently wrong turn, somewhere near U.N. Plaza, and came upon a scene of drugs and menace. I got out of Dodge as quickly as I could, pulse racing. I've been to Philadelphia and St. Louis recently, too. I looked over my shoulder, crossed streets . . .

I further remember Chicago when I was a teenager. And of Detroit, we shouldn't even speak. I lived just 45 minutes away, and going to the big city—or the dwindling city—wasn't really an option.

All of this brings me to the mayoral election we're going to have in New York this fall. For 20 years, we have had only two mayors: Rudy and Bloomy, or, more formally, Rudolph Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg. Giuliani is a Republican, and Bloomberg has always run on the Republican ticket. He styles himself an independent now. But the fact remains: Since 1993, there has not been a Democrat in the mayor's office.

This is amazing, in an overwhelmingly Democratic city.

But the party can't last forever—and it seems certain that, next year, we will have a "progressive" Democrat as mayor. I don't mind saying that this makes me uneasy.

We moved here from Washington, D.C., in 1998, well into the Giuliani renaissance. I knew about this renaissance, of course. But I still had some worries about New York. After all, I had grown up with television shows and movies depicting the horrible crime in New York. How many sequels to *Death Wish* were there? And, of course, I had read the novel that summed up the age: Tom Wolfe's 1987 classic, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*.

New York was a cauldron of racial antagonism and violence. We could get into details, but let me just mention some names: "Bensonhurst," "Yusef Hawkins," "Crown Heights," "Yankel Rosenbaum," "The Wild Man of 96th Street," "Bernhard Goetz," "Freddy's Fashion Mart." In people who remember, these names cause shudders. But to many, these names mean nothing. Think of it: You can be a native New Yorker 25 years old, and basically have no memory of the bad old days. You have known nothing but Rudy-Bloomy security.

In 2004, the *New York Times* was moved to publish an article titled "Is New York Losing Its Street Smarts?" There were young people and newcomers who were clueless about muggings.

To return to my own story: We moved here in 1998, four years into the Giuliani renaissance. It was soon clear that the biggest danger, in our neighborhood, was being run over by happy moviegoers. That was at midnight. In daylight hours, the danger was being run over by young mothers with strollers, or by nannies pushing those strollers. Back in the quaint village of Georgetown, I didn't even like walking on M Street after about 10 P.M.

Our neighbors in New York recounted the awful past: "Oh, you wouldn't have liked living here before. That park over there was a 'needle park.' You couldn't go near it, only drug dealers and thugs. And let me tell you what happened to my aunt . . ."

In 1993, New Yorkers turned to Giuliani out of desperation. They didn't

want to elect a hard-nosed Republican prosecutor. It wasn't natural to them. But they had almost no choice: Their backs were to the wall, guns were to their heads. So they did it. And Rudy and his partners beat back crime, with alacrity.

It's hard to remember—bewildering to remember—what the prevalent thinking used to be: Tough policing was racist in nature. Crime had root causes, namely inequality and poverty, and you couldn't do anything about crime until you eliminated those causes. You just had to accept it, you just had to live with it. Rudy & Co. said, "Nonsense," and proved it.

The mayor was willing to withstand what very, very few people are willing to withstand. He was willing to be called a racist—screamed at as a racist—over and over and over. You have to have a stomach of iron, and a spine of steel, to

be screamed at as a racist. Rudy just took it. And reminded people that black citizens, more than others, were victims of crime.

There were people—I knew some—who were nostalgic about the old New York, or pretended to be. The present, safe New York was just not "edgy" or "authentic" enough. There were Gap stores everywhere. You might as well be in the suburbs. Times Square had been "Disneyized," they said. That was one of the great putdowns of the day: "Disneyfication." Times Square was better—certainly more authentic—when it was less square: marked by drugs and prostitution.

But others liked the new New York, a lot. They felt that Rudy was protecting them. The story was told that, at a bus stop, an old lady saw a "youth" acting up. And she called out to him, "You bet-

ter watch out, or Rudy's gonna get you."

Giuliani was limited to two terms, so in 2001 we were going to elect a new mayor. "That's it," I thought. "It was fun while it lasted." One beautiful late-summer day, I was walking through Riverside Park, where families were picnicking and birds were chirping. It was idyllic—Disneyesque, you could say. And I thought, "Once Mark Green is mayor, all this will be over." That was my concern, anyway.

In due course, Green became the Democratic nominee. He was an old aide to Ramsey Clark and Ralph Nader. He was a long way from Giuliani.

The primary elections, Democratic and Republican, were held on September 11. Later in the day, they were postponed. During the weeks of the general-election campaign—i.e., when the World Trade Center still smoldered—Giuliani was very popular. He campaigned vigorously for the Republican nominee, Bloomberg. And the nominee spent a fortune from the fortune he had made. He won, with 50.3 percent of the vote. We were granted a reprieve.

And Bloomy proceeded to do something remarkable: He drove down crime even further. You could practically sleep in Central Park. In 2008, he got the city council to change the law on term limits, allowing him to run a third time. This was a brazen move, a power move. But I, for one, was pleased. As far as I was concerned, Bloomy could be mayor forever, if Rudy couldn't.

Let me throw some stats at you. Last year, there were 414 murders in New York—the fewest since 1928. In 1990, there were 2,262 murders, which came to more than six a day. In the last 20 years, murder is down 83.2 percent, rape is down 55.5 percent, robbery is down 79.1 percent, burglary is down 83.4 percent—I could go on.

And this was no accident, no matter of luck: It took tremendous political courage.

With Bloomy, conservatives have had to put up with certain things. A few months ago, we at NATIONAL REVIEW had him on our cover as "New York's Nanny," flying like Mary Poppins with his umbrella over Gotham. The piece inside by Mark Steyn was excoriating, funny, and true. In an editorial a few weeks ago, we described the mayor as a "prissy little autocrat."

Yes. He banned smoking in bars and



Michael Bloomberg and Rudolph Giuliani, October 2001

restaurants. He banned or curbed trans fats (whatever they are). He has tried to limit the size of “sugary drinks.” He is not a Goldwater Republican. And I don’t care. Because, in New York, I’m essentially a one-issue voter—and that issue is crime. If that is not in check, nothing else matters. If you have to look over your shoulder, if you can’t go out, if you have to move—who cares about the size of sugary drinks?

Myron Magnet said it best in a recent essay for *City Journal*: The job of a New York mayor is to ensure, to the extent possible, freedom from fear. That is the whole enchilada.

Apparently, our next mayor will be a woman named Christine Quinn, the speaker of the city council. She is a “progressive” out of Central Casting. She has been inveighing against a police technique known as “stop and frisk.” Bloomberg’s critics have been screaming that this technique is racist. He is taking the abuse, and talking back to it. A New York congressman complained, “The mayor has shown no willingness to rein in the NYPD.”

The words “rein in the NYPD” should send a chill down the spine of everyone who lives in New York. There was once a time when the NYPD was good and reined in. And criminals ruled.

There are people who say that New Yorkers will never go back. They will never again “tolerate the intolerable,” to borrow a phrase from Norman Podhoretz. They have seen the lights of Paree—a safe, livable, delightful New York—and they won’t go back to the farm. I don’t believe it. Everything Rudy and Bloomy have done is reversible. The barbarians are never vanquished, permanently. They are always at the gate, waiting to be allowed back in.

What can reverse our reign of peace? A mayor who submits to racial bullying. Leadership that is complacent, inattentive—that lets our guard down. “Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.”

The least important thing about New York is my relation to it. New York does not exist for my personal pleasure. There are 8 million people here, all with their own fish to fry. But everyone has an interest in freedom from fear. And it has been so lovely to live here. **NR**

Vaper Strain

The senseless demonization of e-cigarettes

BY ANDREW STUTTAFORD

As I write, I am vaping—yes, that’s the word—inhalating an odorless vapor from a plastic facsimile of a cigarette, battery-powered, bought for \$10 at a local store, and good, it is claimed, for 400 puffs. The business end is fashioned to look like a filter. In another nod to nostalgia, the tip glows as I inhale. It’s not the real thing, nothing like. Plastic is neither leaf nor paper. It holds no memories of that old bar down on the Lower East Side, that conversation once upon when. There’s no tobacco, no combustion, none of the warmth, none of the evocative transience, none of the mouth-feel of cigarette or cigar, and it looks just a bit dumb. Walk into Rick’s with an e-cigarette and Rick would laugh. Then again, Bogie died at 57.

Whatever the aesthetics of e-cigarettes, as nicotine-delivery systems go they are a lot safer than the cancer sticks of old. There’s no carbon monoxide, no tar, very little, in fact, of tobacco smoking’s carcinogenic stew. To be sure, the Food and Drug Administration has detected tobacco-specific nitrosamines (a carcinogen) in the e-cigarette cartridges that contain the treats to come. A 2009 study revealed about the same quantity of TSNAs in cartridges as might be found in a nicotine patch, a total about one-nine-hundredth of the level found inside Joe Camel. The vaper (I know, I know) will *inhale* an even smaller portion, a tiny fraction of a minuscule amount. Furthermore, TSNAs were the only carcinogens detected in this study. Boston University’s Dr. Michael Siegel, a 25-year veteran of tobacco-control work (and a Centers for Disease Control alumnus), has noted that smokers of conventional cigarettes may inhale maybe

40 other carcinogens, not to speak of “thousands of [other] chemicals.”

But what about the antifreeze? This substance, more happily associated with autos than lungs, has seeped into the e-cigarette debate, setting up a scare or 50. The truth is that the FDA found some diethylene glycol—an important ingredient in antifreeze—in just one of the cartridges surveyed in the 2009 study, a dismaying result but almost certainly a rogue finding. E-cigarettes generally do contain, however, a base of propylene glycol to “hold” the nicotine and any added flavoring. Propylene glycol *is* used in antifreeze, but as a kinder, gentler alternative to its rough diethylene cousin, particularly when there is any danger of contact with food. As is explained in the compound’s Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry toxicological profile (September 1997), “the [FDA] has classified propylene glycol as ‘generally recognized as safe,’ which means that it is acceptable for use in flavorings, drugs, and cosmetics, and as a direct food additive.” Move along, there’s nothing to see here.

As an alternative to propylene glycol, some e-cigarettes use vegetable glycerin as their base. This common food additive will affect their taste, but not your health.

And so far as the ingredients lurking in an e-cigarette are concerned, that ought to be about it. This is not, of course, a reason for arguing that research on these products should cease, or that stricter quality control should be opposed. Nor is it a claim that e-cigarettes are risk-free. They may, for example, inhibit lung capacity, at least temporarily. Beyond that and those pesky TSNAs, there is also the matter that most e-cigarettes will be used to deliver nicotine, a potentially addictive substance—albeit one that has been given up by tens of millions. Then again, much of nicotine’s famously powerful addictiveness can be attributed to the fact that it is being delivered via tobacco, a medium with naturally occurring monoamine oxidase inhibitors that seem to have a great deal to do (it’s a long story) with the difficulty of quitting smoking. Divorced from its leafy accomplice, nicotine is not *that* addictive, nor under those circumstances, to quote John Britton, who leads the tobacco advisory group for Britain’s Royal College of Physicians, is it even a “particularly hazardous” drug.

What about secondhand smoke, butcher

Mr. Stuttaford is a contributing editor of NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE.

of innocents, enricher of laundries? E-cigarettes give off little or no odor, and, although the research is still at an early stage, the health risks of secondhand vaping likely rest somewhere between zero and infinitesimal.

Considering all this (Dr. Britton has been quoted as saying that if everyone switched over to e-cigarettes it could save “millions” of lives), the medical world ought to be cheering the swift rise of a hugely safer alternative to demon

The medical world ought to be cheering the swift rise of a **hugely safer alternative** to demon tobacco.

tobacco. E-cigarettes are, so to speak, catching fire. In the U.S., sales are expected to hit \$1 billion in 2013, twice the total of a year ago. That’s still only about 1 percent of the total spent on tobacco products, but it says something that Altria Group Inc. (parent company of Philip Morris USA), Reynolds American Inc., and Lorillard Inc. (which paid \$135 million for blu eCigs in 2012) have all entered this market. Non-U.S. e-cigarette sales have been expanding rapidly too, reaching an estimated \$2 billion in 2012.

But e-cigarettes have given tobacco’s fiercer foes, well, the vapors. Brazil, Norway, and Singapore have banned them. Others have imposed strict controls, including the prohibition of vaping in public places. Some British railway companies have exiled vapers from their carriages on the carefully considered grounds that they make other passengers “uneasy.” Such stupidities are not confined to abroad. A growing number of America’s politicians, bureaucrats, and other nuisances are on the offensive against e-cigarettes, including—if recent reports are true—New York’s nanny-in-chief, Michael Bloomberg. And he won’t be the last.

There *are* some legitimate concerns. There is a wide range of e-flavors, some of which, cherry crush, say, or chocolate (I’m not sure—on many grounds—about maple bacon), might appeal to a younger set, but such worries are best addressed by prohibiting sales to minors. Other objections—that e-cigarettes might act as a gateway to the real thing (in reality, they

are more likely to represent an exit from it) or that they might re-glamorize smoking—are feeble stuff. This suggests that the real agenda is driven by the precautionary principle run amok, or, ominously, by something darker still.

Cynics might point to the loss of valuable tax revenues as the motive, but there’s much more to it than that. The campaign against tobacco began with the best of intentions, but it has long since degenerated into an instrument for its activists

both to order others around and to display their own virtue. And with that comes an insistence on a rejection of tobacco so absolute, so pure, that it has become detached from any logic other than the logic of control, the classic hallmark of a cult. So mighty is the supposed power of this anathematized leaf that anything—even when tobacco-free—that looks like a cigarette or provides any approximation of its pleasures is suspect.

It’s too much, of course, to expect any respect these days for the principle that adults should be left to decide such things for themselves, but the chance that the e-cigarette could save an impressive number of lives should count for something. Europe’s sad snus saga suggests that that might not necessarily be so. For generations Swedes have taken a form of oral tobacco, a snuff known as “snus,” cured in a way that sharply reduces its TSNA content. Snus is available in the U.S., land of dip and chew, but, within the EU, where no such tradition exists, it can be sold only in Sweden. Taking snus is not without risk, but it’s far less harmful than smoking. Its popularity in Sweden, especially with the guys, goes a long way to explaining why that country has Europe’s lowest incidence of lung cancer among men. It has been estimated that introducing snus elsewhere in the EU could save some 90,000 lives a year, but the EU’s capnophobic leadership has rejected the idea. Anti-tobacco jihadists are quite content, you see, to accept that the perfect can be the enemy of the good.

As America’s vapers might be about to find out. **NR**

#Humble - exhibitionism

Anthony Weiner and our parallel online lives

BY ROB LONG

YEARS ago, when an aging movie star won an Emmy award for something like Best Supporting Actress in a Guest Role—which is a category specifically designed for aging movie stars—she raced to the podium, clutched her award, stared at it lovingly, and then trilled, “I hope you get along with Oscar and Tony!”

Meaning, Please be aware, members of the audience, that I also have an Oscar and a Tony.

Sickening, yes, but also sort of elegant. It was an early version of what’s now called a “humble brag,” or to use the proper new-media spelling, #humblebrag. The idea is to couch a screamingly bald boast (“I am a successful and important person in the movie business”) within a humble or rueful Tweet (“Remind me never to agree to begin pre-production on a project when I’m still doing post-production on another! #stressedout-ofmymind”).

The writer Tim Siedell, who Tweets (hilariously) as @badbanana, identified perhaps the most egregious humble bragger of them all. Last December, during the Christmas season, he Tweeted: “Nice #humblebrag, Little Drummer Boy.”

Because, when you think about it, the Little Drummer Boy is a pretty awful humble bragger. “I have no gifts to bring?” That’s just another way of saying, Guess where I am? I am RIGHT NEXT to the manger! OMG! Literally!

Search Twitter for that hashtag, and you’ll uncover a treasure trove of #humblebrags—and they’re not all jokes; a lot of folks on Twitter have no idea they’ve committed a humble brag until someone else calls them on it—each designed to elevate the Tweeter, each a mini self-press release crafted to remind everyone about the fabulous life and exciting times that the Tweeter is living and the Tweetee is not.



New York mayoral candidate Anthony Weiner, August 2013

And it's not just Twitter. People post artfully filtered photographs on Instagram of incredible views, spectacular meals, friends hugging and laughing and whooping it up. Facebook status updates are chockablock with superlatives—"Had an AMAZING time this weekend seeing old friends! Luv you guys!!!!" and "My tenth trip to Santorini was actually my first, because I saw it with my beautiful wife and incredible children." It's hard to reconcile all of that personal fulfillment and those joyful gatherings of friends and those deeply felt connections to family with a nation that seems addicted to antidepressants, sugary carbohydrates, and divorce.

Unless, of course, we're lying. Unless all of those #humblebrags and upbeat status updates are a kind of wish fulfillment, what French literary critics might call a "parallel narrative" to the real narrative, in which our friends are fat and boring and our children complain about the Greek food and our wife announces that she "just needs some time to figure things out." Real life is almost impossible to Instagram. How we really are, and how we really feel, cannot be tweeted. And besides, if we construct a parallel narrative that's more attractive and exciting than our real one, who's to say we can't just live there, in a cradle made of lies and false smiles and #humblebrags?

I have a friend who is notorious for his Facebook updates. In one day, he'll broadcast a cascade of gleeful and celebratory messages. Things like, "Amazing breakfast in Malibu with my attorney.

Blessed to have such a dedicated and thorough person on my team!" And then later, he'll post something like, "Great news from my agent. The network loves my script! Fingers crossed we get to produce it!" And he'll top it all off with, "Quiet glass of Côte-Rôtie with my lady. Life is good."

One day, though, after a series of glamorous and plummy updates and #humblebrags, I ran into him, in real life, at the E-Z Lube around the corner. "Aren't you supposed to be at a screening?" I asked, pointing to my iPhone.

He shrugged unapologetically. "I just post stuff that makes a good story," he said. "It doesn't have to be real. I mean, real-real."

Who's to say, in other words, that serial Tweeter and social-media pioneer Anthony Weiner is more real-real, in his mind anyway, than his ludicrously bragadocio parallel identity of Carlos Danger? We've all had a good laugh or a sickened grimace (or both) at his behavior—the shirtless preening, the penis photography, the sexy take-charge talk—but isn't it basically the same thing as all of those "Amazing weekend!" and "Beautiful wife!!" Tweets and status updates, just the nude version? As Anthony Weiner, unrepentant New York City mayoral candidate, is tireless in pointing out, he never *met* any of the recipients of his user-generated content. He never even wanted to.

Carlos Danger exists in a parallel world somewhere, to be petted and admired by compliant and (to go by the user photo-

graphs) slightly plump ladies all over the Web. They may call it "sexting" but, forgive me, where's the sex, exactly? The whole enterprise is constructed solely to fuel auto-erotic fantasies. The only one givin' it up for Anthony Weiner is . . . Anthony Weiner. Though as a prescient Woody Allen has observed, "Don't knock masturbation. It's sex with someone I love."

It's tempting, of course, to dust off the shrink's sofa and diagnose Messrs. Danger and Weiner as hopelessly twinned malignant narcissists. And one look at his shirtless profile pic—chest thrust out, leering like a reject from MTV's *Jersey Shore*—suggests that there's something seriously wrong with them both. Only two people with a very loose set of screws could brazen it out on the campaign trail without wilting in mortification. But the animating drive behind career politician Carlos Danger (né Weiner) isn't just for power and attention—although there's a lot of that going on—but also a pathetic kind of cowardice. Look at me! he seems to be saying. Look at my worked-out bod! Look at my penis! Pretend we're having sex together and I will, too. I'll be Carlos Danger and you be a girl who likes bad boys. And the two of us will never be in the same room together. Anthony Weiner, despite his on-the-prowl twin, Carlos Danger, prefers to do it alone. He'd rather look like he's doing things than actually do them.

In that way, he's not all that different from the terabits of megapixels of carefully curated Instagrams floating around the Web, or the zillion words of puffed-up status updates, or the #humblebrag Tweets we're all—or, at least, many of us are—guilty of uploading onto our friends' timelines. That, too, is a form of auto-erotic gratification. That, too, is a kind of retreat from the real world and an investment in a parallel identity. Look at me! we're all saying. Look at my happy family! Look at my adoring friends! Look at our amazing times together! If you pretend to think I'm having an amazing life, I'll pretend that you are, too. We'll each be Sancho Panza to the other's Don Quixote, and I can say that because I'm in Spain right now! And it's amazing!!! Although I'm sort of bummed that King Juan Carlos and I only had time for coffee. I've missed hanging out with him. #humblebrag.

NR

AP PHOTO/BEBETO MATTHEWS



Why Like Ike

Conservatives got Eisenhower wrong the first time around

BY KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON

Rancho Mirage, Calif.

THIS was Republican country—there’s no mistaking the fact. You can hardly get from Point A to Point B in the golf belt of the California desert without paying homage to a particular kind of Republican: You motor down Gerald Ford Drive, and if you make a right turn on Frank Sinatra, you might recall that he made one, too, beginning his political days as a JFK man but ending them raising money for Ronald Reagan. Just down the road, President Barack Obama is meeting with his Chinese counterpart at Sunnylands, the former home of Republican moneyman Walter Annenberg, publisher of *TV Guide* and ambassador to the Court of St. James’s. (To get there, exit the Sonny Bono Memorial Freeway on Bob Hope Drive and go just past Gerald Ford—if you hit Country Club Drive, you’ve gone too far.)

Sunnylands is a masterpiece of midcentury modernism, and Palm Springs and its environs are famous for their *Jetsons*-flavored houses. The architecture is such a draw that Modernism Week is an important buttress for the area’s tourism-driven economy, and design aficionados come from around the world to tour the famous residential works of Richard Neutra, William Cody, and others. The architecture is not incidental: Whereas

Washington’s monumental, fascist-flavored buildings (especially the works of Paul Cret and other practitioners of “stripped classicism”) take their inspiration from Greek and Roman public buildings, the most notable architecture of the California desert is uniquely American and private—sometimes aggressively private: Other places in the country have gated communities, but Canyon Lake, just down the road, is a gated city, one of five in the region.

The midcentury-modern style reached its fullest flower in southern California, the center of post-war American optimism, around 1957, the cultural high-water mark of American history. It is a bold and open style of architecture, one that employs techniques and materials associated with commercial buildings and mass production, bringing high design to the upper reaches of the middle class. These are homes meant to have new cars parked in front, under carports rather than in garages—no need for a full enclosure in the perfect California weather. (Ronald Reagan quipped that if the Pilgrims had landed on the West Coast, New England would still be a wilderness.) These are homes meant to be built on golf courses, but not stuffy, aristocratic golf courses of the sort one sees around Greenwich, Conn.,

AP PHOTO

Lower Merion, Pa., or other exhausted bastions of East Coast WASP culture. In its golden age, Palm Springs may have been in part a playground for the rich and famous—legend is that Gerald Ford and Jackie Gleason used to liven up their golf games with wagers of \$1,000 a hole—but it was also home to a new affluent class of professionals and entrepreneurs with their roots firmly in the middle class. Its amusements were American high-bourgeois—golf and tennis, convertibles—its style was American high-bourgeois—from tailfins to Dorothy Draper—and its politics were American high-bourgeois, meaning Republican.

As everything from the local hospital system to the nearby elementary school to mountain-overlooking Eldorado Country Club documents, this was Eisenhower country.

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER was born in Denison, Texas, at the nadir of his parents' marriage. His father, David, a member of the puritanical River Brethren offshoot of the Mennonite faith, did not drink or smoke, but was nonetheless plagued with a vague personal inconstancy and suffered from wanderlust. He frittered away a substantial inheritance and left a comfortable life among his prosperous family in Abilene, Kans., ending up in Texas as a menial laborer for the Katy railroad.

Like Abraham Lincoln, Dwight Eisenhower was motivated by the desire to put as much economic, social, and (not coincidental) physical distance between himself and his impoverished childhood as he could. Whereas Lincoln found his way out in practicing law, Eisenhower, the last president born in the 19th century, was delivered from a laborer's life by that most characteristic of modern American institutions: a standardized test. U.S. Senator Joseph Bristow (R., Kans.) was a reformer, and rather than using appointments to the service academies as a tool of political patronage, he administered a competitive examination. Ike came in second, and ended up at West Point rather than his first choice, the Naval Academy at Annapolis. Eisenhower's indefatigable confidence was in no small part rooted in the fact that he, like Lincoln, had lived the American promise in full, and, like Lincoln, Eisenhower would make broadly shared prosperity the hallmark of his domestic agenda after the war. Like Lincoln, Eisenhower would preside over very large investments in what the former called "improvements"—Eisenhower's interstate highways were his answer to Lincoln's railroads, and the St. Lawrence Seaway that Ike helped bring into being would have delighted Lincoln.

Ike also finished some of Lincoln's work, especially regarding access to education and economic opportunity, and desegregated those schools and institutions over which he had direct federal power as president more than a year before *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided. In his first State of the Union speech, he announced his hostility to segregation, but he did not feel that he was legally empowered to crusade against it outside his specific federal jurisdiction. (He was, in the words of one biographer, the "last president who actually believed in the Constitution.") After *Brown*, he was empowered, and when Democrats attempted to use the National Guard to block the desegregation of southern schools, Ike sent in the 101st Airborne, which was among the units he had commanded at D-Day.

President Truman had never enforced his order to desegregate the U.S. military, and two-thirds of the units were segregated when Ike took office, along with many auxiliary facilities. None

of them were by the end of his first term—not even the southern shipyards, the segregation of which had been assumed to be destined to endure in perpetuity. Adam Clayton Powell rightly identified Eisenhower as having done more to "restore the Negro to the status of first-class citizenship than any president since Abraham Lincoln." Minnijean Brown, one of the students escorted to school in Little Rock by Eisenhower's troops, declared: "For the first time in my life, I felt like an American citizen."

Eisenhower believed strongly in meritocracy. He had enjoyed basic economic security as an Army officer, but he had also known frustration. His career stalled in the peacetime Army, and he was nearly court-martialed for mishandling housing-allowance paperwork. He wasn't a businessman—his one major achievement in free enterprise was figuring out how to pay the 25 percent capital-gains tax rate on his memoir income rather than the very high personal tax rates that prevailed at the time. He sometimes annoyed the business community, as when he signed off on a bill that increased the minimum wage by a third. The minimum wage was higher in real terms under Eisenhower than it is today.

When Ike was president, his management style was still very much that of the military commander: Much as he had aligned, as a general, the actions of infantry, armor, and air support, he now saw himself as mustering national resources in a coordinated strategy. "I patiently explain over and over again that American strength is a combination of economic, moral, and military force," he said. "If we demand too much in taxes in order to build planes and ships, we will tend to dry up the accumulations of capital that are necessary to provide jobs for the millions of new workers that we must absorb each year." But unlike his European counterparts, Eisenhower sought to rally the nation's resources not through subjecting the economy to political discipline but by setting it free. While France and England were nationalizing industries, Eisenhower's America was abolishing wage and price controls.

And it was Eisenhower's experience as a commanding general that led him to the most important item on his political agenda: "waging peace."

‘WAGING PEACE” was an idea that Eisenhower took seriously—he made it the title of the second volume of his memoirs—and it was the key to both his domestic and his overseas political success.

As the man principally responsible for shaping NATO, Eisenhower could not be accused of failing to take the worldwide Communist threat seriously enough. But Eisenhower, as he said over and over again, saw NATO first and foremost as a tool for the prevention of wars rather than the fighting of them—that was a secondary mission and, in the case of the Soviets and Chinese, a last resort. Harry S. Truman left him with a lot of peace to be waged. By ending the unpopular and fruitless conflict in Korea, Eisenhower relieved the nation of a major drain on its economy and excised a cancer eating away at the United States' national military credibility. He scrupulously abjured what he contemptuously called "brushfire wars," which would have sapped military manpower, matériel, and prestige, but left no doubt in Moscow or Beijing that any serious threat to U.S. national security would be met with overwhelming force. He twice had the good sense to

overrule subordinates who wanted to use nuclear weapons, the second time dispatching a note to his military advisers reading: “You boys must be crazy.” In doing so, he established the nuclear threshold—in effect, a no-first-use rule—that has held ever since.

His sense of fair play added tremendously to the country’s diplomatic standing in the world: When the English and French (using the Israelis as a ruse) violated Egyptian sovereignty during the Suez crisis, Eisenhower backed Egypt and threatened to crush the pound if the Brits would not behave. Likewise, when Chiang Kai-shek made needlessly provocative moves against Red China, Ike allowed Beijing to impose some modest losses on the generalissimo—but never let them think they would get away with seizing Taiwan. Both of those episodes put American enemies, allies, and rivals alike on notice that the United States was conducting a foreign policy that took seriously the idea of collective security and national nonaggression, not only for reasons of principle but because they were the best way of pursuing legitimate U.S. national-security interests.

When Eisenhower did sign off on foreign interventions—in Iran and in Guatemala—he chose to act through covert operations with discrete, well-defined goals: reversing the advance of Communism in Guatemala and deposing the Mossadegh regime in Iran. In both cases, the United States was taking sides in an internal conflict, largely at the behest of commercial interests whose property was being stolen by nationalizing regimes. Eisenhower, who famously warned Americans about the growing influence of the “military-industrial complex,” was wonderfully parsimonious with the blood of U.S. troops—after he ended the war in Korea, there were no American combat deaths for the

remainder of his presidency—but took a more interventionist view of CIA-led covert operations.

In all of that, Eisenhower was not entirely unlike President Reagan, who sought to frustrate the Soviets in Afghanistan and Angola, and the Communist enterprise in Central America, but not at the cost of dispatching divisions there. Reagan’s deployment of the military was a mixed bag—disaster in Lebanon, 19 dead in the course of rolling back a Communist coup d’état in Grenada, and an airstrike in Libya. His covert actions in the Contra matter were not entirely unlike Ike’s, with the exception of being in the end a good deal less covert. He was happy to get an arms-reduction treaty with the Soviets and never came close to provoking them into a direct military confrontation. He oversaw a large military buildup and—contra Madeleine Albright—saw the point of having it and not using it.

There is, perhaps, a lesson in that for contemporary conservatives. The main U.S. adversary in the early 21st century is Islamic radicalism, and we suffered the worst-ever terrorist attack on U.S. soil on September 11, 2001, because of intelligence and law-enforcement failures, not because we needed another division to occupy Iraq or another air wing to deploy in the Persian Gulf. The invasion of Afghanistan—taking the fight to al-Qaeda directly and to their Taliban patrons—was a relatively straightforward proposition. The ongoing nation-building occupation of Afghanistan and the related operation in Iraq are precisely the sort of brushfire war that Eisenhower hoped to stay out of. As predicted, they have sucked a great deal of money out of the Treasury and filled a large number of graves, while the inability of the United States to comprehensively impose its will on either country has diminished our standing in the world rather than enhanced it. Eisenhower’s war machine was not in the nation-building business, but in the nation-unbuilding business. Which is why he made so little use of it.

THE prospect of total war was Eisenhower’s horror but also, in a way, his deliverance. Eisenhower inherited a large budget deficit and desired to eliminate it. At the time, the U.S. national-security establishment was spending an amount of money each year exceeding the combined profits of every American corporation, according to Jean Edward Smith’s delightfully written *Eisenhower in War and Peace*. Unencumbered by fanciful ideas about self-financing tax cuts and other fiscal fairy tales, Ike set about cutting the budget, starting with the biggest piece: the military. Recognizing that the spread of nuclear weapons and the existence of a Communist bloc had fundamentally changed the model of warfare, Eisenhower began by cutting the budget and head count of his own service branch—the Army—by a third, and then rolled back naval expenditures. The only branch to see its head count and budget expand was the new U.S. Air Force, which had the largest responsibility for maintaining the credibility of the nuclear deterrent. Eisenhower thought it was absurd to worry about having enough infantry



Arnold Palmer and Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1950

divisions to occupy the Soviet Union and China after a nuclear strike on the United States. The response to a nuclear attack would be a nuclear counterattack: “God damn it, it would be perfect rot to talk about shipping troops abroad when fifteen of our cities were in ruins.”

Getting his domestic agenda passed through Congress was relatively easy. Eisenhower was enormously popular, and he was a wily if occasionally brutal politician. He’d spent years juggling the egos and agendas of Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Charles de Gaulle—Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson were not much by comparison. If anything, he had more trouble with the Republican opposition, who wanted—get this—a more aggressive foreign policy and large tax cuts. Conservatives did not know how good they had it: William F. Buckley Jr. launched this magazine and the conservative movement in part to oppose Eisenhower-style Republicanism—“Our principles are round, and Eisenhower is square,” he wrote in a 1955 letter to Max Eastman. But *NATIONAL REVIEW* ended up grudgingly endorsing Eisenhower in 1956—not “We Like Ike” but “We Prefer Ike”—and later, in the heat of the 1964 battle, WFB suggested that Barry Goldwater name Eisenhower his running mate, an idea that Richard Brookhiser called “both crazy—Ike would not have played second fiddle to Abraham Lincoln—and possibly unconstitutional.”

Conservatives would have to wait for John F. Kennedy for their big tax cut and their proxy war with the Soviets. The interstate highway system was paid for out of a dedicated gasoline tax, while other new spending was offset by intelligent cuts in the military and elsewhere. Eisenhower inherited a large deficit in 1953 (large by the standards of the time, some \$6.49 billion) and left office with a surplus, following surpluses in 1956 and 1957. If he had not signed off on a \$12.8 billion deficit in 1959, a product of the arms race, he would have presided over an aggregate surplus.

There were no major recessions in his eight years in office—indeed, the U.S. manufacturing and export sectors were performing at unprecedented levels of productivity, as a result of which employment and wages remained strong. That had something to do with the post-war global economic situation—the United States was the last industrial economy standing—but Ike’s insistence that budgets be balanced, resources be diverted from unproductive military engagements, and education and economic opportunity be more widely accessible helped convert what could have been a post-war bubble into a decade of broadly shared growth. General Eisenhower brought general peace and general prosperity.

IN retirement, the golf-addicted Eisenhower drifted away from Augusta National, where his decisive action against racial segregation was not received with universal admiration, and toward the California desert, where every day was a good day for golf and the dry climate agreed with him. Eisenhower had been tormented by ill health of various kinds—an intestinal disorder, heart trouble, and a mild stroke—and California was a tonic. It was both more democratic and less than his life in Washington. He had little use for the monarchical trappings of office (he rolled his eyes at General Patton’s plumage) but had a strong desire for privacy, relatively little of which was afforded to him at his farm in Gettysburg. At Eldorado Country Club, he settled into another

modern American institution—a gated community—which provided him with the privacy and security he needed. He did not live like a duke in exile—he lived like a reasonably well-off American. As Lucius Clay put it, “The American people took him for what they wanted Americans to be.”

Though you’ll meet any number of patrons of the Eisenhower health-care network around the Coachella Valley, and a few old-timers who speak glowingly of the general, you’ll meet relatively few committed Republicans or movement conservatives. Reagan’s is not a name to conjure with, either. Nearby enclaves such as Indian Wells are overwhelmingly Republican, but those GOP faithful are not numerous enough to overcome the liberal invasion of the desert. Palm Springs proper has become a gay mecca, with estimates of the city’s gay population running from one-tenth to one-third of residents. Its annual gay-pride celebration is one of the largest in the country. So made-over has been the politics of the area that Representative Mary Bono Mack, a painstakingly moderate Republican with a great deal of goodwill from the community, fell to a hard-left community-organizer type while Barack Obama became the first Democrat ever to win Riverside County twice, putting an exclamation point on the decline of the GOP in the area. (The political reality is that Mary Bono Mack had been married to the wrong half of Sonny and Cher.)

Though many blame social conservatives for Republicans’ decline in California, it is not obvious that this is the case. Eisenhower, who vowed never to set foot in a church once he was free of Army chapel requirements, became a nominal Presbyterian upon entering politics. He described himself as a deeply religious nonconformist, an orientation that was no doubt a legacy of his River Brethren past and of his great independence of mind. But he was not above exploiting religious feeling for political gain: The words “under God” were inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance under Ike’s watch, and he made a show of it.

Eisenhower may have sometimes called himself a progressive, but his bedrock priorities—a strong military, balanced budgets, and limited government—are classical conservatism. He had a conservative cabinet, though one that was neither especially ideological nor partisan. He also knew how to throw the other side a bone: He sought out an AFL leader, a Catholic Democrat from the pipefitters’ union, for the labor slot, leading *The New Republic* to dismiss the Eisenhower cabinet as “eight millionaires and a plumber,” as Smith notes. When Mamie was redecorating the family home, she brought in the doyenne of American interior design, Dorothy Draper, for the work, but it was Ike who insisted on the use of union labor. He was committed to defending the American way of life against Communism, but he stood up for colleagues in government (and, perhaps more important, at Columbia University during his presidency of that institution) who were baselessly accused of having red leanings. He detected that Senator Joe McCarthy was keenly interested in publicity, and blew him off in public without ever mentioning his name. Like President Obama, President Eisenhower pronounced himself ready to meet with anybody in the pursuit of peace, and, like President Obama, he was pilloried for it by conservatives.

Conservatives berated Eisenhower for making peace with the New Deal and the unions. He said that a party that tried to undo Social Security and the labor laws would “never be heard

of again.” Having drummed the general out of their midst, conservatives rallied behind Ronald Reagan, a self-professed New Deal Democrat and union leader who found himself alienated from the party of FDR by the rising influence of the far Left.

Comes the time, comes the man. Eisenhower entered office with ridiculous approval ratings—and he left office with the same ratings. In his last years, he was not only the most respected political figure in the United States, he was the most admired American bar none, at home and abroad. He executed a tremendously important policy agenda, and he made it look easy—but it wasn’t: There were real economic and social challenges at home, and the Soviets and the Chinese were playing for keeps. But Eisenhower had a deep appreciation for those most conservative of virtues: steadiness, judgment, predictability, attention to detail. It was an era of few surprises from the White House.

As though to underscore that point, his last notable public act was presenting the Eisenhower Trophy to Arnold Palmer at the Bob Hope Classic before shooting a hole-in-one (his first ever) at Seven Lakes. That being done, he died and was laid in state in an \$80 Army-issue coffin in his customary field jacket—no fruit salad on his chest, just the five stars signifying his rank as General of the Army. Along with General Pershing, he was one of the few officers to have worn five stars—meaning that he outranked George Washington. (Washington got his five stars posthumously.)

“I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can,” Eisenhower proclaimed, and he meant it. He took courageous stands on everything from Suez to civil rights, but he was never a preening moralist in the mold of Barack Obama, nor was he constantly congratulating himself on his courage like, to pull from a few recent memoir titles, Karl Rove, Tim Pawlenty, Barbara Lee, and Max Cleland. Eisenhower’s personal style and his policy agenda were in a sense perfectly matched: Both appealed to that broad swath of American society that thinks of itself as the middle class. Like Ike, they had served in the Army, come home with a new interest in higher education, played golf, watched westerns, hoped for better things for themselves and their children, and dreamed about retiring to a country club in California. Mamie Eisenhower insisted that the White House kitchen recycle leftover Cornish hens from official dinners as chicken salad—not exactly Michelle Obama’s style. Or Nancy Reagan’s.

Under Eisenhower, Republicans were able to communicate to Americans a sense of being on their side. Applying the Reagan standard—“Are you better off than you were four years ago?”—the answer would have been a nearly unanimous “Yes.” Big business, young families, blacks, soldiers, union workers, Republicans, Democrats, golf-course operators—all would have answered in the affirmative. Today’s conservatives can get half of that loaf: It is unlikely—almost unthinkable—that a man of Eisenhower’s personal stature will become a Republican presidential nominee in the near future, simply because there are few if any men of his stature available. But if they are looking for a policy agenda and a political style that communicate that most important message—WE ARE ON YOUR SIDE!—then they could do worse than to look to Dwight D. Eisenhower, who never had to prove it. **NR**

Locked In At Last

The frontier and its absence have both shaped the American imagination

BY CHARLES C. W. COOKE

FOR Americans who had become accustomed to pushing reflexively westward, it must have come as quite a shock to the psyche when, in 1890, in the faraway eastern city of Washington, D.C., the authors of the last U.S. Census report of the 19th century pronounced indifferently that there was no longer such a thing as a frontier line—and so, in Frederick Jackson Turner’s immortal phrase, “closed the first period of American history.”

Because, as Mark Twain quipped drily, they are no longer making land, the second period—which we might for the sake of simplicity call “post-frontier America”—continues to this day. Throughout it, Americans have searched in vain for a new hinterland to conquer and worried as to what might happen to the national character if there were none in store. It is by no means an overstatement to say that the most popular parts of American history involve some sort of perilous travel—the more onerous the better—nor to recognize that it is still primarily these stories that fashion the American conception of self.

In pre-colonial times, the stage on which our celebrities of exploration performed their dramas was the ocean: Children still sing songs about “brave and bright” Christopher Columbus, visit the early settlements of southern Virginia, and know, at least in outline, about the Pilgrims who clambered aboard the *Mayflower*. The Pilgrims’ search for some ungoverned land on which to establish their own sect has been post-rationalized and simplified into a pre-echo of American classical liberalism, just as the purpose of the settlers at Jamestown has been somewhat blunted in our accounts. Nevertheless, the true intent of their missions to one side, the Pilgrims of Plymouth and the businessmen of Virginia remain the most interesting to us because, unlike those who navigated thousands of miles for the thrill of it—or in order to strike it rich or to proselytize—they not only braved the elements in search of a different future, but *stayed* in America to secure that future.

That what is new cannot be new forever is self-evident. A little while after independence had made them the hottest thing in town, the original 13 colonies became the establishment, forming an Old World in the New, rendering the virgin terrain in what was to be perpetually known as “the West” as the future, and elevating Lewis and Clark, the cowboys, and the families of the Oregon Trail as the new pioneers of American ingenuity. Witness the derisive way in which, in Sergio Leone’s classic *Once Upon a Time in the West*, the bartender at rudimentary Flagstone presumes that the well-dressed and mild-mannered Jill McBain must be from “one of those fancy cities back East.” “New

Orleans,” she replies, apologetically. In the rough world to which she has traveled, Jill can become a heroine only when she demonstrates that she can survive alone.

Thomas Jefferson did not live to see his “empire of liberty” stretch across the American continent, nor did Abraham Lincoln survive to hear Jefferson’s “fire bell in the night” fall silent and usher in a nation of free soil, Hamiltonian commerce, and easy homesteading. Nevertheless, by the end of the Civil War, events had forged a nation in which the receding wilderness offered ostensibly unlimited opportunity to those who were prepared to take it. (“Go west, young man!”) The importance of such a frontier to both the imagination and the outlook of a free people is often overlooked, and it may account for the nation’s failed 20th-century scramble to find somewhere else to conquer, first overseas and then beyond planet Earth.

At the start of the century, American sentiment flirted with Theodore Roosevelt, who yearned to turn the attentions of men with faces “marred by dust and sweat and blood” abroad and to transmute the journalist John L. O’Sullivan’s domestic conception of Manifest Destiny into a foreign empire (which he tellingly called “expansion”). But world war, economic depression, and the subsequent responsibilities of becoming the standard-bearer for the global West took care of that idea.

Then, as the Cold War froze into shape, the innocuous beeping of *Sputnik 1* shamed, terrified, and inspired a nation that had always regarded itself as unrivaled in the field of exploration, and Americans looked beyond the exosphere. Space, they were promised in the optimistic argot of mid-century science fiction, was the new—perhaps even “final”—frontier, ripe for colonization and development. But American Space suffered the same fate as did American Empire, and the generation of *Apollo 11* saw its “one small step” first falter and then halt, with the moon landings giving way to the poorly conceived Space Shuttle and, eventually, to nothing.

Early celestial pioneers would have been as astonished by this glum development as James Madison would have been to see California. Barron Hilton, the son of hotel magnate Conrad Hilton (who was born in 1887 in the barren New Mexico Territory), was apparently deadly serious about building a hotel on the moon, telling the *Wall Street Journal* in 1967 that he intended to cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony within his lifetime. Hilton lived among a public that had been raised on both the forward-looking comic-book exploits of intergalactic travelers and the nostalgic adventures of American cowboys, and that lived in a country without serious rivals in the West. Americans did not laugh at the suggestion, instead flooding Hilton with letters asking how they could pre-reserve a room.

And why would they have laughed? Lending an official imprimatur to such visions, a 1958 booklet issued by the White House acknowledged the importance of a frontier to a forward-looking people, commending the “compelling urge of man to explore and to discover, the thrust of curiosity that leads men to try to go where no one has gone before.” In what should be seen in part as a state-



ment of cold fact and in part as a lamentation, the missive observed that “most of the surface of the earth has now been explored and men now turn on the exploration of outer space as their next objective.” Hilton was merely tapping into the zeitgeist.

So, too, to great electoral advantage, was President John F. Kennedy, who foreshadowed his seminal “we choose to go to the moon” speech by declaring in his acceptance speech to the 1960 Democratic National Convention that Americans stood “on the edge of a new frontier; the frontier of the 1960s; a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils; a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats.” Such phraseology has now been widely hijacked and grafted as so much pabulum onto empty speeches regarding government spending. But Kennedy’s optimism was earnest and reciprocated by the public. Many in his generation looked at the stars with as much ambition as the frontiersmen of the 18th and 19th centuries had looked to the terra incognita in the West. To their architects, Mercury and Apollo were intended to be as Lewis and Clark—an overture to a new era rather than a brief, limited, and in truth reactionary spasm.

Nowadays, not only have Americans stopped pushing into the unknown but, for perhaps the first time since the barbarians destroyed civilization and plunged the world into the Dark Ages, technology has in some ways actually stepped *backwards*: The Concorde, the supersonic jetliner that was called the future of air travel, is gone from the skies; there are now no American space shuttles in operation; and America’s space program has reached its nadir, with NASA currently unable to send Americans into space at all.

“Human activity in space,” regrets John Hickman in *Reopening the Space Frontier*, “has been literally going in circles, confined to Earth orbit.” This, at least in part, is the fault of the Earth’s powers’ having signed the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which specifically prohibits nations and individuals from making any claims of sovereignty on planets, moons, asteroids, and other celestial bodies. Had the western frontier been so off limits, and

the series of forts and small towns never built on its edges, who would have pushed into it? Barron Hilton's hotel is unlikely to be built on its own, just as the string of motels and fast-food joints that line America's roads did not exist until the construction of the interstate highway system delivered customers right to their doors.

This sort of government investment is often opposed by free-marketeters—myself included—as being inherently expensive, unacceptably collectivist, and a violation of the principles of limited government. Still, it is worth bearing in mind that so, at the time, was the Louisiana Purchase . . .

Taxonomically, Kennedy's rhetoric has been rather stuffily termed "scientific progressivism." Nevertheless, frontiers are arguably most important to advocates of limited government—at least insofar as they seem inevitably to cultivate the "rugged individualist" character that serves as centralized authority's greatest foe and, thus, as the prerequisite for a political environment that is heavy on civic society and light on government. As the great virtue of the frontier was that Americans dissatisfied with the status quo could move to pastures new and experiment with ideas and models of their own, so the risk for a nation whose borders are established and wildlands are tamed must be that the disgruntled have no option but to stay in place and agitate.

If Frederick Jackson Turner is to be believed, one reason that there was so little real socialism in America before the 20th century is that voters had little need to try to change their towns, cities, and states when they could not only move away from their troubles but move to a place in which mores and hierarchies had not yet been ossified—where, in Milton Friedman's cutting parlance, "the tyranny of the status quo" had achieved no purchase. Ten years after Jackson noticed Americans were running out of land, the Progressive era started; ten years after that began a decade that brought Woodrow Wilson, a national income tax, direct Senate elections, the prohibition of alcohol, and the start of the great federal takeover of the 20th century—from which there can be no geographical escape. This is no coincidence.

None of this is to say that a country cannot be free without a frontier; ultimately Americans remain the architects of their own fate. But the frontier certainly served as a profitable safety valve, and it has now disappeared. There is no longer a cache of free land, nor unlimited opportunity ripe for exploitation, and capitalists need not offer higher wages in order to keep workers from going west. The growth of the federal government, meanwhile, has rendered competition between the states less and less effective.

Foreign countries provide no sanctuary either. When the farmland ran out in America at the end of the 19th century, nearly 600,000 people moved to the untouched Canadian prairie. But many were deeply disappointed by the different climate and culture and moved back; by 1914, two-thirds had returned. If there was nowhere good to go in 1914, is there anywhere now? The last great hope of mankind, as Mark Steyn keeps reminding us, is just that: the "last" hope. There is nowhere else to run. And when the state isn't worried about its citizens' departing, it is more likely to impose onerous burdens on them, as progressive arguments for national economic policy make clear.

"The tendency" of the frontiersman, Turner believed, "is anti-social. It produces antipathy to control, and particularly to any direct control." Meanwhile, "the tax-gatherer is viewed as a representative of oppression." Even now, when discussing the

American character, it is this anachronistic ideal to which most rhetoricians return—regardless of whether or not their political platform comports with its logic, and even when in the same breath they happily denounce the policies with which they disagree as representative of the "Wild West" and characterize their proposers as "cowboys."

But, rhetoric notwithstanding, just as the British Empire's focus on liberty was its ultimate downfall—it is difficult to subjugate people in the name of their liberty—perhaps it is time for us to wonder whether that great ambition to see the United States emerge from its parochial and agrarian roots and expand into the remotest parts of the continent was destined to become the victim of its own success. Manifest Destiny is all well and good, but what happens to a people of endless dynamism and coarse character when they get to the sea and realize that the land has run out? The answer, perhaps, is that they turn inward, and in that moment of final success lose a part of their disposition that is hard to utter and even harder to recreate.

"West," Robert Penn Warren promised ruefully in *All the King's Men*, "is where we all plan to go some day. It is where you go when the land gives out and the old-field pines encroach. It is where you go when you get the letter saying: 'Flee, all is discovered.'" This is true until *all is discovered*. If the harsh life and decentralized spirit of the frontier slowly transformed expatriate Europeans into a rougher, more independent, and new people called "Americans," is it not possible—or even probable—that its subjugation is slowly turning them back? Are Americans really "fiercely individualistic," as the myth would have them? After all, neither real individualism nor real fear is a thing that many Americans have to deal with nowadays, nor do they get much chance to move away and try something new when governments overstep their bounds. Within our closed nation, the growing safety net insulates people ever more from the consequences of their choices—especially in the supposedly more sophisticated cities. For an example of this, examine the difference in election returns between rural and urban counties.

Myths can remain effective shapers of national character only for so long. If we believe that institutions and challenges mold people, it surely follows that a frontier people must need a frontier, and a nation built on individual self-reliance must need theaters in which that self-reliance can play out. The harsh truth is that we've lost a great deal of that distinctly American character, even as we insist upon sentimentalizing it.

And sentimentalize it we do. It is no accident that almost every area of Disneyland, a place primarily dedicated to idealizing America, offers a cartoon variation on the frontier theme: Frontierland memorializes the Old West, Tomorrowland picks up the space theme, Adventureland the imperial frontier, Critter Country the inhospitable desert, New Orleans Square the westernmost big city of the 1800s. Nor is it a surprise that Walt Disney funded construction of his fantasy park in part by airing a television show that featured the "King of the Wild Frontier," Davy Crockett. Disneyland was built in the 1950s, as Americans emerging from a depression and then a total war searched for their next steps into a brave new world. They are still looking, per Kurt Vonnegut—"forever searching for love in forms it never takes, in places it can never be." Why? Well, as Vonnegut wistfully concludes, "it must have something to do with the vanished frontier."

NR

Mobility In America

*Economic growth
won't guarantee it*

BY J. D. VANCE

I GREW up in an old steel town not far from Cincinnati. It is exactly the kind of place that people have in mind when they talk about the end of economic mobility in America: With bad public schools and businesses closing by the day, Middletown, Ohio, is an awful place to get ahead.

It wasn't always like this. When my grandparents moved there from the extreme poverty of Appalachian Kentucky, Middletown was a kind of oasis. Lured by the promise of well-paying jobs in the steel mill, thousands reestablished themselves in Middletown. It was ground zero for the American Dream—a home for those willing to strive for a better life. Now Middletown typifies something else: the precipitous decline of economic mobility.

In America, poor children are more likely to stay poor than almost anywhere else in the developed world. When economists measure the correlation between the incomes of parents and those of their children, they find that it is stronger in America than in all other developed countries except Britain and Italy. What this means for America is depressingly clear: To a large degree, who your parents are determines your fate.

This wasn't always true. When economist Joseph P. Ferrie studied American social and economic mobility from the mid 19th century through the 1950s, he found a society infected with what Tocqueville called a “longing to rise.” By the 1970s, though, that fever had passed. It's not entirely clear why—Ferrie suggests that our former willingness to relocate to seek new opportunities had faded. Whatever the cause, it was, Ferrie declared, “the end of American exceptionalism.”

That's probably a bit dramatic. As our understanding of economic immobility grows, we learn that America is far from monolithic in this regard; opportunity for the working class is largely dependent on where one grows up. In their massive new study on equality of opportunity, economists Emmanuel Saez and Raj Chetty track the income-tax records of parents and children to better understand economic mobility. They find that the American Dream is alive and well in Boston, Salt Lake City, and Omaha. In the South and the Rust Belt, by contrast, a poor child is almost as likely to be hit by lightning as he is to rise to the top of the American income ladder.

To many on the left, the lack of mobility is hopelessly linked with inequality. Alan Krueger, for example, former chairman of the president's Council of Economic Advisers, purports to

show with the “Great Gatsby curve” that the nations with the highest inequality also have the least social mobility. He finds that, on the whole, income inequality and intergenerational income elasticity—the extent to which a person's income is determined by that of his parents—are linked. But within the U.S., the strength of that correlation varies (sometimes wildly so) from region to region. Whatever the connection, there is little evidence that income inequality *causes* immobility.

Nor is economic immobility simply a result of race. Some of the least upwardly mobile regions in the United States are almost exclusively white—Washington Court House, Ohio, and London, Ky., to name just two. And mobility in some red states is high, while in some blue states it's low, so the political disposition to enact programs of assistance for the poor can't explain the gap.

As liberals obsess over economic inequality, conservatives focus too much on economic growth. Economic growth and mobility are not the same. In some cases, they're not even related. Columbus, for example, is flush with growth, but it appears that most of the new, high-paying jobs go to newcomers to the city. Children born there are significantly less mobile than those from Pittsburgh, which *Newsweek* in 2001 dubbed one of America's “dying cities.” It's tempting to reach for an easy solution—to argue that if only there were more or better jobs, economic mobility would take care of itself. But the Chetty study cautions otherwise. Even (and sometimes especially) in our fastest-growing cities, economic mobility is hard to come by.

IT'S tough to square the new data with the old way of talking about opportunity. In what was hailed as a landmark speech on poverty and opportunity, Republican vice-presidential nominee Paul Ryan admirably described the plight of America's poor and working class, and urged us to change it. Yet in advancing a solution, Ryan argued that “above all else is the pressing need for jobs.” Jobs are undoubtedly important, and Republicans justifiably worry about the anemic recovery of the past five years. But there was an opportunity crisis long before Barack Obama was president, and unless we do something about it, there will be one long after he's gone.

Think back to 2005: The economy was humming, household wealth was growing, unemployment was low, and consumer confidence was high. George W. Bush's America was pretty great. Few among us would rather live in today's world of slow growth and grim jobs numbers. But the chances that a person in the bottom fifth would rise to the top fifth were about the same then as they are today—in many parts of the country, dismal. The crisis of opportunity is an altogether different crisis from our passing economic troubles. We should not assume that a solution to one is a solution to the other: It hasn't been in the past, and it probably won't be in the future.

When we focus on opportunity, there is much that speaks to traditional conservative concerns. We've known for a while that family breakdown inhibits mobility, and the Chetty study provides further evidence that two-parent households produce children who are more upwardly mobile than those from broken homes. Dig a little deeper, however, and it's clear that the solution—if one exists at all—is not obvious. Conservatives have argued (rightly) for years that the tax code is littered with

Mr. Vance, a recent graduate of Yale Law School and a Marine Corps veteran, is working on a book about the social mobility of the white working class.

counterproductive marriage penalties. These make little sense, and we ought to get rid of them. But the reason many young working-class women aren't getting married isn't that the tax code gives them incentives to stay single. It's that too many of their male counterparts aren't worth marrying.

When Nordic researchers compared their own countries with the United States, they found that while American men were much less mobile than their Nordic counterparts, there was no significant difference between American girls and Nordic girls. American daughters, it turns out, are doing much better than American sons. In poll after poll, young women indicate their wish to marry, but they're having trouble finding suitable men. Those who do marry find themselves working just as much outside the home as do their husbands, who do significantly less of the cooking, cleaning, and caretaking. Our

previous five years. By 2010, little more than one-third had done so. This is hardly surprising. First, the costs of staying put are lower now than three decades ago. If you can't find a job, Supplemental Security Income, Social Security Disability Insurance, and food stamps make it possible to squeak by. In guaranteeing the basics, we've made it easier not to move beyond them.

On top of that, decades of bipartisan housing policy have trapped many in the least economically mobile regions of the country. From Carter's Community Reinvestment Act to George W. Bush's "ownership society," our government resolved to expand home ownership. And as it succeeded, it made moving to new opportunities more and more difficult: It's hard enough to sell a house in good times; it is virtually impossible to do so in the post-crisis market. Economists

Our marriage crisis is as much about the inadequacies of American men as it is about family values or economic incentives. And that's a problem you can't fix with tax reform.

marriage crisis, then, is as much about the inadequacies of American men as it is about family values or economic incentives. And that's a problem you can't fix with tax reform.

You can't fix it with minimum-wage increases, or stronger labor laws, or reduced corporate compensation, either. Median wages in the United States have grown very slowly since the 1970s. Commentators often bemoan this fact and argue that economic duress is the cause of America's declining marriage rate. But if the problem is entirely economic and not at all cultural, then why are girls doing so much better than boys? Girls live in the same economy and face the same set of struggles (or more of them, some would argue). Even if slow wage growth is a problem, it's an entirely different one from that of men doing less around the house than their wives do.

Also contributing to our opportunity crisis is the design of our entitlement programs. The perfect welfare system would do two things. First, it would guarantee that everyone had the basics. Second, it would encourage movement out of poverty; opportunity means more than not starving to death.

The welfare system is designed largely with the first goal in mind. When LBJ went to Appalachian Kentucky during his "War on Poverty" tour, children in the towns he visited were eating charred furnace coals to fill their empty bellies. Now, thanks to fast food, a technological revolution in agriculture, and food stamps, almost no American child is truly hungry. This is something we should all be proud of. But it has become abundantly clear that the way we accomplish the first goal sometimes works against the second.

When my grandparents moved from Appalachia to Ohio, they had to. There weren't any jobs in Kentucky. The poverty rate then, as now, was astonishingly high. In the 1940s, before food stamps, it could have been *their* children eating furnace coals when the president came to town. So they moved north.

Today, this type of movement happens less and less. In 1980, 47 percent of all U.S. residents had moved within the

have long recognized that geographic movement is an investment in one's earning potential. The combination of anti-poverty programs and housing policy increased the costs of that investment precipitously.

THIS is not to say we should do away with all entitlements. But we ought to reform them to encourage movement out of poverty, not just to ensure subsistence within it. Right now, many western states suffer labor shortages. The primary reason the Chamber of Commerce and other business groups support comprehensive immigration reform is that our industries have jobs but lack individuals willing or able to fill them. So a conservative effort to promote equal opportunity might start by paying people to move toward work instead of paying them to do nothing.

Additionally, Saez and Chetty suggest, certain types of tax reform promote economic mobility, while others inhibit it. The Earned Income Tax Credit, for example, has encouraged it. Additional wage subsidies would give further incentive to young men to enter the workforce, while equipping them with skills that both they and the labor market need.

Meanwhile, as our states move away from income taxes and toward growth-promoting consumption taxes, it's important to design such reforms so that their burdens don't fall on the poorest citizens. We should also continue to work on school choice and other measures that give poor children greater access to educational opportunities.

These suggestions are far from a comprehensive remedy for our opportunity crisis. But the first step is to recognize the problem, and that requires understanding that growth and opportunity are not two sides of the same coin. Growth is imperative, but unless we address the sad state of opportunity, we may one day find that everyone has woken up from something our forefathers called the American Dream. **NR**

Keep Off the Grass

A RODEO clown in Missouri has been banned from rodeo-clowning for the rest of his life because he wore an Obama mask and subjected our president to ridicule. Tough break; rodeo-clowning is not one of those skills that transfer to other walks of life. Construction crews, for example: A big piece of machinery pops the parking brake and starts rumbling away, they don't send someone with a painted face to wave his arms and distract it. On the other hand, waving his arms and distracting us is an adequate job description of the president.

I know what you're saying: First they came for the rodeo clowns, and I said nothing, because I was not a—hold on, I am a rodeo clown. But even if you're not, you have to wonder if the clown went too far. (Note: All clowns go too far, just by being clowns.) Let's just agree that the mockery was not only wrong, it was horribly racist, just as cavils about Hillary Clinton's tenure are sexist. (Criticism of Condoleezza Rice, on the other hand, is motivated solely by the highest principles.) It makes one wonder what you can criticize these days.

Simple: garages. Writing a while back at the website Gawker, so named for the car wreck of logic and rhetoric littering its intellectual-breakdown lane, Hamilton Nolan declared:

As the affluent flock into cities and the formerly tony suburbs turn to slums, you know what I'm not going to miss? GARAGES. Big old ugly garages that are the main feature of the whole ugly suburban house for some reason. Good news: garages have completely gone out of fashion, architecturally speaking.

Park on the street and scrape ice off your car! It's the latest fashion. The author goes on to make clear that he HATES garages, which are a perfectly reasonable thing to have strong emotions about. As long as you say you HATE them in a bossy-pants style with lots of profanity, people who HATE THEM TOO! can feel righteous, and members of the Cretin-American community who wandered into his hip little prissy-snit can be shocked by his blunt truths.

Yawn. Well, it took a year, but he topped it: He hates lawns, too.

Garages are far less popular than they used to be, thank god. And now, it is time to take on the other suburban monstrosity that afflicts this great nation like a plague: lawns. Ban them.

Since hate comes from fear, he's a Grassophobe, right?

The lawn as an emblem of Middle-Class achievement drives some people absolutely daft. Few things irritate a progressive urbanist like the thought of someone working

on the lawn who doesn't understand it's a social construct. All those men pushing mowers over the verdant expanse, unaware that scholars have written entire thesis papers about the psychological effects of early-20th-century seed marketing! They look at their lawn and they *think* they like it. They have no concept of the new trend in natural grasses. No, it's mow mow mow, edge edge edge, control. Men!

Hatred of the burbs and all their ticky-tacky attributes is what Orwell would have called one of the smelly little orthodoxies of the Left, except that lefty workplaces are probably scent-free because someone erupts in hives if anyone in the building lathered up with Irish Spring. Oh, the Left will *let* you live in a detached house, if you simply must, but it had better be close enough to the neighbors' that you can pass the salt shaker through the kitchen window if they ask. It had better have a porch so you can sit out front and wave at the rich diverse parade of people walking past with reusable grocery bags full of organic kale, listening to *All Things Considered*, which is doing a story on the problems facing rural gay Peruvian flautists. You shouldn't be in the backyard grilling, because the carbon emissions and environmental impact of beef farming contribute to the rising of the sea and the inundation of Miami, which isn't necessarily bad because it's full of right-wing turncoat Cubans.

You shouldn't have a big house and you shouldn't have a car and you shouldn't live in a suburb and you shouldn't want what you want. Oh, they'd ban it all if they could.

Now, let me go squishy on the matter: Houses with enormous garages out front aren't particularly attractive. Yes, I know: Aid and comfort to the enemy, right up there with Chris Christie missing the opportunity to give the president a stiff uppercut when he came to look at storm damage. RINO. But that's just my opinion, and for some reason I don't feel the need to convert personal aesthetic viewpoints into public policy imposed on others. If you want to live in an urban apartment so small that you go coffin-shopping just to look forward to the day when you can stretch out and have some elbow room, fine. If you want a suburban manse so grand you need a Rascal scooter to get around the master-bedroom closet, fine.

Well, you know what they say about opinions! Everyone has one, and they're fun to drive into someone's sternum in the checkout line when they're crowding you. I would have liked to show the author of the screeds the crew that fixed a bad patch on my lawn. African-American crew chief, Hispanic workers. He would hate the job they did. Grassophobia = racism, obviously. It's about time the author complained about golf courses, and criticized the president for enjoying the sport.

Look for that in 2017, when a Republican POTUS takes to the links.

NR

Mr. Lileks blogs at www.lileks.com.



The Long View

BY ROB LONG

TO: All Staff
FROM: Jeff Bezos
RE: Changes in the
Washington Post

Hello!

Want to turn on One-Click™? CLICK HERE

If you're reading this, then you must have logged in to the new Washington Post Employee Portal, for which I thank you!

As you all know, a couple of weeks ago I bought the *Washington Post*, for about what it cost the Disney movie studio to make this summer's gigantic bomb *The Lone Ranger*. Hey, let's hope this one turns out better!

[Recommended For You: *The Lone Ranger Television Series, Complete DVD Set \$39.95, The Lone Ranger Television Series, available on Amazon Prime, The Lone Ranger: A Meditation on Race and Power and the Myth of the American West* by Assorted Contributors, University of California Press \$29.95, *The Cowboy in the Closet: Gay Relationships in American Folklore, from Huck and Tom to the Lone Ranger and Tonto*, Ten Speed Press \$19.95.]

People joked at the time that what I meant to do was buy a single copy of the *Washington Post* but I hit one-click without reading the item carefully, and I guess that's one way to look at it. But the truth is, I was surfing around after dinner, had maybe had a few glasses of wine, and boom! This thing popped up. We've all been there, right? One glass of wine too many and shopping on Amazon can be a pretty surprising experience!

[People who bought the *Washington Post* also bought *Citizen Kane Letterbox Millennium Edition with Commentary DVD \$22.95,*

Soft-Tip Q-Tips Family Size \$8.50, All the President's Men Audible Audiobook \$12.45.]

But now that I own it, you're probably asking yourself what I'm going to do with it. Is this going to be one of those situations where a new guy from a totally different industry who lives on the other side of the continent attempts to impose his weird and offbeat "non-journalistic" business practices on something as venerable as the *Washington Post*?

Basically, yes.

[Enjoying this memo? Share your reactions! [Post a review.](#)]

From: dmilbank@wapo.com

*

So far, I have to give this memo one star. It's unfocused and rambling, and it's continually interrupted by pitches for other things to buy. I'm worried that the "new" WaPo under Bezos is going to look like this memo.

Was this review helpful?

From: dgraham@wapo.com

Wonderful! A tour de force! Exactly the kind of memo you want to read when you're tired of losing millions of dollars every year!

Was this review helpful?

I'm not trying to scare anybody, but let's face it: At \$250 million, I overpaid for this by about \$249,999,990.00, which is okay because that's essentially sofa change to a guy like me. But that doesn't mean I want to keep losing money. I'd like to actually make some on this deal, if you don't mind.

So here's what I'd like you all to do. From now on, when you're thinking about a story or trying to get the right "take" on an issue, I'd like you to ask yourself, "Hey, are there any upselling opportunities here?"

For instance, in a story about, say, the budget impasse currently affecting Washington, you might want to remind readers that *Suze Orman's*

Guide to Home Budgeting \$12.95 paperback, \$7.50 Kindle Edition via WhisperSync™ is available now by CLICKING HERE.

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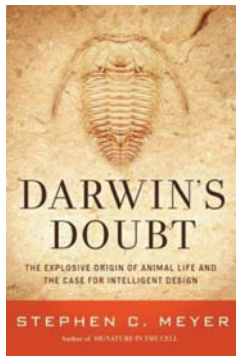
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Books, Arts & Manners

How Nature Works

JOHN FARRELL



Darwin's Doubt: The Explosive Origin of Animal Life and the Case for Intelligent Design, by Stephen C. Meyer (HarperOne, 512 pp., \$28.99)

OUR contemporary debates about evolution are basically an extension of the argument Christians have been having with one another since the Middle Ages, about how much autonomy God granted to the natural world. Creationists claim that it was very little.

Stephen C. Meyer, a philosopher of science at the Discovery Institute in Seattle, is not a creationist in the standard definition of the term: He does not embrace the Genesis account of the world's origins literally, nor does he argue that God made the world in six days. What he does is reject two bedrock principles of modern evolutionary biology: the common ancestry of all living things, and natural selection as the driving force of the evolution of new species. If you reject these two notions of evolutionary biology, then by default you're left with only one alternative: the discrete interventions of an intelligent agent, a Designer, to explain the origin and diver-

Mr. Farrell writes a science/tech blog for Forbes, and is the author of The Day Without Yesterday: Lemaître, Einstein, and the Birth of Modern Cosmology.

sification of life.

In his new book, Meyer argues that evolutionary theory, ever since Darwin's day, has been stymied by a puzzle: the "sudden" appearance of diverse animal phyla, or body plans, in the Cambrian period, which began roughly 540 million years ago. That's when all of the major body plans from which all currently existing classes of animals descend came into existence. According to most paleontologists today, the Cambrian explosion, or radiation, lasted at least 20 million years, but probably longer.

But Meyer contends that it was a much shorter time period: probably as little as 5 million years. And that's an explosion of diversity that is too sudden, too rapid to be adequately explained by Darwinian evolution. For this reason, Meyer argues, Intelligent Design is a more likely explanation. By Intelligent Design, Meyer means some kind of Mind or Intelligence that wrote the genetic code that allowed the explosion of new life forms.

Meyer sets the stage by recalling Darwin's own grappling with the Cambrian challenge: "Darwin . . . suggested that the fossil record may be significantly incomplete: Either the ancestral forms of the Cambrian animals were not fossilized or they hadn't been found yet. 'I look at the natural geological record, as a history of the world imperfectly kept, and written in a changing dialect,' Darwin wrote." This did not satisfy Darwin's contemporary, paleontologist Louis Agassiz—an early evolution skeptic who, Meyer points out, offered good reasons for expecting a better explanation. "Since the most exquisitely delicate structures, as well as embryonic phases of growth of the most perishable nature, have been preserved from very early deposits, we have no right to infer the disappearance of types because their absence disproves some favorite theory," Agassiz wrote in 1874.

This is a challenge that hasn't gone away, says Meyer, who names "several features of the Cambrian explosion that are unexpected from a Darwinian point of view" and need to be explained by defenders of Darwinian evolution, among them "the sudden appearance of Cambrian animal forms," "an absence of tran-

sitional intermediate fossils connecting the Cambrian animals to simpler Precambrian forms," and the fact that the "radical differences in form in the fossil record before more minor, small-scale diversification and variations" turn on its head "the Darwinian expectation of small incremental change only gradually resulting in larger and larger differences in form."

But Meyer's "sudden" is strikingly at odds with what today's paleontologists consider "sudden." And the event was more complex than Meyer allows: As geologists have improved their knowledge of the events of the late Precambrian–early Cambrian, they have realized that it included a particular series of steps.

The starting point was the large, soft-bodied, late Precambrian Ediacaran/Vendian fauna. Then came the first two stages of the Cambrian (Nemakit/Daldynian and Tommotian), where some of the Cambrian explosion began: We see brachiopods, archaeocyathids, early mollusks and echinoderms, and a large fauna of "little shellies" that show the beginnings of skeletonization. All of these stages have been part of the discussion of the Cambrian explosion over the last few decades. Meyer tries to claim that this is not the conventional understanding, but he does not make a very convincing case. He goes on to discuss the third stage of the Cambrian (Atdabanian) as if it were the complete Cambrian explosion—and finds it astonishing that most of the phyla were established by then.

In a 2006 article in the *Annual Review of Earth and Planetary Science*, Charles R. Marshall of the University of California, Berkeley, one of today's leading paleontologists, gives a fairly comprehensive overview of the topic. He diagrams a radiation of animal forms that shows a great deal of continuous evolution over a 50 million-year Cambrian period, from 542–43 million years ago to 490 million years ago. (Meyer doesn't discuss this interpretation, but he quotes Marshall on some other issues.)

Consider again the alleged absence of transitional intermediate fossils con-

necting the Cambrian animals to simpler Precambrian forms. Meyer argues that Darwinian scientists have no explanation for this; indeed, just as Darwin once did, they've tried to dismiss this challenge by falling back on the convenient hypothesis that the fossil record was poorly preserved and/or had been insufficiently sampled. Meyer:

Developmental biologist Eric Davidson, of California Institute of Technology, has suggested that the transitional forms leading to the Cambrian animals were "microscopic forms similar to modern marine larvae" and were thus too small to have been reliably fossilized. Other evolutionary scientists, such as Gregory Wray, Jeffrey Levinton, and Leo Shapiro, have suggested that the ancestors of

the Cambrian animals were not preserved, because they lacked hard parts such as shells and exoskeletons. They argue that since soft-bodied animals are difficult to fossilize, we shouldn't expect to find the remains of the supposedly soft-bodied ancestors of the Cambrian fauna in the Precambrian fossil records. University of California, Berkeley, paleontologist Charles R. Marshall summarizes these explanations . . .

SPRING

My enemy had hatched her young,
Made real the heady boasts she'd sung,

And when I saw the cherished thing,
I vowed it would not fly or sing.

My talons tightened in its fluff.
Their points were digging deep enough

That blood and dung and shrieks sprang out—
This wasn't what I'd thought about

All those weeks in my moldy hollow.
No, by all rights it didn't follow

That, blood to blood, its heart, my pulse
Battered each other. It convulsed

Against no claws or hard joints now
But two plain, helpless hands. Yet how—

When, quickly as a lamp is lit,
It grew, then slashed and gouged and bit

Up in the harrow of the air—
Was I to take my prey back there?

I struck, I buckled. He might know,
Who hung, millennia ago

From nails like mine but did not leave
Even the predator to grieve.

But where was He? Nothing below
Appeared but damp trees, ragged snow,

Dead reeds—a dead end like a cave;
Like smoke, for all the light it gave.

My wings were shriveling, but I
Must make my way through that cold sky

To somewhere that could hardly be,
With what I'd taken into me.

—SARAH RUDEN

Meyer then quotes Marshall:

It is important to remember that we see the Cambrian "explosion" through the windows permitted by the fossil and geological records. So when talking about the Cambrian "explosion," we are typically referring to the appearance of large-body (can be seen by the naked eye) and preservable (and therefore largely skeletonized) forms. . . . If the stem lineages were both small and unskeletonized, then we would not expect to see them in the fossil record.

I went to Marshall's paper and discovered that this passage had been lifted out of context, with the final statement—the part after Meyer's ellipsis—tacked on from *15 pages later in the article*, a section in which Marshall was commenting on a detailed diagram outlining the various factors scientists deem relevant to understanding the entire Cambrian explosion. The implication of the cut-and-paste quote in Meyer's account is that a leading paleontologist is, like his colleagues, trying to explain away a significant challenge to evolution: the lack of intermediate forms in the Precambrian period. But in fact, Marshall was not doing that. Here are the key missing words from Marshall's passage that would have appeared immediately before Meyer's ellipsis:

Finally, I place the word "explosion" in quotation marks because, while the Cambrian radiation occurred quickly compared with the time between the Cambrian and the present, it still extended over some 20 million years of the earliest Cambrian, or longer if you add in the last 30 million years of the Ediacaran and the entire 55 million year duration of the Cambrian.

The passage Meyer lifted has nothing to do with intermediate life forms—

missing or not—in the Precambrian.

Nor is this the only example of misleading quotation. Meyer makes the case that Darwinian evolution cannot explain how the underlying genetic circuitry of animal body plans, bursting forth at the time of the Cambrian, came about. Developmental gene regulatory networks (dGRNs), he writes, resist Darwinian mutational change because they are organized hierarchically: “This means that some [dGRNs] control other gene regulatory networks, while some influence only the individual genes and proteins under their control. At the center of this regulatory hierarchy are the regulatory networks that specify the axis and global form of the animal body plan during development. These dGRNs cannot vary without causing catastrophic effects to the organism.”

Meyer argues that a dGRN could not be altered by gradual mutational changes. He then cites a passage from a 2011 paper by Caltech cell biologist Eric H. Davidson to support his case that such dGRNs have minimal flexibility and cannot evolve the way Darwinian evolution would expect. The quote is from the end of a long passage in the paper “Evolutionary Bioscience as Regulatory Systems Biology,” where Davidson indeed outlines the challenge posed by the lack of flexibility of gene regulatory networks. *But Davidson doesn’t stop there.* To Meyer’s point, he argues: “The basic control features of the initial dGRNs of the Precambrian and early Cambrian must have differed in fundamental respects from those now being unraveled in our laboratories. The earliest ones were likely hierarchically shallow rather than deep, so that in the beginning adaptive selection could operate on a larger portion of their linkages.”

In other words, there’s no reason here to throw out the theoretical basis of evolutionary biology. There is a likely explanation: The gene regulatory networks that determine the basic body plan were not yet buried deep in the developmental process. So this issue is not regarded by paleontologists as an insurmountable problem for evolution.

At no point in the book does Meyer ever actually discuss these issues with Marshall, or Davidson, or any of the scientists working deeply in the field.

He simply lifts quotes from their papers as they seem convenient to his point.

This is the most disappointing aspect of Meyer’s book. It’s hard to read a book like *Darwin’s Doubt* in parallel with, for example, a book like *New Yorker* writer Jim Holt’s *Why Does the World Exist?* Holt spent months chasing down and interviewing a wide range of philosophers and scientists—simply to get their answer to the age-old question: Why is there something rather than nothing? It’s a delightful, thought-provoking read for all the reasons that Meyer’s is not. Holt lets none of his subjects off the hook—politely, but persistently, questioning their opinions and assertions.

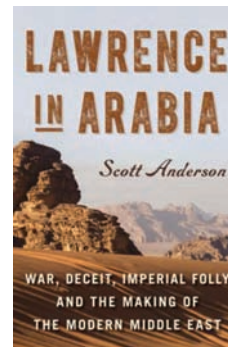
In the last part of the book, Meyer criticizes what he believes to be scientists’ bias against ID, the predisposition never to entertain it as an explanation for the Cambrian Explosion: “They have accepted a self-imposed limitation on the hypotheses they are willing to consider. . . . If researchers refuse as a matter of principle to consider the design hypothesis, they will obviously miss any evidence that happens to support it.” But the notion that scientists are not open to the possibility of agent action in the world is not accurate. In 1967, Jocelyn Bell Burnell, a graduate student in astrophysics at Cambridge, discovered a radio signal coming from the Crab Nebula. It was a fantastically rapid pulse—too rapid to be natural, it was first believed. That it might be the work of an intelligence was seriously considered—until the lack of variation in the beacon-like pulses, accompanied soon by the discovery of other sources sending similar beams toward earth, persuaded scientists that there was likely a natural explanation. Ultra-dense stars called “pulsars” are now considered the culprits.

In the end, *Darwin’s Doubt* boils down to a fundamentally weak argument—the argument from personal incredulity about the origin and evolution of life on earth. As John Henry Newman wrote in 1870: “I have not insisted on the argument from design. . . . To tell the truth, though I should not wish to preach on the subject, for 40 years I have been unable to see the logical force of the argument myself. I believe in design because I believe in God; not in a God because I see design.”

NR

The Myth Maker

DAVID PRYCE-JONES



Lawrence in Arabia: War, Deceit, Imperial Folly, and the Making of the Modern Middle East, by Scott Anderson (Doubleday, 592 pp., \$28.95)

LA WRENCE OF ARABIA enjoys a prominent place in the mysterious and self-perpetuating realm of myth. This remarkable achievement has always depended on the impression he left of himself as both hero and victim. He was able to persuade influential friends and opinion-formers to take him at his word, and many still think it rather poor taste to ask awkward questions about whether he did more harm than good.

Realistically, Lawrence was a British intelligence agent of middling rank and demonic temperament operating in World War I in the Arab provinces of what was then the Ottoman Empire, Germany’s voluntary ally. Only a few experts knew anything about those provinces, and some of them, up to and including Lord Kitchener, secretary of state for war, devised a strategy of weakening the Turks by fomenting rebellion among their Arab subjects.

The principal Arab leader considered likely to fall in with the British strategy was the Sharif Hussein, a tribal chief in Mecca. His longstanding ambition had been to lay hands on enough of the Arab

Mr. Pryce-Jones, a senior editor of NATIONAL REVIEW, is the author of many books, including The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs.

provinces to form an independent kingdom out of them. Without any rightful claim to such a kingdom or the necessary military force for conquest, he was reduced to scheming. The Turks had been on the verge of deporting him to Turkey.

Arab independence was a virtually unknown concept at the time. The tribesmen were willing to fight only on condition they were paid and allowed to loot. The Sharif and his sons Faisal and Abdullah expected the British to do the dirty work of making their plans come true. The Sharif exchanged letters with Sir Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner in Egypt, framing mutual expectations and future rewards. McMahon's language was cautious, but the Sharif and his sons treated it as the warrant for Arab independence. Behind the backs of the British, they nonetheless continued to bargain for better terms with their Turkish overlords. The British also had secrets: The Sykes-Picot treaty, drafted in 1916, proposed to treat the Arab provinces as spoils of war and divide them between Britain and France. Covering all bases, the British were simultaneously supporting Zionism and Ibn Saud, another tribal chief in Arabia as power-hungry as Sharif. The British had a war to win, and kept every option open until victory.

There are things to be said in Lawrence's favor. He withstood hardship. Brave, he rode into battle on a camel at the head of untrained Bedouin. He handled explosives well enough to dynamite Turkish railway lines, and could write a letter in Arabic. Not least, he was honest, disbursing the gold sovereigns indispensable to the tribesmen. (Harry St. John Philby, the intelligence agent supposed to be paying Ibn Saud, instead pocketed much of that subsidy.)

It says a great deal for the tolerance of senior officers and Arabist policymakers superior to Lawrence that they ordered him to carry the war to the Turks but left him free to act as he pleased. Their confidence was misplaced. Lawrence soon fantasized that he was responsible for future relationships between Britain and France, and between Britain and the Arabs, indeed that the Arab future and the British national interest lay in his hands.

Determined to go "biffing the French," as he put it, Lawrence identified with the

Arabs so singlemindedly that the cause of their independence became his cause, too. Lawrence informed the Sharif of the terms of the secret Sykes-Picot treaty. This breach of confidentiality might very well have landed him in a court-martial for treason. His campaigning for the Arabs culminated in a horror in Damascus, the city the Sharif intended to make his capital. After the Australian Light Horse had captured it but ridden on, Lawrence's tribesmen took over and



T. E. Lawrence

started butchering wounded Turks and prisoners by the hundred. Lawrence stood by and did nothing, while other British officers had to restore order by shooting the murderers and looters. By today's standards, Lawrence was guilty of a war crime.

Written after the war in a spirit of resentment, Lawrence's memoir, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, has the purpose of whitewashing his role in what happened to the Arabs. The Arabs had failed to gain independence through no fault of their own but because the British and French

had stuck to the Sykes-Picot treaty and incorporated Arab provinces into their empires. Unwittingly, he had been instrumental in a great double cross and betrayal, and now atoned by spreading guilt.

A writer of fiction and nonfiction, Scott Anderson mixes the two genres in *Lawrence in Arabia*. (The replacement of the expected pronoun in the title does very little.) The book rests on the idea that the Middle East at that time was awash with agents, spies, and dubious characters pursuing their own ends at the expense of honest Turks and Arabs. All were engaged in treachery, subterfuge, greed, and deception. Lawrence at least acknowledged what he had done, and Anderson holds him up as the exceptional example of virtue, in contrast to three others in the same trade: A German agent, Curt Prüfer, was an outright imperialist, and ultimately a Nazi; the Zionist Aaron Aaronsohn set up a spy ring in the belief that it was better for the Jews of Palestine to be ruled by Britain than by the Turks (no good came of this); the American William Yale chased concessions for Standard Oil, ruthlessly merging intelligence work and capitalism.

Anderson believes that history consists of small moments, and in novelistic style he reconstructs the encounters and conversations of his four selected protagonists, continually switching the narrative between them. In complete accord with Lawrence, he attributes to the Allies the low motive of going to war in the Middle East solely to satisfy "imperial cravings." Adjectives like "grotesque" and "preposterous" litter these pages. British politicians are depicted as irredeemably duplicitous and British generals as irredeemably incompetent, all of them caught in "a toxic fusion of racism and British notions of military superiority." In an outstanding example of his lack of proportion, Anderson says of Sir Mark Sykes that, after the treaty bearing his name, it's hard to think of any figure without a nation or an army at his disposal who "was to wreak more havoc on the 20th century."

"Not yet in Arabia a half day," Anderson marvels at his hero, "he had taken it upon himself to calculate a new course for the Arab Revolt." Still with a straight face, he credits the capture of the village of Aqaba by Lawrence and a handful of tribesmen as "a feat of arms

still considered one of the most daring military exploits of modern times.”

Lawrence made the unusual boast that he had been “able to defeat not merely the Turks on the battlefield, but my own country and its allies in the council chamber.” The true patriot is the anti-patriot; but Anderson’s explanation of this paradox goes against the grain of the rest of his book. Despite his contempt for the British ruling class of that time, he nevertheless asserts that it held fiercely to the notion that their word was their bond, and that Lawrence embodied this sense of honor. In fact, no bond had been given, and in any case he was a junior officer taking upon himself political issues outside his remit.

Anderson ignores the possibility that Lawrence’s confused mix of self-hatred and the wish to dominate had psychosexual origins. He is known to have been a masochist who had himself birched by men otherwise forbidden to touch him. He furthermore claimed that he had fallen into the hands of a Turkish governor who had sodomized him. His accounts of this ordeal have details and a sense of self-reproach suggesting that this was something else that he needed to fantasize.

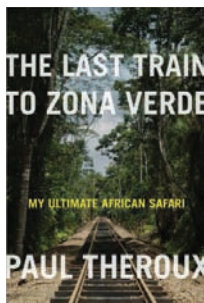
At the end of World War I, the Sykes-Picot disposition of the Middle East was put in place; Zionists were awarded their homeland; and Ibn Saud attacked Sharif Hussein, drove him and his sons out of Mecca, and incorporated their tribes and territory into the new state of Saudi Arabia. Doing the rounds of chancelleries and conferences in Arab dress, Lawrence pestered the great and the good to implement Arab independence, but tribal rivalries and customary autocracy were obstacles too entrenched to be overcome, for which the blame lies with the Arabs themselves. Embittered, Lawrence instead blamed the British. If an insider with his experience, authority, and fame said so, who were Arabs to disbelieve it? Thanks to him, it’s long been a truism for Arabs and Muslims everywhere that a lying and deceitful Britain laid the roots of every one of the ills afflicting the Middle East.

The balance of forces has changed, but not the cast of mind. If it were not for the West, millions of people believe along with Anderson, Islam would be doing just fine and there’d be no need to feel guilty. Of the making of such myths there is no end.

NR

The Mislaid Continent

SARAH RUDEN



The Last Train to Zona Verde: My Ultimate African Safari, by Paul Theroux (Houghton Mifflin, 368 pp., \$27)

DURING his 40 years as a travel writer, Paul Theroux has specialized in journeys in unusual places, by more or less ordinary local means—trains were the favorite, but even a canoe would serve. Originally a Peace Corps teacher in Africa and by preference a loner everywhere, he has been compulsive about sensory observation and personal encounter. Romanticism, hype, and myth-making are his bugbears.

His hard nose may have been a nuisance to people close to him, such as V. S. Naipaul, with whom he publicly feuded, but among popular authors he is perhaps the sole living champion of the full, pitiless story of the Third World’s landscape. For example, in a previous book on Africa, *Dark Star Safari* (2002), he made clear the horror of the prevailing deforestation.

His truth-telling was paradoxically soothing to me. During a long residence in Africa, I saw (and heard, tasted, and smelled) a great deal of bad news that was unacknowledged worldwide, including the massive webs of erosion ruts in misused land that had once been a farming paradise, and I often complained: “Nobody’s allowed to tell what’s happen-

Sarah Ruden is a classicist, poet, and journalist. Her next book, The Music Inside the Whale, and Other Marvels: A Translator on the Beauty of the Bible, will be published in 2014.

ing.” It was well-meaning people I liked, rather than malignant ones I was afraid of, who tended to silence me, a privileged foreigner plagued with the usual guilt and self-doubt. To overcome that resistance takes a heroic degree of misanthropy, and Theroux has had that going for him from the beginning.

Today, however, the sort of confrontation he cherishes is less illuminating. He reports in his new book that he planned a trip up the western side of Africa from Cape Town to Angola, and then inland to the Congo, then through Gabon and Cameroon and Nigeria, to end in Timbuktu, in Mali. He gets as far as Angola but seems overwhelmed less by disgust, horror, and fear than by boredom: Except for something of a reprieve in well-run, placidly colonial southern and central Namibia, the urban slums merely worsen monotonously, there is less and less to see in the countryside—almost all of Angola’s wildlife has been eaten, or blasted by landmines; abandoned farmhouses are falling down; and, instead of traditional villages, there are towns like transit camps to hell—and the more and more constant danger becomes almost dull.

To a Westerner passing through, there is indeed no history or ethnicity perceptible in the reeks, the garbage piling the streets, the fly-blown food, the shelters made of cinderblocks and scraps, and the cheap Chinese buckets and other implements. And there is no longer even a question of a white man’s moving through Nigeria or Mali alone by “normal” ground transport: Al-Qaeda affiliates such as Boko Haram will actually kill to punish the wearing of Western clothing. (Theroux’s trip took place in 2011, before some effective if brutal pushback against the militants.) David Livingstone’s missionary routes, through the relatively peaceful and hospitable Africa of the 19th century, are closed.

In this book, for as far as he travels—at last deciding against a train ride into the “green zone” of the title—Theroux seems rhetorically stuck even while still on the go. The book opens in medias res, with his delighted bush trek led by real Bushmen in Namibia, far away from the developed world’s crises he has heard about on his shortwave radio. But he voices his disillusionment immediately: When his companions return to their

campsite, they put on their ragged Western clothes again. The trek was “what I saw. Or was it an illusion?”

No! I want to yell: You could tell by their bodies and facial features and unique language sounds that they were who they said they were. You experienced that they knew what they were doing: They expertly located game by sound; they found an edible tuber, and you shared it. How much of your ancestors’ livelihood and folkways can *you* replicate? Why should Africans’ adaptations, their very opportunities (like your visit), be a matter of ambivalence or despair for you? How must they appear, for you to be able to imagine that they have a future, as you and yours do?

Back at the start of his trip, Theroux takes many guided tours of the informal townships around Cape Town, but deplores his own and his fellow tourists’ voyeurism and stresses the irony of making money from misery—though some of the miserable, turned entrepreneurial through this lawful and honest activity, are not nearly as miserable as before. He also gives rather short shrift to evidence that both domestic and international spending on World Cup soccer gave South Africa’s economy a new lease on life.

Ordinary tourism—of which Theroux is *not* a fan—with its demands for at least functional relationships up and down the social scale, is in fact a very positive force in a place like Africa, but to acknowledge that, you’d have to at least understand what a “people person” is, if not be one. Africans are the ultimate “people people.” In spotless modern restrooms, women leave the stall doors open so as not to lose sight of each other while laughing and conversing without a pause, yet Theroux views communal roadside calls of nature with an apocalyptic sort of revulsion. I suspect that some of his despair comes not from the admittedly appalling things he encounters but from his perception that, whatever happens, Africans will continue to be themselves, out-and-out different from himself—and from his certainty that this can’t turn out well.

Theroux gets to know international-development professionals, including an administrator of the American Millennium Challenge Corporation. He is skeptical about the claims that things will go

better now because of the powerful organization’s strict rules: It deals only with fairly elected, reasonably honest governments, and withdraws right away when standards are not met. The author, of course, doesn’t put much hope in the give-and-take, do-the-best-you-can-with-what-you-have approach.

In Namibia, Theroux’s credit-card information is stolen, adding a little over \$48,000 in fraud and the consequent difficulty in getting cash to his eventual reasons for ditching his itinerary. The aftermath of a stay in a luxurious safari park, where well-heeled visitors can actually ride the elephants, yields the news that one of the trainers was stomped to death by his charge. He is one of three upbeat individuals Theroux spends time with who die prematurely (the others from a stabbing and a heart attack).

These are all circumstances in which his former strengths become almost laughable weaknesses. As I learned during roughly a decade in South Africa, through ho-hum, middle-class activities he would no doubt sneer at—settling into suburbs, working in business, working for NGOs, traveling with religious groups, going on run-of-the-mill safaris, coming to rely on a couple of servants—the Third World is where you have to see yourself in proportion within the human condition, not stand apart from it and observe and conclude without any help from inside.

This is true of practical matters as well as philosophical ones. Submit to everyday activities in South Africa, and you will find out, for example, all about the morons with their mahout goads who say they can train African elephants, and you will not let them heft you up onto one. These are wild animals; respect that fact. You will also not let a high-spending-limit credit card out of your sight in the hands of an unsupervised backwater hotel clerk. Your great-aunt knows the bromides that apply.

But Theroux, in his isolation in the grim landscape, can do no better than ask, “What am I doing here?” as if that were the important question. Worse, he states, “I never met anyone who said, as the Dutch missionaries in long-ago Malawi often did, ‘I plan to be buried here.’” It’s not accurate to say (with a snort) that he doesn’t get out much; he

gets out too far, all on his own, beyond millions of people who would ask him, “Where the hell else would I be buried?”

And the same millions could easily explain African urbanization, a great puzzle to him. Why do people in Africa (long after forced displacements and bush wars) move from the countryside that provides them basic resources to squalid, dangerous slums where there are no jobs to be had, where young men are seen standing around, doing nothing—not, I would add, even organizing gangs as in Latin America, or taking informal employment, as in any Asian city where industrial work runs short?

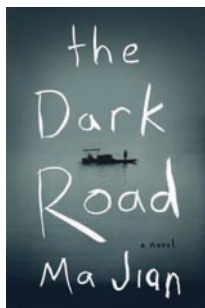
Ask the migrants—*not* judgmentally—why they came to the city, and they may just tell you: To get theirs, the things they’re told they’re entitled to. Theroux doesn’t report social visits in the urban settlements, where he might, by the way, be surprised at how hard it is to find, at least in South Africa, a shack so poor that it doesn’t have a TV, with an African-language channel playing game shows, feverishly anti-Western news, and soaps strong on the Cinderella theme—media that complement the rap music so irritating to him on the road. Africans are daily promised a bizarre combination of revenge and compensation for oppression. The message is an endless source of inertia, frustration, and rage.

Whether things get better depends strictly on whether the conversation between Africa and the West continues and expands and is acted on. Africa, unfortunately, is a continent for which no one has a practical foreign policy—a reasonable, openly stated set of requests and offers that may become a *modus vivendi*, if not a friendship. It’s too bad, because Africa’s residents are, as a rule, extremely able people.

“Africa is not for sissies,” goes the song, but not being a sissy means daring to be middling, and commonsensical, and persnickety, yet to keep making the effort, to admit the necessity of bourgeois commitment. We hear a lot about the pick-and-choose attitude, the ever-threatening abandonments of globalization, but the great truth of the long run is that we and Africans and everyone else are stuck with each other. That may be the only news too bad for Theroux to take. **NR**

Kafka in the Middle Kingdom

RANDY BOYAGODA



The Dark Road, by Ma Jian, translated by Flora Drew (Penguin, 384 pp., \$26.95)

EARLY in *Les Misérables*, Victor Hugo describes an especially cruel kind of torture. A young woman, suspected of heresy, is stripped to the waist and tied to a post. As degrading as this sounds, it's mere prologue: Her persecutors approach, carrying with them the baby she had just been nursing, who is hungry and crying. The officials demand that she recant her heresy before she can succor the baby, or else it will starve to death before her very eyes.

Partway through Chinese dissident writer Ma Jian's latest novel, *The Dark Road*, one of his main characters, also a young woman and mother, describes an experience that could surpass the awful situation that Hugo described: "The greatest torture any human being could suffer is to be pregnant with a child and not know which day it might be torn from you; and then, when it is taken from you, to have to watch it being strangled before your eyes." As the novel makes clear in its exploration of the endless tribulations of "family-planning fugitives" on the run from authorities in rural China, this character knows only too well whereof she speaks, and she is far from alone in possessing such firsthand knowledge.

It's no surprise that Ma's work has been banned in China for the past 25 years and

Mr. Boyagoda's most recent book is Beggar's Feast, a novel. His biography of Richard John Neuhaus will be published in 2014.

that he himself has lived in exile, off and on, for just as long. His books artfully excoriate the Chinese state for governing its country efficiently by governing its citizens' lives so brutally. But rather than evoke only stark distinctions and antagonisms between simply innocent victims and distant, impersonal powers, Ma devotes his considerable literary skill and equally considerable polemical passion to revealing the interpersonal particulars of China's totalitarianism. The diktats may come from a centralized authority, but they are fulfilled, often with blind, raging vigor and open venality, by ordinary people—minor officials and rank-and-file policy enforcers—who fill out the vast reach and depth of the state's mechanisms of command and control. Ma is equally unflinching in his consideration of how frequently onetime resisters and victims of the state finally capitulate and even condone and seek benefit from the programs of official brutality to which they had themselves been subjected. Usually, they do so out of a combination of ground-down spirits, fear, and exhaustion, along with myopic hopes for material goods and improved living conditions.

Ma's literary representations of his native country position him as a natural successor to such Cold War-era dissident European writers as Josef Skvorecky, Milan Kundera, and Czeslaw Milosz, who likewise exposed the banal evils and degradations of daily life under totalitarian regimes. Yet the ultimate meaning of Ma's work—that it may be finally impossible to distinguish between straightforward grim realism and horrific absurdist fantasy when it comes to telling believable and accurate stories of life in

contemporary China—suggests he may have the most in common with Franz Kafka, modern literature's unrivaled explorer of the dehumanizing metamorphoses and trials that were inherent to life under totalitarian rule.

In Ma's latest book, the dehumanizing metamorphoses and trials begin at the very conception of life. This is especially the case for poor village people who break the state's one-child policy while lacking the means of avoiding punishment for themselves and the unborn child, because they have neither the influential connections nor the wads of bribe money required to obtain permissions merely to fulfill what the book declares is "that most fundamental of human rights," the right to bear children. Driven by a need to defend this right by exposing its manifold denials, this novel is less artfully accomplished and more bluntly polemical than the author's past efforts, but nonetheless powerful.

The family at its center is made up of a teacher named Kongzi; his peasant wife, Meili; and their lone child, a little girl called Nannan. When Meili becomes pregnant with a second child, the family goes to extreme and desolating lengths to avoid the population-control police: First, they leave behind their village and family and friends, in no small part to protect these people from the certain punishments—extortionate fines, bulldozed houses—that they will receive if the authorities decide any of them knowingly harbored an illegally pregnant woman instead of immediately reporting her crime. Next, they become river migrants, living on a cramped, plastic-sheeted fishing boat that floats on terribly polluted



Ma Jian



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waters among many other such families likewise trying to have more children. With suspicion and sympathy competing to frame their interactions with each other, these families lead a meager and fearful life balanced between the constant worry of arrest and the necessity of feeding and caring for themselves.

Ma uses their situation to expose some of China's current priorities. "I earn ten times more as a demolition worker than I did as a teacher," Kongzi remarks at one point, while at another he learns that certain species of fish are granted "Class One Protection" and their migration routes secured by the state, even as the state regularly arrests undocumented migrant workers and sends them to forced-labor camps. Enterprising men compete along the river to offer grieving families the lowest prices for retrieving the corpses of suicide relatives, while ignoring the bodies of dead newborns—girls, of course—that wash up on the shores. Away from this dark, dark water, neighborhoods are regularly destroyed to make way for grand building projects that turn out to be merely shined-up shells used for photo ops with visiting dignitaries. And in the neighborhoods that are still standing, residents encounter command-encouragements on the walls of family-planning offices: "SEVER THE FALLOPIAN TUBES OF POVERTY; INSERT THE IUDS OF PROSPERITY." Blunt and awful, the slogan is lyric poetry compared with what actually happens inside the family-planning offices.

We learn as much when Ma turns back our basic, hopeful expectation of the story—that Kongzi and Meili will struggle and struggle but ultimately succeed in bringing their new child into the world. This is not to be. Eight months pregnant with the baby they have decided to name Happiness (the irony too obvious), Meili is discovered and arrested by family-planning police, who subject her and her child to a forced abortion. And rather than merely allude to this experience, or focus on the surrounding tensions and traumas of abortion (as Hemingway does in his story "Hills Like White Elephants" and Gwendolyn Brooks in her poem "The Mother"), Ma describes the event itself in sharp and violent detail, right down to the matter-of-fact strangulation that takes place after the baby is born alive. Physically, psychologically, and emotionally wrecked, lying on an operating table and listening to the abortionist and his staff

make small talk while cleaning up, Meili is ordered to sign some paperwork confirming that Happiness was stillborn and then, to top it off, she is billed for the procedure. She's given a parting gift, nothing less than a one-child-policy swag bag: "There's a free bottle of mineral water inside, four packs of condoms, and a contraceptive handbook. Now, please get off the table. I need to wash it."

If the novel ended here, it would be a relatively straightforward account of human tragedy and state-mandated injustice. But it goes on a great deal more, so that Ma can reveal the divisive consequences and broader implications of the couple's denied effort to have a second child. Kongzi soon abandons the thoughtfulness and courage that characterized his life as a schoolteacher, husband, and father. Instead, he becomes a single-minded sexual brute, consumed with producing a male heir while openly disdainful of the prospect of having a second daughter. And when Meili successfully gives birth to a second child, and it turns out to be another little girl, born no less with defects and maladies owing to her mother's terrible diet and living conditions, Kongzi secretly hands his new daughter over to a sketchy adoption agency that will probably sell the baby to the proprietor of a child-beggar ring, where there's a premium placed on handicapped little ones.

Confronted by such desperate prospects for her future children, Meili comes to willingly accept the state's proposal to abandon fertility for prosperity. She decides she will never give birth again and instead aggressively pursues wealth as a small-time entrepreneur. She begins to enjoy success when her diminished, imploding family reaches its ironically named final destination, Heaven township, a onetime quiet farming district that's lately become a thriving dumping zone for the consumer waste of First World countries. Here, if you're not already sterile or barren because of earlier experiences with state family planning, or because of the toxic surroundings, you can have as many children as you'd like. These children will scavenge among the wiry silver mountains of our discarded phones and computers and printers, in search of materials that can be sold to benefit them and their parents—living the sort of lives that, as Ma Jian devastatingly describes in *The Dark Road*, are all too plausible in today's China. **NR**

Film

Future Imperfect

ROSS DOUTHAT

To give life to an imaginary world, it's necessary to give it physicality—flesh and bone, bile and blood, and, in science fiction, gears and wires as well. This defiant fleshliness is what made Peter Jackson's take on Middle Earth seem gritty and plausible, even to viewers who didn't know Gondor from a gondola. It's what made the original *Star Wars* movies—with their battered model spaceships, their puppet Yoda—feel so much more authentic than the glossy, friction-free, entirely virtual prequels. It's why the dripping horror of *Alien* still terrifies, why the acid-eaten Los Angeles of *Blade Runner* is always worth revisiting, and why so many effects-driven blockbusters today fall short—inspiring a “wow” but lacking the kind of tactile immediacy that separates reality from simulacra.

And it's why so many of us were eagerly anticipating this summer's *Elysium*, the second sci-fi film from the South African writer-director Neill Blomkamp. Four years ago, in his surprise hit *District 9*, Blomkamp took a \$30 million budget and made one of the best alien-invasion movies of recent years: a vivid, visceral story about bug-like aliens marooned in a Johannesburg refugee camp, variously hated, exploited, and misgoverned by their human hosts.

The plot of *District 9* was sketchy and imperfect, but the movie still felt brilliantly *real*: The aliens and the weaponry and the stinking, sprawling shantytown had exactly the right mix of the familiar and the foreign, the normal and the grotesque. And it helped, too, that the movie's politics were nice and messy. There was an apartheid allegory in there somewhere, but the film wasn't just a “good aliens, bad humans” message movie: It had a real feel for the moral and political complexities of the scenario it conjured up.

The good news, for Blomkamp fans, is that the fatter budget he was handed for *Elysium* has been employed to the same visceral effect. This time the year is 2154, and the world's rulers have escaped a

teeming, half-ruined planet to a space station in the sky—a spinning ringworld, with lawns and swimming pools filling its inner rim, hanging high above the chaos down below.

That sweeping contrast—between elegance and ruin, a techno-utopia and its crumbling mirror image—lets Blomkamp play with a range of aesthetics, from steampunk to the sleek futurism of sci-fi's golden age, while remaining firmly grounded in the raw immediacy of dust and earth, metal and blood. There are no aliens this time, but there are robots and cyborgs, locked in combat with ordinary mortals, and it's a testament to the director's visual gifts that once again his inventions feel more convincing than most of their competitors for your summer movie dollars.

Unfortunately that's where the good news ends. The visual elements of *Elysium* fulfill the promise of *District 9*, but Blomkamp's sophomore effort disappoints on every other front. As in his first movie, the Afrikaner émigré's imagination seems to be feeding off an interesting mix of white guilt and white anxiety, and his vision of a Malthusian Earth abandoned by its elite plays as a kind of worst-case scenario for post-apartheid South Africa, or even—given that his main earthbound setting is a ruined, Spanish-speaking Los Angeles—a fulfillment of every American immigration skeptic's darkest fears.

But that reactionary subtext is buried very deep, and the movie's text is a thudingly predictable morality play—a kind of left-wing *Atlas Shrugged*, in which the planet's only problem is that the elite have fled to orbit, and everything down below would somehow be magically fixed if only the rich and powerful cared enough to do it. There is no attempt to even vaguely humanize the Elysians, no explanation for their inhumanity and indifference: There's only the clear and pressing need to shatter their technological monopoly, spread their wealth, and (hint, Obamacare, hint) bring their fantastic health care to the masses down below.

The man for this job is a working-class hero named Max, played by Matt Damon with his customary diligence. One of the few Anglos left in the L.A. of 2154, he's a former car thief who suffers an industrial accident that leaves him with just days to live, and he volunteers for what amounts to a suicide mission, sponsored by an underground figure named Spider (Wag-



Matt Damon in *Elysium*

ner Moura), to kidnap an Elysian billionaire and download crucial secrets from his brain.

This mission is complicated, inevitably, by a love interest from Max's past (Alice Braga) and her leukemia-stricken daughter, who needs to reach Elysium to obtain access to its state-of-the-art healing machines. (The absence of a planetside black market in Elysian technology is one of the film's many painful departures from verisimilitude.) And it brings our hero into conflict with the film's two baddies: Elysium's defense minister, played by Jodie Foster with an air of boredom and what I think is supposed to be a South African accent, and her off-the-books henchman, played by the definitely South African Sharlto Copley (he starred in *District 9*) with much more bloodthirsty zest than the script deserves.

Fortunately for Max's chances, Elysium is protected by a military that's even more incompetent than the Starfleet in J. J. Abrams's latest *Trek* film. Blomkamp has conjured up a space-age utopia that seems to rely for its defenses on a lone L.A.-based soldier with a rocket launcher, and that's governed by a computer system that can be easily reprogrammed to . . . well, that'd be giving away the ending, but suffice it to say that in real life, a space station whose custodians were this egregiously stupid would never have made it into orbit, or even off the ground.

A similar stupidity permeates the whole script: The world-building is lazy, the plot has yawning holes, and the political message becomes so didactic it would embarrass Aaron Sorkin. Blomkamp has a gift, that much is clear, but not a gift for screenwriting. So the next time his visual imagination is turned loose, let's hope it's on someone else's story. **NR**

The Blasphemy Police

IN 2010, the bestselling atheist Richard Dawkins, in the “On Faith” section of the *Washington Post*, called the pope “a leering old villain in a frock” perfectly suited to “the evil corrupt organization” and “child-raping institution” that is the Catholic Church. Nobody seemed to mind very much.

Three years later, in a throwaway Tweet, Professor Dawkins observed that “all the world’s Muslims have fewer Nobel Prizes than Trinity College, Cambridge. They did great things in the Middle Ages, though.” This time round, the old provocateur managed to get a rise out of folks. Almost every London paper ran at least one story on the “controversy.” The *Independent*’s Owen Jones fumed, “How dare you dress your bigotry up as atheism. You are now beyond an embarrassment.” The best-selling author Caitlin Moran sneered, “It’s time someone turned Richard Dawkins off and then on again. Something’s gone weird.” The *Daily Telegraph*’s Tom Chivers beseeched him, “Please be quiet, Richard Dawkins, I’m begging.”

None of the above is Muslim. Indeed, they are, to one degree or another, members of the same secular liberal media elite as Professor Dawkins. Yet all felt that, unlike Dawkins’s routine jeers at Christians, his Tweet had gone too far. It’s factually unarguable: Trinity graduates have amassed 32 Nobel prizes, the entire Muslim world a mere ten. If you remove Yasser Arafat, Mohamed ElBaradei, and the other winners of the Nobel Peace Prize, Islam can claim just four laureates against Trinity’s 31 (the college’s only peace-prize recipient was Austen Chamberlain, brother of Neville). Yet simply to make the observation was enough to have the *Guardian* compare him to the loonier imams and conclude that “we must consign Dawkins to this very same pile of the irrational and the dishonest.”

Full disclosure: Five years ago, when I was battling Canada’s “human rights” commissions to restore free speech to my native land, Richard Dawkins was one of the few prominent figures in Her Majesty’s dominions to lend unequivocal support. He put it this way:

I have over the years developed a dislike for Mark Steyn, although I’ve always admired his forceful writing. On this issue, however, he is clearly 1000% in the right and should receive all the support anybody can give him.

Let me return the compliment: I have over the years developed a dislike for Richard Dawkins’s forceful writing (the God of the Torah is “the most unpleasant character in all fiction,” etc.), but I am coming round rather to admire him personally. It’s creepy and unnerving how swiftly the West’s chattering classes have accepted that the peculiar sensitivities of Islam require a deference extended to no other identity group. I doubt *The Satanic Verses* would be

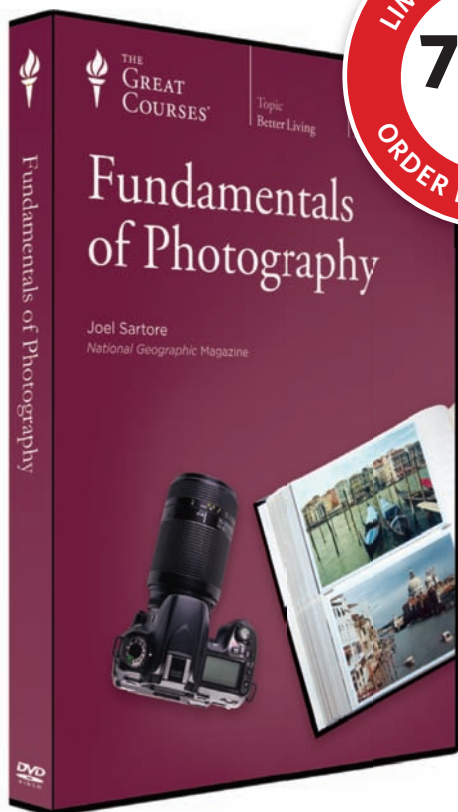
accepted for publication today, but, if it were, I’m certain no major author would come out swinging on Salman Rushdie’s behalf the way his fellow novelist Fay Weldon did: The Koran, she declared, “is food for no-thought. . . . It gives weapons and strength to the thought-police.” That was a remarkably prescient observation in the London of 1989. Even a decade ago, it would have been left to the usual fire-breathing imams to denounce remarks like Dawkins’s. In those days, Islam was still, like Christianity, insultable. Fleet Street cartoonists offered variations on the ladies’ changing-room line “Does my bum look big in this?” One burqa-clad woman to another: “Does my bomb look big in this?” Not anymore. “There are no jokes in Islam,” pronounced the Ayatollah Khomeini, and so, in a bawdy Hogarthian society endlessly hooting at everyone from the Queen down, Islam uniquely is no laughing matter. Ten years back, even the United Nations Human Development Program was happy to sound off like an incendiary Dawkins Tweet: Its famous 2002 report blandly noted that more books are translated by Spain in a single year than have been translated into Arabic in the last thousand years.

What Dawkins is getting at is more fundamental than bombs or burqas. Whatever its virtues, Islam is not a culture of inquiry, of innovation. You can coast for a while on the accumulated inheritance of a pre-Muslim past—as, indeed, much of the Dar al-Islam did in those Middle Ages Dawkins so admires—but it’s not unreasonable to posit that the more Muslim a society becomes the smaller a role Nobel prizes and translated books will play in its future. According to a new report from the Office of National Statistics, “Mohammed,” in its various spellings, is now the second most popular baby boy’s name in England and Wales, and Number One in the capital. It seems likely that an ever more Islamic London will, for a while, still have a West End theater scene for tourists, but it will have ever less need not just for Oscar Wilde and Noël Coward and eventually Shakespeare but for drama of any kind. Maybe I’m wrong, maybe Dawkins is wrong, maybe the U.N. Human Development chaps are wrong. But the ferocious objections even to raising the subject suggest we’re not.

A quarter-century on, Fay Weldon’s “thought police” are everywhere. Notice the general line on Dawkins: Please be quiet. Turn him off. *You can’t say that*. What was once the London Left’s principal objection to the ayatollah’s Rushdie fatwa is now its reflexive response to even the mildest poke at Islam. Their reasoning seems to be that, if you can just insulate this one corner of the multi-cultural scene from criticism, elsewhere rude, raucous life—with free speech and all the other ancient liberties—will go on. Miss Weldon’s craven successors seem intent on making her point: In London, Islam is food for no thought.

NR

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



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