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Contents

NATIONAL REVIEW

MAY 29, 2017 | VOLUME LXIX, NO. 10 | www.nationalreview.com

Richard Brookhiser on Trump and Jackson
p. 16

ON THE COVER Page 22

Everyone an Enemy

Antifa's reason for describing something or someone as 'fascist' is not that it is actually fascist but that describing it that way is politically advantageous. Likewise with any number of other slurs. Antifa are in effect claiming to oppose everything that is bad—and, of course, it is Antifa who decide what is bad. *Ian Tuttle*

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ARTICLES

FEATURES

BOOKS, ARTS & MANNERS

SECTIONS

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NATIONAL REVIEW

MAY 29 ISSUE; PRINTED MAY 11

Letters

Girl with *Bull*

I read Jay Nordlinger's piece about *Fearless Girl* ("Girl, Misplaced," May 1) and her placement opposite *Charging Bull* and agree that it's an injustice that the new sculpture warps the meaning of another's work.

I love the vision of both statues but don't understand why they have to be in opposition to each other. Isn't the idea of the "can-do spirit of America" the same as the fearless spirit of a "woman hold[ing] her ground, no matter what challenges come barreling down the pike"? I have an idea for resolving the dispute. Instead of having her oppose the bull, place *Fearless Girl* in front and to the side of *Charging Bull* and let them face the challenges America encounters together, fearless and with a can-do spirit.

Mary Turner
Via e-mail

Clarifying the Law

Ramesh Ponnuru announces, with approval it seems, that "a relatively solid conservative bloc of four . . . will be capable of making law when Justice Anthony Kennedy joins it" ("The Gorsuch Triumph," May 1).

And that is a good thing? I thought conservatives prided themselves in recognizing that making laws is reserved for the people's representatives in Congress, and not for the members of SCOTUS, however conservative they may be.

John Vandonk
Norco, Calif.

RAMESH PONNURU RESPONDS: I meant "making law" as in "specifying legal rules based on statutes and the Constitution," not "replacing the content of statutes and the Constitution." The phrasing is ambiguous, I'll admit, but in my defense I was not making an argument about jurisprudence.

What about the Fair Tax?

Mr. Cole's excellent article "The Case for Tax Reform" (May 1) is both timely and pertinent; however, he missed an opportunity by not considering replacing the graduated income tax. Funding the federal government through a national sales tax, a.k.a. "Fair Tax," is an idea much praised but seldom seriously discussed. Although replacing the current method of funding the federal government is closer to revolution than reform and unlikely in the short term, the benefits are obvious and well documented. Such a consideration was understandably beyond the scope of this article, but possibly Mr. Cole could be persuaded to write an article considering revolution?

Dave Helma
Mica, Wash.

ALAN COLE RESPONDS: Many of the reforms discussed in the piece include elements of the Fair Tax proposal. For example, removing deductions and adopting a destination-based business tax are both reforms that make the current tax code more like the Fair Tax. However, adopting a Fair Tax system in full would increase taxes on many lower-income voters. This is likely why Congress so far seems reluctant to do so.

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

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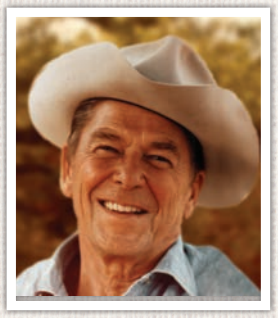

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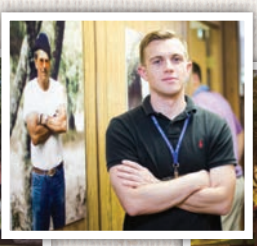

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The Week

■ We were for firing Comey before the Democrats were against it.

■ President Trump fired FBI director James Comey, who had made himself eminently fireable. Last July, Comey took it upon himself to become not only the nation's top policeman, but its top prosecutor, explaining in a long press conference that while Hillary Clinton had clearly broken the law by hosting classified information on her private e-mail server, she did not deserve to be prosecuted—a decision that was not his to make. Then, shortly before November's election, Comey announced that the FBI was reopening its investigation into Clinton's e-mails, based on evidence found on the computer of Anthony Weiner. A few days later, he reclosed the reopened investigation. This sequence of events—which has had Republicans and Democrats repeatedly reversing themselves in their opinions of Comey—was outlined in a memo by Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein, who rightly observed that Comey's actions broke with longstanding Justice Department precedent, to the frustration of critics on both sides. Indeed, the Bureau's reputation is at a low ebb because of Comey's decisions, and one way or the other, he needed to go. Of course, press reports suggest that when Trump fired Comey, he was angry about the Russia probe, Comey's ubiquity in the media, and the FBI director's refusal to make a statement exonerating him of wrongdoing. If true, none of this speaks well of Trump. The public deserves a forthright answer about the hows and whys of the decision, and if the White House does not provide it, Congress must seek it. Ideally, the administration will find a replacement well respected on both sides of the aisle who will be appropriately independent of the position's inevitable political pressures.

■ The Trump administration announced ten judicial nominees—all of them professionally accomplished and known as conservatives. These nominations matter more than ever: The federal courts' power has continued to grow, but the Supreme Court's docket has shrunk. Trump has deferred to the right people on this issue, both inside and outside his administration. Judicial nominees are the brightest spot in the Trump presidency.

■ Call it the Almost Victory Lap. Hillary Clinton, in an interview with CNN anchor Christiane Amanpour, said, "If the election had been on October 27, I would be your president." She blamed her loss on FBI director James Comey, on WikiLeaks, on misogyny . . . Before chewing once more on these gnawed old bones, one must say that the main reasons Mrs. Clinton lost were her opponent and herself. For all his flaws and blunders, Donald Trump had a simple message: I will fight for you. Hillary Clinton was entitled, evasive, and unprincipled: unclear about her own goals and a bad manager of her team. Her husband was cut out for this line of work; she manifestly is not. If her party does not learn this and move on, maybe it isn't, either.

ROMAN GENN

■ President Trump's executive order on religious liberty was tepid at best and dangerously misleading at worst. The declaration that the administration intends to vigorously protect religious freedom is preferable to anything Hillary Clinton would have said, but the order itself has no legal force. Its allegedly operative provisions—taking on the Johnson Amendment (which restricts the political activities of nonprofits) and the HHS contraception mandate—changed no laws or regulations, and if pastors or leaders of other nonprofits rely on the executive order to enlist their organizations in partisan political activities, they still risk their organizations' tax exemptions. The language regarding the contraception mandate was particularly weak, merely urging the relevant agencies to "consider" changing regulations to protect religious liberty. Moreover, the order was completely silent on the hot-button culture-war issues that constitute the gravest threat to religious freedom. If Trump truly wants to protect religious freedom, his order wasn't even a start. There's hard legislative and regulatory work to be done, and if this order is any indication, Trump has little appetite for the task.

■ Congressional leaders have hammered out a 1,700-page, $1 trillion omnibus spending bill to fund the government through the end of fiscal year 2017 (which falls on September 30). It is noteworthy for what it does not include: most of Donald Trump's and Republicans' recent campaign promises. The bill does not defund Planned Parenthood. It does not include any of the deep cuts to domestic agencies that the president has proposed. Public broadcasting is funded at current levels. The National Endowment for the Arts' budget is increased. There's even funding for California's high-speed rail. What did Republicans get? The bill provides $1.5 billion for border-security improvements (which

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cannot be used for new border-wall construction). The president also received $15 billion in supplemental funding for the Pentagon, as well as an extra $10 billion for emergency defense spending through the overseas-contingency fund. There is at least one significant victory here: These defense outlays were not tethered to an equal increase in non-defense discretionary spending—an Obama-era precedent that has long needed to go. Nonetheless, it's hard to chalk the bill up as anything but a loss. Yes, there were limits to what Republicans could do: They needed Democratic votes to push a spending bill over the finish line, and they undoubtedly would have shouldered the blame for a shutdown, justifiably or not. But Republicans control the White House and both branches of Congress. From this bill, one might well think the opposite.

■ In May, the entertainer Jimmy Kimmel delivered a heartfelt monologue in defense of Obamacare. Kimmel related the experience of his newborn son, who needed immediate postnatal surgery to fix a heart defect. The incident, Kimmel proposed, made him appreciate Obamacare's protections. "If your baby is going to die and it doesn't have to," he argued, "it shouldn't matter how much money you make." That Kimmel went through a horrific experience is not in doubt; neither is his right to advocate whatever system he prefers. But his view on this matter is dangerously simplistic. In Kimmel's view, Americans face a choice: They can have a health system in which nobody is excluded, or they can give "a huge tax cut to millionaires." This is false. Health care is a scarce resource, which means that whatever regime is installed, there will always be trade-offs. Under the current system, which Kimmel prefers, many Americans still do not have insurance, and even more have coverage that does not make economic sense for their families. In addition, Medicaid, which accounts for most of the recent increase in coverage, is now accepted by fewer and fewer doctors and increasingly provides substandard care. As for single-payer—the usual "solution" to these problems—it would not meet the standard that Kimmel has laid out. Should the plan put forward by Bernie Sanders be passed by the U.S. Congress, it would add $32 trillion in spending, necessitating significant tax hikes on more than just the "millionaires" who Kimmel believes should pay. We are glad that Kimmel's family is doing well but would invite him to look beyond it when laying out his policy preferences in the future.

■ In his opening monologue on *The Late Show*, Stephen Colbert called Donald Trump . . . no, we won't say what he called him. It was from the left (natch), savage (also natch), and grossly sexual (the new natch, apparently). The Twitterverse exploded with suggestions that Colbert's remark was homophobic (he imputed to Trump a practice that, if the imputation were true, would suggest that the president is gay, or at least gay-curious). It wasn't—it was class-ophobic. If we want to experience this kind of stuff, we can go to a bar, a locker room, or any unedited comments section. Colbert gets paid millions of dollars to do better. Shame on him.

■ Jim DeMint left the Senate to become president of the Heritage Foundation. Now Heritage has ousted him. His critics say he was a bad manager who got the think tank too involved in political machinations rather than the generation of ideas. His fans say this is just a power play by rivals. We hope that the turmoil ends soon, so that Heritage can resume exerting a constructive conservative influence on Republicans in Washington, D.C.—an influence that is more needed than ever. For that matter, we hope Senator DeMint can do the same thing in whatever new role he finds.

■ President Trump's latest tax-reform proposal—he offered two during the campaign—is his least detailed yet. It contains some good ideas. Ending the deduction for state and local taxes would keep low-tax states from having to subsidize high-tax ones. Cutting the corporate tax rate would make investment in the United States more attractive. But the plan will have to be filled in carefully. Trump says nothing about letting businesses write off the cost of investments immediately, which is at least as important as lower rates in encouraging investment. His desire to help families with child-care costs should lead to tax cuts for all parents, not bigger tax subsidies for commercial day care. And with the debt scheduled to grow ever larger, budget plans should not be made in the expectation that higher economic growth or spending restraint will materialize in the future. Trump appears to be letting Congress take the lead from here. It should seize the opportunity to combine pro-growth reform, middle-class tax relief, and fiscal prudence.

■ President Trump does enjoy trade theater. He spent a few days making noises about simply pulling the United States out of NAFTA (it is not clear that he has the power to do so unilaterally) and then announced with some fanfare that he would merely be renegotiating the trade accord. Trump has been complaining about NAFTA since before it was signed—opposition to it is one of the few consistent features of his political outlook. But in all these years, he has never discussed at any length any specific provision of the accord to which he objects, and many of his public statements on the subject suggest that he understands what NAFTA says and what it does only in a very general way. There probably is no single feature of our contemporary public life that is as grossly undervalued as the close economic relationship between the United States, Canada, and Mexico. One of life's little ironies is that the same populists who detest NAFTA covet "energy independence," seldom acknowledging that what they really are talking about is North American energy independence: Nearly half of our crude imports come from Canada, and Canada imports tens of billions of dollars' worth of U.S.-made energy products. NAFTA, like all the works of men, is imperfect, but President Trump owes it to the country to explain what exactly it is he would like to see changed before he charges willy-nilly into a very important economic relationship. The United States has enemies enough in the world, and the Canadians are not among them.

■ Trump has already decided to teach those dastardly Canadians a lesson, which he intends to do by raising prices for American construction companies and their customers. At issue are long-standing complaints by U.S. lumber producers who believe that their Canadian competitors receive an unfair subsidy from Ottawa. Most U.S. timber is harvested on private land, while most Canadian timber is harvested on Crown lands, where prices are set through long-term contracts called "tenures." Those fees, some U.S. firms insist, are too low. The issue has been repeatedly litigated under both NAFTA and World Trade Organization procedures—this is one of the reasons we have those trade accords—and Canada has prevailed, with trade authorities finding that whatever indirect subsidy Canadian lumber producers may be receiving is trivial, amounting to less than 1 percent of the prices

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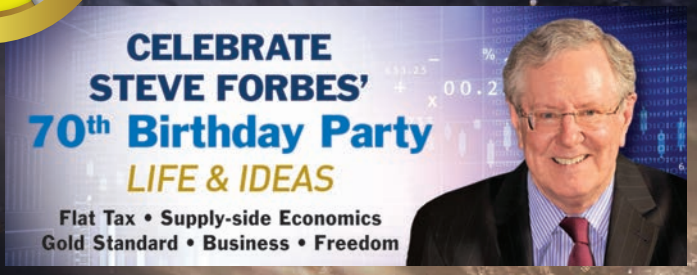

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they pay for logs. Canada has vast forests and a population smaller than California's; that looks like a cheap place to produce lumber, irrespective of forestry policy. Jacking up prices on Canadian lumber, which is commonly used in house-framing, will hurt U.S. builders, real-estate developers, and home-buyers in the service of a narrow domestic business interest that repeatedly has failed to make its case. NAFTA and the WTO provide valuable procedures for resolving trade disputes. But sometimes U.S. business interests lose, simply because they do not have the better case.

■ Former president Barack Obama announced that he would give a speech in September on health care sponsored by the investment firm Cantor Fitzgerald. His fee: $400,000. In America's dream-mind, we might wish our ex-presidents would return, like Cincinnatus, to their plows. But that possibility vanished long ago. Once they reenter private life, ex-presidents monetize their eminence. It comes with less grace from an ex- who trashed Mitt Romney as a heartless gotrocks, and some liberals—notably, Senator Elizabeth Warren—criticized Obama for it. To which we say, like the old lady, described by Abraham Lincoln, watching her husband fight a bear: "Go it, husband! Go it, bear!"

■ Ileana Ros-Lehtinen has a number of "firsts" to her credit. She was the first Cuban American elected to Congress (in 1989). She was the first Hispanic woman elected to Congress. She was the first Republican woman elected from Florida. But her real distinction has been her unflagging dedication to freedom the world over. She is a famously cheerful woman, but she is also fearless and staunch. As much as she is a friend to political prisoners, she is a scourge of dictators. Fidel Castro labeled her "la Loba Feroz," meaning "the Ferocious She-Wolf." "Ily," as the congresswoman is known, has announced her retirement from Congress at the end of this term. No one is irreplaceable, but it's hard to imagine another Ily.

■ Ajit Pai, head of the Federal Communications Commission, is starting to undo one of the mistakes of the Obama years. The FCC imposed sweeping new regulations on the Internet in the name of "net neutrality," which became a cause of the Left. The concern was that service providers would favor preferred websites and hinder access to others. Never mind that there was no evidence that this was happening or about to happen, and never mind as well that the governing law passed by Congress was a deregulatory one. After the FCC acted, investment in broadband declined—something that, as Pai points out, has not previously happened except in a recession. Net freedom is a policy that worked phenomenally well until the FCC started moving away from it in the last few years, and luckily we are returning to it.

■ When the American Civil Liberties Union came out against a rioter's veto over speeches on campus, it was a refreshing reminder of the middle two words in its name. In other recent controversies, the ACLU has argued against religious-liberty statutes that it used to support; sued a Catholic hospital for refusing to perform sex changes; and urged that Obamacare be kept on the books. If the ACLU is going to be just another interchangeable liberal organization, perhaps it should follow the example of the National Abortion Rights Action League, which renamed itself NARAL so that the letters would literally no longer stand for anything. Or the two groups could just merge?

■ The EB-5 visa program, which offers visas to foreigners who invest $500,000 or more in certain American development projects, is riddled with problems. A 2015 Government Accountability Office report found that the program presents a high risk of fraud, because EB-5 recipients are not subject to the same requirements as other visa holders, and noted cases of counterfeit documentation. In 2013, Virginia state authorities suggested that gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe had used the EB-5 program as a de facto "visa for sale" scheme. The program is again in the news after Nicole Meyer, sister of presidential adviser Jared Kushner and a higher-up at Kushner Companies, advertised visas to Chinese investors for half-million-dollar investments in a Jersey City, N.J., housing development. During a visit to Beijing, Meyer spoke about how the project "means a lot to me and my entire family" and discussed her brother's tenure as the company's CEO. This episode, together with so many other problems, makes a compelling case for reforming this misbegotten program.

■ Beyond all the photo-ops, Michelle Obama's school-meal crusade also yielded minute and detailed federal requirements for lunchroom ladies across America. Scholastic cafeterias are not commanded merely to cut down on salt and use whole grains and skim milk almost exclusively, but must even "offer all the vegetable subgroups identified by the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans over the course of the week in minimum required quantities." Anyone who has had children will recognize multiple flaws in this scheme, not least that a cafeteria staff that can mess up sloppy joes will now be expected to prepare arugula primavera. While the bulk of Michelle's busybody regulations remain in effect, Trump's Agriculture Department has clawed back at least a few by allowing low-fat chocolate milk and loosening scheduled changes that would have further squeezed sodium content and required 100 percent whole grains. If the public-school kids of America could vote, it would be Trump in a landslide.

■ Minimum-wage increases lead to a deterioration of health in less-skilled American workers, particularly unemployed men, according to Michael R. Strain et al. in an article in *Economic Inquiry*. That should surprise no one: Those for whom employment is already out of reach are like pole vaulters who are unable to clear the bar and then see it raised. In itself, increased stress is a risk factor for disease, and then despair of reentering the labor force can lead to depression, which can lead individuals to neglect their health. The researchers' findings are not monolithic—women, for example, show a slight improvement in mental health as the minimum wage rises, even as their overall health declines—but the bigger picture of the effect that minimum-wage hikes have on the segment of the population most directly affected by them is not bright. Skeptics of raising the minimum wage often point out that it reduces opportunity for young adults and others looking to climb the ladder. Add health impacts to the list of unintended costs that advocates of raising the minimum wage should address if they want their proposals to add up.

■ Texas governor Greg Abbott signed a bill into law banning "sanctuary cities" in the Lone Star State. The law makes local officials, including the administrators of public colleges, subject to Class A–misdemeanor charges if they refuse to cooperate with federal immigration authorities' requests to hold noncitizen

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inmates for deportation, and imposes civil penalties of up to $25,000 per day, along with possible jail time and removal from office for recalcitrant officials. The bill, Abbott has said, is intended to ensure that Texas cities are not "harboring people who have committed dangerous crimes," as has been the case in other so-called sanctuary cities. Local officials need to have some discretion (in order, for example, to investigate violent crime in illegal-immigrant communities), but municipal declarations that their jurisdictions will *never* cooperate with federal immigration enforcement go too far, and Texas is entirely within its rights to call them to account. Governor Abbott seems to recognize that his job is to make the whole state a sanctuary for the law-abiding.

■ Georgia has decided to become a "campus carry" state. In so doing, it will join 30 other states in which colleges are either required or permitted to allow licensed students to bring their guns onto campus. The reaction to the news has been predictable. In *The Atlantic*, the *Times*, and the *Washington Post*, terrible prognostications abound. Before long, we are told, the state's colleges will resemble the O.K. Corral. Imminently, we will see rampant grade inflation, as professors become terrified of their students. Ineluctably, debates over politics will turn fatal. Are these fears founded? It is hard to see how they can be. Georgia, recall, is coming late to this party, and it is a party that has been peaceful hitherto. In the other 30 states in which the idea has been tried, precisely nothing of consequence has happened. There has been no decline into Wild West violence, no pernicious alteration of the student–teacher rapport, no ugly undermining of the spirit of debate. As usual, liberalization has proven uneventful. So it will be in Georgia. And the next state after that.

■ Emmanuel Macron won a thumping 66 percent in the runoff round of the French presidential elections—not bad for a 39-year-old first-time candidate leading a brand-new political party (called "En Marche!"). For all his newness, Macron is a child of the established center-left: a graduate of one of the schools that populate the French governing class, a former minister in the Socialist government that he replaces. His bet is that he can recharge the French economy by undoing its rigid labor laws, while simultaneously persuading the Germans to inject a little inflation into the euro. (What is the French for crossing a chasm in two jumps? *Fais gaffe!*) Marine Le Pen's 34 percent of the vote fell humiliatingly short of pre-election polls—but nearly doubled the 17.8 percent her fascist father won in the runoff in 2002. The National Front, dirigiste, protectionist, pro-Putin, and anti-immigrant, remains to snarl at every misstep—and potentially to profit.

■ The chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, visited the president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, at his home in Sochi. They discussed ongoing war in Ukraine and ongoing war in Syria. Putin is a bad actor in both. Also, Merkel pressed him on civil and human rights in Russia: the brutalization of gays, particularly in Chechnya; the banning of the Jehovah's Witnesses; the arrest of political dissenters. This is Western leadership, and will be appreciated by not a few Russians.

■ President Trump is right to fast-track American missile-defense systems to South Korea. He is wrong to risk the presence of that system by demanding that South Korea foot the bill for it. The Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery bolsters American and South Korean defenses against missile attack, but this increased security has come at a cost. China is angry, many South Koreans are nervous, and throwing a wrench into the deployment through a demand for payment (quickly modified by Trump's national-security team) unnecessarily heightens tensions. That's not to deny that South Korea should ultimately pay more than the roughly $880 million per year it currently pays the U.S. to offset the cost of American defense deployments. But that negotiation should occur when existing agreements expire next year, not through public threats in a time of heightened tensions and a change of government in Seoul. We can't forget: The THAAD battery protects American lives as well. For now, its presence is more important than payment.

■ In a move that stunned the State Department and the National Security Council, President Trump invited the Philippines' president, Rodrigo Duterte, to the White House. He did this in a friendly phone call to Duterte. Duterte is a brute and a murderer, with a great deal of blood on his hands. He revels in this record, too. It's true the United States has an interest in the Philippines. It is a historic ally. Also, it was our only colony. Duterte has been in a fiercely anti-American mood, denouncing President Obama as a "son of a whore" and saying that he would realign the Philippines with China. Trump is right to reinforce ties to the Philippines—but past administrations have tended that alliance while also standing for human rights, and Trump should follow their example.

■ The main opposition leader in Russia, Boris Nemtsov, was murdered in 2015. Since then, the main opposition leader in Russia has been Alexei Navalny. He has not yet been murdered. The Putin government has bedeviled him with arrests and charges, making it impossible for him to run for office. He has been subject to physical attacks as well. In the latest, an assailant threw a toxic liquid in his face, mainly blinding him in one eye. The government has denied Navalny the right to go abroad to seek treatment. The government also seems in no hurry to catch the assailant. Navalny has displayed sangfroid, saying that he hoped he would be cured, but, if not, Russia would someday have "a president with a stylish white eye."

■ Venezuela must be another one of those places where "true socialism has never been tried." The country has descended into anarchy; soldiers are brutalizing protesters in the streets; people are starving, with the average Venezuelan having lost nearly 20 pounds over the past year because food is so scarce; people are dying horrible deaths in hospitals that lack the ability to provide

CHESNOT/GETTY IMAGES

What A Single Diet Soda Does

If you consume soda or know anyone who does, then this is affecting you directly.

For years, Big Soda companies have been handing out **millions of dollars** in an attempt to prove that their drinks are NOT the cause of obesity.

In fact, the New York Times recently exposed one Big Soda company that paid **$1.5 million** to fund their own research group. Their ultimate goal? To convince the public that drinking soda is safe. (NYT, August 9, 2015).

But this goes beyond just soda. It turns out there are THREE OTHER DANGEROUS FOODS that are being marketed as "health foods."

These foods may be harming you from the inside, and they could **be the reason why you are not losing weight, no matter what you have tried.**

One of these foods even contains an ingredient that is actually banned in almost every first world country – except the U.S., where it is still legal!

These are three foods you should never eat! But they're so common, you probably have at least one of them in your pantry right now! You may have even consumed these foods today.

Go to **www.BadFood8.com** to find out these foods.

P.S. These foods might be extremely harmful to your health. About 80% of Americans consume at least one of these foods. So please watch this shocking presentation at **www.BadFood8.com** before it's too late.

routine services. How did this happen to what was, not all that long ago, the wealthiest country in Latin America? The answer in Venezuela, as in Cuba and North Korea and any number of backward basket cases, is: socialism. Hugo Chávez came to power on a wave of populist support and, cheered by American Democrats ranging from Representative Chaka Fattah and Jesse Jackson to celebrity liberals such as Sean Penn and Oliver Stone, began enacting a program out of the Bernie Sanders playbook: large-scale redistribution, plundering the private sector, "democratizing" key economic sectors, large and ultimately unsustainable increases in welfare spending, etc. What happened next was predictable enough: rising debt and inflation; the imposition of currency controls and other political efforts to substitute brute force for economic reality; the shutting down of opposition media as fronts for moneyed elites, and then naked political repression; shortages of everything from toilet paper to cooking oil; ever more unlikely conspiracy theorizing insisting that all of this unhappiness was somehow cooked up by the CIA and Wall Street. We have seen this show before, and we know how it ends. Socialism is socialism.

■ Christians hoping to return to their ancient homes in the Nineveh Plain in northern Iraq have to rebuild them. ISIS invaded in 2014 and promptly set about burning their houses. Kurdish peshmerga drove ISIS out last winter, but not before its fighters littered the towns with booby traps. Former residents fear to go back, even if only to assess the damage. To reestablish lasting Christian communities over the ruins, they need security, jobs, and infrastructure—a package too difficult for anyone to assemble in one fell swoop. Instead of doing nothing because it can't do everything, Aid to the Church in Need, a Catholic relief organization, is doing something. It has led the formation of the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee, a consortium of Catholic and Orthodox Christians, which earlier this month broke ground on the construction of 100 homes, the first installment of a plan that includes 11,900 more. The final cost is estimated to exceed $200 million. Persecuted Christians in the Middle East have learned to put not their trust in princes. They depend on the generosity of coreligionists living in comparatively comfortable circumstances in America and elsewhere. Take the hint.

■ Quit the soul-baring: This is the message a source close to the British royals relayed from Queen Elizabeth II to her grandsons, who spent last year talking about mental-health issues, particularly their own, in a major PR campaign. "It might be that soul-baring isn't what Buckingham Palace is looking for," according to the source. With Prince Philip retiring from public life, the queen believes her family must focus on "representing the nation," not "individual royal activity." It's a refreshing throwback. Did anyone need Prince Harry telling Robin Givens, "Everyone needs a hug every now and then," before adding, "And it so happens that I've been told over and over again that I'm very good at giving hugs"? Or the boys talking about their trauma in soft-focus videos? The Queen should relay blunt advice from her one-time confidant Winston Churchill: "If you are going through hell, keep going." She knows the truth of it. And even with a faltering husband and grandchildren given to cringeworthy disclosures, the queen keeps going. She intends to maintain her full public schedule this year.

■ The lure of the open road, stretching forth into the sunset, has inspired Americans from Whitman to Kerouac to Cormac McCarthy, and, in this respect, Australia is basically America with Vegemite. Its spacious outback highways have long attracted novelists, filmmakers, and assorted dreamers—most recently a precocious twelve-year-old who drove 800 miles west from his family home outside Sydney, stopping occasionally to pump some gasoline without paying. One gas-station manager said the boy was tall enough to pass for 20, and he certainly drove like a college kid, hitting a curb along the way and dislodging the rear bumper (which was why the police finally pulled him over). The adolescent antipodean said he intended to visit relatives in Perth, 2,500 miles away; more likely, it would seem, he just wanted to get out of his hometown. But either way, before he attempts his next epic road trip, we suggest he wait until he's old enough to acquire a license, and perhaps a bit of world-weariness.

■ Jumana Nagarwala, a Michigan doctor, has been charged with mutilating the genitals of two seven-year-old girls, a federal crime. In a report on the case, the *New York Times* referred to the barbaric procedure of female genital mutilation as "genital cutting." The *Times* section editor explained in response to a reader's question that she "chose to use the less culturally loaded term" because "there's a gulf between the Western (and some African) advocates who campaign against the practice and the people who follow the rite." She didn't want to use language that "widened that chasm." Indeed, the gulf between those who brutalize young girls by disfiguring their genitalia and those who regard that practice with horror could hardly be wider. Dr. Nagarwala, who faces ten years in prison if convicted, will find that the U.S. criminal code is clearer on this point than the *Times*.

■ Two things are true at once about Ann Coulter's recent attempt to speak at the University of California, Berkeley. The school was wrong not to protect her fundamental First Amendment freedoms, and she was wrong to respond to the controversy by turning on her friends and allies at the Young America's Foundation. Shortly after she canceled her appearance on campus (amid fears of mob violence), she tweeted out a direct attack at YAF, her original cosponsor for the planned event, accusing it of acquiescing to the university's censorship. YAF did not acquiesce; it sued the university. In fact, YAF made the same choice that Coulter made—not to risk seeing young men and women bleed in the quad when the university had already demonstrated its unwillingness to protect speakers and students from mob violence. Instead of pointing fingers at one another, conservatives, and others interested in free speech, should be focused on the university's dereliction.

■ ESPN is in trouble. It has committed huge sums for rights fees to broadcast live sports, its subscriber base is declining, and it just laid off dozens of employees, including some of its most famous "front-facing" talents. While "cord-cutting," the process of debundling cable services in part through greater use of streaming video, is costing ESPN revenue, its decision to politicize its programming content seems to be changing its audience. A media-research firm recently found that ESPN's viewing demographic has moved left along with its content—at least in one key city—and it makes sense that, as the channel keeps moving left, it will decrease its potential audience. Not every sports fan likes to celebrate Caitlyn Jenner's transition or to listen to hours of

commentary praising Colin Kaepernick's alleged moral courage. ESPN's demise is hardly imminent, but the audience for endless coverage of the Victimhood Olympics is limited.

■ We're into the Soviet-revisionism portion of Bill Nye's career. As part of his new Netflix show *Bill Nye Saves the World*, Nye recently aired a segment titled "My Sex Junk," which features Nye, who holds a bachelor of science degree in mechanical engineering, gyrating in the background as actress Rachel Bloom sings about how "sexuality's a spectrum." But in a 1996 episode of Nye's previous show *Bill Nye the Science Guy*, a young woman explains that "inside each of our cells are these things called chromosomes, and they control whether we become a boy or a girl. See, there are only two possibilities: XX, a girl, or XY, a boy." There is some dispute about who did the deleting—Netflix or Buena Vista TV, which holds the program's distribution rights—but the episode in its Netflix version no longer includes that scene. Hypothesis: What's changed in the two-decade interim between shows has nothing to do with science.

■ Adolph Kiefer was born in 1918 in Chicago. His parents had been born in Germany. Adolph became one of the greatest swimmers in the land, making the Olympic team at age 17. He won the gold medal—in the Berlin Olympics. Another Adolph, or Adolf, wanted to meet this boy. That was the chancellor of Germany. Hitler considered Kiefer a son, or near son, of Germany. So he came with his entourage, including Goering. After shaking the swimmer's hand, Hitler pronounced him "a perfect example of the true Aryan." Before long, this true American was in the U.S. Navy, designing a program to save our seamen from drowning. He later went into business and has now died at 98. His life was an example of the nature of America and Americans—a concept that Hitler and other racialists have always had trouble understanding. R.I.P.

HEALTH-CARE REFORM

Doctoring the Bill

HOUSE Republicans passed a health-care bill that is flawed, unpopular, and being received by Democrats and the press as an act of wanton cruelty. They were nonetheless right to pass the bill, because it offers a chance to set health-care policy on a better course than Obamacare—if the Senate improves it.

In the run-up to the House vote on the bill, the Democrats seized on an amendment that they claimed threatened people with preexisting conditions, who sometimes had difficulty finding insurance before Obamacare. While some Democrats claimed that the amendment would put nearly half of the U.S. population at risk of financial or medical calamity, the truth is that it is carefully limited. Under the amendment, a state could allow insurers to charge higher premiums, for one year, for people who were entering the insurance rolls with a preexisting condition. People who had maintained their insurance coverage (which they would be getting financial assistance from the federal government to do) could not be charged extra for any medical condition. The hope is that by keeping people from gaming the system—going without insurance while healthy, then buying it at favorable rates when sick—the change would enable a reduction in premiums.

Some liberals have engaged in a particularly despicable distortion of this provision, saying that the bill "defines rape as a preexisting condition." No part of the bill does this, of course. And nearly every state has laws that prevent women from having to pay higher premiums because of medical conditions resulting from rape.

The second attack on the bill is that it takes health insurance away from millions of people. Most of those millions are buying coverage now only to avoid Obamacare's fines on people who forgo insurance. The Republican bill eliminates those fines and so the Congressional Budget Office predicts that they will leave the insurance rolls. Several million other people, however, would lose insurance that they want because the bill also rolls back Obamacare's expansion of Medicaid.

That program provides substandard insurance at a high cost, and the bill's reforms to it are generally valuable. But the bill could usefully be changed to get more people into private coverage. The subsidies the bill provides to help with insurance purchases should be augmented for people who make a little too much money to qualify for Medicaid; they should also be augmented for people in their fifties or early sixties, whose policies are more expensive. Insurance companies that benefit from the subsidies should be required to offer at least one policy with a premium equal to the size of the subsidies. That way people could get, at no out-of-pocket expense, some protection from the cost of a medical emergency. States could also assign such coverage by default to people who do not use their subsidy.

Such changes to the bill would mean that it yielded a smaller change to the number of people with insurance. More people would have catastrophic coverage, and changes in government policy would cause less disruption in insurance markets. The bill would be more popular, too. The result would be a health-care market that still had a significantly larger role for the federal government than we would prefer, but one in which it was significantly easier for people to choose the insurance they want.

Criticism of the bill has featured a high ratio of hysteria to sense. Senate Republicans should set calmly to improving it.

MARK WILSON/GETTY IMAGES

President Donald Trump and Republican representatives appear in the Rose Garden following House passage of health-care legislation, May 4, 2017.

SARA D. DAVIS/GETTY IMAGES

Populism's False Start

The Trump administration should become more responsive to voters' concerns

BY RAMESH PONNURU & RICHARD LOWRY

THE early Trump administration has been many things, but "populist" hasn't truly been one of them.

When you discount the tweets, the all-consuming media controversies, the drama over personnel, and the Russia investigation—granted, that's a lot of discounting—it has been a fairly conventional Republican administration on policy.

The major legislation on the agenda so far—the health-care and tax bills—is shaping up about how you'd expect in any Republican administration. Action on trade has been underwhelming. Trump pulled out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, but Ted Cruz, too, said he opposed the deal. (So did Hillary Clinton, for that matter.) Measures being taken against imports of Canadian timber and Chinese steel, both longtime sore spots, are well within the bounds of the policy of past administrations. Trump puts more emphasis on immigration enforcement than his primary-campaign rivals would, but the three positions that made him so distinctive on immigration—the Wall, a Muslim ban, and mass deportation—are proving more difficult to implement than he thought or were left along the wayside during the general election.

In short, the Trump administration hasn't created a new populist departure in American politics; it hasn't even—as some of us hoped—nudged Republican policymaking in a more populist direction to better account for the interests of working-class voters. The early months of the Trump administration have proven to be populism's false start.

Why is this?

There is no Trumpist wing of Congress. The most pro-Trump faction in Congress during the election was the Freedom Caucus, which shared Trump's disdain for the Republican establishment. But the Freedom Caucus is made up of ideological conservatives concerned with limiting government, not Trumpian populists focused on the interests of the working class. When the Freedom Caucus helped bring down the initial version of the House health-care bill, Trump briefly went after it.

Even in the White House itself, it turns out that Trumpists are only one faction. This is, in part, because there was no populist staff-in-waiting in Washington to draw on. The people in Congress with the greatest affinity for Trump-style populism were Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama and Representative Dave Brat of Virginia, who beat Eric Cantor in a primary in an immigration-focused insurgency. Sessions, an early Trump endorser, has former staff scattered through the administration, most importantly Stephen Miller, the policy director in the White House. Otherwise there was no well of populist talent to draw on, except a few refugees from *Breitbart*.

They haven't had the oomph or the numbers to prevail over the establishment, "globalist," or Trump-family elements in the White House. They haven't decisively lost to these other factions—Steve Bannon hasn't been ousted—but they have been more embattled than anyone would have thought a few months ago.

On top of this, the intellectual spadework hadn't been done prior to the ascent of Trumpism. There is no populist think tank on the right. The institution that is closest to Trump is the Heritage Foundation, but—as with the Freedom Caucus—this is an ideological mismatch. Heritage is perhaps the conservative think tank most devoted to policies rooted in the 1980s, making it a strange partner for a president who ran a campaign trashing the old Reaganite pieties.

The signature piece of Trumpian journalism in the campaign was Mike Anton's "Flight 93" essay, which was essentially a highly emotional case that electing Hillary Clinton would be a catastrophe. And Anton is now in the administration, which would make it impossible for him to flesh out a Trumpian populism even if he were so inclined. Talk radio is pro-Trump, but not overwhelmingly concerned with policy. *Breitbart* is a collection of, in Lionel Trilling's phrase, irritable mental gestures. The Trumpian journal *American Affairs* is playing catch-up, out with its inaugural issue about a month ago. It may be that by the time it establishes itself, assuming it does, Trump will have wound up in a different place.

And this may be the biggest problem for Trumpism: The president himself, who recently called himself a globalist *and* a nationalist, isn't a reliable Trumpist.

Some of the core themes of his campaign could, it's true, be combined into a reasonably coherent view of government policy. A Trumpist philosophy would feature skepticism of trade, immigration, and foreign intervention, a moderate social conservatism, and support for government activism to benefit the working class. Think of it as Buchananism with less zeal for small government and less religious traditionalism.

But Trump himself shows no signs of having thought about his program in

this way, or of having thought much about a program of action he would undertake as president at all. Neither he nor any of his aides put any effort into rethinking a broad range of policies to fit with his new approach. On many issues, then, he simply defaulted to the conventional Republican position. He certainly didn't build a new consensus in his party—or even among his own aides—for new positions.

If Trump were a different kind of political leader, his longstanding preoccupation with foreign trade might have moved him to develop strong convictions about the flaws of NAFTA and how to address them, or about whether designating China a currency manipulator would advance his objectives. Perhaps that kind of political leader would not have had the visceral appeal that Trump in fact had to many people. But if he had won office, there would have been more follow-through. Trump is instead up for grabs on these issues. He has already flip-flopped on the currency question, and nobody knows whether he will really press for major changes to NAFTA.

Many Republicans, especially on the Hill, have felt only relief on seeing the party domesticate Trump. And some relief is justified. It's good that Trump isn't going to wreck NATO and that the likelihood of a trade war has declined. But Trump's failure to build a sensible conservative version of populism comes at a price: Much of the party's agenda remains defective in the very ways that contributed to Trump's rise in the first place. It is too geared toward the interests of rich people and big business, and insufficiently relevant to the challenges of today's economy.

How might Republicans—whatever their attitude toward the president himself—adapt their program to make it more responsive to contemporary concerns? They could scale back their tax cuts for the highest earners in order to provide more middle-class tax relief. They could alter their health-care bill so that it shifts more Medicaid recipients into the private insurance market and deprives fewer of them of coverage altogether. They could reduce low-skilled legal immigration in addition to ratcheting up enforcement of the laws against illegal immigration. And they could make a major push to expand educational options beyond the traditional four-year college, notably including apprenticeships (an idea whose potential appeal to this president should not require elaboration).

This is a sketch, to be sure. Yet it still represents more thought on the question of how to match the Republican agenda to the moment than we have seen from the White House or the Congress. Republicans may be so powerful right now that they see no need for any recalibration. But their hold on power is threatened by the perception that their agenda would harm, or at least not help, most Americans. The working-class voters who supported both Obama and Trump, meanwhile, could produce more surprises. Perhaps Trump's most dedicated followers will be disillusioned and go looking for a new charismatic leader. Or perhaps Trump will find that his alliance with conservatives is lowering his public standing and end it.

Victory in November 2016 surprised most Republicans and gave them an opportunity to build a new governing majority. So far they are squandering it. NR

A History Lesson for The President

Trump understands Andrew Jackson better than the Civil War

BY RICHARD BROOKHISER

In an interview with Salena Zito of the *Washington Examiner*, President Trump offered his thoughts on Andrew Jackson and the Civil War, which gave everyone something to talk about besides North Korea and health care.

Parsing Trump's remarks is complicated by his stream-of-unconsciousness style. Drilling down, he turns out to have been half right and half wrong. Scholars' reactions to him were as mixed, in their way, as Trump himself.

This is what Trump said: "I mean, had Andrew Jackson been a little later you wouldn't have had the Civil War. . . . He was really angry [about what] he saw . . . with regard to the Civil War, he said, 'There's no reason for this.' . . .

"People don't ask that question, but why was there the Civil War? Why could that one not have been worked out?"

Trump's most obvious mistake was his math. Jackson left the White House in 1837, the Civil War began in 1861. Twenty-four years is longer than a little later. Trump corrected himself in a tweet: "President Andrew Jackson, who died 16 years before the Civil War started, saw it coming and was angry." Closer, but no cigar: Sixteen years—four presidential terms—is still a fairly long time.

If Trump's math was fuzzy, his view of Jackson's character and opinions was clear and clearly right.

Jackson faced his own proto–Civil War in 1832 when South Carolina, led by his soon-to-be-former vice president John C. Calhoun, announced that it would not collect the tariff of 1828 within its borders. The tariff, Calhoun explained, was protectionist, therefore discriminatory against high-importing states, therefore unconstitutional. He asserted South Carolina's right to disobey it.

Jackson disagreed. "The Union," he declared in a public toast—"it must and shall be preserved." ("The Union," Calhoun responded—"next to our liberties, most dear.") Jackson got Congress to pass a bill allowing him to collect the tariff in South Carolina by force, and let it be known he would happily lead the troops himself. South Carolina backed down; in return, the tariff was lowered. Jackson later said that one of his regrets in life was not hanging Calhoun.

Trump's scholarly critics, knowing Jackson's record, made a more serious point: Great men do not make history. David Blight, professor of American history at Yale, told *Mother Jones* that Trump's remarks were "like saying that one strong, aggressive leader can shape, prevent, move history however he wishes. This is simply [a] 5th grade understanding of history or worse."

True. But denying the role of strong leaders is simply a grad-school understanding of history or worse. Strong leaders never act as they wish or all alone, and they know it. Jackson had to mobilize support and lead it. One reason he facilitated the expulsion of the Cherokees from Georgia was to keep that state in his corner during his fight with South Carolina.

The crisis of 1860–61 was far more serious than Jackson's. South Carolina, which seceded in December 1860, was no longer an outlier but a leader, with six more states following it out of the Union by February 1861. Their grievance was not a single law, but the political system itself, which had put Abraham Lincoln, a Republican (and, in their view, an abolitionist), in the White House.

But personality still mattered. The outgoing administration of James Buchanan was weary and inept, the incoming Lincoln administration was slow to find its feet. A determined president of military mien might have made southern fire-eaters revise their calculations. The clash might have been delayed, or brought on more advantageously for the Union.

More disturbing was Trump wondering whether the Civil War might not have been "worked out."

This was in part businessman's talk—the kind of thing I have been hearing all my journalistic life from executives, usually Republican, who ask why politicians don't "do what is reasonable," "use common sense," etc., etc. (Politicians don't because they are moved by ambition, and by different judgments of what is

reasonable.) With Trump the sentiment came filtered through the ego of the self-described artist of deal-making.

But Trump's thoughts about the Civil War, like his thoughts about Andrew Jackson, were not plucked from thin air. They are the natural first reaction of anyone thinking about the carnage of the Civil War. They were also the scholarly consensus of the early and mid 20th century. Couldn't this have been stopped? we ask, appalled. Yes it could have, said scholars 70 to 90 years ago.

That consensus had a name—the "Repressible Conflict," inverting William Seward's incendiary 1858 argument that there was an irrepressible conflict between slavery and liberty. Biographer Albert Beveridge put the consensus view pithily in a letter to economic historian Charles Beard. "The deeper I get into this thing"—Beveridge was working on a biography of Lincoln—"the clearer it becomes to me that the whole wretched mess would have been straightened out . . . if the abolitionists had let matters alone." *Straightened out* is almost Trump's formulation.

One way of avoiding the whole wretched mess would have been if slave owners had agreed that their institution ought to end sometime. A number of prominent slave owners—James Madison, John Marshall, Henry Clay—belonged to the American Colonization Society, which founded Liberia in 1821 as a refuge for freed American slaves, though it only ever harbored a few thousand. Could buy-outs have increased the number? Madison and Thomas Jefferson had come up with figures—$600 million and 900 million, respectively—that seemed prohibitive. I have met cotton determinists who argue that if the whole wretched mess could have been put off for only a few years, when Egyptian cotton came onto the world market, American slave owners would then have been eager to sell. I am not so sure. Slavery was never solely an economic proposition. Owning people is fun, once the initial repugnance is overcome, and Americans are ingenious enough to have thought of other uses for their possessions.

A more likely way of avoiding the whole wretched mess would have been for the country simply to accept slavery's survival. But slave-state leaders did not want their institution simply to survive—they wanted it to spread to the territories: existing ones like Kansas, and soon-to-be-acquired ones in the Caribbean basin (pro-slavery filibusters tried to take over various parts of Central America and Mexico throughout the 1850s). Influential northern Democrats, most prominently Illinois senator Stephen Douglas, were happy to accept such a trajectory.

ROMAN GENN

That deal was never worked out because enough abolitionists, ex-Democrats, and ex-Whigs formed a new party, the Republican party, to stop it. This is history a Republican president ought to know.

Charles Kesler, professor of government and political science at Claremont McKenna College (and NR veteran), hailed President Trump, in a recent *New York Times* op-ed piece, for "redirecting Republican policies toward the pre–New Deal, pre–Cold War party of William McKinley and Coolidge, with its roots in the party of Abraham Lincoln." Which presidents of that Republican party would have asked, with Trump, why the Civil War could not have been "worked out"? Not Lincoln, certainly, nor Grant, nor TR (who called Jefferson Davis "an unhung traitor"). Beveridge, before he turned to biography, was indeed a Republican senator from Indiana. Is that the kind of Republicanism that should be revived and applauded?

Great men have an effect on the world, not least because of what they think about the world. But ordinary men matter too, especially in democratic ages. Last fall, a friend of mine in Wisconsin took me to Ripon, to see the Little White Schoolhouse, which claims to be the birthplace of the Republican party (Michigan also has a contestant). There in 1854 twenty locals met to protest a law, shepherded through Congress by Stephen Douglas, opening Kansas to slavery. It was men such as these, in dozens of places, who made the movement that Lincoln and Seward led.

Figuring out the motivations of masses of men can be daunting. Tocqueville warned that modern historians are tempted to look for a shortcut and find it in some vast, impersonal cause. For them, "it is not enough to show what events have occurred: They wish to show that events could not have occurred otherwise." But history can jump several ways, because men can. To trace the past we have to follow men's minds. To act rightly now, we—Trump, professors, all of us—have to be clear in our own. **NR**

Tax Federalism

Ending the state-and-local deduction would help make blue states pay their way

BY STEPHEN EIDE

At this early stage in the debate over President Trump's tax plan, much of the discussion has centered on his proposal to eliminate the state-and-local-tax deduction. Conservatives have long viewed closing this loophole as the great lost cause of President Reagan's 1986 tax reform, though it has sometimes been criticized by Democrats as well. Everyone agrees that repealing the state-and-local-tax deduction would disproportionately affect blue states, where taxes are high and rising due to ongoing fiscal strain. It might be possible to make good on the Trump administration's pledge of one of the biggest tax cuts in American history without targeting this particular deduction. But it probably won't be possible to do so in a fiscally responsible way.

When a filer tallies up how much he owes the IRS in a given year, a deduction shrinks his "adjusted gross income," creating a smaller base to which the federal income-tax structure is applied. The theory is that you shouldn't have to pay full income taxes on earnings that you used to cover certain unavoidable or justifiable expenses. Seventy percent of households claim the standard deduction, currently $12,600 for a married couple filing jointly. The remaining 30 percent "itemize" deductions, and more or less all of them claim state and local taxes paid. They take how much they paid in property and income or, in rarer instances, sales taxes and multiply that sum by their top marginal federal income-tax rate (the highest is now 39.6 percent). This figure may then be subtracted from their taxable earnings.

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By granting filers the right to claim as a deduction the taxes they have paid to other governments, federal law essentially gives states and cities first dibs on taxable income. For this reason, the state-and-local-tax deduction has always held an appeal for many federalists. It holds an even stronger appeal for filers in the upper income-tax brackets and for blue-state politicians. According to the most recent data from the IRS, only 4 percent of all filers had an adjusted gross income of $200,000 or more, but this cohort represented 13 percent of all those who itemized taxes paid and accounted for 47 percent of the total amount claimed. The more income you earn, the more likely you are to itemize deductions, the more property taxes and state and local income taxes you are likely to owe each year, and the higher your top marginal federal income-tax rate is likely to be.

As for blue-state officials, they appreciate how the deduction exports a portion of the high taxes they impose on households to federal taxpayers. The larger a jurisdiction's tax burden, the larger the subsidy it receives via the federal tax code. The ten states that Hillary Clinton won most decisively, which are home to 31 percent of the total population, enjoyed 54 percent of the value of the state-and-local-tax deduction.

But the deduction has long had many detractors as well. It is rare to come across a policy proposal pitched as "tax reform" that does not somehow target it. If you want to cut tax rates or free up revenues for some other purpose without exploding the deficit, then you need to go where the money is. Among tax expenditures for individuals, only those related to health and retirement benefits ($235 billion and $140 billion, respectively, in the 2018 fiscal year) and capital gains ($108 billion) cost more than the state-and-local-tax deduction ($103 billion). The deduction is inefficient with respect to the tax code (because lost revenue must be recaptured via higher rates) and from a fiscal-policy standpoint.

Taxpayers should be brought as close as possible to the cost of government. Not only does the deduction reduce the "tax price" of public services by subsidizing them; it also creates—because only general forms of taxation are deductible—an incentive to rely more on income and property taxes than on user fees. As the Tax Policy Center has noted, unlike most forms of aid to states and cities tracked by the federal Office of Management and Budget, the state-and-local-tax deduction is subject to practically no oversight. The Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders campaigns both called for limiting the state-and-local-tax deduction because of how much it benefits high earners.

But however broad the support for repealing or reducing this deduction may sometimes seem, we won't know how deep it runs until the tax-reform battle is truly joined. Much would hinge on whether those freed-up revenues were repurposed toward new tax breaks or programs or toward cutting rates, and on who would benefit. New York, New Jersey, Illinois, and California are home to 35 House Republicans, or roughly the same number as the Freedom Caucus's membership. Given how much revenue is at stake with this particular deduction, blue-state Republicans in Congress could thwart or water down tax reform in a manner similar to the way in which the Freedom Caucus brought down the first iteration of the American Health Care Act in March.

In trying to game out the implications of eliminating the deduction, it is important to appreciate the strain under which the blue-state fiscal model now labors. This model is characterized by high taxes made necessary by robust public services and commitments to generous pay and benefit packages for unionized work forces. State and city Democrats stubbornly refuse to acknowledge any

Taxpayers should be brought as close as possible to the cost of government.

tension between those two priorities, but it is very real. Many progressives would like to significantly expand services, but their ability to do so is now highly constrained by retirement-benefit costs.

According to the most recent data from the Census Bureau, state and local general revenues increased 36 percent over the previous decade, whereas public-pension costs doubled. Since state and local governments are nearly always subject to balanced-budget requirements, increased spending on pensions leaves that much less for education, infrastructure, safety-net programs, and so on. New York City politicians are at present up in arms over potential federal cuts to public housing. But city government would be much better positioned to address the New York City Housing Authority's $17 billion maintenance backlog had it not also run up $150 billion in unfunded retirement-benefit liabilities. Taxes are already high in blue states (they dominate the top rankings of the Tax Foundation's annual report "State-Local Tax Burden"), but the dreadful math on public pensions makes further income- and property-tax increases a question of when, not if. This means that, without a course correction, federal taxpayers are set to shoulder an even greater share of states' and localities' fiscal irresponsibility in coming years.

Many households in the middle and upper-middle class benefit from the state-and-local-tax deduction. But the GOP plan would significantly shield them from the impact of its elimination by doubling the standard deduction to around $25,000. Many households that had found it economic to itemize would instead opt for the standard deduction (the average total deduction claimed for filers making less than $500,000 is about $23,000). As for the highest earners, who on average benefit the most from the deduction and are also most capable of relocating or reorganizing their finances, they might choose to move out of blue states for more-favorable tax jurisdictions. Outmigration can be deadly for a fiscal model that's highly reliant on income inequality. In California, Connecticut, and New York City, around half of all personal income taxes are paid by filers who report more than $500,000. Texas and Florida do not have a state income tax, and their already strong appeal would be intensified by the elimination of the state-and-local-tax deduction.

Providing no-strings-attached general Treasury support for states and cities with a long record of putting off difficult fiscal choices doesn't strengthen federalism. It weakens it. On many social issues, state and local Democratic politicians are busy trying to develop their own brand of "progressive federalism." That's fair enough, but when it comes to their benefit programs and work forces, they should expect to pay their own way. Federalism is a two-way street. Eliminating the taxes-paid deduction would, fiscally speaking, be a way to test whether progressive federalists have the courage of their convictions. NR

Owning Their Future

The joy of DECA

BY JAY NORDLINGER

Anaheim, Calif.

SIXTEEN thousand high-school students have converged on Anaheim, but not to go to Disneyland. Well, they will do that, too, most of them. Mainly, they are here to participate in a giant career-development conference. The theme of this conference is "Own Your Future." The participants, the high-schoolers, are walking around in blue blazers, with a patch that says "DECA."

What does "DECA" stand for? "It stands for truth, justice, and the American way," says John Fistolera, an official with DECA. This is a good quip. "We're about free enterprise," says Fistolera, "and free enterprise is the American way."

For decades, DECA has been known as "DECA," plain and simple. (The word is pronounced "Decka.") But, once upon a time, the letters stood for "Distributive Education Clubs of America." The term "distributive education" is now antique—even more antique than "voc-ed" (for "vocational education"). The preferred term now is "career education," or "career and technical education." I myself had never heard the term "distributive education" until a few years ago, when I was interviewing Harold Hamm.

He is the 13th and last child of cotton sharecroppers in Oklahoma—and the leading oilman in the United States. When he was in high school, in the early 1960s, he took part in a D.E. program. It meant that you got school credit for working. And the classes you took probably related to the work you were doing. Young Hamm was working at a truck stop. And he wrote a paper on oil exploration.

His D.E. teacher was a man named Jewell Ridge. The teacher meant a lot to Hamm, and to many other students, most of them poor. When Ridge died, Hamm delivered a eulogy at his funeral. Recounting all this to me, Hamm got tears in his eyes.

DECA was founded in 1946, when going to college was not de rigueur. Young people needed skills for the work world. They still do, of course. But college is a box that increasingly must be checked. Most DECA students are college-bound. Nonetheless, the organization still serves kids who aren't.

Here in Anaheim, I meet a young man who is going straight to the Air Force. Another one is joining the family business, to learn the ropes.

DECA has 200,000 members—student members—in 3,500 high schools. There is also a college division, though smaller (15,000 members in 275 colleges and universities). The fundamentals of business are taught in the classroom, and they are buttressed by encounters with real businessmen—practitioners. DECA is a kind of partnership between schools and the business world.

I particularly like a phrase from DECA literature: DECA aids in "preparing well-adjusted, employable citizens."

In addition to studies, internships, and the like, there is competition—the thrill of competition. DECA stages competitions on the local, regional, state, and national levels. These competitions test a variety of business skills. The conference here in Anaheim is the big enchilada, the Super Bowl, the national finals.

Did I say "national"? They want you to say "international." Actually, I should have said "Olympics," rather than "Super Bowl." There are students here from all 50 states plus a handful of countries: Spain, South Korea, China, and Canada. The Canadians are very competitive when it comes to DECA. Canadians? Mild-mannered, polite, self-effacing Canadians? Yes. Think hockey.

For many students, wherever they're from, DECA provides an opportunity to scratch a competitive itch. A lot of DECA kids are devotees of *Shark Tank*, a reality-TV show. On this show, entrepreneurs, or would-be entrepreneurs, pitch a business plan to a panel of seasoned, savvy investors—the "sharks." One young man in Anaheim says, "I may not be good at sports—but I'm good at DECA." He is a "decathlete," in a pun you hear.

When competing, the students must wear their blazers—their blue DECA blazers. Why? This blazer is an equalizer. Rich kids, poor kids: They all look the same, essentially. No one need worry about the vexing question of dress.

DECA students, those 200,000, mirror the general high-school population: in the male–female ratio, for instance. But they differ in one respect: They tend to come from poorer families. They may have an unfortunate cycle to break out of. They may be hungry to get ahead and prove themselves.

There is a young woman here who has never been out of her hometown (in Pennsylvania). Neither have members of her family. She is here thanks to a scholarship from AT&T. Her world has been vastly widened.

Among the 16,000 in Anaheim, there is a great diversity. They come from every corner and in many flavors. I meet Italian-American kids from New Jersey—right out of Central Casting. Mexican-American kids from Albuquerque. Black kids from the Deep South, and Rust Belt cities.

For many students, wherever they're from, DECA provides an opportunity to scratch a competitive itch.

There are many, many South Asian kids—the sons and daughters of immigrants from India. No doubt the fathers of many of them are motel owners, pharmacists, and engineers. No doubt these kids have been instilled with the values of hard work, entrepreneurship, and upward mobility.

One of the things students in Anaheim do is run for office: the various offices of the wide DECA network. On an exhibition floor, there is a booth promoting the candidacy of one Vishwesh Ravva. He lives in Memphis and is running for vice president of DECA's southern region. Campaign slogan: "Wish for Vish."

When I look at these kids in their blue blazers—planning for the future, thinking about their place in the economy, dreaming of what they can contribute—I think they are as American as Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer ever were.

Speaking of planning for the future: The conference includes a kind of life-skills program called "Aspire." Students

hear about paying for college. They hear about careers—fields of endeavor, fields of employment. They write a "personal mission statement." They learn about budgeting, credit-card debt, etc. Essentials.

Also, they have a great opportunity to "network": meeting their fellow DECA-ites from all over the country (and beyond). These contacts may come in handy. Furthermore, they have a chance to meet with "executive mentors," men and women who have made their way in business and in life, and have something to impart to others.

One of these mentors is Allan Bell, of Atlanta. He grew up in Detroit—hard, hard Detroit—the youngest of 16 children. His mother died when he was ten. When he was twelve, he knew that he wanted to be an accountant. Yes, an accountant. And he is a CPA today.

He is also starting a DECA-esque organization, dedicated to teaching young people about entrepreneurship. I say to him, maybe too snarkily, "We can't all be social workers." He responds, "Nor *should* we."

Meeting with their mentors, the students ask such questions as "What did college mean to you?" "How would you do it differently?" "What was your first job?" "What did you learn from it?" "How did you get to where you are?" And there is a hardy perennial: "What advice would you give your younger self?" An interesting, maybe awkward question.

JAY NORDLINGER

On the exhibition floor, there are booths representing many business schools and institutes—including a hotel school in Lausanne. There are also booths representing businesses, such as Sparkling Ice, a beverage line. ("Never Too Busy to Get Fizzy.") Businesspeople meet potential future employees. The students meet potential future employers. It's win-win, in that capitalist way.

Elsewhere on the floor, students are engaged in madly intense video games. What I have called "games" are VBCs, or "Virtual Business Challenges." These challenges are divided into several categories, including hotels, restaurants, retailing, and sports management. Consider the restaurant challenge: Students have to figure out menu pricing, purchasing, staffing, a dining layout, a kitchen layout, and so on. What's more, they have to do it under the gun—on the clock—competing against others. They are zealously focused.

Later on, thousands of DECA kids will sit in front of hundreds of judges, participating in an array of competitions. There is an introductory level, which involves role-playing: How do you train a new employee? How do you deal with an angry customer? And at the top level, you submit a 30-page business prospectus. You are really in the shark tank.

Some of these kids have businesses already. Horse-grooming, for example. I hear about a kid from last year who started a business online. He sells vintage and limited-edition sneakers. And he has made a lot of money. This is an advance beyond the old lemonade stand (though kids still create and man those).

The judges come from various sectors of the business world. They may be with well-known companies, such as Marriott and Otis Spunkmeyer (a nice cookie). They may be dot-com whizzes. Or franchisees. Or bankers. Or even officials of the Small Business Administration. Many are DECA alumni.

There is a family feeling about DECA—"a culture," as someone says. DECA people, young and old, like to wear DECA paraphernalia (quite apart from the blue blazer). They like the identity, the brand. And one DECA generation helps the next.

I meet two students from Dallas who have just been through a round of competition. They were charged with outlining plans for a fall festival—a fall music festival. Forty performers on three stages, offering all genres of music. And the students had 30 minutes to prepare their plans. How did they do? They're not sure about the judge, but they themselves feel pretty good about it.

And you can feel pretty good about America, as you survey this conference. "What a great organization," I hear a woman sigh to her husband. All of us oldsters are suckers for kids in blue blazers. Not all of them are angels, let's not kid ourselves. But when you peek in on DECA, you truly think that, for all its problems, America will steam on. NR

SARAH L. VOISIN/THE *WASHINGTON POST* VIA GETTY IMAGES

Rioters burn trash cans and newspaper stands in Washington, D.C., on Inauguration Day, January 20, 2017.

Everyone an Enemy

The vague and dangerous ideology of leftist violence

BY IAN TUTTLE

THERE is currently, on the streets, smashing storefronts and setting things on fire, a group called "Antifa," for "anti-fascist." Antifa are not a new phenomenon; they surfaced during the Occupy movement, and during the anti-globalization protests of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Antifa movements began in early-20th-century Europe, when fascism was a concrete and urgent concern, and they remain active on the Continent. Lately, Antifa have emerged as the militant fringe of #TheResistance against Donald Trump—who, they maintain, is a fascist, ushering into power a fascist regime. In Washington, D.C., Antifa spent the morning of Inauguration Day lighting trash cans on fire, throwing rocks and bottles at police officers, setting ablaze a limousine, and tossing chunks of pavement through the windows of several businesses. On February 1, Antifa set fires and stormed buildings at the University of California–Berkeley to prevent an appearance by *Breitbart* provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos. (They succeeded.) In April, they threatened violence if Ann Coulter spoke on the campus; when the university and local law enforcement refused to find a secure location for her to speak, she withdrew, saying the situation was too dangerous.

These and similar episodes call to mind Woody Allen's character's observation in the 1979 film *Manhattan*: "A satirical piece in the *Times* is one thing, but bricks and baseball bats really gets right to the point of it."

ALL politics is, at some level, a vocabulary contest, and it happens that American politics is currently engaged in a fierce fight over, and about, words. The central word at issue is "fascist," but there are others: "racist," "sexist," and the like. A great many people are currently involved in a turf war, aiming to stake out conceptual territory for these charged words: What is fascism? What isn't it?

An illustration: In April, Heather Mac Donald was physically blocked from an auditorium at Claremont McKenna College, in Claremont, Calif., where she was scheduled to speak. Mac Donald is a scholar at the Manhattan Institute, a prominent right-of-center think tank. She is a noted expert

on law enforcement, especially the complex relationship between law enforcement and minority communities. She was among the first to theorize that anti-police protests in Ferguson, Baltimore, Milwaukee, and elsewhere have facilitated an increase in urban crime; the so-called Ferguson Effect is now a matter of consensus among experts on both the left and the right. National Review readers will be well acquainted with Mac Donald; she publishes in these pages regularly.

A group of students from Pomona College, part of the consortium of Claremont schools, penned a letter to Pomona president David Oxtoby, affirming the protest at their sister institution. Mac Donald, they wrote, should not be permitted to speak; she is "a fascist, a white supremacist, a warhawk, a transphobe, a queerphobe, a classist, and ignorant of interlocking systems of domination that produce the lethal conditions under which oppressed peoples are forced to live." Mac Donald was not offering any material for substantive intellectual discussion; she was, they claimed, challenging "the right of Black people to exist."

The last is, to those who are familiar with Mac Donald's work, an odd charge. Among her central claims is that the reluctance of law enforcement to police minority communities has disproportionately affected those same communities; more young black men are being killed by St. Louis PD's hands-off approach than were being killed by "proactive policing." Mac Donald does not oppose "the right of Black people to exist"; she maintains that it is being threatened by militant anti-police sentiment.

But substantiating accusations that Mac Donald is a "fascist, a white supremacist," etc., is not the point. The point is finding charged language to signify that Mac Donald ought to be *persona non grata*, without needing to prove the case. The outraged undergraduates of Pomona College and Antifa are different in only one regard, albeit an important one: Antifa are willing to employ muscle to achieve their ends.

The purpose of words is, the philosopher Josef Pieper suggested, "to convey reality." But it is clear that, for Antifa, the purpose is to cloak reality. Antifa's reason for describing something or someone as "fascist" is not that it is actually fascist (although perhaps on occasion they do stumble onto the genuine item), but that describing it that way is politically advantageous. Likewise with any number of other slurs. Antifa are in effect claiming to oppose everything that is bad—and, of course, it is Antifa who decide what is bad. Hence the organizers of the Inauguration Day protests could write, as their mission statement, that "#DisruptJ20 rejects all forms of domination and oppression." That is a good monopoly if you can get it.

Roger Scruton, in *A Political Philosophy: Arguments for Conservatism* (2006), examines how the manipulation of language facilitated the Communist enterprise and its myriad evils:

> Who and what am I? Who and what are you? Those are the questions that plagued the Russian romantics, and to which they

> produced answers that mean nothing in themselves, but which dictated the fate of those to whom they were applied: . . . bourgeoisie and proletariat; capitalist and socialist; exploiter and producer: and all with the simple and glorious meaning of them and us!

What George Orwell called "Newspeak" in his novel *1984* "occurs whenever the main purpose of language—which is to describe reality—is replaced by the rival purpose of asserting power over it." The latter is the purpose of "anti-fascism." Who and what are you? A fascist. Who and what am I? An anti-fascist. Them and us, tidily distinguished.

REALITY shapes language, but language also shapes reality. We think by means of words. Our perceptions change as the words change, and our actions often follow. Back to the Communists: No one killed affluent peasants. The Party "liquidated kulaks."

Using words to cloak reality makes it easier to dispose of that reality. Antifa are not satisfied with labeling people fascists; they want them to bleed on that account. On Inauguration Day, in Washington, D.C., an Antifa rioter sucker-punched white nationalist Richard Spencer. Spencer is as near to a prominent fascist as one will find in the United States today, and a bona fide racist (an Antifa twofer). But the imperative of anti-fascism, to reject "all forms of domination and oppression," applies by anti-fascists' own inexorable logic no less to Heather Mac Donald—or to the Republicans of Multnomah County, whom Antifa threatened to physically assault if they were permitted to participate as usual in the annual Portland Rose Festival parade. Why not punch them, too?

Reality shapes language, but language also shapes reality. We think by means of words. Our perceptions change as the words change, and our actions often follow.

At *The Nation* in January, Natasha Lennard showed how this logic works in practice. "Fascism is imbued with violence and secures itself politically through the use or threat of it," writes Lennard, quoting from *Militant Anti-Fascism: A Hundred Years of Resistance*, a 2015 book written by anti-fascist blogger "Malatesta" (Errico Malatesta was an Italian anarchist committed to revolutionary violence). As a result, there can be little question of the necessity of "counter-violence"—"as in Ferguson, as in Baltimore, as in Watts, as in counter-riots against the Ku Klux Klan, as in slave revolts." There are a great many questions ignored here—to take one obvious example, whether the riots that consumed Baltimore in late April 2015 are in any meaningful way comparable to nineteenth-century slave rebellions—but consider for now just the use of "counter-violence." It depends entirely on accepting the premise that Donald Trump is a fascist. Since fascism is "imbued with violence," a violent response to the Trump administration is therefore necessary.

This sort of reasoning, such as it is, gets a more extensive workout in Emmett Rensin's "From Mother Jones to Middlebury: The Problem and Promise of Political Violence in Trump's America," published in *Foreign Policy* in March. Rensin purports to assay recent left-wing political violence, but his clear if unstated purpose is to defend it. According to him, questions of ethics—*Is it right to commit violence?*—or of tactics—*Is it wise to commit violence?*—are unhelpful; what matters is *why* political violence happens. The answer, he says, is "intolerable pressure" on the lives of "the poor and oppressed"; "the intolerable pressure of a hateful and fearful world is always waiting to explode."

This romantic pabulum conceals a salient fact: The victims and perpetrators of recent violence are hardly who Rensin makes them out to be. "The poor and oppressed" are not students at Claremont McKenna College (est. 2017–18 tuition: $52,825), and Muhammad Ashraf, the Muslim immigrant who owned the limousine burnt out on Inauguration Day, is not "the company" stamping its vulgar capitalist boot upon the downtrodden. Rensin sidesteps this flaw in his analysis by offering a taxonomy of violence that, conveniently, theorizes away both leftist responsibility and non-"oppressed" victims: According to him, there is violence perpetrated by the state—e.g., drone strikes, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention centers, and the killing of Michael Brown (generally wicked); there is violence perpetrated by right-wingers that is tacitly endorsed by the state—e.g., lynch mobs and white-supremacist murderer Dylann Roof (always wicked); and there is violence that "explodes" from among the "oppressed" (understandable, and who are we to judge, really?).

What Lennard and Rensin are saying, underneath the layers of refurbished revolutionary cant, is that Donald Trump is a grave threat that justifies abrogating our laws against arson and assault—just like all of those other grave threats, from chattel slavery to Ferguson. They are not so bold as to come right out and say it, but they are, in the final analysis, simply claiming that people who think like them should be exempt from the law's constraints, and that people who do not think like them should not receive the law's protections. In an article published shortly after Inauguration Day, Lennard complained that prosecutors had brought up about 200 D.C. rioters on felony rioting charges.

WE have been through this before.

"During an eighteen-month period in 1971 and 1972, the FBI reported more than 2,500 bombings on U.S. soil, nearly five a day." So notes Bryan Burrough in his 2015 book *Days of Rage: America's Radical Underground, the FBI, and the Forgotten Age of Revolutionary Violence*, which chronicles the 15-year reign of terror, idealism, and ineptitude of radical left-wing groups such as the Weather Underground, the Black and Symbionese Liberation Armies, and others that began

in July 1969 with a bomb in Manhattan and ended in April 1985 with the arrest of the last members of the United Freedom Front in Norfolk, Va. Writes Burrough: "Radical violence was so deeply woven into the fabric of 1970s America that many citizens, especially in New York and other hard-hit cities, accepted it as part of daily life." When a bomb exploded at a Bronx movie theater on May 1, 1970, police tried to clear the building, but patrons refused to leave, demanding to see the rest of their film.

Sophisticated justifications for violence were part and parcel of this fever. Leftist radicals were immersed in revolutionary literature—Lenin, Mao, Che Guevara, Malcolm X's *Autobiography*—and those texts were candid. In 1963, Frantz Fanon published *The Wretched of the Earth*, the first sentence of which read: "National liberation, national reawakening, restoration of the nation to the people or Commonwealth, whatever the name used, whatever the latest expression, decolonization is always a violent event." He continued, inverting Christian teaching:

> In its bare reality, decolonization reeks of red-hot cannonballs and bloody knives. For the last can be the first only after a murderous and decisive confrontation between the two protagonists. This determination to have the last move up to the front, to have them clamber up (too quickly, say some) the famous echelons of an organized society, can only succeed by resorting to every means, including, of course, violence.

The preface to the original edition of *The Wretched of the Earth* was written by French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who was even more bullish about violence: "To shoot down a European is to kill two birds with one stone," Sartre suggested. "There remain a dead man and a free man."

Among the dead men was Frank Connor, a 33-year-old banker from New Jersey, killed on January 24, 1975, when FALN, a radical group dedicated to Puerto Rican independence, detonated a bomb in the historic Fraunces Tavern in Lower Manhattan. An interview with his son, Joseph, appears toward the end of *Days of Rage*. About his father's murderers, Joseph concludes: "They appointed themselves my father's judge, jury, and executioner. He represented something they didn't like, so they decided they had the right to kill him." Moreover, many like them were excused—Weather Underground bombers Bill Ayers and his wife, Bernardine Dohrn, became celebrated academics—because their violence had served the "correct" politics.

Today's leftists are more gun-shy than their predecessors, but the differences are a matter of degree. Under the aegis of "anti-fascism," leftist thugs have appointed themselves adjudicators of the fates of Richard Spencer, Heather Mac Donald, the limo owner or Trump voter—anyone they "don't like"—and in this lawless realm, whatever crimes Antifa commit are not crimes, and their victims are not victims.

One senses, too, that they enjoy the simple frisson of violence. When Lennard writes in her post–Inauguration Day essay that Spencer's getting punched in the face was "pure kinetic beauty," she is on a spectrum with Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver, who raped white women as an

"insurrectionary act," and Dohrn, who gushed over the artistry of Charles Manson's murders. ("Dig it! First they killed those pigs, then they ate dinner in the same room with them, then they even shoved a fork into the pig Tate's stomach! Wild!")

If the first 100 days of his administration are any indication, Donald Trump may well be a fairly conventional president, except in his personal conduct—which, even then, is likely to be more Berlusconi than Mussolini. He is, though no one left of center would dare admit it, arguably the leftmost Republican president ever elected, and his closest advisers—his daughter and son-in-law—were until a few minutes ago lifelong Democrats. But the sort of people who join Antifa are not the sort who interest themselves in such details. No fanatics are.

The impulse toward destruction is deep-seated. Kirkpatrick Sale, in his authoritative history *SDS: The Rise and Development of the Students for a Democratic Society* (1973), writes:

> Revolution: how had it come to that? . . . There was a primary sense, begun by no more than a reading of the morning papers and developed through the new perspectives and new analyses available to the Movement now, that the evils *in* America were the evils *of* America, inextricably a part of the total system. . . . Clearly something drastic would be necessary to eradicate those evils and alter that system.

That describes far more than just the violent fringe of 1970s leftism. It is the stated position, today, of many Antifa and Occupiers and Black Lives Matter supporters, and it is the unacknowledged assumption of many progressive Democrats who would never throw a stone. It is the expressed belief, too, of many who embrace the label "alt-right." It is a weed that, for 50 years, has been taking root.

The natural and necessary institutions—chief among them civil society and the law—that make it possible for people to live together peacefully and prosperously require a degree of freedom. Inevitably, grifters will swindle and demagogues will charm. But those determined to subvert these institutions fail to see, or refuse to see, that the most likely alternative to the principle of equality under law is a form of "domination and oppression" worse than anything they currently oppose.

The remedy to outbursts of political turmoil is not to wantonly tear down what fragile order exists, or to impose some new, ill-conceived order by force. Power, at least in the long run, does not grow out of the barrel of a gun; Mao was wrong. Legitimate and stable political power is rooted in the healthful loyalties that temper destructive political passions. Rightly ordered affections—toward God, country, and one another—promote the civic friendship in which citizens work side by side to promote one another's best interests, and by which inevitable disputes can be resolved with a minimum of conflict. When Lincoln urged that "we are not enemies, but friends," he was stating a necessary condition of the American republic.

The Antifa ideology can produce only enemies. NR

Closing Time

American retail's fast, furious decline

BY KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON

Midwest City, Okla.

Heritage Park Mall is a tomb, a crumbling and boarded-up monument to a particular weird moment in American history when we did that most American of all things: attempt to perfect a community by rebuilding it from scratch. With its shops and restaurants and public spaces, and its proximity to banks and offices, the American shopping mall was the reincarnation of the downtown business district, moved indoors where it could be air-conditioned, efficiently policed, and surrounded by a sprawling Salton Sea of asphalt to provide ample parking. The old downtown died most places, and, now, the new downtown is dying, too: At the highwater mark, there were about 5,000 malls in the United States, and there are now 1,100, at least 400 of which are expected to close in the next few years. In the 1980s, developers built an average of 60 malls a year—and more than 100 in some years. Now, cities from San Bernardino, Calif., to High Point, N.C., are dealing with the husks of these dead retail behemoths. There are documentary films and TED talks about dead malls.

"I remember it fondly," says longtime resident and city councilman Sean Reed, recalling Heritage Park Mall. "We used to go there when we were little kids and wander it all day."

Cameron Crowe's 1982 magnum opus, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, is a deep meditation on a number of subjects: marijuana, Thomas Jefferson, and statutory rape among them. But the name is all wrong: With apologies to Mr. Hand, what happens at Ridgemont High is a relatively minor part of the story—the real story is about fast times at Ridgemont Mall, the lightly fictionalized cinematic version of the Sherman Oaks Galleria that is at the center of the Ridgemont High universe and was, for a minute, something close to the center of American pop culture. Frank Zappa made a hit record that consisted of little more than his daughter aping the speech patterns of the mall's young female customers over a fairly generic (for Frank Zappa) guitar track. "Valley girl"–speak spread like an infection over the land.

Sherman Oaks Galleria is far from Oklahoma, but its story is a familiar one.

After an ignominious decline during which it was reduced to something like an indoor version of New York City's Canal Street—and also, this being the United States of God Bless America, after a whole lot of litigation—the Sherman Oaks Galleria was more or less put out of its misery. Gone is the mauve Art Deco–by–way–of–Patrick Nagel interior, though the movie theater remains. Most of what remains was converted into office space—Warner Bros. is a client, but it is mostly mortgage lenders and other financial-services companies. The rest has gone the

LUBA MYTS

way of Chess King and red nylon parachute pants. The hubris of the 1980s is well under the heel of Nemesis: Duran Duran just played a two-night engagement at the Agua Caliente Casino Resort Spa in Rancho Mirage, Calif.

The emergence of the mall as the preeminent public space in American life may seem like one of those weird inexplicable 1980s things, like 18 percent mortgage rates, *American Psycho*, or the presidential candidacy of Walter Mondale. But it was in a sense only a reversion to ancient norms: In Singapore, there is a large shopping mall called "The Forum" (which was, and is, a common name for malls), while the one in Santo Domingo has a more Hellenic moniker: "Agora." But if you go back and watch *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, what's really remarkable isn't the underage sex or the terrible fashion sense or how close in retrospect the 1980s were to the 1960s (nice hippie wagon, Spicoli) or any of that.

It's that all those middle-class, white, suburban high-school kids had jobs.

'I DON'T think it will ever be a mall again."

Councilman Reed, who serves this modest suburb of Oklahoma City with an economy dominated by Tinker Air Force Base, says that the thing his constituents ask him about most often isn't their taxes or schools or 911 response times but the festering corpse of Heritage Park Mall, a retail graveyard in a downward-bound corner of this city that hasn't housed much in the way of commerce or food courts (seriously, not even an Orange Julius!) in many years, the only remaining customer-facing enterprises being those two great totems of the American 20th century: a Sears and a charismatic megachurch.

Heritage Park Mall died the way malls die. But the greater Oklahoma City metropolitan area is not very much like Southern California. A high-profile chunk of real estate in Sherman Oaks is going to become *something*. In Midwest City, Okla., the best-case scenario may be that the mall becomes nothing. Three options are on the table as the city tries to work out what to do about the vacant mall. One plan is to try to rehabilitate the interior retail space, but Reed does not have much confidence in that plan, and neither do many other people in Midwest City. A second option is to try to convert the property into a mixed-use development, meaning office spaces, townhouses, and whatever retail can be lured in. Midwest City is not shy about using public resources to encourage retail development: The mall may be dead, but across town a new strip mall has been built with tens of millions of dollars in tax incentives.

Option three? Knock the damned thing down. The Sears and the church would remain, and the rest would be converted into a park.

The owner of the property has plans of his own—he wants to wall off all but a few thousand square feet of retail space and rehabilitate the sequestered space, fixing the mall up in segments—but so far no one seems to be taking them all that seriously.

A dead mall is a problem. It's a blight and an eyesore, for one thing. Heritage Park is boarded up, and sometimes the grass is allowed to get a little tall. There are financial problems as well: Heritage Park Mall used to produce more than $1 million a year in revenue for Midwest City; what little commerce still exists on the property (there's a Pelican's Wharf restaurant detached from the mall proper but on the lot) produces about $70,000 a year. That's a big hit: Sixty-five percent of the ad valorem taxes generated by the property had been earmarked for the schools. And while the mall isn't producing much revenue, the city still has to police it and protect it against fires. (Fire marshals tend to take an especial interest in boarded-up, abandoned buildings with large, open interior spaces.) Replacing those lost tax funds has not been easy: In a sprawling metro area such as Oklahoma City, there's a new municipality every couple of miles in the exurban stretches, meaning that businesses that left the mall but set up shop elsewhere often did not do so within the boundaries of Midwest City, which is festooned with a lot of signs offering residents the advice (economically illiterate but popular) that they should "buy local."

The more common sign says FOR LEASE.

BECAUSE the thing is, it isn't just the mall. Heritage Park is bounded on three sides by commercial properties with a lot of vacancies. The shopping center to the north is between a quarter and a third vacant, and the tenants in the occupied spaces—Ron's Burgers and Chili, New York Nails, an animal hospital, People's Church and its nearby PC Kids center, a physical therapist, Hearing Aid Center, Midway Clinic, Rupert Thomas OB/GYN, a tanning salon, and an Edward Jones—all have something in common: They are in businesses that require physical presence. (Yeah, you can trade stocks online, but that isn't exactly what Edward Jones does.) Amazon is in all sorts of businesses, but it is not yet offering to watch your kids or minister to your labradoodle or your reproductive plumbing or your immortal soul. On the other side of the mall, there's a blood-plasma donation center two doors down from an Arby's—if you are in search of the Eliotic objective correlative for despair, there it is. The shops that are thriving are like the jobs that are thriving: They are difficult to outsource.

And shops and jobs go together: One in ten employed Americans works in retail. Retail salesman is the single most common job in the United States, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And while much has been made of the decline in old-line industrial jobs that carry a certain nostalgic charge, there are 17 times as many retail jobs as jobs in automobile manufacturing, 100 times as many retail jobs as steel jobs, and 210 times as many Americans working in retail as in coal mining—not just miners, but all coal-mining jobs, from CEO on down. Shop jobs mostly are not especially high-paying (though they sometimes are), and they tend to be held by workers who for various reasons—sometimes lack of skill and education, but also things such as the need for flexible scheduling or physical limitations—often do not have a great many desirable options. People sometimes scoff: "Yeah, creative destruction is great—we'll just tell all those unemployed steelworkers to become software designers!" But the fact is that steel mills and mines and factories employ a great many highly educated and highly skilled people, from engineers to machinists, and they are a lot more likely to be able to find good new jobs than is the 48-year-old mother of three who works four days a week at the local Sears. That job may not provide enough to support a family of five, but it may very well pay enough to take care of the mortgage and the electricity bill—for two-income families, those modestly paid retail jobs aren't about pin money.

Those jobs are going away.

We see here the very familiar contours of a bubble. After decades of rapid expansion, retail is in sharp decline, with stores closing at a higher rate today than they did during the financial crisis and recession of 2008–09. Bebe, which at its high point operated a couple of hundred shops, soon will be online-only. Clothiers such as Rue 21, Payless, and Limited are closing hundreds and hundreds of outlets. The sporting-goods business has seen a bloodbath: Gander Mountain is bankrupt and closing stores, another victim of the contraction that took down MC Sports and Sports Authority while putting serious downward pressure on the finances of the survivors.

Some 8,000 stores are expected to close this year.

The migration of retail out of shops and onto the Internet has been significant—last year saw online retail pass a symbolically important milestone, accounting for 51 percent of all purchases—but it wasn't radical or unexpected. In fact, the retail building boom really kicked off at the same time as the rise of online commerce: in the middle to late 1990s. Which is to say, the retail-space bubble inflated in parallel with two other important bubbles: the dot-com bubble and the much more significant housing bubble.

When housing prices were skyrocketing around the turn of the century, Americans did not use all that new wealth to pay down household debt or start high-tech enterprises in their garages or anything like that: They monetized that equity and bought gigantic televisions. They bought new furniture and clothes and shoes, and the consumer-goods market began to look like another one of those can't-miss propositions that come along and cause trouble every few years. Retailers and developers responded by building new shops and strip malls, taking advantage of millennial-era cheap money to leverage the hell out of themselves in the quest for growth and volume. They loaded themselves up with debt that is perfectly bearable when profit margins are 11 percent but deadly when they're 7 percent.

In addition to cheap money, they also took advantage of a lot of free money: Note that even as it struggles with a zombie mall and high vacancy rates in nearby retail centers, Midwest City is using tax dollars to subsidize the development of yet more retail space on the other side of town, the world of Panera and Starbucks. More retail space means more sales-tax revenue, and if you take a short-term and relatively narrow view—the typical political view—then spending a few million dollars to make sure that whatever new conglomeration of Pei Wei, HomeGoods, and Lane Bryant is getting built gets built in your taxing jurisdiction rather than the one next door looks like a pretty good investment. Which it is.

Until it isn't.

Big operators of malls and retail space such as Pennsylvania Real Estate Investment Trust are taking a beating: PREIT is down 20 percent for the year, and if you judged by its press releases, you'd think all PREIT's people did all day was chase

down tenants to replace moribund Sears locations and occasionally replace the company's chairman. The investment houses can (and will) take care of themselves. But what about all that vacant space blighting up cities and towns across the country? And what about the people who used to work in all those stores?

THE first job of Oklahoma City's Heather Boulware was at a TG&Y, which middle-aged residents of the southern half of the United States may recall as "Toys, Guns, and Yo-Yos." It was what our grandparents would have called a general store. "It was like a Super Walmart without the groceries," she says. She started working there when she was 15 years old. Hers was a common experience: She was earning a little money—"a whopping $3.35 an hour"—which she invested in the things kids invest their money in: "I got paid every two weeks, and I'd buy books and go out with my friends. Some of it, I saved up for Christmas presents for my family." TG&Y offered its employees a discount, and another benefit that made Boulware the heroine of Christmas morning: "I worked there the Christmas that Cabbage Patch dolls were huge. We got a shipment, and they let me hold one back for my little sister." Now that she is an adult with children of her own, she understands that what she was actually investing in was learning how to have a job. "I had to be accountable," she says. "I had hours, had to be there on time, had to be clean and dressed appropriately. And I had to interact with people in a way I hadn't before: In a job like that, you have to answer questions, and if someone is kind of mean to you or critical, you can't stomp off and cry. I wasn't a kid at work—I was an *employee*."

But there are fewer opportunities like that today, and there will be even fewer in the near future. Boulware's daughter skipped retail entirely and worked in a series of food-service jobs while attending college. "She's a college student, and she says that this isn't her 'big-girl job.' But she makes good money, it's flexible, and she can go to school and study while having the freedom to do things she won't be able to do when she gets her big-girl job, which will be as an English teacher." Working changed her daughter. "She already was fairly responsible—much different from me when I was that age. But when she started working, she was more mature, less confrontational, and able to see things from a different point of view. And she became much more independent."

The Boulwares are statistical outliers: In the 1980s, about 40 percent of those 16 to 17 years of age were employed, as were nearly 60 percent of those 18 to 19 years of age. Less than 15 percent of that younger cohort is working now, together with about 35 percent of the older group. Fewer of those jobs at Ridgemont Mall and its food court are being filled by middle-class teenagers. Who is working there? Illegal immigrants are eight times as likely to work in service jobs as in agriculture. The Pew Research Center puts the illegal-immigrant share of the restaurant work force at 11 percent, while the pro-immigration labor-activist group Restaurant Opportunities Center United puts the share at 30 to 40 percent in major urban areas.

It often has been observed that the real value of a first job is not the money earned in that job: The real value of the first job is that it leads to the second job, and the third. At the high end, retail work can be extraordinarily lucrative: *Texas Monthly* reported that competition for top salesmen at high-end department stores resulted in salaries exceeding $100,000 a year—and that was in 1997. But the same is true today: Walmart district managers earn incomes well into six figures, as do high-performing managers at similar companies. Three-fourths of them begin as hourly associates. Walmart likes to tell the story of Claudine McKenzie, a daughter of poor Caribbean immigrants who went to work for the company as a temp when she was 20 years old and three months pregnant. She went on to become a highly paid manager. Along the way, she received benefits ranging from paid maternity leave to generous insurance to the company's "Life with Baby" program, which helps educate young parents about the resources available to help them with their new responsibilities.

But the decline of retail will mean fewer stores and fewer starting jobs at those stores, constricting the path from unskilled hourly worker to richly remunerated manager. Fewer people will have the opportunity to learn and to demonstrate those basic elements of personal accountability—keeping a schedule, making peace with difficult customers—that Heather Boulware spoke about.

The decline of retail will mean fewer stores and fewer starting jobs at those stores, constricting the path from unskilled hourly worker to richly remunerated manager.

Those dead malls are a visible testament to what the decline of retail means to American communities: blight, lost taxes, public nuisances. But there is an invisible testament, too: It is not so much a matter of jobs lost in the present but of jobs that never come into being in the future. What all those teenagers and low-skilled workers need isn't a $15 minimum wage but a foothold, a way to enter what is after all the world's most productive economy and begin the process of advancement. For the kids headed to Stanford and Silicon Valley and Wall Street, the way ahead is, for the moment, fairly clear. For the dead-average 17-year-old who intends to—maybe *has* to—move out of his parents' house next year and into a life of self-sufficiency, who not long ago might have gone down to the local Sears or Circuit City or hardware store and started a new job 24 hours after asking for it? That way is less clear. But what is quite clear is that our current system of education, which focuses the great majority of its energy and resources on those students at the very top of the performance curve and those at the very bottom, is not doing very much for those in the middle. It is as relevant to the 21st century as an Orange Julius or a Chess King outlet—dead as Heritage Park Mall, even if it doesn't know it yet. NR

Zinke Rides In

But will the new interior secretary take on the federal-lands bureaucracy?

BY SHAWN REGAN

EARLIER this year, Ryan Zinke arrived at his new job on horseback. Dressed in boots, jeans, and a cowboy hat, and seated somewhat awkwardly on an English saddle, Zinke rode a 17-year-old Irish sport horse through the streets of Washington, D.C., to Interior Department headquarters, where he would begin his first day as President Trump's interior secretary. Zinke, a fifth-generation Montanan who had previously held the state's at-large seat in the House of Representatives, wanted to make a point: Things are going to change in Washington, D.C.

"The rough riders have arrived in Interior," Zinke later told me. "There's a lot of anger and resentment out west that our voice isn't being heard." His tone marks a stark shift away from the Obama administration's brand of coastal environmentalism, which often sought strict public-land protections, and toward a rough-and-tumble management style that is more accepting of traditional land uses. As Zinke would later tell a crowd of western ranchers: "The war on the West is over."

Higher-profile positions in the Defense and State Departments may get more attention, but secretary of the interior is no lightweight cabinet post. The Interior Department's various agencies, which include the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management, oversee 500 million acres of surface land—more than one-fifth of the nation—and nearly five times as many subsurface acres onshore and offshore. The department's Fish and Wildlife Service is charged with protecting endangered species and regulating their habitat on private lands, and its Bureau of Indian Affairs is responsible for upholding the government's obligations to Native American tribes. For many people who live and work in the American West, the importance of the interior secretary rivals that of the president.

Given that Zinke was relatively unknown on the national scene, his appointment was a bit of a surprise. His appearance at the Republican National Convention last year was met with puzzlement by many delegates who had never heard of him. His rèsumè includes a 23-year career as a Navy SEAL, from which he retired in 2008. After two years in the Montana state legislature and one term in Congress, Zinke now finds himself in charge of a sprawling bureaucracy with widely varying responsibilities, from listing endangered species to managing livestock-grazing on public lands. Perhaps of most importance to the current administration, the Interior Department also controls vast fossil-fuel resources, which Trump has promised to tap.

"I had no expectations, no anticipations, of being the secretary of the interior," Zinke says. In a recent speech, he recounted how it came to be: After being summoned to Trump Tower, he had a short, wide-ranging discussion with the president-elect, but he left the meeting unclear about what position he was being considered for. When he received a congratulatory call from Vice President–elect Mike Pence the next day, Zinke responded: "What job?" Zinke's main experience, drawn from his military service, was in national security. But as a westerner who for a short time sat on the House Natural Resources Committee, Zinke had also begun to cultivate an image as a "conservative conservationist."

Although Trump promised during the campaign to rein in the Environmental Protection Agency and ramp up domestic energy production, he said little about public-land issues. Would he scale back Obama's conservation efforts, attempt to rescind Obama's national-monument designations, and encourage logging, grazing, and other forms of development that have declined in many rural western communities? And would he take up some of the more controversial proposals that are brewing in the West to devolve control of federal lands to the states?

Zinke offers few clues as to what the future holds. His stated views present a somewhat unclear message about the direction of public-land policy in the age of Trump and whether his "rough rider" approach will truly confront Washington's dysfunctional and overbearing federal-land bureaucracies.

More than a steward of land and resources, Zinke talks like a commander of a department in need of strong leadership, tactical proficiency, and a winning attitude. "This is an important mission that we are going to accomplish successfully," he tells me. "And the president has given me the guidance to win."

In this respect, Zinke is the real deal. During his time in the Navy, he led a number of SEAL operations across the globe. His service included stints on SEAL Team One, leading counterinsurgency and contingency operations in the Persian Gulf and the Pacific, and two tours on the über-elite SEAL Team Six. He later served as deputy and acting commander of a combined special-operations task force in Iraq and was awarded two Bronze Stars. The 2014 book *Eyes on Target* claims that Zinke "was responsible for killing or capturing 72 known enemies, insurgents, and terrorists."

Zinke will now set his sights on America's many natural-resource and land-management challenges. Catastrophic wildfires regularly burn through the nation's forests and budgets. Armed standoffs, such as last year's occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon, have recently erupted over grazing rights. The crumbling infrastructure in our national parks has created a $12 billion maintenance backlog. Endangered-species protections have closed off millions of acres to energy development. And current environmental policies are more likely to provoke conflict and litigation than to encourage cooperation and a sensible balance of land uses. In part, Zinke says, the problem is that Interior's basic approach has been far too centralized and "heavy-handed."

"From a military perspective," he says, "the strength of any force is the sergeant, the chief, and the frontline. If they feel

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like they don't have the right authority or the right resources to make the decisions, a lot of times there's frustration. The decisions that are being made are oftentimes from Washington, D.C., and they're not appropriate everywhere." One of Zinke's top priorities is to make sure that the "troops in the field" can "make decisions that are more collaborative and locally driven, rather than having to go to D.C. for a decision of whether to clean a toilet or not."

Zinke sees energy development as a national-security issue—and one he is now well positioned to deliver on. "The world is a lot safer when America is stronger, and much of that strength, quite frankly, relies on energy being reliable, affordable, and abundant," he says. Trump has already signed executive orders to begin withdrawing Obama's Clean Power Plan, which required states to cut carbon emissions from power plants, and he has instructed the Interior Department to lift his predecessor's bans on new federal coal leases and offshore drilling in the Arctic. "We can't power the country on pixie dust and hope," Zinke said at the time.

MANY thought Trump's election, supported in no small part by rural America, would usher in a new era in public-land policy, perhaps even delivering on the promise of the "Sagebrush Rebellion" of the 1970s and '80s, which sought to transfer large amounts of federal land to western states. Such a movement has been simmering once again in recent years, primarily in Utah, a state where two out of every three acres are owned by the federal government.

In 2012, Utah's Republican governor, Gary Herbert, signed a bill calling on the federal government to transfer 30 million acres to the state. Its backers argued that restrictions on development and access were harming local communities. Washington, not surprisingly, didn't listen, and Utah's lawmakers have since pursued various tactics to try to assert greater control over the land in their state.

As a candidate, Trump indicated that he opposes the transfer movement. "I don't like the idea because I want to keep the lands great," he told *Field & Stream*. "And you don't know what the state is going to do." Zinke is an outspoken critic of the idea. "I am absolutely against transfer and sale of public lands. I can't be more clear," he said at his confirmation hearing in January. In 2016, Zinke resigned as a delegate to the Republican National Convention over the party's proposed support for transferring federal lands.

Overall, Zinke is viewed as a mixed bag on policy. His opposition to the transfer of public lands has won him praise from some in the environmental community and criticism from some conservatives who see the transfer proposal as the ultimate way to achieve the local management Zinke ostensibly favors. He has been a vocal supporter of the Land and Water Conservation Fund—the federal government's primary funding source for acquiring new public lands from private landowners—despite efforts by other House Republicans to reform the program so as to address maintenance needs on existing public lands. As a state senator, Zinke twice earned higher annual ratings from the Montana Conservation Voters than any other Republican in the state's legislature—although while in Congress, Zinke earned just a 4 percent lifetime score from the League of Conservation Voters, who criticized his "anti-environmental record" and his support for "more dirty and dangerous

drilling." A recent *Wall Street Journal* editorial argued that Zinke's environmental positions have not been conservative enough, claiming that his "history of deference to Washington landlords isn't Trumpian."

Zinke calls himself "an unapologetic admirer" of Teddy Roosevelt. At his confirmation hearing, he said that Roosevelt "had it right when he placed under federal protection millions of acres of our federal lands and set aside much of it as national forests." This view allows Zinke to brand himself as a pro-conservation Republican, but it also raises questions. Roosevelt, after all, was a Progressive Era leader. He favored centralized control of the nation's natural resources, with management not by locals but by the expert judgment of Washington bureaucrats. Along with Gifford Pinchot, the founder of the Forest Service, TR advocated what historian Samuel Hays called "the gospel of efficiency," or the belief that "experts, using technical and scientific methods, should decide all matters of development and utilization of resources."

Today's public-land-management practices and institutions—which Zinke readily criticizes—are largely the product of this Progressive Era thinking. Such an outlook favors large-scale public ownership of natural resources, federal bureaus devoted to efficient management and the promotion of the public interest, and formal comprehensive planning, all allegedly guided by science and insulated from political influence.

That isn't how it has worked out in practice, however. Public-land management today is neither scientific nor efficient, and it's hardly resistant to political pressures. Interest groups regularly exploit the government's conflicting mandates and its lack of clear direction. The result is what former Forest Service chief Jack Ward Thomas has called "a Gordian knot" of laws and litigation, which hinders agencies' ability to respond to changes or resolve competing demands for resources. "What we're witnessing is a bureaucracy of litigation, of management by neglect, that has been causing a catastrophe for our land and a lot of anger," Zinke says.

Ironically, Zinke is now tasked with reining in the very powers that Roosevelt helped create to set aside public lands. The Antiquities Act of 1906, signed by Roosevelt, allows the president to declare federal lands off limits to most forms of development. Obama used the act to designate more national monuments than any other president, including the 1.35 million–acre Bears Ears National Monument in Utah, which he created in the final weeks of his presidency despite opposition from the state's governor, legislature, and congressional delegation. In April, Trump issued an executive order instructing Zinke to review all national monuments of more than 100,000 acres created since 1996 and recommend whether the president should rescind any or reduce their size. But it is unclear whether Trump has the authority to do so without an act of Congress.

Zinke is clearly no Progressive Era true believer. While in Congress, he held listening sessions on a draft bill that would have required local residents to approve monument designations made under the Antiquities Act. "When it comes to a monument, I think the state should have a say on it," he said at his confirmation hearing. And although he opposes the land-transfer movement, he has supported proposals that would allow some federal lands to be managed by state-appointed advisory committees. "We are going to be the department that works with local communities, that listens to issues at the community and state level," Zinke tells me. In practice, his appeal to Roosevelt seems to be a way to justify taking a more active role in the management of public lands, as TR and other Progressive Era conservationists did by advocating the development of the nation's natural resources.

In the West, where nearly half of the land is federally owned, these issues have salience. And while there is debate over the best path forward, there is widespread agreement on one thing: Something needs to change.

Today's public-land management is costly, dysfunctional, and acrimonious. Decisions are political, not scientific, and they are often based more on national values than on local ones. Bureaucratic red tape keeps agencies in perpetual gridlock without any clear sense of purpose or direction and wastes billions of dollars each year. And disputes over grazing rights, endangered species, and natural-resource development are tearing at the social fabric of many western communities. Zinke is right that much could be done to address these issues even while preserving federal ownership of the land. But ultimately a new public-land paradigm, not a recycled one, will probably be required to cut the Gordian knot.

Public-land management today is neither scientific nor efficient, and it's hardly resistant to political pressures.

Over the years, our public-land policies have followed broader trends. In the 19th century, federal-land disposal via the Homestead Acts reflected the dominant classical-liberal ideas of the time and a belief in small government. The 20th-century Progressive movement reversed course and held that federal lands were best retained and managed by experts. Later in the century, as the administrative state expanded, multiple-use management emerged as a way to reconcile interest-group competition. The Sagebrush Rebellion paralleled the Reagan-era deregulation movement.

What is the future of public-land policy in the age of Trump? Will it reflect the broader backlash against Washington elites, who are seen as indifferent to the well-being of local communities? Or, as Zinke seems to suggest, will it seek to return to some bygone era—almost certainly fictitious—when federal decision-makers achieved the proper balance between conservation and resource development? And, more practically, can Zinke convert the populist zeal associated with Trump's rise into concrete and workable plans for reform?

Time will tell. For now, the "rough riders" are running the Interior Department and bring with them Zinke's western ethos, which he summarizes this way: "When you leave a campground, you leave it in better condition than you found it." NR

Athwart

BY JAMES LILEKS

The Emperor's New Clothes

Modern life, for the socially aware, consists of a million filaments that constrain your every thought and action.

You have been dragooned by friends to go to McDonald's, because they want coffee. You are concerned: Is it fair trade? The only other possible option being coffee commandeered at gunpoint by grinning goons from United Fruit, who have already shot some burros to get the grower's attention.

Does the McDonald's pay a living wage? The only other possible option being a convoy of tumbrels that take away the employees who drop dead on payday.

Are the uniforms made of organic cotton? The only other type being some strange, lab-grown inorganic cotton spun from sludge pumped out by Dow Chemical's dioxin factories.

Are you using the drive-thru, which means you will be fuming because the cars ahead of you are fuming out exhaust that will produce lethal hurricane seasons in Florida any year now—although serves them right, when you think about whom they voted for. It gives you a moment of pleasure to think about those inbred yokels choking on their chaw-juice when climate change whips their satellite dish off its stick and decapitates the statue of Jeeeeeezuz they have in the front yard. But then you think about polar bears and you're mad again.

The easy answer to these vexing anxieties: Throw a brick through a McDonald's window during an anti-free-speech protest, because Trump likes Big Macs. Or, if you can't be there, at least share or like a video of someone who did. You don't want your kids to ask what you did during the Resistance and feel a blush of shame because you didn't retweet that meme.

Not that you'd have kids. The carbon impact! Might as well set an oil well on fire!

If you are such a person, everything is political. And that's great! It means you can judge other people for absolutely everything—including whether or not their pants are non-ironically nostalgic.

Confused? Here's an example. *The New Yorker* is concerned about whether people might be wearing the new J. Crew collection for the wrong reasons:

> When I contemplated those dresses, what struck me was their willful nostalgia; preppy clothes may be inherently nostalgic, but the whimsy of these items seemed over the top. During the Obama years, nostalgia might have seemed harmless, even admirable, but today it feels like a troubled and doubtful impulse. Does it make sense for young, urban men to dress up like Rust Belt factory workers, or for women to embrace the style of Hyannis Port in the nineteen-sixties? The answers to those questions have changed over the past six months.

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If Hillary Clinton had won, it'd be jack-dandy if young, urban men dressed up like Rust Belt factory workers. It's not okay now, because those are the uniforms of the deplorables, and to adopt their mufti validates racism, sexism, xenophobia, and uncritical enjoyment of Billy Joel songs.

Nostalgia: *Now it feels like a troubled and doubtful impulse.* Nostalgia was permitted under Obama because the past, which was of course awful, nevertheless produced—or failed to prevent—the shining present. For all its sins and fits and fights, the past had birthed our world, which was pointing in the right direction.

Now it's back to being problematic. Because it should be! Anyone who says he likes cars with tail fins ought to be asked whether he also likes segregated lunch counters.

Another question that has changed over the past six months:

"Does it make sense for women to embrace the style of Hyannis Port in the nineteen-sixties?"

In other words, because of policies shoved down the nation's throat by a stubby-fingered misogynist, suddenly it's worrisome to adopt the styles of an era when women had fewer rights. But wearing the uniform literally associated with Hyannis Port, the residence of a man who treated women like chewing gum—well, that would be okay if the election had gone the other way.

Anyway. The author says J. Crew is failing because no one wants to be a J. Crew person anymore, or wants to have a predetermined store-bought persona into which they can pour themselves. He notes what Internet clothing ads look like and says:

> The ads rejected, or claimed to reject, the whole idea of "life style." In many cases, they showed products without models, just floating in space. The implication was that I was a self-defining, self-sufficient person. I didn't need to aspire to some other life; I could build one myself, without entering some bubble-like subculture.

And this is news to a grown-up, I guess.

Who wants to live like this? Who wants to be constantly exhausted by subjecting every anodyne act to the scrutiny of the groupthink's consensus du jour? Today boxer shorts are okay because they hark back to the honest proletariat bloomers of the '30s, when unions were strong. Tomorrow they're bad because underwear has been historically gendered, and wearing it perpetuates a system of oppression. The classic men's Y-front assumes the wearer has a penis. Seriously. Like this is 2007 or something.

The end result of all this isn't changed behavior on the part of the perpetually worried. The end result is just blog posts and tweets and shaming campaigns to keep everyone else in line. Sure, that J. Crew top might be incorrectly nostalgic, but it's cute and it's on sale. Besides, it's organic cotton.

And the clerk looked biracial! So it's totally okay. NR

The Long View

BY ROB LONG

NSA SURVEILLANCE TRANSCRIPT

RECORDED UNDER FISA DIRECTIVE 349.12A

TOP SECRET STATUS: MASKED

Begin extract.
[Static. Clicks.]
MALE VOICE 1: Look at that. Look at that. Now that's a grilled cheese, am I right? People are saying, they say to me, all over, doesn't matter where I am, why can't we make a grilled cheese like we used to? And know what I say to them?
MALE VOICE 2: Hello? Yes? We are on the phone, Donald. Is time now for call. Yes?
MALE VOICE 1: Oh! Hey! Yeah! Sorry, was just telling Sean something about this amazing—you gotta come here, Vladimir. The guy here does this incredible sandwich—
MALE VOICE 2: Is not now time for this. Sandwich talk, not for this time. Please. Donald. This is a talk to have.

[Tone.]

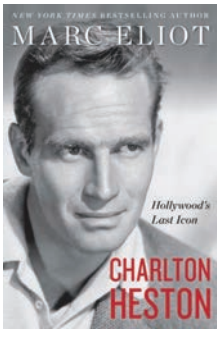
MALE VOICE 2: Who is joined? Someone to conference call has connected?
FEMALE VOICE: Bonjour, messieurs. Désolée pour le retard—
MALE VOICE 1: I ordered the steak.
FEMALE VOICE: —Il y avait des problèmes avec le numéro d'identité—
MALE VOICE 1: Okay, this isn't the waitress at the Mar-a-Lago . . .
MALE VOICE 2: I am very busyness. Can we please—Donald, we are talking to Madame Le Pen.
MALE VOICE 1: Oooooh. Ouch. Seriously. Too bad. Not a great campaign, honestly. People are saying it wasn't great.
FEMALE VOICE: Well of course they are mostly Jews.
MALE VOICE 1: Not mostly, no. Some, I'm sure. But it's out there, is what I'm saying. Just a loser of a campaign, sorry to say, Mary.
FEMALE VOICE: Marine.
MALE VOICE 1: No, I never served. Went to military school, and being single in the Seventies, let me tell you, in all honesty, a lot like Vietnam. But no. Never was a Marine. But I respect and revere our military—
FEMALE VOICE: No! No! I mean, je m'appelle—my name, my name is "Marine." It is "Marine." Not "Mary" or "Marie." "Marine." I am called that.
MALE VOICE 1: "Marine" is a weird name. Is your sister named "Coast Guard"?

[Silence. Static.]

MALE VOICE 1: Wow. Tough room.
MALE VOICE 2: Silence. Silence. Why is it the headache I am pounding in my head all the time when we have this phone together, Donald? Please. Was hoping that three of us can think of next precisions for large plan.
MALE VOICE 1: Large plan? Better not be a fat shot, Vladimir.
FEMALE VOICE: Donald, this is a situation that is philosophical. I have as you know lost the mandate. What is imperative at this time is for a new strategy to emerge.
MALE VOICE 1: She talks pretty good. I thought it was a no-Engleesh-type deal, but guess not.
MALE VOICE 2: What is now is that the e-mail release no longer has utility. We did an e-mailyana hackniyatski from the opposition with this Fransk mandate and it was of use zero. Now what is necessary is—
MALE VOICE 1: Coulda told you the e-mail thing wouldn't work in France. In the first place, who speaks French? Nobody I know speaks French. Sean Hannity? Alex Jones? Totally not French in any way, shape, or form. Let me tell you something, and this is something I know, something I hear all over the place, something people say to me and have said—believe me, it's incredible, it really is, just amazing what's been accomplished.
FEMALE VOICE: What is he saying, this cretin?
MALE VOICE 1: Thank you, but like I said, I never served.
MALE VOICE 2: Donald, this is not—
MALE VOICE 1: You know what I told Vladimir, Marine? I said, and okay, I'm not politically correct, but I said, maybe she should lose some weight. Around the face, because I didn't see the other parts on the shows, it was mostly the face and jowl area—
FEMALE VOICE: I am fat?
MALE VOICE 1: Your words, dear. No, just, and you know what it is? It's all of the French-women-don't-get-fat business, all of that, people say to me, they come up and it's thank you and keep doing what you're doing and what's all of this about French women not getting fat—
FEMALE VOICE: People say this to you? In that fashion?
MALE VOICE 2: Nyet! Donald, no, on track please, on topic!
MALE VOICE 1: They do all the time! Because then they see you, and let's be honest, you're not a slender lady, right? With the eclairs and the all of that? Take some time, lose 20 or 30 or even 40, really, because it's there, okay? It is there. I saw it on *Morning Joe*.
MALE VOICE 2: Mistake to this arrange. Ending this.
FEMALE VOICE: I am confused. I had the impression we were going to strategize the return of a powerful Right in Europe?
MALE VOICE 1: Not so much with the bread, then.
End extract.

Leading Man

PETER TONGUETTE



Charlton Heston: Hollywood's Last Icon, by Marc Eliot (Dey Street, 576 pp., $29.99)

NINETEEN SEVENTY-EIGHT was a tough year for tough guys in film.

Audiences responded to the puerile infantilism of John Belushi in *National Lampoon's Animal House*, the pouty self-involvement of John Travolta in *Grease*, and the sensitive stoicism of Jon Voight in *Coming Home*, but where were the adventurers, roughnecks, and swashbucklers who made American movies so distinctive?

To be sure, Clint Eastwood was as popular as ever, but that year he was seen in a comedy centered on an orangutan—*Every Which Way but Loose*—rather than as Dirty Harry. What about Steve McQueen? The strong, impassive star of *The Great Escape* and *Bullitt* was in theaters, but in a lamentable change of pace, an adaptation of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. The saddest case of all might have been that of John Wayne, who had made his final film two years earlier—Don Siegel's dirgelike western *The Shootist*—and would be felled by stomach cancer the following year.

A tide was turning. Tough guys were either reinventing themselves or fading from view. In March of that year, however, a brisk action film was released that bucked the trend. The plot of *Gray Lady Down* was simple: After accidentally crashing into a freighter, a submarine tumbles to a sea shelf in the Atlantic, where it remains until a rescue operation commences. As directed by the talented, efficient David Greene, the film holds the viewer's attention thanks to its premise alone—when is help coming? will the men go crazy in the meantime?—but its impact is attributable almost entirely to the presence of its leading man, Charlton Heston.

In an attention-grabbing, sometimes thrilling performance, Heston plays Captain Paul Blanchard, who oversees the sinking submarine (and its anxious, erratic crew) with grace and grit. Early in the film, after the engine room has flooded and water comes close to breaching the control room, Blanchard barks, "Secure that door!" The captain is informed that men are behind that door, but—knowing that the safety of the submarine as a whole is more important than the fate of a few—he does not alter his order. "Secure it!" Blanchard repeats, in Heston's assertive (but not angry) voice.

Yet the lanky, bearded Heston also expresses calm and compassion—not smarmy, "I feel your pain" sentimentality, but the sort of confidence that only a natural leader can project. In one touching moment, Blanchard expresses trust in an inexperienced seaman tasked with serving as a medic, saying in a calm, unruffled manner, "Let's have a look at your patients." The same note of manly confidence is found in Blanchard's two-word response to an Annapolis-trained officer who wonders whether he will ever go home again: "Hell, yes." Heston's delivery makes believers of us all.

Gray Lady Down is no masterpiece, but it is a potent reminder of the satisfaction of watching a man of action—in control of his emotions, in charge of his underlings, and in command of his vessel. By 1978, such characterizations had become rare, but for Heston, they were old hat. Audiences who knew him from such classics as Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956), Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958), and Franklin J. Schaffner's *Planet of the Apes* (1968) expected the actor to embody a certain kind of man: brawny but dignified, virtuous yet vigorous.

In fact, Heston (1923–2008) recognized that such qualities were inherent in his screen persona. In an honorable new biography of Heston, author Marc Eliot offers a quote from the actor in which he reflected on his function in such disaster movies as *Earthquake* (1974) and *Airport 1975*. "No matter how versatile an actor may be or how he strives to widen his range, he must deal with his shadow," Heston said. "And my shadow has been Moses, El Cid, and Michelangelo, not to mention a president or two. If you need a chariot race run, a ceiling painted, or the Red Sea parted, you think of me. So in this film it isn't necessary to explain that my character will be responsible."

Audiences expected Heston to embody a certain kind of man: brawny but dignified, virtuous yet vigorous.

Eliot links the actor's preference in parts with a childhood trauma. At age ten, Heston was uprooted from his rough-and-tumble upbringing in Michigan—"I pictured myself like Tom Sawyer—hunting and fishing, trapping, canoeing, and all that stuff," Heston recalled—when his mother walked out on his father and decamped out of state. "For the rest of his life, Heston sought to reclaim that lost world through the creative universe of acting," Eliot writes, "in characters and films that resonated with him and that would define him as a figure of strength, stature, leadership, and ideals."

As recounted by Eliot, Heston held himself to high standards off-screen, too.

Mr. Tonguette has written about the arts for the Wall Street Journal, The Weekly Standard, *and* The New Criterion. *He is the editor of* Peter Bogdanovich: Interviews.

Among Hollywood stars, Heston stood out for the integrity with which he led his life. "He lived an exemplary life as a family man, married to the same woman for sixty-four years," Eliot writes. This record distinguishes Heston even from stars known for their on-screen virtue—after all, even Henry Fonda (a.k.a. Abe Lincoln, Wyatt Earp, and Tom Joad) was married five times—and it may have limited his appeal among tastemakers. As Heston admitted in an interview in 1977: "I'm not a public drunk. I've only had one wife. My kids aren't runaways. People don't find a big public flaw in me, and they seem to need that from anyone who's had success and attention."

At the same time, Heston was no square. To the contrary, Eliot's book firmly establishes that the actor was always game for a good fight. A sought-after commodity after the success of *The Ten Commandments*, Heston leveraged his standing to insist to producer Albert Zugsmith that Orson Welles direct—not just co-star in—*Touch of Evil*. "Zugsmith wanted to make the movie with Charlton Heston, and Heston used that to his advantage," Eliot writes, "telling the producer he would do the film only if Welles directed."

In life, Heston's courage could manifest itself in surprising ways (befitting an actor who described himself as a political independent). In the early 1980s, after being appointed by Ronald Reagan to oversee a task force on the arts, Heston revealed himself to be keenly committed to the cause of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). In 1990, the actor struck a blow against political correctness when he submitted his resignation from Actors' Equity in protest of the union's attempt to disallow Jonathan Pryce from playing a Eurasian part in *Miss Saigon* on Broadway. "The council's obscenely racist rejection of Jonathan Pryce's right to play the part he created in *Miss Saigon* revolts me," Heston wrote at the time. And, throughout his life, Heston was resolute in his advocacy for civil rights.

Never was the actor more unbowed than when standing up for the Second Amendment during the five years (1998–2003) he headed the National Rifle Association. Eliot works overtime to clearly and cool-headedly establish the thinking behind Heston's involvement with the NRA. For example, he quotes generously from Heston's 1997 speech to the National Press Club, in which he eloquently and astutely characterized the Second Amendment as "the first among equals" in the Bill of Rights: "It alone offers the absolute capacity to live without fear. The right to keep and bear arms is the one right that allows rights to exist at all."

Much is made of the plum parts Heston may have lost as a result of his NRA presidency. "He said to me one day at the height of the controversy," his daughter Holly recalls, "'I worked long and hard to get where I am so I can stand behind what I believe in, and I don't care if I don't get a job.'" To his credit, Eliot recognizes that the "graylisting" suffered by the actor "was enforced by the children of those whose careers were curtailed by the blacklist because of their political beliefs in the '50s"—an instance of total hypocrisy that is, sadly, par for the course in Hollywood. Meryl Streep or Lena Dunham weighing in on a presidential election is welcome, but Charlton Heston speaking his mind on gun rights? Not so much.

Yet it matters little in the end that Heston died marginalized in his industry. Heston's authority comes across even in mediocre films beneath his station (just as his decency shines through in the grossly unfair interview he is put through in Michael Moore's 2002 documentary *Bowling for Columbine*), proving the prescience of French film critic Michel Mourlet, who praised Heston in a famous article in *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1960. Mourlet wrote that the actor's "eagle's profile, the imperious arch of his eyebrows, the hard, bitter curve of his lips" were "what he has been given, and what not even the worst of directors can debase." In other words, Heston is worth watching even when a particular film might not be.

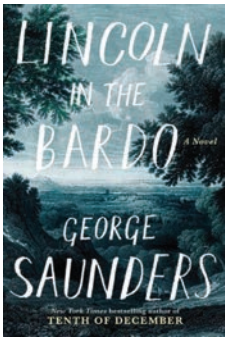
Nonetheless, this book arrives at an apropos moment. Had Heston not succumbed to Alzheimer's, he might have lived to see his popularity spike once again. On the campaign trail, Donald Trump often invoked the names of Generals George S. Patton and Douglas MacArthur with particular relish. To many, the name of Charlton Heston is similarly associated with the twin virtues of strength and nobility. See? Tough guys never go out of style. NR

UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Charlton Heston and Orson Welles in Touch of Evil *(1958)*

Enlightened Lincoln

JASON LEE STEORTS



Lincoln in the Bardo: A Novel, by George Saunders (Random House, 367 pp., $28)

In February 1862, Willie Lincoln, the eleven-year-old son of Abraham and Mary, died of typhoid. His parents were, by every account, shattered, and in the following days the president reportedly made solitary nighttime visits to the crypt in which his son's corpse had been interred.

George Saunders, already esteemed for his short stories and essays, takes one such visit as the premise of his first novel, which is among the less likely and more moving works of fiction I have read.

It is also among the hardest to explain. The "bardo" of its title comes from Tibetan Buddhism and refers, among other things, to the period between death and rebirth. *Lincoln in the Bardo*'s multiple narrators, Willie Lincoln among them, find themselves in this state without quite realizing it; they know something odd has happened but believe themselves to be convalescing and long to go home. By day, each must enter his "sick-form" in its "sick-box" six feet under. By night, their immaterial selves "walk-skim" about the graveyard—conversing, remembering, forgetting, and desperately trying to stay put.

Where they might go instead, none is sure. Periodically, the frozen cemetery is transformed into a blooming garden and each among the dead has visions of the people he left behind. "You are a wave that has crashed upon the shore," they say, and invite the dead to follow them to another life or realm. But it's not quite believable. "Mother came," Willie tells us. "About ten of her But none smelled the least like Mother Say, what is that trick To send a lonesome fellow ten false mothers." (Willie prefers extra spaces to periods.) Despite the lack of verisimilitude, great force of will is required to resist their call. "To stay," another narrator explains, "one must deeply and continuously dwell upon one's primary reason for staying; even to the exclusion of all else."

So fixated are they on their reasons for staying that their immaterial forms express the fixations. One narrator, killed by a falling beam on the day he would have consummated his marriage, appears naked and encumbered by his "tremendous member." A young man who has committed suicide after being jilted by his lover rhapsodizes about the small quotidian beauties of life and appears with many eyes, ears, noses, mouths, as if desperate to take in everything he no longer can. These and other voices alternate with chapters composed of quotations from books and historical records, which set the broader scene. Included are a few imaginary sources that the reader might not recognize as such, making it slightly difficult to know what is history and what is fiction: my only complaint.

Readers of the *Bardo Thodol*, usually but inaccurately presented in English as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, will recognize some of its imagery in Saunders's descriptions, as well as themes and images common in Buddhist sutras. But Saunders has avoided structuring his plot as an exact analogue of the Tibetan text, and were it not for the novel's title, one might read it without knowing that it has anything to do with Buddhism at all.

A few Buddhist ideas will nonetheless help make sense of it. The first comes not from Tibet but from the second- or third-century Indian philosopher Nagarjuna, who held that the fundamental nature of all things is *shunyata*, a Sanskrit term usually translated as "emptiness" or "voidness." Neither translation, with its nihilistic overtones, is adequate. The idea is rather that things lack any inherent, unchanging nature or fixed existence: *Shunyata* can

WIKIPEDIA

Willie Lincoln, 1855

be understood as a rejection of the essentialism that has dominated so much Western thinking, in favor of something like the ever-changing flux of Heraclitus. This doctrine eventually came to dominate all Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism (that is, most of Buddhism). In the monasteries of Tibet, its development reached a pitch of intellectual complexity comparable to that of medieval Western Scholasticism, and at about the same time.

The concept of *shunyata* provides an insight into Tibetans' attitude toward their vast pantheon of buddhas and deities. It's not that these beings are thought to represent mere aspects of one's own psychology, as is sometimes claimed, nor are they regarded as more real and ultimate than human beings, like the Judeo-Christian God. They are instead considered to be exactly as real as we are, part of the flux along with everything else. Or, as one of Saunders's narrators puts it with more poetry and paradox: "None of it was real; nothing was real. Everything was real; inconceivably real, infinitely clear." Held to be one with the flux—not somehow "beneath" or "behind" or "beyond" it—is the primordial nature of mind. What

this is I cannot clearly explain; it is said to be knowable only through meditative experience. But the literature describes it as luminous, clear, full of compassion, and transcending the duality of subject and object.

The *Bardo Thodol* describes a series of visions that the dead will have, first of peaceful and then of wrathful buddhas. In order to escape the cycle of birth and death and become a buddha oneself, what is required is simply to recognize these visions as one's own "projections" and see them as inseparable from the primordial nature of mind. And that is a second interpretive key to *Lincoln in the Bardo*. Without it, readers will likely mistake one of the novel's most vivid and disturbing scenes for the final judgment and think that a thoroughly admirable character, a minister, has been damned. From a Tibetan Buddhist perspective, he is just seeing his own fear of hell. (Which is not to deny that, also according to Buddhism, cruel deeds will bring upon those who commit them an intense if non-ultimate kind of suffering.)

A third interpretive key is the ethical notion that by seeing one's lack of fixity—by letting go of rigid self-definition and experiencing the tremendous *relief* that comes with this—one will naturally become more compassionate. Saunders's deceased narrators undergo this loosening of self in a dramatic way: They are able both to merge with one another and to enter the bodies of the living, thereby experiencing the minds and thoughts of others. "My God, what a thing!" exclaims one. "To find oneself thus expanded!"

The expansion is not always pleasant. Suffering might be the thing to bring it about, and Saunders imagines that Willie Lincoln's death had something like this effect on his father. Abraham has been "made less rigidly himself through this loss," comments a narrator who has experienced his thoughts. "Therefore quite powerful," adds another.

This Lincoln is characteristically philosophical, and we hear at length his imagined reflections on both the moral significance of the Civil War and the mysteries of life and death. Far from presenting these as unrelated topics, Saunders convincingly weaves together the historical and the personal, the political and the existential, in Lincoln's powerful, brooding mind. The result is a kind of epiphany: "His sympathy extended to all, . . . blundering, in its strict logic, across all divides." The dead experience similar insights, and the three main narrators respond by making personal sacrifices in Willie's behalf. (Saunders's bardo is particularly hard on children who tarry there, perhaps symbolizing the way in which patterns of egotism and injustice harm the most innocent among us.)

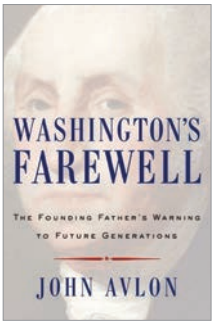
This novel is often funny, but sad, sad, sad. Most of its narrators introduce themselves with a brief summary of their lives and sorrows, and to read these is to be made viscerally aware of the universality and variety of human suffering, from that of the beautiful slave who spent her whole life being raped to that of the lonely old spinster, dull and plain. But the sadness is without bleakness and contains no hint of despair. As I read *Lincoln in the Bardo*, I thought more than once of the final stanza of Matthew Arnold's depressing poem "Dover Beach":

> Ah, love, let us be true
> To one another! for the world, which seems
> To lie before us like a land of dreams,
> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.

I think that if I consistently believed everything after that exclamation point, I would be unable to rise from bed, let alone heed Arnold's injunction. *Lincoln in the Bardo*'s land of dreams is, in a way, the opposite. Armies clash, but not ignorantly, and one of them for a great and just and noble cause. As one of the narrators prepares to exit the bardo, he "thr[ows himself] down on the good and blessed earth," regarding it no less for its transience and woes. And if Saunders's Lincoln is lacerated by grief and far from certain where Willie has gone, he at least has the comfort of not needing to *aspire* to love, but instead, holding his son's lifeless body, can think, "Love, love, I know what you are." NR

'Manifesto for Moderation'

ALVIN S. FELZENBERG



Washington's Farewell: The Founding Father's Warning to Future Generations, by John Avlon (Simon & Schuster, 368 pp., $27)

Books about specific presidential addresses have become commonplace. In recent decades, we have been treated to book-length studies of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural Address, Eisenhower's Farewell Address, and Kennedy's Inaugural Address. John Avlon's *Washington's Farewell* will take its place as one of the best of this expanding and increasingly popular genre.

Unlike the messages that inspired those previous studies, Washington's Farewell Address was not delivered orally before spectators. He submitted the 6,088-word document to a newspaper in the run-up to the 1796 presidential election. Washington had an announcement of particular importance to make: that he was stepping down at the end of his second term as president. This news, certain to capture readers' attention, provided an opportunity for Washington to pass along advice to his countrymen as to how they might best preserve the hard-gained fruits of the American experiment in self-government. A master of timing, Washington, in choosing this

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particular venue to attract the widest possible audience, demonstrated once again that he was every inch the "great actor" his vice president, John Adams, proclaimed him to be.

Washington, as Avlon notes, had a "genius for goodbyes." The trial run for the Farewell Address was the "circular letter" Washington sent to the 13 governors immediately before he resigned his military commission to Congress in 1783. He asked that the letter be read aloud to the people of the respective states. In it, he argued for a strong national government, the impartial administration of justice, a permanent defense apparatus, and the submerging of sectional allegiances into a common national identity. After eight years as the nation's first president, he would have even more advice to pass on.

Washington hoped to step down at the end of only one term in office, and near the end of that term he had asked James Madison, then in the House, to draft a message of farewell. After he decided to accept a second term, at the urging of squabbling cabinet members Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, Washington put Madison's handiwork aside. In 1796, determined not to die before the first peaceful transfer of power in the young nation could take place, Washington retrieved Madison's words and asked Hamilton to add to them. Then, after giving the document a careful scrubbing, he released it.

Washington's Farewell Address is at once his most widely known and least understood message. Once treated with great reverence, it fell out of favor in the years following World War II. This was, to some degree, the result of a perhaps willful misinterpretation of it on the part of those who opposed American aid to Great Britain as it withstood Nazi bombardment. In fact, Washington's proclamation was hardly the isolationist screed that the anti-interventionists made it out to be.

It was, rather, a warning that the United States take care not to be drawn into foreign wars as a result of alliances entered into either out of habit or owing to bonds of affection. He did not want the United States to sacrifice lives, treasure, and its own interests, security, and independence to another nation that manipulated it for its own selfish ends. Steering clear of this trap and maintaining a defense apparatus strong enough to deter foreign aggression, Washington insisted, were the best guarantors of peace.

In making the case that the U.S. enhanced its own security by keeping Britain afloat, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appeared to his critics as breaking faith with his most illustrious predecessor. (His critics said that he did so a second time when he sought a third term in 1940.) Yet FDR, in a famous fireside chat, urged his listeners to imagine how American security would be affected should British possessions in the Western Hemisphere come under the control of Nazi Germany and Nazi ships replace the British navy as the principal patroller of transatlantic shipping.

After World War II, when new alliances were formed to check Soviet ambitions, Roosevelt's successors all but declared Washington's admonition to avoid entering into "permanent alliances" out of date at a time when a rival superpower presented an existential threat to the U.S.

Turning his attention to our own times, Avlon argues rather convincingly that Washington's advice has taken on new relevance and urgency. Washington, like most of the Founders, feared that factions would prove the ruination of the new nation. John Adams's reading of history taught him that "there never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide": At critical junctures in history, individuals began to invest more of their loyalties in factions than they did in their nation's ultimate well-being, and foreign nations proved only too happy to tip the scales in favor of factions that supported their interests.

No sooner had Washington taken office than the factionalism he so much feared threatened to divide the nation into two camps. Washington was so fearful that bitter rivalries between the followers of Hamilton and of Jefferson would split the nation into two warring camps that he delayed his retirement. Most of the factionalism Washington lamented was sectional or regional in scope; were Washington writing today, he would no doubt also decry the identity politics that pushes people into "red" and "blue" camps. In an era when consensus, compromise, and bipartisanship are increasingly rare; legislative-district gerrymandering more precise; interest groups more powerful; campaigns cost-prohibitive to all but those with tremendous wealth or access to it; and politicians, courts, and citizens concerned more with "rights" than with obligations, the forces tugging away at the bonds of national unity are considerably stronger than in Washington's day.

Placing Washington's Farewell Address beside today's news stories about Russian meddling in U.S. politics, one might fear that we are on the verge of a repeat performance of one of the greatest crises of Washington's administration: the revolutionary French government's attempt to exploit the pro-French sympathies of Jefferson's followers to weaken, if not topple, Washington's administration as a means of enhancing its own influence on world affairs. Avlon's discussion of what history knows as the Citizen Genêt affair has a decidedly contemporary ring, and should be carefully studied by the current administration as well as by those investigating the extent to which a foreign government attempted to influence the 2016 presidential election.

Avlon declares Washington's Farewell Address a "manifesto for moderation." The same might be said of this book and its author. If large segments of the American people take Washington's words, and Avlon's interpretation of their meaning, to heart, those who make policy in their name might finally find a way out of the morass that has kept American politics stymied for at least a generation. NR

Washington's Farewell Address is at once his most widely known and least understood message.

Sahara of The Beaux Arts

LAUREN WEINER

The New Philistines, by Sohrab Ahmari (Biteback, 144 pp., $14.95)

Sohrab Ahmari refers to the "new" Philistines in his book about today's arts scene, but those of us who have been around for a while know how much today's scene resembles yesteryear's. For quite some time, artists and writers in the Western democracies have been cooking up works that "invariably revolve around race, gender and class, power and privilege," and that try to advance an ideological agenda that is "a heady mix of radical feminism, racial grievance, anti-capitalism, and queer theory," to use the words of Ahmari, a writer and editor in the *Wall Street Journal*'s London bureau.

Last year, Ahmari attended screenings, exhibits, workshops, plays, lectures, dance recitals, and gallery openings—in London, mostly, but occasionally in New York—and offers here the depressing results of his tour of "the hard left avant-garde and the identity-politics hucksters." Their absurdities barely outstrip what a satirist could dream up.

And did dream up. If you were a reader of the London *Daily Telegraph* any time between the 1950s and the end of the 20th century, you might have come across the "Way of the World" column by "Peter Simple," the pen name of a playful reactionary named Michael Wharton. Wharton's fictional characters included one Marylou Ogreburg, the impresaria of a "Bread and Marmite People's Multiracial Street Dance Theater" that used "a combination of dance, mime, dustbin lids, lumps of solidified risotto, and wall posters to create a uniquely impactful effect of protest and social awareness."

Compare that to Ahmari's real-life visit last year to a "painfully *au courant*" gallery in London's Vauxhall district, where "Second Sex War," an installation by artist Sidsel Meineche Hansen, was featured. "Second Sex War" involved loud, pulsating house music and a large screen on which could be seen EVA v3.0, whom Ahmari describes as "a female humanoid figure, bald with round, mirror-like glasses for eyes, stroking an intimidating laser penis . . . that extends from her crotch like a blue flame."

According to the exhibit notes, this "post-human pornography" was supposed to raise questions about "the gender binary" and to register anger against capitalist "accumulation." Even with the notes, Ahmari says, one could not tell whether the installation was a warning against the degrading effects of virtual reality or an invitation for the viewer to join in. It didn't matter, of course; as long as Professor Hansen (she is an associate professor at a Danish art academy) was mucking around in identity politics, she could be said to be on the side of the angels.

Nor has Shakespearean drama been spared this submersion in political clichés. The reconstructed Globe Theatre in London, Shakespeare's Globe, has had a new artistic director since the middle of last year. Emma Rice (who will be stepping down next year after an extremely short tenure) is one of the "identitarians," to use Ahmari's term, and a rather cagey one, for she gave assurances upon taking the job that she was "never going to lead with an idea" but would "always let the work lead." She also said, "There are no rules." But indeed there have been rules, including that the company strives, in all productions, to cast female and male actors in exactly equal proportions.

Rice also announced her desire to make Shakespeare "relevant"—a goal of which Ahmari does not disapprove. But he reports that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as presented by Rice "punctuat[ed] scenes with song-and-dance routines. A Bollywood-style dance number set to Beyoncé's 'Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)' came early on, and the audience was treated to a rendition of the late David Bowie's 'Space Oddity' during the Rude Mechanicals' play-within-a-play. The entire action, moreover, was accompanied by Indian music."

A South Asian concept could profitably have been used for the staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Ahmari believes. Blending subcontinental folklore with English folklore might have added something, he says, but that would have required "a sincere, rigorous encounter with these sources" and a flinty-eyed look at the mainstream culture and the peripheral culture alike, not simply bashing the mainstream culture as oppressive. That is not what these people are about, though: "The texture and weight of genuine difference elude art of this kind, with its ironic posturing and tendency toward the flattening pastiche."

Just as "identitarian" as the artists are the culture critics who comment on their works. This we can tell from the (to me) endless chapter of this brief book dedicated to a symposium in *Artforum*, the leading arts magazine in the United States, according to Ahmari. The participants use all the latest lingo, such terms as "legibility," "illegibility," and "intersectionality."

The first two refer merely to whether a poem, painting, or play is accessible to other people. Ahmari shows how these critics disparage an artist's wanting to actually reach an audience: To them, legibility is a sign of knuckling under, whether consciously or not, to the power

Ahmari shows how critics disparage an artist's wanting to actually reach an audience.

Lauren Weiner is the associate editor of Law and Liberty *(libertylawsite.org).*

structure. In one of those passages that should go without saying, Ahmari writes more in sorrow than in anger of "the desire to be universally legible" as "among art's oldest and noblest impulses. And yet, among the identitarians it is considered a great sin."

As for "intersectionality," it has to do with a hierarchy of biases that the identitarians believe exists. Some kinds of prejudice or discrimination, goes the thinking, outweigh other kinds and there needs to be a way of deciding which oppressed identity group has bragging (or kvetching) rights over others. Enter intersectionality, "a sort of grievance Olympics," in Ahmari's memorable phrase—a way of "investigating various social situations to determine which group is more oppressed and therefore has the better moral claim." This concept provides a new, theoretical justification for the Left's claim that members of minority groups cannot be racist.

Even so, it's a trip down memory lane. Didn't "Peter Simple" once talk up the invention of something called a "Racial Prejudometer"? This was a "Way of the World" column from the turn of the millennium, written at a time of well-intentioned but fumbling attempts by the authorities to deal with heightened racial tensions in Britain. "Peter Simple" generated fake testimonials in praise of a new gizmo that you could point at anyone suspected of racism, including yourself. The user only had to "press the easy-to-find 'action' button and read off the result in prejudons, the internationally recognized scientific unit of racial prejudice."

The columnist admitted that this wondrous new device was "not yet perfect." He allowed as how "there have been incidents in London when black people, Indians, Pakistanis, Somalis, Chinese, Japanese, and others have all been involved, causing their prejudometers to 'over-read' and implode." The gizmo wasn't supposed to register bigotry shown by people who weren't white. Its designers vowed to tinker with it until such glitches got ironed out. NR

MOONLIGHT IN NASHUA

The moonlight rouses me at half past three,
piercing through thick curtains I had drawn,
but for this gap. My heavy-lidded eyes
return the glare. What's this bald rock to me
but glassy basalt leering from the skies
indecently before the wholesome dawn

can chase it off? I know the facts: We need
the moon to stop earth wobbling on its axis,
thus regulating temperature; besides,
it tells the sea's invertebrates to breed.
But I'm evolved; immune to lunar tides,
and have no love for any fool who waxes

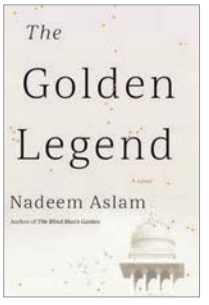
nostalgic when he drinks light second-hand,
and uses this excuse for acting strange.
I rambled through the streets at night in June.
Now it's too cold to climb a fence and stand
beneath a balcony, begging for a spoon
of wild honey, pleading for small change.

My life has waned beyond that phase; it's cast
into the iron calendar I keep
to pay my bills—the lasting consequences
of midnight walks in my moonstricken past.
It's someone else's turn to lose his senses.
The clock stays set for five. It's time to sleep.

—STEPHEN SCAER

On the Run

RANDY BOYAGODA



The Golden Legend, by Nadeem Aslam (Knopf, 336 pp., $26.95)

'THINGS being as bad as they are, . . . this world won't last for much longer," an old baker observes partway through Nadeem Aslam's hard-eyed new novel. The baker's young nephew Imran has already seen too much of the world to be persuaded by such avuncular hopefulness, and very much holds with his brother Laal's view: "I've got worse news for you, uncle. . . . The world will survive forever, with everything staying exactly as it is now." One sentence later, this youthful fatalism proves more than a cheap tough pose: We learn that Imran's "brother was gunned down outside the baker's shop, the corpse dragged through the streets behind a military vehicle over the coming days, until nothing remained at the end of the rope. Imran managed to disappear and began another long journey, this time towards Pakistan."

The poor guy! In Aslam's rendering, present-day Pakistan just might be the world-historical capital of fatalism. After all, this is a place where men matter-of-factly raise their shirts to assure one another they're not wearing suicide-bomber vests; where an intelligence officer roughs up a grieving widow in her home and then demands that he be shown out formally like a proper guest; where a four-year-old boy dies soon after his father converts to Christianity, "poisoned, everyone suspected, for being

Mr. Boyagoda, a novelist, is the principal and the vice president of the University of St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto, where he is also a professor of English and holds the Basilian Chair in Christianity, Arts, and Letters.

the child of an apostate, by someone in [the] family." Elsewhere, the leader of a sectarian mob turns down a request "to burn down every Christian house before daybreak," but not out of mercy: He's the local landlord and he needs the rent money from an alleged blasphemer's coreligionists. He successfully encourages the mob to focus its fury on that one man. Meanwhile, the survivors of family members killed as part of a CIA-related gunfight rage against America but accept U.S. citizenship as reparation and migrate there.

Why bother reading an imaginative work shot through, indeed endlessly strafed, with such bleakness and brutality? Won't it merely confirm just about every newsfeed stereotype about prospects in an unstable, poor, violent, Muslim-majority country? In fact, as he did with his four acclaimed earlier novels, Aslam reveals—with much subtlety and many lyrical transports—small but undeniable portions of sacrifice, courage, love, and even beauty at work in an otherwise harrowing world.

The novel's characters and events are haunted by the life and death of Massud, a 55-year-old architect. With his elegant wife, the fellow architect Nargis, he leads a quiet, cosmopolitan existence in a simple compound situated close by the Grand Trunk Road ("one of the planet's great sinews"), in the middle of a lightly fictionalized version of Lahore that Aslam names Zamana. The architects' home is full of models from around the world that inspire their work. They are keen to design monuments and buildings that celebrate and enact cross-cultural understandings and sympathies, and they have ensured that their illiterate Christian servants' daughter Helen has had an excellent education, one that has made her a budding journalist. In sum, they are gentle, earnest, and self-consciously enlightened people who worry that division and barbarism too often win out against unity and goodness when it comes to religious complexities in Pakistan, and they sincerely want to do something about this.

In other words, they are not long for this world. While traveling to take part in the formal opening of a new city library the couple has designed, Massud is killed in a firefight that breaks out between an alleged CIA agent and local gunmen who could have any number of identities and allegiances. Afterward, seeking only to mourn her husband's loss on her own terms, Nargis is pulled into a local-cum-international imbroglio whose details recall actual events from 2011 that featured onetime CIA contractor Raymond Davis and disputes over diplomatic immunity and U.S.-government reparations for foreign citizens. Aslam is less interested in reconstructing recent geopolitical controversies, though, than in revealing the human cost of trying to live through and beyond them—especially for Nargis, whose beloved dies before she can tell him the great secret of her life: She was born and raised a Christian but has lived as a Muslim since her early twenties, according to a rationale that Aslam discloses in a series of affecting flashbacks.

Nargis adamantly and bravely refuses to play a part in the cynical political theater that's being engineered out of her husband's death, and the intelligence officer assigned to change her mind intensifies his investigation into her background. In turn, her secret is imperiled, as are the lives of many others connected to her, including an aged Anglican bishop, Nargis's longtime servant Lily, and Lily's daughter Helen and her would-be beau Imran, who turns out to be a one-time recruit to Kashmiri militancy who has turned into a permanent runaway. His conversion from radicalism owes to his good sense, decency, and inherent concern for others.

Aslam provides each of these characters with fully fledged backstories that are often engrossing, but as the story reaches its second half, his moving around between his characters' personal histories unnecessarily saps the great propulsive energy of the novel's present-day plots. The latter heighten in tension as the characters' parallel situations begin to intersect and intensify in peril. In effect, all are on the run, for reasons that often involve being accused of insulting Islam or threatening public order; all try to offer help, hope, and refuge to one another; and all are somehow connected to Nargis's secret, which means, ultimately, that the state has a grim interest in their doings. Aslam's plotting of pursuit, evasion, capture, and escape is intricate and engrossing, provided we accept his invitation to enjoy old-fashioned coincidences along the way (and we should).

His own earnest, even throbbing symbolism might prove harder to enjoy. For example, there is a 987-page book created by Massud's father, which was inspired by the medieval book of hagiographies that also provides this novel with its title. The version of Massud's father is a self-selected compendium of "the countless ideas and thoughts that had travelled over the ages from one part of the planet to another. It outlined and examined how disparate events in the history of the world had influenced each other, the hidden or forgotten contributions that one set of humans had made towards the happiness and knowledge of another." Massud was carrying this book when he was killed. It was all but destroyed in the encircling chaos, and the novel's other characters devote their rare free and safe time to repairing it. There's a clear double moral on offer here—about loyalty to a loved one and the ideas that inspired him, and about affirming the power of intercultural understanding to overcome despair and ignorance.

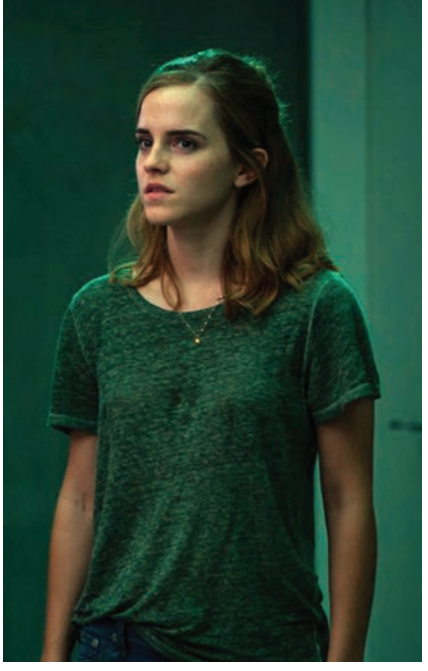
Far less obvious and precious, and thereby far more moving and memorable, is the sudden and stunning decision that one of the main characters makes at novel's end. This is a decision that extends two people's lives for at least another day, provided they first outrun the latest sectarian mob chasing after them. NR

Aslam reveals small but undeniable portions of sacrifice, courage, love, and even beauty at work in an otherwise harrowing world.

Film

Closed *Circle*

ROSS DOUTHAT



Emma Watson in The Circle

ROUTE ONE ENTERTAINMENT

THERE are two ways to make technology terrifying. You can place it in the wrong hands—the rogue government agency, the power-hungry corporation, the monologuing supervillain. Or you can suggest that there are no right hands, that our machines are corrupting society from the bottom up.

The first approach gets you a gadget-driven action movie, a '70s-style paranoid thriller, a Bourne or Bond film. The second approach gets you a dystopia, with the BBC anthology series *Black Mirror* being the most powerful recent example. In *Mirror*, the various brave new worlds of social-media tyranny have no villain, no mastermind, not even a Mustapha Mond to explain it all—just the crushing horror of realizing that we built this nightmare for ourselves, brick by brick and click by click.

The aspiration of *The Circle*, adapted from the novel of the same name by the Bay Area literary entrepreneur Dave Eggers, seems to be to take both approaches at once. On the one hand, it's a movie that offers scenarios extending naturally from the world in which we live, placing its characters in a social-media panopticon just a touch more advanced than the current Facebook/Twitter/Google/Tinder nexus and implying that if this is a prison, it's one we've chosen for ourselves.

But at the same time, *The Circle* wants to offer the (reassuring?) promise that the information age has a bad guy somewhere, atop the digital pyramid or deep inside the inner ring, who can be vanquished in a way that will make a difference to our fate. The only difficulty is recognizing him, because he might look like Tom Hanks.

Tom Hanks? Yes, him: In *The Circle*, he plays Eamon Bailey, a visionary Silicon Valley CEO with a cult of acolytes around him, a founder and innovator in the Steve Jobs mode. Except that instead of Jobs's mix of zeal and cool, Bailey has the qualities that we associate with, well, Tom Hanks: a rumpled dad-like charm, a reassuring approachability, a touch of goofiness, an overwhelming air of decency. Which makes him a great choice for the part—just about the only great choice, sadly, that *The Circle* makes in its casting or its script.

Our heroine, Mae, played by Emma Watson, is a drifting Millennial working for a dreary collection agency whose life gets transformed when her pal Annie (Karen Gillan) sets her up with an interview for The Circle, a Silicon Valley behemoth whose main product, called "TruYou," seems to combine various social-media platforms into one all-purpose way of online being that renders all the others obsolete.

Mae starts out as a "guppie," a low-level employee working on the TruYou help desk, but she has connections higher up. Annie is part of the gang of 40, Bailey's inner circle, so she sneaks Mae into the guru's book-lined study for a peek at how the 0.000001 percent lives—and then, a little later, Mae starts making small talk with a handsome stranger (John Boyega of *The Force Awakens*) who turns out to be none other than Ty Lafitte, the legendary programmer who developed TruYou and now wanders The Circle's campus looking mysterious and staring intently into his smartphone.

In the way of bad movies, Ty decides almost immediately that he can trust Mae with his sense that something is terribly rotten with the state of TruYou. This sentiment is echoed by her ex-boyfriend (Ellar Coltrane of *Boyhood*, unbelievably terrible), a Luddite type who fixes cars and makes antler chandeliers in a woodland cabin.

But despite what the men in her life are telling her, Mae's skepticism about her employer melts when The Circle turns out to be not just cool but lifesaving: It helpfully brings her ailing father (the late Bill Paxton) onto its comprehensive health plan, and its snazziest new technology, a marble-sized camera that can be planted anywhere, helps the Coast Guard rescue her when she takes a reckless nighttime kayaking trip in San Francisco Bay.

It's that incident that really brings her to Bailey's attention, at which point she gets made over as The Circle's leading evangelist—going "full transparency" by wearing a camera 24/7 and embracing the company's various creepy-sounding credos ("Secrets are lies," "Knowing is good but knowing everything is better"). Meanwhile, Bailey is moving forward with a plan to link voter registration seamlessly with your TruYou profile and let people cast their votes online, Annie is melting down from some unexplained stress, Ty is skulking in the background, and it seems clear that at some point we're going to learn the sinister plan beneath all this high-minded talk about a better world . . .

. . . but alas, we never do. Mae has the inevitable crisis of conscience, the predictable encounter with the cost of full transparency, and with Ty's help leads a rebellion against Bailey. But the movie never clarifies exactly what The Circle's leaders are trying to do with all their power, which makes its ultimate message more than a little murky. Is the problem that Hanks's guru is wicked and bent on using everyone's data for nefarious purposes? Or is the online panopticon itself inevitably dystopian, inhuman, oppressive? Would a life lived on TruYou be okay if control of the network were more decentralized, if there were no God-like gurus watching from above?

Admittedly, there are movies that could make a virtue of this ambiguity. But *The Circle* is not one of them: With its general clumsiness and unsubtlety, it's a movie that needs to deliver some kind of plot payoff, some kind of unexpected conspiracy that justifies the time we've spent with Mae and Bailey and the antler-artist. It doesn't, so you can skip it; there's probably something much more fascinating in your Facebook feed right now. **NR**

Happy Warrior

BY ANDREW STILES

Sociopolitical Media

WHATEVER your opinion of Donald Trump, you have to admit: He was right about perverts.

For years, our current president implored the Democratic establishment to cut ties with former congressman Anthony Weiner, a "sicko" whose deviant bent and proximity to Hillary Clinton threatened our national security and would inevitably "bring down" the people around him. They should have listened.

Former FBI director James Comey recently explained to members of Congress that his controversial eleventh-hour "meddling" in the presidential election was prompted by the discovery of classified e-mails on Weiner's hard drive, forwarded by his wife, Huma Abedin, along with a request to "pls print."

Nevertheless, Hillary persisted in holding Comey (and Vladimir Putin, and the media, and sexism) accountable for the demise of her otherwise compelling candidacy. (So compelling, in fact, that her campaign aides reportedly considered "Because it's her turn" as a potential rallying cry.)

Even if Hillary is right, the implications are not as profound as she and many of her conspiracy-minded fans would like to believe. Mainly, it would mean that Anthony Weiner, a.k.a. "Carlos Danger," has finally eclipsed Bill Clinton for the title of most consequential pervert in American politics. Congratulations are in order.

A far more distressing development is Hillary's official decampment from her woodland refuge in Chappaqua. The failed candidate is not only hawking another tedious memoir on the corporate-speaking circuit, she's also starting a political-action committee, presumably to help kick-start Chelsea's inevitable foray into politics. But since hell hath no fury like a Clinton scorned, we can't really rule anything out, can we? The soul shudders at the thought of the atrocious eyesight puns a third Clinton campaign could assault us with in 2020, touting her "perfect vision for the future," or whatever. The heart sinks.

We'll mark her down as a "maybe." In the meantime, those of us in search of political disruption must turn our gaze upon the American heartland, where a rich nerd walks among average voters posing for endearing photo ops. His name is Mark Zuckerberg, and he's definitely running for president.

Officially, the 32-year-old Facebook founder has "no plans" to run for president at this time, but no one believes him. He's spent the last several months pursuing his New Year's resolution—to visit and meet people in every state in the country, a quest that has taken him to Charlotte Motor Speedway, a Ford assembly line in Michigan, a dairy farm in Wisconsin, and a random family's dinner table in Ohio. It's almost as if he is deliberately trolling a certain failed candidate who woefully underperformed in Rust Belt states.

Zuckerberg has been documenting his travels on his multibillion-dollar social-media platforms and even responds to comments from his (90 million!) followers like an actual person. His photo stream is a parody of the little indignities we force our politicians to endure: driving a tractor, feeding a calf, touring a factory, chowing down on brats and cheese curds. What sort of sane, politically unambitious person would subject himself to this?

In case there was any doubt as to his intentions, Zuckerberg, who for years identified as an atheist, recently renounced his lack of faith in response to a Facebook comment. "I went through a period where I questioned things," he wrote, "but now I believe religion is very important."

Zuckerberg would obviously run as a Democrat, or as the founding member of an obnoxious new party that rejects political ideology in favor of "what works." There will never cease to be an appetite among cultural elites for a technocratic centrism that values corporate profits *and* social justice while embracing TED-talk pablum as a form of enlightened discourse. "Can the US elect a young centrist disruptor his [*sic*] starts his/her own party? Yes, we can," journalist Ron Fournier tweeted in response to Emmanuel Macron's victory in the French election.

We probably could. Zuckerberg enjoys high name recognition and decent approval ratings. He's a self-made billionaire who speaks Mandarin and clears (though not by much) the low bar of being more charismatic than Hillary. He'd make history as the youngest president, and the first Jewish president, now that he's found religion again. Oh yeah, and he has access to more information about our personal lives and predilections than our closest friends and relatives do.

Politics aside, a national conversation about the merits of social media, and Silicon Valley culture writ large, wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. Zuckerberg describes his work as "connecting the world and giving everyone a voice." Unless you live in China and want to be connected to unsavory information about your government. Facebook, in an effort to re-enter the Chinese market, has developed software to enable state-sponsored censorship.

The company recently announced the hiring of 3,000 new content monitors because its widely touted livestream service is giving voice to too many murderers and other violent criminals. Social media are just reality television 2.0: crass, shallow entertainment fueled by petty grievances, often fake, but at least we get to be the stars of the show, plugging our personal brands, curating our best selves, optimized for advertising. Thanks, Zuckerberg.

Our favorite tech firms, meanwhile, have evolved from plucky underdogs into corporate behemoths that commoditize our daily lives and employ hordes of lobbyists on Capitol Hill, yet they somehow manage to evade the animosity and skepticism directed at Wall Street and "Big Business." Why not put them in charge of the government? We'd hardly notice if they started slipping constitutional amendments into our terms-and-conditions contracts. Do you agree? NR

Mr. Stiles is a freelance journalist in New York City.

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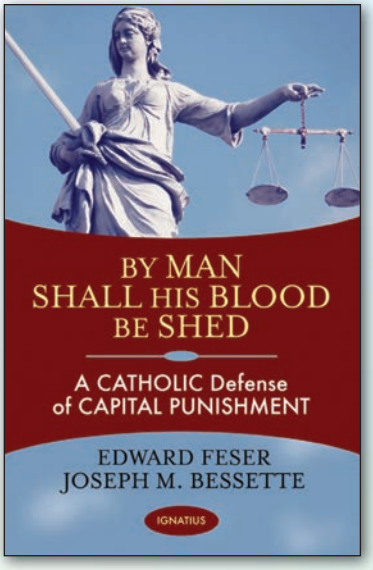

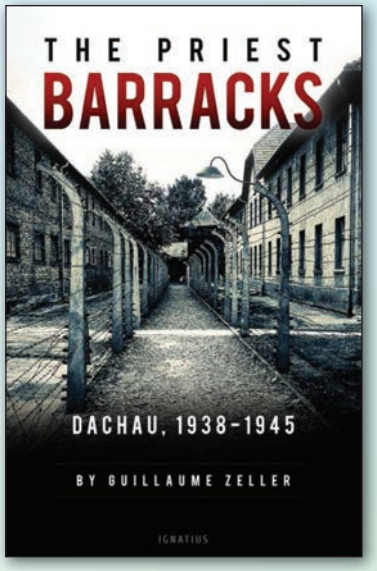

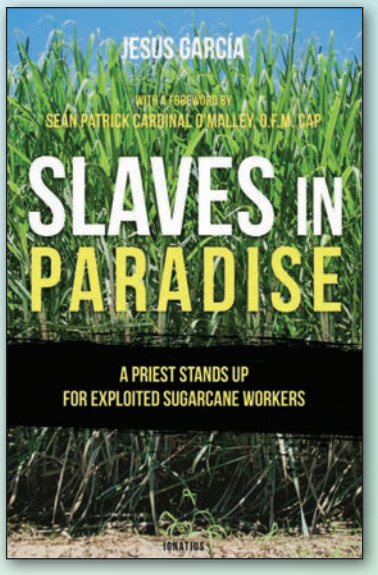

By Man Shall His Blood Be Shed – *A Catholic Defense of Capital Punishment*

Edward Feser and Joseph Bessette

The Catholic Church has in recent decades been associated with opposition to the death penalty. It was not always so. This timely work recovers, and calls for a revival of, the Catholic tradition of support for capital punishment. Drawing upon a wealth of philosophical, scriptural, theological, and social scientific arguments, the authors show that it is the perennial and irreformable teaching of the Church that capital punishment can in principle be legitimate — not only to protect society from immediate physical danger, but also for purposes such as retributive justice and deterrence.

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The Priest Barracks

***Dachau 1938-1945* – Guillaume Zeller**

How many people know that at the Nazi death camp Dachau, three barracks out of thirty were permanently occupied by clergy from 1938 to 1945? Some 2,579 priests, monks and Catholic seminarians from all over Europe were imprisoned there, out of which 1,034 lost their lives. For eight years, both tragedies and magnificent gestures punctuated the journey of the clergy at Dachau, from the terrifying forced march of "Holy Week" to the heroic voluntary confinement of priests in the barracks of those dying of typhoid, to the moving clandestine ordination of a young German deacon by a French bishop.

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Slaves in Paradise

***A Priest Stands Up for Exploited Sugarcane Workers* – Jesus Garcia**

The Dominican Republic is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Caribbean. Yet when missionary priest Fr. Christopher Hartley arrived there in 1997, he discovered another side to this paradise: the deplorable living and working conditions of the people who harvest the country's sugarcane, and the illegal human trafficking that brings them to the plantations as slaves. Inspired by the Gospels and Mother Teresa, Fr. Hartley carried out intense evangelization, applying the social teachings of the Church to fight for their dignity and justice.

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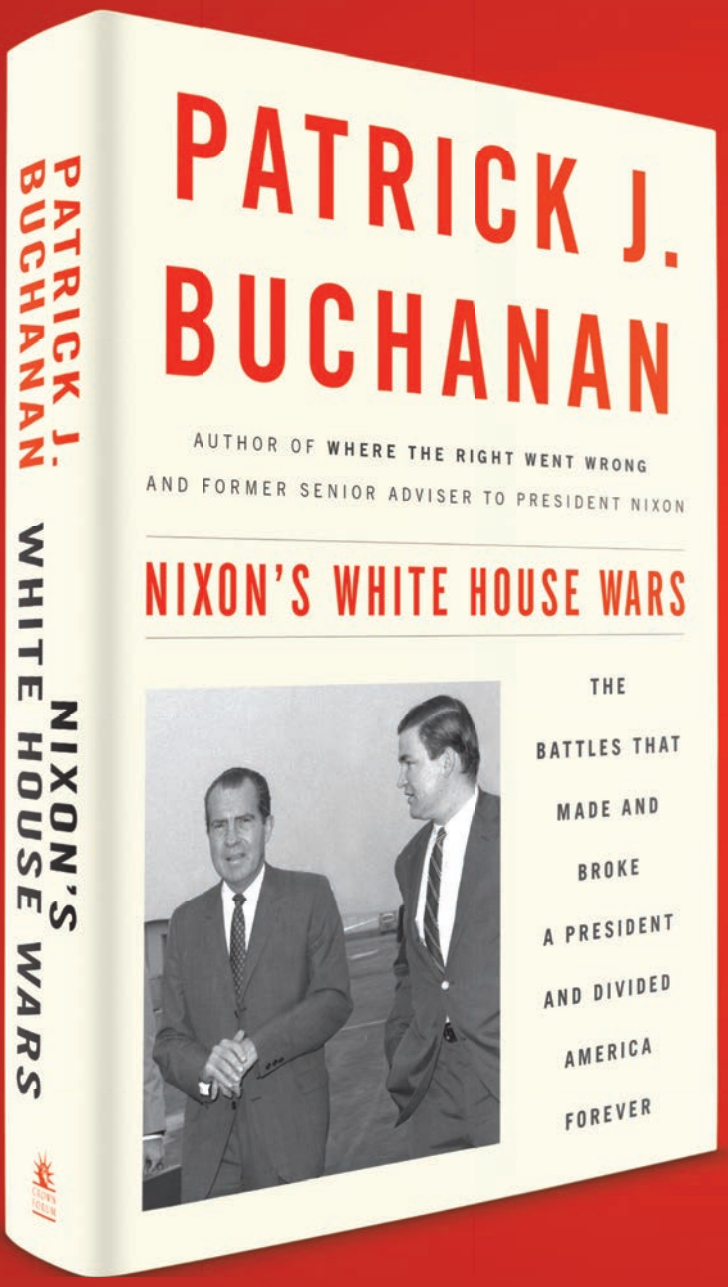

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