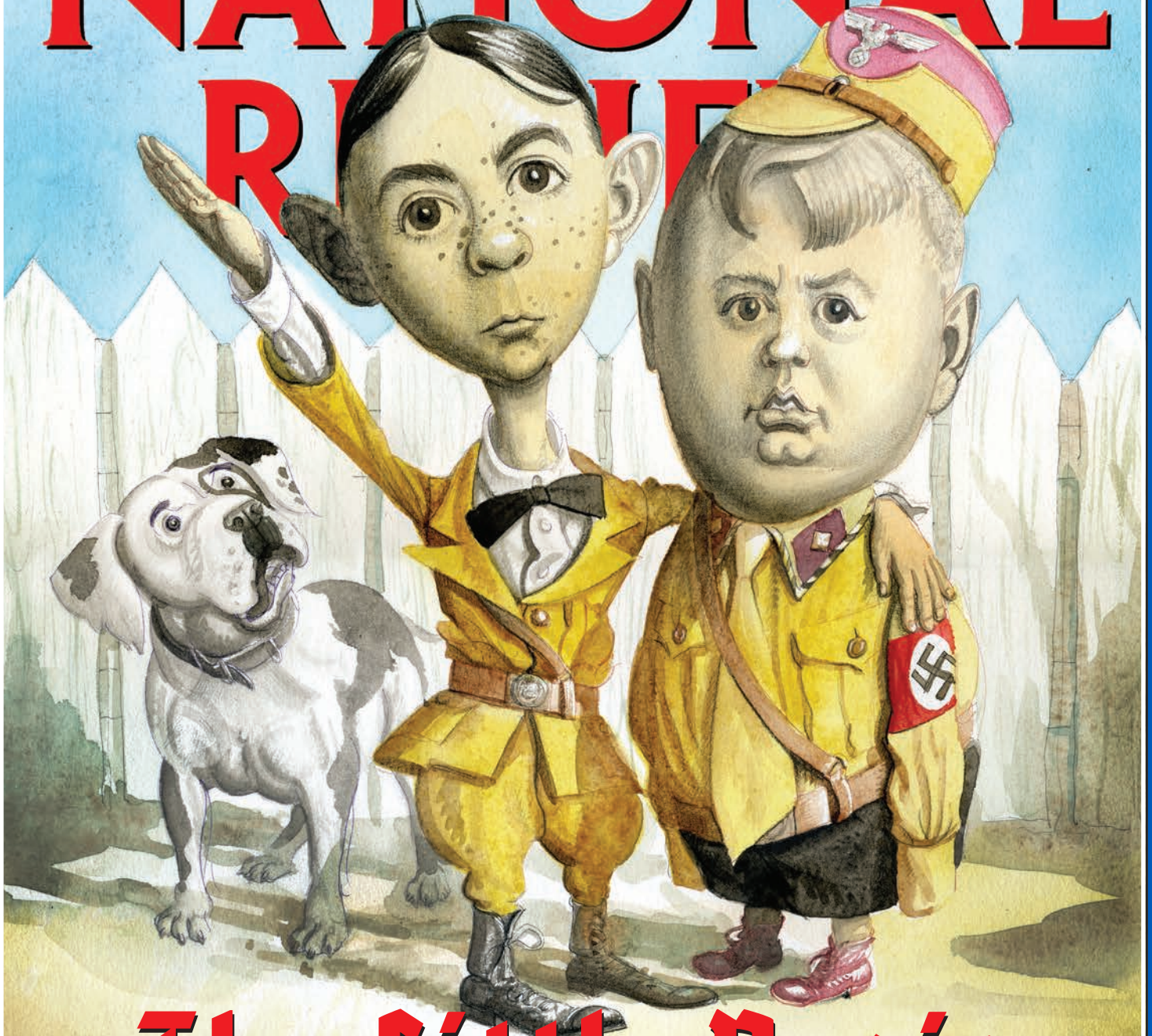
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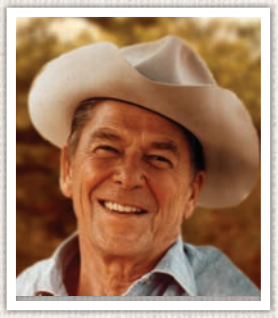
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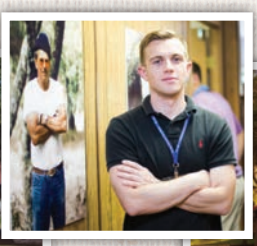
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Letters

Masked Media Critics

I have enjoyed NATIONAL REVIEW for nearly four decades. Even when NR gets it wrong (in my view), they almost always do so thoughtfully and from sound conservative principles.

In the current issue, you presented me with an exception to this rule. I refer to your (admittedly mild) defense of CNN's "doxxing" (or, rather, threat to do so) of a young "Redditor" who created and posted a video graphic of CNN being beaten up by Donald Trump. Rather than focusing on CNN's a) inability to take a (kind of lame) joke, or b) devotion of investigatory resources to such a trivial matter when there are other obvious issues that could benefit from such "sunlight," you said: "Why should political social-media posts be anonymous? . . . The identity of social-media pundits is a matter of public interest. Let the sun shine in."

Here's the problem: Anonymous speech is an integral and fundamental right tied to the right to free speech itself. If this were not inherently obvious, please note that our nation's civil-rights jurisprudence recognizes this fact explicitly. The modern-day political climate is such that a person's life can be destroyed for even trivial transgressions of the current liberal pieties. More grimly, leftist mobs roam the land ready to destroy property, pepper-spray the objects of their unhinged hatred, and worse. There are sound reasons to remain anonymous when being provocative, and weighing these against the ludicrous idea that some guy with a GIF editor is a "pundit" of any stripe does not exactly scream out for "sunshine."

Of course I am aware that the First Amendment applies to state action and thus says nothing about whether CNN is permitted to deploy resources to cause someone harm as a penalty for mocking it. The "civil rights" argument is just a parallel: This is the powerless standing up to the powerful, something liberals claim to admire (until the moment it's something that gets their own panties in a bunch, of course). Combined with CNN's willingness to die on the barricades to protect the anonymity of someone making up fake-news allegations against Republicans, I think the real story here is the appalling hypocrisy on display.

J.D. Baldwin
Via e-mail

THE EDITORS RESPOND: You're welcome, and thanks for your support. We agree that CNN deserved at least mild criticism, which is what we think we gave it. We agree as well that anonymous speech is constitutionally protected. Whether it should be celebrated is a different matter. Sometimes "the powerless" are just the cowardly.

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The Week

■ Clearly, any sportscaster named Nathan Forrest need not apply for a job at ESPN.

■ Steve Bannon got the axe. He had alienated many of his co-workers through infighting and leaks, and White House chief of staff John Kelly reportedly (and understandably) regarded him as a destabilizing force. Bannon told a reporter that the heroic nationalist phase of the Trump presidency is over. If so, it is over before it began: The administration has not yet even drawn a design for its border wall. Bannon also dismissed white supremacists as a tiny and impotent fringe; but they are stronger than they were before he decided to give the alt-right, in his own words, a "platform." Bannon is back at Breitbart.com, where we hope he listens to his better angels.

■ Mitch McConnell complained that Trump had excessive expectations for how quickly Congress would move on legislation. Trump fired back, and then kept firing back. Both men have a point. Trump had said again and again how easy it would be to pass a health-care bill; but McConnell did have seven years to prepare one. Instead of allocating blame, perhaps they should spend their time trying to get a health-care bill passed?

■ Last spring, Julius Krein, a young, Harvard-educated financier, launched *American Affairs*, a new policy journal that sought to lay a coherent intellectual foundation for an ascendant Trumpism. Now, in the aftermath of Trump's controversial remarks about Charlottesville, Krein has renounced his support of, and his vote for, Donald Trump. "Not only has the president failed to make the course corrections necessary to save his administration," Krein wrote in the *New York Times*, "but his increasingly appalling conduct will continue to repel anyone who might once have been inclined to work with him." After finding much to admire in the "hazy outlines" of an insurgent campaign, Krein is now reduced to salvaging Trump's agenda from "the wreckage of his presidency." Given how fervently he supported Trump, only to quit on him less than a year into his presidency, one hopes he will undertake this new project with a new sense of modesty.

■ Mitt Romney joined the critics of President Trump's response to Charlottesville. There was much to criticize, especially Trump's statement that "very fine people" had joined a march that was in truth undisguisedly anti-Semitic and racist. Romney, though, went with a less meritorious criticism: that Trump was wrong to call out left-wing protesters for their violence, since neo-Nazis were worse. Romney is right that Trump should choose his words more carefully; on this occasion, he should have done the same.

■ The Republican primary for Jeff Sessions's seat in the Senate has not shown Alabama Republicans in their best light. Luther Strange, the appointed incumbent, has spent the campaign



ROMAN GENN

See page 10.

arguing that none of his rivals can match his devotion to the president—although in truth he seems closer to Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell. Mo Brooks, a conservative in the U.S. House who did not support Trump last year, spent his campaign obscuring the fact, and didn't make the run-off. Now Strange faces Judge Roy Moore, who came in ahead of him in the first round. Moore is famous in state politics for putting his own interpretation of God's law above the commands of higher courts. Is there some way to bring Sessions back to the Senate?

■ A *CBS News* story reports that Iceland is currently leading the world in "eradicating Down syndrome births." The country has not discovered an innovative treatment for the genetic disorder. Icelanders are simply killing babies with Down syndrome before birth, through a combination of prenatal testing and abortion. This testing is optional, but doctors encourage it and the vast majority of expectant mothers choose to receive it. Nearly 100 percent of Icelandic mothers who receive Down-syndrome diagnoses (which are sometimes false) have an abortion. The situation in the U.S. is not all that different. The West has made a moral rather than a medical breakthrough, and not a good one.

■ All of a sudden, Senator Marco Rubio acquired a new security detail. Why? Apparently, because a leading player in the Venezuelan government ordered that he be assassinated. Senator Rubio is one of the world's fiercest, and most specific, critics of the Venezuelan regime. He has particularly antagonized Diosdado

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Cabello, a veteran *chavista* believed to be in charge of the country's security forces. It is Cabello who evidently ordered the hit. Any indication that the Venezuelan government has tried to follow through should be met with a fierce response.

■ Donald Trump just can't quit his favorite General John Pershing myth. After the Barcelona terror attacks, he tweeted: "Study what General Pershing of the United States did to terrorists when caught. There was no more Radical Islamic Terror for 35 years!" This was an obvious reference to a story he told on the campaign trail. He claimed that Pershing, when he served in the Philippines, ordered the execution of dozens of prisoners with bullets dipped in pig's blood. This brutal action, according to Trump, so demoralized Islamic terrorists that they were quiet for decades. There is no evidence to support Trump's story. There is instead considerable evidence that General Pershing pursued more lenient policies than his predecessors in order to earn goodwill from Filipinos. It is hard to know which is worse: that Trump has libeled an American hero, or that he thinks he complimented him.

■ Two presidential councils composed of high-profile business executives—one dedicated to economic strategy, the other to manufacturing—were dissolved after an executive exodus that began with the resignation of Merck CEO Kenneth Frazier, who quit in protest of the president's clumsy response to the murder and mayhem in Charlottesville. He was soon joined by the heads of Walmart, 3M, Intel, and others, and the strategy board decided to dissolve. Trump's first response, as it often is, was to take to Twitter to savage his critics: He accused Frazier of keeping pharmaceutical prices high in a "ripoff" of American consumers. But as it became clear that Trump was on the losing end of that fight, he decided to claim he had decided to dissolve the advisory boards himself. The councils themselves are no great loss, inasmuch as they seldom met and would have, at most, offered careful advice to a president who truly listens only to a tight circle of confidants. For quite some time now, Republicans have been losing support in the business world even as their reputation for slavish fealty to business interests stayed intact. The first trend, at least, seems to be accelerating in the Trump era.

■ The American Civil Liberties Union has proven itself half-commendable in recent weeks. On the plus side, the outfit has assiduously ignored calls to drop its staunch commitment to the First Amendment—even when the amendment protects neo-Nazis. But then along came some men who elected to exercise two rights at once, and the ACLU's resolve failed. Henceforth, the group explained, it would not be defending the speech right of those who "hate" if they are simultaneously carrying firearms. Hostility to the Second Amendment trumped devotion to the First. Should gun owners be denied their *Miranda* readings or deprived of an attorney if arrested while carrying a weapon? The ACLU's version of the Constitution is evolving before our eyes.

■ Few organizations in the United States enjoy more undeserved respect than the Southern Poverty Law Center. Formed in 1971 to oppose white supremacists in the South, it has since morphed into a particularly dangerous and disingenuous far-left activist and fundraising organization. Its current specialty is classifying and tracking so-called hate groups, and it has created a list only a university radical should love. It lumps together true white supremacists with Christian organizations such as the Alliance Defending Freedom and the Family Research Council (FRC). It tracks hate-group leaders and also calls American Enterprise Institute scholar Charles Murray a "white nationalist." It has, in other words, become unhinged, and other unhinged people have used its lists to abet their acts of violence. In 2012, Floyd Lee Corkins tried to massacre FRC employees after seeing the group's name on the SPLC list. In 2016, student radicals referred to the SPLC to justify physical attacks against Murray. It is thus a genuine shame that corporations such as Apple and JPMorgan Chase chose to respond to the alt-right march and terror attack in Charlottesville by giving money to the SPLC. It has demonstrated time and again that it exacerbates American divisions and intentionally blurs the lines between genuine Nazis and mainstream conservatives. The SPLC is a cancer on the American body politic and deserves no one's support, especially not support from two of America's most powerful and respected corporations.

■ If you're traveling to Seattle, bring a lead umbrella. Since 1984, a law has prevented the Washington state government from conducting preparations for, or setting out an evacuation plan in case of, a nuclear attack. During the Cold War, Washington legislators wanted to demonstrate their confidence in Russian nonaggression and deescalate first-strike tensions. The legislators wanted to go even further: Nuclear preparations are imprudent, reads a vetoed section of the bill, because they give citizens a false sense of security in an emergency situation where there are almost no survivors. The law was then forgotten until May, and a bill with bipartisan support now awaits a committee hearing in the state senate. North Korea has concentrated the mind . . . sort of: The committee will have to wait until January to discuss the bill.

The Southern Poverty Law Center is a cancer on the American body politic and deserves no one's support.

■ The deadly terror attacks in Spain remind us, if we needed a reminder, that Europe has a terrible new normal. It's now expected that every few weeks or—at most—few months, a terrorist will strike somewhere, usually in the heart of one of Western Europe's greatest cities. The attack in Barcelona was just as heinous as we've come to expect, with the driver reportedly maneuvering to strike as many people as possible in the middle of one of the city's favorite pedestrian gathering-places. Spanish security forces had developed a reputation for effectiveness after the horrific Madrid train bombing in 2004, but as the saying goes, the police have to be effective every time, while the terrorists do not. The attack heightens the urgency of the continued offensive against ISIS. It's vital not just to destroy the inspiration for

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terrorist violence but also to stabilize the Middle East and stanch the flow of migrants and refugees into Europe. Otherwise, expect the new normal to get worse still.

■ ISIS is committing genocide against religious minorities in Iraq and Syria, the State Department reiterated in August, in its annual report on international religious freedom. Last year, under pressure, the Obama administration finally designated the crisis *genocide*, following unanimous votes to the same effect in the U.S. Congress and the European Parliament. The word "genocide" has consequences: America and 142 other countries have signed the U.N. Genocide Convention, which obliges them "to undertake to prevent" the abomination and to "punish it." The U.S.-led military coalition in Iraq has made progress at least toward preventing it from continuing in Mosul. Meanwhile, more words, but the right words: In addition to prioritizing genocide victims for aid and asylum, a bill passed by the House, though stalled in the Senate, enjoins the State and Justice Departments to help foreign governments identify and prosecute *genocidaires* where possible.

■ The U.S. government is facing what seems a great and terrible mystery. Several of our diplomats have returned home from Cuba, to seek medical treatment. In Cuba, they were deafened—by some sort of sonic device, apparently. The same happened to Canadian diplomats. Who did this? The Castro dictatorship? That would seem unlikely. For decades, our diplomats have been in Cuba, unmolested. Why would the dictatorship molest them now, when full diplomatic relations have been established? Also, would not an attack on U.S. diplomats be reckless in the extreme? Possibly suicidal, for the Cuban government? Moreover, the government of Justin Trudeau has very warm relations with Havana. So, who did this, and why? Let's hope that these questions do not remain mysteries.

■ Hong Kong was supposed to enjoy an exemption: to be an island of democracy and liberalism, attached to a one-party dictatorship (with a gulag). That exemption has proved chimerical. The government has now jailed three students who have led democracy protests. The judge in the case said that the sentences were necessary to deter a "sick trend": namely the belief of some Chinese that they should live in a democracy. Such thinking is "arrogant and self-righteous," said the judge. One of the students—Joshua Wong—said, "You can lock up our bodies, but not our minds! We want democracy in Hong Kong. And we will not give up."

■ Robert Mugabe is the dictator of Zimbabwe, 93 years old. His wife, Grace, is his former secretary, and a mere girl at 52. The dictator is set to run in one of his sham elections next year. If he dies, Grace has vowed, the ruling party will run his corpse. Mrs. M. is a fit partner for the dictator. In South Africa recently, she beat the hell out of a young woman—a 20-year-old model—who had been spending time with two of the Mugabe sons. Mrs. Mugabe's weapon of choice was an extension cord. "She flipped," reported the model, "and just kept beating me with the plug. Over and over." The model was left a bloody mess. The government of South Africa has smoothed over the incident, allowing Mrs. Mugabe to return to Zimbabwe, where life goes on as normal. Mrs. M. has assaulted people before—particularly photographers. But that is nothing compared with what her husband has done to the country at large.

■ Colin Kaepernick will be featured at the National Museum of African American History and Culture, a division of the Smithsonian Institution. An exhibit on Black Lives Matter will include shoes, a game-worn jersey, and other items belonging to the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback. His knee, not his arm, earned Kaepernick most of his fame. He spent much of the 2016 season kneeling during the pregame national anthem to protest, he said, police brutality. The world is deluged with political opinions. The gridiron promises refuge from them, and Kaepernick knocked a hole in the canopy. He ended up drawing more attention to himself than to his cause, during those brief moments reserved for athletes and spectators on both sides to face in the same direction and agree about something. The museum can honor whom it wishes.



MICHAEL ZAGARIS/SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS/GETTY IMAGES

■ With its wave of statue vandalism, the alt-left delivered a crude rebuke to Robert E. Lee. Now they have added ". . . and the horse you rode in on." Students at the University of Southern California are calling USC's horse mascot, Traveler, racist because his name is similar to that of Lee's favorite horse, Traveller. The origins of the mascot's name are unclear, but the first horse to use it at USC was a Hollywood veteran who had appeared in a girl-with-horse movie called "Snowfire" and been a regular on the *Lone Ranger* series (at USC, even the mascot is a movie star). Over the years (the current incumbent is Traveler IX), the horse's name and image have been trademarked, and his care and housing are paid for with an endowment that a comp-lit professor can only envy, so Traveler isn't going anywhere. (Admittedly, all the Travelers have been white males, though the original was half Arabian, if that's any help.)

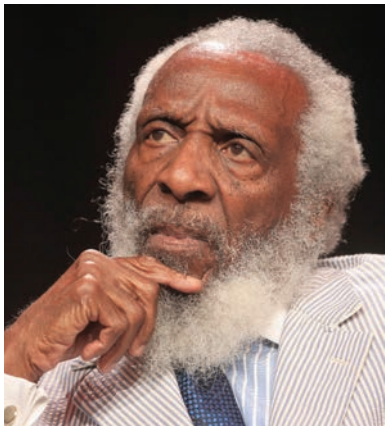
■ As the USS *Indianapolis* steamed from Guam to the Philippines on July 30, 1945, the bombing of Hiroshima was only a week away. The ship's 1,196 crewmen didn't know that, of course, even though they had just delivered a secret cargo, later revealed to be enriched uranium, to the island of Tinian, where the bomb was being assembled. Most of them did not even live to see the end of the war—because shortly after midnight, two Japanese torpedoes sank the *Indianapolis*, killing a quarter of the crew immediately and leaving the rest exposed for several days, until a Navy patrol plane happened to spot the site of the sinking. Of those who survived the initial blast, only 321 were still alive when rescue craft arrived; the rest drowned or succumbed to hypothermia, seawater poisoning, or sharks. It was the largest loss of life at sea from a single ship in the history of the U.S. Navy. Now Paul Allen, the Microsoft billionaire, has located the wreckage of the

Indianapolis on the floor of the Philippine Sea. It's an impressive technical feat that we hope may provide a measure of closure for the families of those who died and the 22 remaining survivors—and prompt renewed gratitude from the rest of us.



■ Arthur Finkelstein was one of the most famous, most effective, and most notorious Republican consultants. He mastered many arts, including negative campaigning. He was a Jewish, gay libertarian willing to run combative hard-right campaigns. He believed that government had grown too big and helped to elect politicians who would deal with this trend. He also had an important insight: that there were Democrats more conservative than their party who would vote for Republicans, if those Republicans were pitched to them in the right way. We take particular satisfaction in one election: that of 1970 in which James L. Buckley became the "sainted junior senator from New York" (as his brother WFB would call him). Arthur Finkelstein had a virtuous hand in that election. He has died at 72. R.I.P.

■ The son of parents in small-time show biz, Joseph (or Jerome, sources vary) Levitch hit the big time in his early twenties, starring with Dean Martin in nightclub comedy acts and on national television, which in the late 1940s was new. Movies followed. America knew him as Jerry Lewis. He played a twitchy younger-brother type, fast to jump but slow to comprehend—and boyishly awkward, like early Woody Allen but without the philosophy jokes. At age 33, Lewis wrote, directed, and starred in *The Bellboy*, a vehicle for his slapstick and sight gags. A few years later he repeated the feat with *The Nutty Professor*, his favorite. He appeared in more than 60 films. French critics lionized his creative genius. Americans were slower to take him seriously, although by now his influence on comedy is not much disputed. He began hosting the annual telethon for the Muscular Dystrophy Association in 1966 and raised more than $2.6 billion for it over the course of more than 40 years. Dead at 91. R.I.P.



■ Hugh Hefner caught Dick Gregory doing standup comedy in Chicago in 1961 and hired him to work the Playboy Club. Gregory's career took off overnight, helped by a profile in *Time* magazine and an appearance on *The Tonight Show*. Integrating wit and social commentary à la Lenny Bruce and Mort Sahl, Gregory established himself as a specialist in observations on black–white social tensions during the civil-rights era. He went to Selma in 1963 to support a voter-registration drive and ran for mayor of Chicago in 1967. The following year he ran for president, as a write-in candidate. He went on hunger strikes to protest the Vietnam War and then to oppose or support causes ranging from South African apartheid to American Indian rights. His comedy career by now abandoned, he turned ever more ascetic, preaching against drugs and advocating better nutrition for the poor. He denounced abortion as a form of black genocide. Full of interlocking conspiracy theories, which he thundered about with passion in later years, he was an enigmatic man whose excesses tended sometimes toward the oddball but often toward the righteous. Dead at 84. R.I.P.

AT WAR

Trump's Afghan Escalation

President Trump, thank goodness, doesn't want to lose a war on his watch. He had a choice. On the one hand, he could follow his instinct to pull out of Afghanistan, act on his many bumptious calls to abandon the war, and please his most fervent supporters. On the other, he could acknowledge the disaster that would result in Afghanistan and potentially the region if he followed this course and instead work toward a more responsible policy. He rightly picked the latter option and spoke to the nation about his new strategy.

If President Obama had been as willing to examine his political promises and ideological predispositions in the light of reality, he would not have pulled out of Iraq, creating the conditions for the rise of ISIS and for overwhelming Iranian influence in that country. Obama's foolish choice, as Trump said, informed his more sober-minded decision on Afghanistan.

Trump's strategy will involve the deployment of an unspecified number of additional troops, looser rules of engagement, and pressure on our supposed ally Pakistan, which continues to play a dangerous double game by harboring our enemies. Any future drawdowns will be based on an evaluation of conditions in the country and region, not arbitrary deadlines. This is all to the good, and better than a precipitous total withdrawal. But cautions are in order.

First, if we have established anything in Afghanistan over the last 16 years, it is that victory will be extremely difficult to achieve given the limited social capital in that tragic, war-torn, highly tribal country. Anything recognizable as success will be impossible without a commitment much larger than the American public is, understandably, willing to contemplate. So, for all of Trump's stalwart talk about winning, the realistic choice is between a holding action and defeat.

It's not clear that Trump will have the appetite for this difficult, twilight war over the longer term, and his natural predilections confused how he talked about the strategy. He said we aren't going to engage in nation-building, but if the course of the war is dependent on the performance of the Afghan military and government—this, presumably, is what the conditions are about—we will need to try to foster the development of Afghan national institutions, i.e., engage in some nation-building.

As for Pakistan, Trump's tough rhetoric was welcome. His warm words about India, in particular, probably concentrated minds in Islamabad. But Pakistan won't easily be pressured out of a policy of maintaining strategic depth in Afghanistan via the Taliban that it has pursued for decades out of a sense of its national interest. Wrenching it into a different strategic orientation is a major diplomatic undertaking at a time when Rex Tillerson's understaffed State Department appears to be held together with duct tape and baling wire.

GREGORY: FREDERICK M. BROWN/GETTY IMAGES



President Donald Trump announces new strategy for Afghanistan, August 21, 2017

MARK WILSON/GETTY IMAGES

All that said, Trump's approach is better than the alternative. If the Taliban were going to (at least in its propaganda version) expel us from Afghanistan, it would vastly increase its prestige, and if it were to take over the country, it wouldn't be long until fanatics began using its territory to plot against us. This was our experience in Iraq. Obama's pullout hastened that country's downward slide and the day we had to send troops back in. Trump is right not to want to repeat the cycle in Afghanistan.

POLITICS

The Charlottesville Melee

There's no putting a happy face on President Trump's ham-fisted and equivocal response to the mayhem and murder in Charlottesville, where white supremacists staged a march and rally during which one of their number murdered a young woman and injured 19 others when he drove his car through a crowd of counter-demonstrators.

The president started on the day of the violence with an oddly vague condemnation of hatred "on many sides." Then, under extreme political pressure, he came back two days later and more specifically denounced the neo-Nazis and their allies. If he had left it at that, the media might have still carped at his tardiness, but no one would have been able to criticize the content of his final statement on the matter. Instead, he held a press conference the next day where, clearly angry at the criticism of his remarks, he let loose as only this president can. In an instantly notorious line, he said there were "fine people" marching on both sides.

Good people disagree about a great many things, including the propriety of maintaining Confederate monuments in public places. But that is not what Charlottesville was about. Charlottesville was host to a torchlight parade organized by white supremacists who were chanting slogans against Jews, flying swastika banners, and demanding racial separatism. There are no good people in that parade. These ideas are not merely mistaken but evil, and the president of these United States ought to have said as much in the plainest terms possible.

It is true, as the president said, that there was violence on both sides in Charlottesville. But the neo-Nazis were the instigators via their idiot march, and they had a murderer in their midst. They must get the lion's share of the blame. This shouldn't mean turning away from the depredations of antifa. It, too, came spoiling for a fight. In fact, during much of the violence it was hard to tell which helmet-wearing, pole-wielding, punch-throwing side was which. Antifa is, contrary to its name, a genuinely fascistic movement, and the same people on the left who are lambasting President Trump for his lack of moral clarity need to demonstrate some of their own by forthrightly denouncing the violent fanatics on their side.

The extremes of the two sides feed off energy and attention they derive from street fights, and there will probably be more Charlottesvilles. Next time we hope Trump finds the words necessary to the moment.

CULTURE

The Confederates and Us

President Trump asked a reasonable question about Confederate statues: "Where does it stop?" Charlottesville, Va., voted to take down its statue of General Robert E. Lee; will statues of George Washington be next? He too owned slaves. There are voices on the left who want to prove Trump right: They have Washington, Jefferson, and Columbus in their crosshairs. Since this controversy heated up, even statues of Joan of Arc have not been safe from hostile graffiti.

There are answers to Trump's question, but they all involve—although the word these days may require a trigger warning—discrimination. A flag honoring the Confederate fallen in a cemetery is not the same as a statue honoring the president of the Confederacy in a public thoroughfare. A monument erected to celebrate a white-supremacist riot, which New Orleans had until earlier this year, is not the same as a memorial to the father of our country. And a public decision to alter a city's historical markers is not the same as a private act of vandalism. Those who take it upon themselves to deface or take down monuments should be prosecuted.

Many of the Confederate memorials were put up not just to commemorate the dead, celebrate the achievement of peace, or teach the facts of our history: They were put up to make statements of support for the Confederate cause or of defiance against desegregation. It is no surprise that they are taken as such by many people, including neo-Nazis. In these cases, to put statues in a museum, or to add explanatory plaques, is not to erase history but to undo its distortion.

In considering the past, we should be clear-eyed about both historical evils and human fallibility. Not everyone who abhors slavery today would have abhorred it had they been whites in 1850s Georgia. Yet time and place do not efface right and wrong. General Lee was given a choice in 1861, and made the wrong one. Admiral Farragut made a better one. Is our country capable of making the necessary distinctions, or even discussing them intelligently? Our debate may concern judgments of our past, but our conduct of it will render a judgment on our present.

Editor's Note: The next issue of National Review will appear in three weeks.



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ROMAN GENN

Divided They Stand (or Fall)

Anti-Trump Republicans are not facing their challenges

BY RAMESH PONNURU

President Donald Trump's response to the mayhem in Charlottesville, Va., led to renewed calls for Republicans to abandon him. Even beforehand, reporters had written about a possible challenge to his renomination in 2020. Vice President Mike Pence felt obliged to disclaim any interest in being a challenger himself.

Interest in this question is a sign of Trump's political weakness. Nobody would be talking about the 2020 primaries if Trump's poll numbers were stronger, or if he had signed major legislation on health care or tax reform. But his Republican opponents face four hurdles before they can mount a serious campaign against him—and they do not seem to be paying any attention to the biggest one.

Three of those hurdles are familiar from coverage of the Trump administration's first seven months. First, Trump retains the support of most Republican voters: Roughly 80 percent of self-identified Republicans approve of his job performance. Second, it's not clear who would be able and willing to lead a Republican campaign against him. Third, we are in an era of strong negative partisanship. Even Republican voters who have serious reservations about Trump will be loath to do anything that might help the Democrats win the next presidential election.

If the administration continues on its current trajectory, the Republican opposition could overcome those obstacles. During his first seven months in office, some of his strong supporters have become weak supporters and some of his weak supporters have quit on him. More Republican voters could leave him if he makes no further legislative progress, or if they grow weary of defending him in future controversies, or if the economy weakens, or if special prosecutor Robert Mueller uncovers damaging information about him. If his numbers fall enough, some ambitious Republican politician will want to run against him. Republican voters might even eventually conclude that dumping the president is their surest way to keep the Democrats out of the White House—although that is going to be a very hard sell, since he won last November when a lot of people offered plausible reasons why he wouldn't.

Even if anti-Trump Republicans grow in number, though, they will still face a fourth problem: They are internally divided. They are united in disliking Trump, but they are not united in all their reasons for disliking him, in what direction they would like to see the Republican party go in, and in what policies they want the country to adopt.

Start with immigration, an issue that played an important role in Trump's victory in the Republican primaries. In July, Trump endorsed legislation to reduce legal immigration levels by half. Many of the Republicans who are most critical of Trump, including Senators Jeff Flake and Lindsey Graham, criticized him over this issue too. But other conservatives who frequently oppose Trump, including the editors of this magazine, are for the bill.

Or take health care, the subject of the major legislative effort Congress has undertaken during Trump's tenure. Both Arizona senators, Flake and John McCain, have been cool at best toward Trump. But the two of them split on health care: Flake voted for the Senate Republicans' most recent bill, McCain against it. Senator Mike Lee of Utah, who did not vote for Trump, was skeptical of the main Republican bills because they did not deregulate enough. Governor John Kasich of Ohio, who also did not vote for Trump, was opposed because they restrained federal spending on Medicaid.

These divisions among anti-Trump Republican reflect the diversity of the coalition the party represents. That coalition includes business-oriented moderates, tea-partying conservatives, and working-class nationalists. None of these groups would easily fit in the Democratic coalition, but they have very different outlooks. The first and second, but not the third, back free trade and (at least vaguely) entitlement reform. The second and third, but not the first, would like to curtail affirmative action. The first and third groups, but not the second, like the idea of a big federal push for infrastructure spending.

Trump won the primaries as the champion of the working-class nationalists, a group that had grown as a proportion of the Republican voting base but that had not been well represented in the party's leadership. He also won it because the other two groups were split. Moderates who disliked Trump weren't going to vote for Ted Cruz to stop him, and conservatives weren't going to vote for Kasich.

These splits have survived the campaign. When Mitt Romney registers his disagreement with the president's plan to withdraw from the Paris climate-change accord, most members of the business-moderate faction nod along. The other two groups prefer Trump's approach. Trump supporters in those groups look at Romney's declaration

and are reinforced in their support of the president and in their irritation with anti-Trump Republicans.

Many of Trump's Republican critics say that his character repels them much more than his policies. That his character is deficient a point on which the critics almost entirely agree. Whether or not they like the idea of cutting immigration, they dislike having a president who is mercurial, petty, dishonest, complacently ignorant. Their consensus on this admittedly important question obscures their disagreement on much else.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that so many of these anti-Trump Republicans are admirers of Senator Ben Sasse of Nebraska. Thoughtful, well read, self-deprecating, Sasse is as far from Trump in personality as it is possible to be. His criticisms of Trump have centered on the president's offenses against decency and lack of familiarity with constitutionalism. What he is known for, besides those criticisms, is giving voice to a conservative philosophy that emphasizes virtue, civil society, and their relationship to each other.

What Sasse has not yet done is take a stand on the issues that divide anti-Trump conservatives. Advocates of the immigration-control bill don't yet know whether to count him as an ally or an opponent. If he comes out for reducing immigration, he will disappoint a lot of Trump critics; so too if he comes out against it. Sasse kept his head down for most of this year's Obamacare debate, rising only to demand a vote on a bill that would have deferred most questions about health policy for a year or two.

If Sasse were to run for president, though, such choices would become inescapable. He could well find himself appealing only to Cruz Republicans or only to Kasich Republicans—and in either case he would probably fail.

Or perhaps he would find a way to unite the different elements of the party behind an agenda that the public would find appealing and that would actually do some good for the country. It's a challenge that has so far eluded President Trump. But it has also eluded congressional Republicans, and the Republican candidates whom Trump defeated. The Republican party has enormous power but does not know what it wants to do with it. Republicans who detest the president should not kid themselves that this predicament is all his fault. NR

Who Needs Advisory Boards?

Trump should take the opportunity to rethink the Right's relationship to Big Business

BY REIHAN SALAM

At the start of his presidency, Donald Trump invited a number of America's leading business executives to serve on two new advisory boards: the Strategic and Policy Forum, devoted to providing the Trump White House with advice on economic issues, and the Manufacturing Jobs Initiative, which focused more narrowly on the president's plans for an industrial revival. Though there's nothing unusual about having corporate America's leading lights serve on such boards, which have been around for ages, the fact that Trump was able to persuade so many of them to sign up in the wake of his controversial campaign seemed a reassuring sign, especially to jittery investors. If the chief executives of PepsiCo, General Motors, IBM, and other corporate giants were willing to do business with the new administration, surely all would be well.

That's not quite how things have turned out. Almost from the inception of these advisory boards, members have been wrestling both publicly and privately with the propriety of serving on them. On February 2, less than two weeks after Trump's inauguration, Travis Kalanick, who was then the CEO of Uber, resigned from the Strategic and Policy Forum to protest the president's temporary visa freeze on a handful of Muslim-majority states, better known as the "Muslim ban." Given Uber's various PR woes and its heavy reliance on immigrant drivers, this shouldn't have been too surprising. Distancing himself from Trump was an easy way for Kalanick to score points with his many detractors on the left.

Something similar could be said of Elon Musk, the celebrated tech visionary behind SpaceX and Tesla, and Bob Iger, the chief executive of the Walt Disney Company, a sprawling media conglomerate, both of whom parted ways with the Strategic and Policy Forum on June 1, just after the president decided to withdraw from the Paris climate accord. Silicon Valley and Hollywood were never on the Trump train, so one could dismiss their departures as little more than posturing. After the Charlottesville incident, however, it became clear that just about all members of both advisory boards were rushing for the exits. Seeing the writing on the wall, Trump disbanded them both.

There is a case for simply saying good riddance to the advisory boards and all that they represent. Most of the corporate chieftains who agreed to serve as part of the Strategic and Policy Forum and the Manufacturing Jobs Initiative did not do so out of any affection for Donald Trump. Rather, they presumably recognized the value of having the ear of the president, or at least one of his underlings, since it could mean influencing the country's policy direction in ways that would serve the interests of their shareholders. When it became clear that associating with the Trump administration was proving too costly to their reputations and those of their companies, the CEOs bolted. Fair enough. Then, of course, there is the cultural dimension. As the country's educated professionals grow more socially liberal, it's hardly surprising that corporate elites would follow. Perhaps a divorce between the GOP and corporate America was inevitable, Trump or no Trump.

But there's another way to look at the dissolution of Trump's advisory boards, which is that it gives the Right an opportunity to rethink its relationship to Big Business.

By all means, business executives should do their best to serve all of their stakeholders, whether they reside in Columbus, Ohio, or in Kuala Lumpur. As far as U.S. policymakers are concerned, however, the essential question ought to be whether a given business is serving the interests of the American people broadly understood.

Right now, our chief interest should be in boosting productivity growth. From the end of the Second World War to the start of the Great Recession, real GDP per capita in the U.S. has grown at an average of 2.5 percent a year. Since 2007, it has grown a mere 0.6 percent a year. Just about every challenge facing

American society would be much easier to meet if the U.S. grew at even half the rate it did in decades past.

Viewing matters through this lens, we can't really speak of a single, monolithic corporate America united around a single "pro-business" agenda. Rather, we have innovative, high-growth companies that contribute to rising productivity by investing in their U.S. work force, alongside a growing number of corporate dinosaurs that are content to exploit cheap credit and cheap labor to keep their broken business models afloat.

Consider the ongoing debate over corporate-tax reform.

House speaker Paul Ryan and his allies are pushing hard for corporate-tax reform to include "full expensing," which would allow businesses to deduct the entire cost of their investments in the first year instead of depreciating them over a longer period. Others, including most members of the House Freedom Caucus, would rather pursue deep cuts in the corporate tax rate but leave the current law's depreciation schedule intact. There's no way to do both without massively increasing the federal deficit, so lawmakers are duking it out over the kinds of companies that should come out ahead.

Businesses that intend to make significant new capital investments—firms building massive fulfillment centers, manufacturers that rely heavily on high-tech equipment, and fast-growing start-ups—are far more inclined to back full expensing, for the obvious reason that it would greatly ease the burden of expanding and upgrading their operations. In contrast, established firms that have no intention of making new investments, or that have more labor-intensive business models, are adamantly opposed to full expensing if it means giving an inch on the corporate tax rate.

Narrow though this debate might seem, the direction Republicans choose to take on tax reform will have profound implications for America's economic well-being. To the partisans of an overall rate cut, full expensing is nothing but a sop to high-investment businesses. Why should we prioritize their needs over those of other firms? But if our goal is to raise productivity, there's no question that we ought to encourage firms looking to invest in new, more advanced equipment rather than reward companies for investments they made ages ago—not least because doing so would likely boost growth in wages and incomes over the long haul.

We see a similar dynamic at work in the debate over the tax treatment of the profits U.S. firms earn overseas. The U.S. government, and in particular U.S. trade negotiators, do a great deal to protect the interests of U.S. multinationals, regardless of whether those companies deign to return the favor by reinvesting in the U.S. economy. But that's hardly the fault of corporate executives. The real problem is that, as it stands, the U.S. corporate-tax code gives U.S. multinationals a perverse incentive *not* to invest at home.

At 35 percent, the statutory U.S. corporate income-tax rate is among the highest in the world, so naturally U.S. corporations do what they can to avoid paying it. Many U.S. multinationals achieve this by shifting their operations to overseas tax havens, where they can defer paying U.S. taxes on their foreign earnings indefinitely, so long as they never use their foreign profits to invest in the U.S. Needless to say, this is a perverse result. One would hope that when U.S. multinationals expand their businesses abroad, at least some of the resulting profits would make their way back home—ideally to be reinvested in domestic operations, which could then be a source of high-wage, high-productivity employment. When the Apples and Alphabets of the world keep their profits locked up in Ireland, however, this simply doesn't happen.

While this might sound like a niche issue, it goes to the heart of what we might call the "globalization bargain." As Brad Setser of the Council on Foreign Relations has observed, one of the central arguments for embracing free trade is that while doing so will inevitably create winners and losers, the gains are more than big enough to make up for the losses in aggregate terms, and government's role is to help ensure that the losers are adequately compensated. That's hard to do if the winners from globalization shift their most valuable intellectual property to lightly taxed foreign subsidiaries to get out from under the IRS.

Conservatives tend to support moving to a territorial tax system, in which U.S. multinationals would no longer have to pay U.S. taxes on money earned abroad, yet they'd be free to plow the profits back into their U.S. operations. This is also the position favored (not coincidentally, I'd venture) by most U.S. multinationals. The danger, however, is that under a territorial system, U.S. multinationals would have good reason to move all of their taxable operations out of the U.S. and into tax havens.

The real problem is that, as it stands, the U.S. corporate-tax code gives U.S. multinationals a perverse incentive *not* to invest at home.

As an alternative, Congress ought to consider adopting a global minimum tax, under which foreign earnings would be subject to a specified tax rate—17 percent, let's say. Companies that have already paid 17 percent or more in corporate taxes to a foreign government would be free to bring the rest of their profits back to the U.S. tax-free. Those that have paid less would have to pay the difference to the U.S. Treasury. Essentially, the global minimum tax would punish U.S. multinationals that go abroad primarily to dodge U.S. taxes while leaving all others—the ones that are doing their part in the globalization bargain—pretty much untouched. Moreover, the revenue from a global minimum tax could finance tax cuts elsewhere, including a move towards full expensing.

If Congress were to adopt a corporate-tax overhaul that helped increase the gains from globalization while spurring a domestic investment boom, it would be an achievement for the ages. Donald Trump could happily claim credit, and soon the CEOs would come flocking back to the White House. **NR**

Conservatism In the Desert

Senator Jeff Flake makes a Goldwateresque stand against Trump

BY LUCY CALDWELL

Snowflake, Ariz.

If you drive 200 miles northeast of Phoenix, deep into Navajo County, Ariz., you will find yourself in the Town of Snowflake. Nestled in a corridor of the state between the Hopi and Fort Apache reservations, this is Arizona's high country—the woodsy White Mountains, a region that bears little resemblance to the low country of the Sonoran Desert.

The town of around 5,000 is not exactly a cultural hot spot. Snowflake's claims to fame include being an early hotbed of Mormon polygamy (a lifestyle choice that landed one of the town's founding fathers in jail) and, later, the location of the purported alien abduction that inspired the sci-fi movie *Fire in the Sky*.

But now, perhaps the most notable thing about Snowflake is that it is where the new leader of a conservative resistance to Trumpism, Arizona's junior U.S. senator, Jeff Flake, was born. The similarity between his surname and "Snowflake" is no coincidence—it was Flake's great-grandfather who was imprisoned for polygamy after founding the town. Flake's western bona fides include being a fifth-generation Arizonan. His father was mayor of Snowflake, and his uncle a beloved speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives. Before he won a bid for the U.S. House in 2000, Jeff Flake served as executive director of the Goldwater Institute, a conservative think tank with an emphasis on individual rights. (I worked at the Goldwater Institute between 2009 and 2014.)

To say that Jeff Flake is a native son of this state would be an understatement. Following in the tradition of Barry Goldwater, Flake is not the first Republican senator from Arizona to contravene GOP marching orders—it was just last month that John McCain doomed attempts to repeal Obamacare, the culmination of a career that has included crossing the aisle to join the late Ted Kennedy in pushing comprehensive immigration reform, not to mention the less well-loved but seldom forgotten campaign-finance reform of the early aughts, the McCain-Feingold Act.

As the borrowed title of Flake's new book, *Conscience of a Conservative*, reminds us, Arizona Republicans have a history of marching to their own beat and incubating endangered political philosophies. And it is also in the tradition of Arizona Republicans to oppose presidents they consider dangerous. It was Goldwater who, along with Arizona congressman John Rhodes, made clear in 1974 to President Nixon, a man he'd long considered dangerous to the republic, that his presidency would not survive and that resignation was his only option. Famously, Goldwater traveled to the White House the night before Nixon's resignation to meet with the president, to tell him that the writing was on the wall.

Jeff Flake is now having a Goldwater moment with Donald Trump, of whom his new book is highly critical. Bucking the narrative of the party faithful, who hold their nose as they stand by President Trump, Flake contends that the current administration represents the "executive branch in chaos." And he is making such criticisms in a year when he must survive both a primary challenge and a general election to retain his Senate seat. But if history is any guide, Flake's resistance to Trumpism will not be his undoing. Despite its reputation as a red state, Arizona produces national politicians who are anything but partisan. John McCain credits former U.S. senator Dennis DeConcini, a Democrat who represented Arizona from 1977 to 1995, for mentoring him when he took



BILL O'LEARY/THE *WASHINGTON POST* VIA GETTY IMAGES

Senator Jeff Flake

Lucy Caldwell is the chief strategy officer and executive vice president of Crowdskout, a data-management, marketing, and analytics platform for campaigns, nonprofits, and advocacy. She previously worked as the senior political adviser to the Goldwater Institute.

office. The senior senator brought McCain along to hold frequent bipartisan press conferences with reporters to foster debate. McCain tells similar stories about former Arizona Democratic congressman Mo Udall.

Nor do Arizona voters tend to vote straight-ticket. Trump won the state last year, but several darlings of the far Right suffered defeat, including Trump ally Joe Arpaio, the longtime Maricopa County sheriff and immigration firebrand.

Over the years, Flake has defied the party line several times, and he's been no worse for the wear electorally. In 2013, his first year in the Senate, he voted in favor of the Employee Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA)—the bill would prohibit, in hiring and employment, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity—for the second time, having previously done so as a House member. During the Bush administration, Flake became a vocal opponent of the Iraq War. In the debate over climate change, he has been warm, at times, to cap-and-trade. At the end of the last administration, he was the lone Republican senator to support opening trade with Cuba. He traveled with Obama to negotiate the deal.

Flake was also one of a handful of Republican senators to decline to endorse Trump during the 2016 campaign. He stayed home during the Republican National Convention last summer and chastised Trump for his campaign rhetoric and style.

This is not an act—it's genuine Flake, and I've seen this first-hand. Eight years ago, wanting a break from undergraduate life, I took a leave for a semester and retreated to Arizona, my home state. I had dabbled in journalism but had never worked in politics. I applied for a job to be a press assistant for Representative Flake and was invited to the district office for an interview.

To my surprise, after I'd spent a few minutes with his chief of staff in a windowless, fluorescent-lit conference room, Jeff Flake walked through the door, dismissed his staffer, and began interviewing me himself. But Representative Flake was not particularly interested in hearing about my nonexistent qualifications for the role. It was a few days after my stepmother's father, the late journalist Bob Novak, had died of a brain tumor. I had never met Flake, but he had sniffed out the family connection.

"It's just such a loss," Flake told me, recounting how he and Bob had frequently met for breakfast in Washington before Bob's illness. He considered Bob a sounding board for his thoughts about breaking rank. Bob had gained some enemies on the right by questioning the Iraq War, which Flake by then also opposed. What he had really valued about Bob, Flake told me, was how willing he was to go against the grain on issues of the day.

I didn't get the job, but this exchange, which put Flake's commitment to thoughtfulness over partisan loyalty on display, has stuck with me. His critics on both the left and the right who have called his denunciations of Trump a stunt have obviously not been paying attention these 15 years that the man has been in office.

Noting that Flake's approval ratings are at an all-time low in the state, some speculate that he must be fearful about reelection next year—some right-wing pundits have even posited that this so-called stunt will mean he's finished. The Trump administration has already met with would-be primary challengers, and in August, the president himself tweeted that Flake was "toxic" and that it was "great to see" former state senator and perennial candidate Kelli Ward throw her hat in the ring to unseat the senator. Trump called him "weak on borders, crime and a non-factor in Senate." Of course, in Arizona, polls have not always been a reliable indicator of reelection chances. When McCain was running for reelection just two years ago, his approval ratings were among the lowest for any U.S. senator, yet he won reelection handily, first by obliterating Ward, his primary challenger, who now hopes to unseat Flake. The last time a Republican senator from Arizona lost a bid for reelection was 1926.

Arizona is a semi-open-primary state, meaning that nonaffiliated voters can vote in any party primary they choose. No Democratic presidential nominee has won Arizona since 1996, but registered independents, not Republicans, are the largest voting bloc in the state by far. Arizona's independents don't stay home when they have the chance to turn out in primaries, and it has usually been GOP contests that they have chosen to vote in.

It's no secret that the Trump agenda, which will now be front and center in Flake's reelection race, has failed to gain traction with independents. That bodes well for Flake in a Republican primary against a Trump loyalist. (Another potential Flake challenger recently characterized himself without irony as "drinking the [Trump] Kool-Aid.")

On issues ranging from ENDA to Cuba, Flake's past and present contrarian positions are in fact consistent with what most Americans think, according to polls. A few of Flake's detractors point out that in recent months he has appeared to toe the line on the Trump administration's policy agenda. In July, for example, the senator voted for the "skinny" Obamacare repeal, which went down to defeat.

But Flake's warnings about Trump are as much a statement about the importance of our policymaking culture as they are about the content du jour of public policy. Consider the senator's words in *Politico* on July 31:

> There was a time when the leadership of the Congress from both parties felt an institutional loyalty that would frequently create bonds across party lines in defense of congressional prerogatives in a unified front against the White House, regardless of the president's party. . . . Vigorous partisans, yes, but even more important, principled constitutional conservatives whose primary interest was in governing and making America truly great.

Twitter-length Flake last summer, on learning of Tim Kaine's nomination to the Clinton ticket: "Trying to count the ways I hate @timkaine. Drawing a blank. Congrats to a good man and a good friend."

Flake is trying to breathe life back into bipartisanship, which worked well for our country in the past, even if it's an outlook that our current president doesn't encourage. Like Goldwater and others who came before him, Jeff Flake will probably never be president himself (nor, at this moment, is there reason to believe he has his eyes on that prize). But a prediction: He will be Arizona's senator come 2019. And he just might be the guy to get conservatism back on track. NR

The Uses and Abuses of Cultural Identity

Look to Corey Stewart's near-win in Virginia

BY SAAGAR ENJETI & MARSHALL KOSLOFF

President Donald Trump's inability thus far to translate his populist-nationalist message into a coherent policy agenda, combined with his low approval ratings, could have some Republicans convinced that a return to "normalcy" is on the horizon. For Republicans reluctant to support Trump, a return to normalcy would mean a full embrace of the traditional post-Reagan agenda of low taxes, entitlement reform, and free trade. They view this agenda as normal even though GOP primary voters and Trump himself repudiated free trade *über alles* and all talk of entitlement reform during the 2016 presidential campaign. Trump cited these establishment policy goals after securing the GOP presidential nomination and in the early months of his presidency, but they are clearly not his focus.

These Republicans might tell you that Trump won only because too many primary candidates cluttered the field, he faced one of the worst general-election opponents in American history, and he was able to manipulate lazy mass media. And once elected, Trump has been unable to get much done, the critics note, pointing to the poor initial rollout of the so-called travel ban and to Trump's inability to push Congress to pass populist legislation of consequence.

The apparent paralysis of the Trump administration has lured some into the comforting belief that there's no need to rethink Republican orthodoxy. True, they say, Trump destroyed one establishment candidate after another, and he paid little heed to conservative sacred cows during the campaign, but that didn't signify any deep-rooted changes taking place within the GOP.

Corey Stewart's recent near-victorious gubernatorial-primary campaign in Virginia against former RNC chairman and George W. Bush White House official Ed Gillespie shows that's just not true. Stewart's full-throated defense of Confederate monuments and heritage has proven effective with the Republican base. In April, during the gubernatorial campaign, the Charlottesville city council decided to remove the now infamous statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee. In response to this, Stewart tweeted: "After they tear down Lee & Beauregard, they are coming for Washington & Jefferson. #HistoricalVandalism."

Trump's tweets in the wake of the recent violence in Charlottesville, tying the debate over Confederate statues to political correctness, closely resemble Stewart's April tweet. On August 17, Trump wrote: "Sad to see the history and culture of our great country being ripped apart with the removal of our beautiful statues and monuments. You can't change history, but you can learn from it. Robert E Lee, Stonewall Jackson—who's next, Washington, Jefferson? So foolish!"

Those who dismiss the danger posed by Stewart and his ilk point to failed candidates such as Wisconsin's Paul Nehlen, who primaried Paul Ryan in the 2016 campaign. Nehlen was trounced, losing 84 to 16 percent. In his campaign, Nehlen attacked Ryan for lacking loyalty to then-candidate Trump, and he parroted Trump's campaign positions, such as opposition to illegal immigration and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, while painting himself as a successful businessman.

Nehlen sounded like Trump, but he failed to understand why Trump was successful in the first place: Trump's competitors generally supported immigration reform and free trade, while Republican primary voters generally were skeptical on these issues; with his trademark aggressive rhetorical flourishes, Trump emphasized this gap. Nehlen lazily copied Trump's exact words without applying them to Wisconsin's first congressional district. Given the length of Ryan's tenure in Congress—he was first elected in 1998—his views on trade and immigration are probably fairly close to his constituents' views, or close enough to keep him in office.

Mr. Enjeti is a reporter for the Daily Caller News Foundation. Mr. Kosloff is a public-interest fellow at National Review.



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By contrast, Stewart's energetic defense of Confederate monuments and history, combined with his attacks on the media and his lack of fealty to political correctness (which both are reminiscent of Trump), perfectly fit the local Virginia context.

Traditional Republican orthodoxy has few if any means to quell the cultural unrest that drives the Trump and Stewart phenomena. Recent polling indicates that Trump's and Stewart's similar positions on Confederate monuments overwhelmingly resonate with the Republican base and the American populace at large. In a Marist poll conducted after the August violence in Charlottesville, 62 percent of respondents supported leaving up the statues. A similar *Economist*/YouGov poll found that 78 percent of self-identified Republicans either somewhat or strongly disapprove of taking down the statues.

Stewart placed Gillespie in a difficult position throughout the campaign, much as Trump is now doing to his opponents on the issue of Confederate and historical statues. Though Gillespie does not support getting rid of the monuments, he did not make their removal a centerpiece of his campaign.

He also wasn't supposed to be in such a tight race. Gillespie very nearly upset Virginia senator Mark Warner in the 2014 Senate campaign. He has high name recognition, his pro-life views and pro-growth tax agenda perfectly align with the conservative GOP base in Virginia, and he has shown a remarkable ability to appeal to moderate suburban voters in northern counties, who are critical to winning an increasingly blue state.

Stewart is a Georgetown-educated international-trade lawyer who has held elected office in Virginia for more than a decade. The first post to which he was elected, in 2003, was that of Occoquan district supervisor on the board of supervisors in Prince William County, one of the wealthiest and most populous counties in Virginia. Stewart gained regional notoriety in 2007 when the board of supervisors ordered the county police to aggressively pursue illegal immigrants. Stewart went on to mount a failed campaign for lieutenant governor. He emerged as an unlikely statewide figure after Trump chose him to serve as his Virginia state-campaign chairman in December 2015.

Stewart's tenure as campaign chairman came to a dramatic end in October 2016, when he mounted a pro-Trump rally outside the Republican National Committee's D.C. headquarters to protest plans to shift resources away from Trump's Virginia campaign. He was then summarily fired by the Trump campaign for highlighting the campaign's conflicts with the RNC.

Stewart had announced his intention to seek the Republican nomination for governor in April 2016, but after his bitter departure from the Trump campaign, he was considered a long shot by Virginia political insiders. Stewart's statewide and national profile rose after an infamous "Ask Me Anything" Reddit dialogue in which he referred to Gillespie as a "cuckservative," agreed with the suggestion that former president Bill Clinton is a rapist, and "CONFIRMED" the forum's suspicion that Democratic governor Terry McAuliffe is a "cuck." ("Cuck" is a term of abuse, based on the word "cuckold" and inspired by a genre of pornography, for Republicans seen as emasculated and too sympathetic to the interests of foreigners.)

Stewart followed his "Ask Me Anything" exchange with bellicose tweets decrying nationwide efforts to remove Confederate statues from public grounds. "Nothing is worse than a Yankee telling a Southerner that his monuments don't matter," he wrote, though Stewart himself is no southerner, having grown up in Duluth, Minn.

The national media pointed to polls showing Stewart down 20 points a month before the election, citing his rhetoric as the cause and mirroring their predictions about Trump during the presidential campaign. "Stewart's campaign may be remembered as showing the limits of race-tinged attacks on 'political correctness,' even among a very conservative electorate," Ed Kilgore wrote at *New York* magazine in May. "Racist dog whistles are one thing. Howling at the moon while defending the Lost Cause is another thing altogether."

But Stewart came within 4,500 votes of beating Gillespie in the June 2017 primary and did not let his loss stop him from almost immediately declaring his candidacy for the U.S. Senate in Virginia in 2018. Gillespie's supporters blame the close election on low voter turnout and note that Gillespie spent very little in the primary campaign, but Republicans should not ignore Stewart's popularity.

Stewart says that candidates from across the South have reached out to him, seeking advice on how to tap the same cultural vein he did during the gubernatorial race. Stewart's hammering of a cultural-identity issue comes from a dangerous new playbook that insurgent GOP candidates can employ, perhaps to great electoral benefit. Such a strategy may not depend on the political success of the Trump administration.

"We deliberately were, at times, more controversial in order to attract mainstream media, in order to attract earned media," Stewart told the *Washington Post* after his narrow defeat.

In Virginia and elsewhere, politicians have long used cultural identity and anxiety as a tool to help them win elections. In 2014, Dave Brat, an economics professor at Randolph-Macon College in Virginia, shocked the American political scene by unseating Eric Cantor, then the House majority leader and the speaker-in-waiting. By all accounts, Cantor was a conventional conservative who had checked all of the traditional Republican ideological boxes. But Cantor's perceived support for immigration reform—Brat depicted him as pro-amnesty in campaign speeches—left him vulnerable to an insurgent campaign from the right.

In hindsight, we can see that Brat's campaign resembled Trump's and Stewart's. Brat was an underdog candidate who attacked Cantor with fiery rhetoric on his immigration policy. Perhaps unknowingly, Brat wrote the playbook for at least the next two election cycles. Once is a fluke, twice is a trend, thrice is certainty. The GOP's reluctance to address the cultural-identity issues within its base has left an opening for Stewart-like candidates to hijack the party and the conservative movement as a whole.

While it is sound policy to let states and localities find their own responses to hot-button cultural controversies, this is simply not sufficient. The lesson of the 2010s is that the biggest mistake the GOP can make is to promote conservative orthodoxy without directly and clearly addressing issues of culture and identity.

In the meantime, Stewart and the next round of insurgents are preparing for 2018. "After I showed that you could stand up for Confederate monuments and . . . withstand the punishment from the mainstream media, I knew that others would follow," he recently declared to *BuzzFeed*, in an ominous warning of things to come. NR

That Magic Feeling

A day at Abbey Road Studios

BY JAMES ROSEN

THERE is no happy ending to this story. Not many years from now—*five? one?*—the world will be reduced to an uninhabitable state in which no Beatles are alive.

Nor will this essay meet the dictates of feel-good pop psychology, wherein my visit to Abbey Road Studios in London this summer neatly caps, and thereby helps me to turn the corner on, my Fab obsession. Pilgrimage to Mecca did not free me of the quasi-religious fervor that seized me at seven and has led me to accumulate vast archives capturing virtually every sonic blip they ever recorded, released or unreleased, and virtually every published interview they ever gave. I remain pathetically in the grips of Beatlemania.

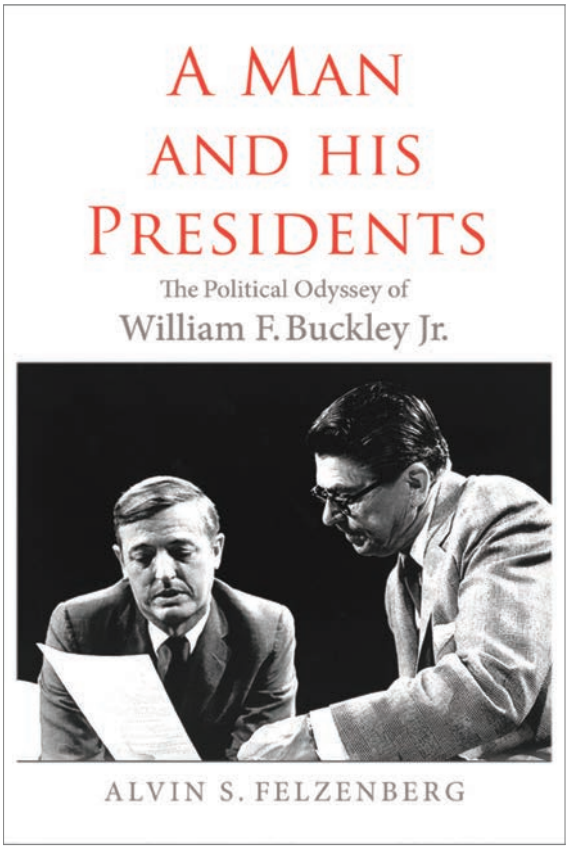
Mr. Rosen is the chief Washington correspondent of Fox News.

A physical sensation—a body-wide tingling, possession by electricity—struck during my first attempt at pilgrimage. It was February 2006 and I was covering Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's meetings with the Quartet, the cadre of foreign ministers gamely drafting a roadmap for the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. (The session proved memorable only because former president Carter made a special appearance to lecture the Quartet on—*what else?*—Israel's perfidy.) With New York and Washington still asleep and a bit of time to myself, I wandered the streets near my hotel in suit and tie, puffing a cigar and imagining myself, Murrow via Mitty, one of the great foreign correspondents.

Suddenly, it dawned on me: *You fool! You should be using this time to visit Mecca!* I milked an ATM, hailed a taxi, and barked: "Take me to the holiest of holy Mecca sites." "Where's that, mate?" "Abbey Road Studios," I replied, and the driver nodded wearily: *one of those*.

Deposited alone, I couldn't even stage the zebra-crosswalk photo. I just stood across the street, keenly surveying the pre-Victorian structure at 3 Abbey Road, St. John's Wood. Mere sight of the place triggered the electricity that suddenly possessed me. More precisely, it was physical visitation: the reaching at last of the epicenter of All That, confirmation, as though any were needed, that the Beatles weren't some grand media confection, a hoax of *Capricorn One* dimensions . . . It had all really happened.

Those steps: That's where they jumped on each other for the *Please Please Me*–era photos, the outtakes from which first appeared in Mark Lewisohn's 1988 reference volume, *The Complete Beatles Recording Sessions: The Official Story of the Abbey Road Years 1962–1970* . . . The roof: That's where Paul took John, that night during the *Sgt. Pepper* sessions, when the Beatles' founder was tripping hard and needed fresh air, and Paul, to erase the experiential gap with his best mate, resolved to take LSD . . . The only other spot on earth that had produced that same electric-possession sensation had been Tiananmen Square, with the giant



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The Beatles during a recording session for the album Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, 1967*

painting of Mao staring down. All That had really happened, too.

I breached the wall perennially covered in Beatle-ffiti and climbed the steps to the front door, just as the lads once did in newsreel comings and goings, and addressed myself to the receptionist, a brunette who, in my memory, resembles Elizabeth Hurley (although Anglophilia may here have conquered cognition). I told her I was an American journalist traveling with the secretary of state, showed my official credentials, and asked if there was any way she could walk me past—*not in, just past*—Studio Two, where the Beatles recorded most of their canon. "No, I'm sorry, I Kant," came the posh-accented reply; an instant later, I was back on my lonely street corner. Consolation came from an older gent carrying a tuba case. No, but he *had* played on one of Paul's solo albums—*what do you mean you don't remember which one?*—and his friend had played on "Eleanor Rigby." "He got a day rate," the man said wistfully.

This time the invitation came from a stranger. An assistant to a world-renowned classical pianist I'd never heard of—*how would I have?*—wrote me to say the musician was a fan of my work on Fox News and knew of my interest in the Beatles, and how would my family and I like to attend his next session at Abbey Road, in Studio Two with the London Symphony Orchestra, on July 13?

Before securing the time off or verifying that the pianist, Jan Mulder, existed, and this was not some elaborate extortion plot, I was booking travel.

Sara and I took our two boys, whose middle names are Lennon and McCartney, to London but not to Abbey Road; my one shot at Mecca would not be spent fretting over lost fidget spinners. Instead we invited along Sara's cousin and her husband, affluent Londoners accustomed to elite rooms but still impressed by my ticket to ride to one of the most revered, yet least visited, sites in all of Great Britain.

Because Abbey Road remains one of the world's most technologically sophisticated and solidly booked recording studios, only a handful of public tours have ever been conducted, and then only for small groups. This differentiates the studio from a heavily trafficked attraction such as, say, Buckingham Palace. For this reason, assuming flawless execution of *Mission: Impossible*–style diversionary tactics, one stands a better chance, mathematically, of rummaging the queen's pajama drawer than of setting foot inside Studio Two—where, as well, Pink Floyd recorded *Dark Side of the Moon*.

This time, the receptionist—a different one—was expecting me. I signed the visitors' log directly beneath two inked names: visitor Adam Sharp, whom I knew as the publicist for the late Sir George Martin, and Sharp's host, Giles, who was of course Giles Martin, son of Sir George and inheritor of the solemn task of remixing all reissued Beatles recordings. *Giles was here!* Maybe we would bump into him and somehow win admission to the vaults—or relive that time, in 1991, when I'd accosted the Martin family during a layover at LaGuardia . . .

Gabriel Mulder, the pianist's lanky 20-year-old son, introduced himself. He had assured me jackets were unnecessary but welcomed us in a black velvet jacket, black T-shirt, white slacks, and sneakers. It was Gabe, it turned out, who was the James Rosen fan who thought to invite me to his father's fourth (or was it his fifth?) recording session at Abbey Road. "For us," Gabe told me, grinning like a young Roger Waters, "Fox News is like the Beatles and you are like Paul McCartney." I warned him never to repeat such heresies.

After an exchange of gifts—my latest book and the new *Sgt. Pepper* set (featuring outtakes recorded Right There!) for four Abbey Road coffee mugs Gabe had very thoughtfully procured from the gift shop—we toured the entire building, save one exception: The fabled roof, site of John's LSD retreat, eluded us. Here was Studio One, red sign illuminated outside, a separate classical session under way inside, cavernous and eerie as one glimpsed, through control-room glass, a baton rising and falling in the hand of a white-haired conductor.

Here was the renovated cafeteria, adorned with black-and-whites of the '62-era Beatles in That Spot. There was '78-era Paul, sliding his tray down That Food Line. The shots of Gerry and the Pacemakers scarfing food with George Martin, or Cilla Black playfully pulling on the tie the famed producer always wore to work, now conjure eras as distant as the Civil War.

Every hallway featured long lines of framed, autographed movie posters, their soundtracks having been conducted or mixed there. Cluttering the industrial-carpeted walkways, awaiting disposal, were obsolete '90s-era reel-to-reel machines, now shelter to the sparkling-water bottles stowed beneath them. An alcove housed a photocopier and tens of thousands of pages of yellowing sheet music: the print library. The idea of glimpsing, let alone sampling, the 400 hours of master tapes the Beatles filled between 1962 and 1970, a communion ritual afforded only to a privileged few historians, had been raised by me a few days earlier and summarily shot down by the three corporations whose permission is now necessary for all such demonstrations. And the master tapes are, in any event, housed offsite.

Finally, we visited the Studio Two control room. There we watched, through the glass and on mounted TV monitors, Jan Mulder massaging a Steinway while conducting 41 casually dressed LSO musicians. *Forty-one, did you say? The exact number of classical musicians brought in, in formal dress, to record the mad*

crescendo on "A Day in the Life" 50 years ago in—This Very Spot! After an hour the cellists and violinists broke from the hymn they were rehearsing ("Come Thou Fount") on this latest of Mulder's Christian-themed albums, and the maestro joined us to say hello.

Dutch-born, tall and lanky like his son, Jan also sported a black T-shirt, along with a '70s perm and the same aura of unflappable decency his son exuded. Several of his albums have gone gold and platinum, and the Mulders, it turns out, are residents of North Carolina—and Trump fans. From his breast pocket Gabe proudly produced a three-by-five of him and Dad posed with the president-elect, thumbs-up, after an inaugural rehearsal.

Also present was Geoff Foster, the Grammy-winning studio engineer best known for his work on Daniel Craig's James Bond films. His eagerness to return to the console and the work at hand exposed him as the embodiment of John Cheever's definition of a good host: He held in equilibrium the pleasure he took in his guests' company and the pleasure he took in knowing they would all soon be gone.

A break in recording enabled Sara, our guests, and me to tread the famous steps that lead down from the control room to the floor of Studio Two: the white-walled, parquet-covered inner sanctum of British rock. Here possession posed a brief threat: As we looked down the staircase, I was overcome, briefly, with hot flashes and held my head in my hand. My wife poked me.

Once before, in October 2005, when Sir Paul plucked me from a small studio audience to play piano for him during the recording of the *XM Artist Confidential* program, a nudge from Sara had kept me from collapsing into tears, my default state at Paul's concerts following the death, in late 2001, of George Harrison. The Beatles' proximity to death is more than I can handle. A solitary trip to see last year's excellent Ron Howard documentary, *Eight Days a Week*, had left me so distraught that my six-year-old asked why "the Beatles movie" made me so sad. "It's just that they were so great," I offered, "and it was so long ago."

Jolted into propriety, I roved the large room, photographing every major and minor detail, marveling at how similar the chamber looks to its 1960s appearance. *Who knew those famous white-metal sidings with the slits sit on wheels? And that filthy, bent grate—that had to have been there then! Look: the completed session agreement form for the cellist, Jennifer Brown!* After a few more minutes spent grasping at communion, with our small party kindly but unnecessarily concerned for my emotional state, we repaired to the basement, and the Abbey Road Café, for a fine lunch of *antipasto*, *arroz con pollo*, *sopa de lentejas*, and York ham with cheddar.

Stepping outside, Gabriel brilliantly took our zebra-crossing photo. And then, with the same cruelty that was visited upon the pilgrims who filled the Ed Sullivan Theater and Shea Stadium, when the show was over and one's brief, frenzied exposure to the Magical Ones had come to its end, we were disgorged back into Real Life.

"This next song," Paul used to tell the fans, "will have to be our last one this evening . . ." And when the jet-engine screaming would erupt in protest—you can hear it before "Long Tall Sally" on the reissued version of *Live at the Hollywood Bowl* that Giles Martin recently superintended—Paul would adopt a mock-stern headmaster's tone and say, "Oh, yes . . ."

But the screaming only grew louder and more determined, until no one, including the Beatles themselves, could hear anything at all. **NR**

Doyle's War

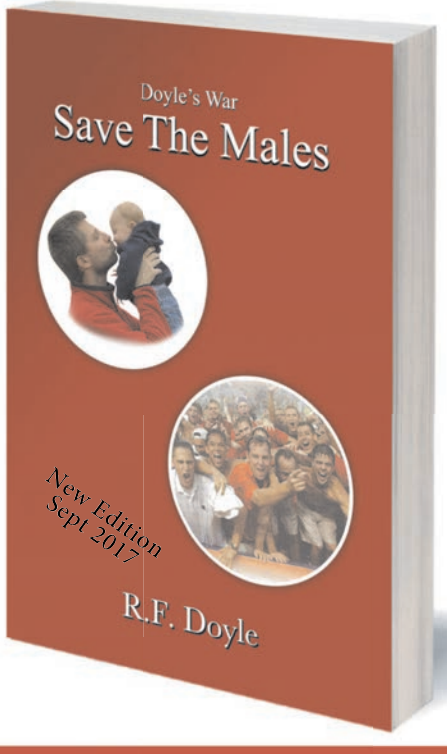
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White nationalists, neo-Nazis, and alt-right demonstrators clash with counter-protesters in Charlottesville, Va., August 12.

CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

The 'N' Word

They hate Jews and adore swastika swag, but don't you dare call them that . . .

BY KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON

Dallas

'WINDOW NINJA, what's your twenty?"

The militia is here, in the park next to city hall, on patrol, pretty decently armed up with 7.62x39mm rifles, pudgy faces concealed behind olive-drab keffiyehs, radios crackling with status reports, eyes presumably alert behind the polarized aviators they're not quite ready to give up in spite of the weak light of the early dusk, and they are ready—and by-God eager!—to stand tall in Texas and enforce justice for the law, an eagerness that is kind of *hilarious* even if it is something a lot less than amusing to the actual law-enforcement officers here, standing stiff-necked and rigid behind steel-tube barricades with their riot batons and helmets casually arranged on the thick August summer grass behind them, watching as the setting sun sends the long shadow of Robert E. Lee falling across the various and sundry wackos, prodigal sons of the Confederacy, sad little left-wing collegiate tomboys playing radical dress-up with red bandanas over their faces like spaghetti-western bandits and SMASH THE FASH! placards, conspiracy theorists who want you to know what the Federal Reserve—the creature from Jekyll Island!—is really up to, old-fashioned rednecks whose T-shirts proclaim them STONE COLD COUNTRY BY THE GRACE OF GOD, weird skinny twitchy guys who mention in every other sentence that they served in the Marines and who probably didn't actually serve in the Marines, self-described free-speech activists, that inevitable dude with the mullet waving the Confederate flag, guys in home-made riot gear slapped together from dusty hunting and motorcycling equipment, acres of sad dreary desert-camo cargo pants over coyote-tan boots from the Army-surplus shop, Communists, anarchists, extravagant beards, TV cameras, dreadlocks, ponytails, banana magazines protruding from matte-black Kalashnikov's knockoffs, cases of bottled water by the City of Dallas for your dissident convenience, Antifa and Antifa wannabes, Democratic-party organizers, cotton-candy vendors, at least three kinds of police, including Dallas mounties on big fine gray horses, the whole mess kind of milling about counterclockwise, a slow-motion hurricane of human angst and rage and boredom and more rage.

A couple of hundred people are here at the side protest in a largely Confederate cemetery, trampling on the graves of Civil War veterans and widows and on group graves for young children felled by the many terrors of the 19th century. The main show, with the speeches and sound system and all, is across the way at city hall.

Somewhere in the shadows, Window Ninja is watching. A silent sentinel, a watcher in the dusk.

At the eye of the hurricane, at least for a minute, is the local ambassador from the Republic of Kekistan.

Maybe you don't know about Kekistan. Here's the deal, from the website Know Your Meme: "The Cult of Kek, also known as the Church of Kek, is a satirical religion based around the worship of the ancient Egyptian deity Kek (also spelled Kuk or Keku), an androgynous God of darkness and chaos who is often depicted as a frog or frog-headed man in male form or a snake-headed woman in female form. On 4chan, the character Pepe the Frog is often considered a modern avatar of the diety [*sic*], who uses ancient Egyptian meme magic to influence the world, often by fulfilling the wishes of posts that end in repeating numbers."

Kek is another silly in-joke from the Dumb Green Frog Gang, the Internet *apfelstrudelführers* of the so-called alt-right, and it's a pretty good example of their *modus dumbasseri*. The flag of Kekistan is a Nazi battle flag with the blood scarlet replaced by Pepe green and the swastika at the center transformed into a Kek cross, four "K"s arranged around a central "E." When three "K"s aren't enough . . .

"IT'S A PARODY!" screams the slightly porky man from Kekistan, who has literally wrapped himself in the flag, wearing it like a superhero's cape. The crowd isn't having any of it. "It's based on a Nazi flag!" comes the response from the skinny little kid in the yarmulke. "That's . . . *not okay*!" The crowd moves in on the Kekistani, who insists that he isn't a racist or a neo-Nazi or anything like that—in fact, he says, he doesn't even particularly care about the Confederate statues here in the park adjacent to city hall, which, in theory, is what this pageant of rage is really all about—he is, he says, simply here to exercise his free speech. Free speech about what? He either doesn't know or won't say.

"I'M NOT A NAZI!"

The girls in the red bandanas creep in, eyes wide, ready to SMASH THE FASH! as hard as their soft pink little fists can smash it. He's sweating and squealing and wide-eyed and pretty clearly thinking about when he read *Lord of the Flies* in high school as the crowd tightens in around him, the eye of the rage hurricane contracting on his person. But nothing happens. It's like kids at a junior-high dance: Somebody has to make the first move, otherwise the boys and the girls just stay on their own respective sides of the gym and never start dancing. The bandana brigades came for a riot, but they will go home disappointed.

Slick takes it all in. Slick has traveled to this protest from . . . somewhere . . . and he doesn't want to be interviewed or to give his name. Amid the various kooks and cranks and goons and mall-ninja militiamen, he's a slick little f***er indeed, neat church-boy haircut, button-down shirt, khakis, pristine Nikes. No fatigues and swastikas and Confederate flags for him. He's like a miniature Richard Spencer, 20 years younger and still enjoying his anonymity. Aloof and ironic, he's an organizer, on the phone at intervals with somebody somewhere, making his report.

"The mayor of Charlottesville is a Democrat," he explains, "and a Jew."

This gets the attention of the little gaggle of protesters who had spent the better part of an hour standing around a Confederate flag and swapping cigarettes and conspiracy theories—fluoridation and the other classics—among themselves before Slick showed up on the scene. "So, he wanted chaos, and he got it. He wanted all the havoc he could. And people died." He tells an exculpatory version of the Charlottesville story in which the police, not the white nationalists, are at fault: The "free-speech activists," who were chanting about Jews and flying swastika banners, were a peaceful bunch, he says, not looking for any trouble, and, rather than do the usual thing and keep the police between the "free-speech activists" with the Nazi regalia and the Antifa thugs looking to SMASH THE FASH! the Charlottesville police plotted to push them together in order to provoke violence that could be blamed on the boys from Kekistan.

Someone lays a hand on the Kekistani's chest: "DO NOT TOUCH ME!" he screams, and what ensues is a little game of "I'm Not Touching You!" that will be familiar to anybody who ever spent much time in the back of a station wagon on a long family road trip.

The cotton-candy guy does steady business. A fair profit, nothing more.

A guy shooting video on his iPhone interviews one of the militiamen, and he's going on and on about the militiaman's rifle and its ammunition: "Full metal jacket!" he repeats, over and over, obviously ignorant of the fact that the rifle in question can be loaded only with jacketed ammunition, since this isn't 1899. A young black woman on a cheerful pink bicycle rides past and pauses to take in the show. The dramatic contrast is of interest to the guy shooting the video, and he points it out to the militiaman. "You're here with your rifle, with your full-metal-jacket ammunition, and here's this *little girl* on her bicycle." She leans in to speak to him. "Here's this 30-year-old woman on her bicycle," he corrects himself.

Slick puts on his red MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN cap and wades into the scrum.

"CONVENTIONAL Republicans" is how he describes his parents, chuckling. "*Episcopalians*," he adds with a little snort.

"I had a very normal childhood in Dallas," says Richard Spencer, the slickest and most notorious racist in American public life since David Duke. "I went to St. Mark's"—that's a $28,000-a-year prep school—"and I was on the football team. But I was interested in some more avant-garde things." He directed and starred in a school performance of *K2*, Patrick Meyers's 1983 Broadway play about a doomed mountaineering expedition. "It's a real . . . *masculine* play," Spencer says, with just a hint of self-derision in his soft voice. "It's about two mountain climbers climbing K2. One leaves the other to die. Very Nietzschean." His interest in theater continued into his adulthood. "At UVA, I directed my own productions, including a very avant-garde, Robert Wilson–like version of *Hamlet*. I was looking for something beyond pedestrian reality and bourgeois society."

Richard Spencer isn't a storm trooper. He's a theater kid.

The nexus of fascism and the avant-garde is familiar territory, from the Italian Futurists to Le Corbusier. Poor rotten old syphilitic Freddy Nietzsche provides the shared philosophical basis, or at least the shared intellectual *posture*: The new man and the new civilization must be pulled forth out of the corruption and decadence of the present by intellectual and/or physical violence. If a white nationalist's name-checking a gay experimental-theater icon sounds weird to you, you aren't paying close enough attention. The so-called alt-right is not about politics: It is about aesthetics. And though it shares some political space with conservatism and, thanks to Donald Trump, with the Republican party, the alt-right isn't exactly right, either: Richard

Spencer is a pro-choice atheist with some substantial reservations about capitalism, a man who mocks the Republicans as a bunch of Babbitts who cannot see that life contains "more than free trade and tax cuts." And he is, inescapably, a deep-dyed Nietzschean. Or at least he thinks he is, and he describes his first encounter with *The Genealogy of Morals* as "a shattering experience." He is insistent in his belief that people do not really change over time, a point to which he returns several times, and reading Nietzsche is as close to a transformative experience as he'll allow.

Transformation is a theme in his life. He talks about having lost a lot of weight after "bulking up" to play offensive tackle in high school, and is famously vain about his looks. He affects a "fashy" razor haircut with a little lock arranged to casually fall just so over his right eye and often dresses in pastoral tweeds like he's hunting grouse on an English country manor. He is much more interested in the aesthetics of his movement than he is in any specific policy ideas, a subject about which he is in fact quite vague. "I recognize the power of spectacle," he says. "It could even be something as simple as looking good—something conservatives could learn from. Politics isn't just about dusty ideas or arcane policy matters. The question isn't whether you're about politics or about theatrics, because those aren't different things. But is it *just* theatrics? Speaking for me, absolutely not." Asked for his top three policy-agenda items, he gets to No. 2: a net-zero immigration policy and "a tremendous change in foreign policy." He says the usual thing about "neoconservatives" hoping to bomb the world into democracy.

He likes Depeche Mode and "peaceful" ethnic cleansing and rejects the label "white supremacist," and he is obviously and painfully embarrassed by the swastika flags and silly costumes that invariably show up in the crowds he attracts, though he has been known to throw out a Heil or two himself—he'll cop to being "trollish" on occasion—as he did when celebrating the election of Donald Trump, the alt-right hero whose shine has quickly worn off, at least for America's most infamous white nationalist. "Swastikas are not my style. But once you declare, 'I am a white American, I am proud of my heritage, my identity matters, I am not just an individual, not just interested in free markets and tax cuts,' then you get the 'H' word or the 'N' word. People get called 'Nazi,' and they want to throw it back in the face of their adversary. And some people are stuck in the past, and they're not able to understand that we need to live here and now, and not in the 1920s or the 1940s. Others *want* to alienate themselves from society. My strategy is to be provocative and radical in the best sense, but also to communicate with"—here is a favored bit of alt-right lingo—"the normies."

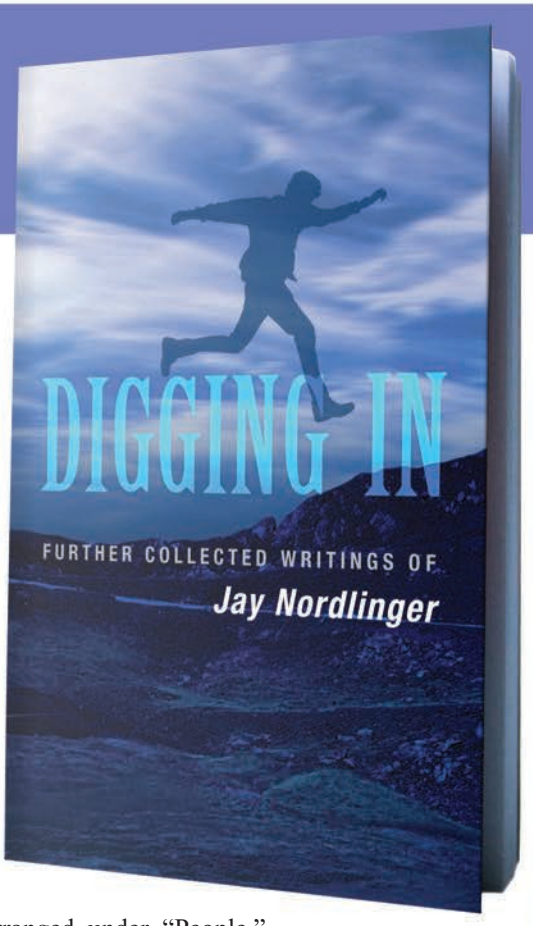
Spencer's career traces the arc of the alt-right's intellectual development. He thought of himself as part of the Right, broadly attached to the conservative movement, in spite of his secularism and his distaste for religion and religiously informed politics. He studied at Virginia and did a master's in humanities at the University of Chicago, and worked at *The American Conservative*, the right-wing periodical co-founded by Pat Buchanan. When his views proved too extreme for that journal, he moved on to *Taki's Magazine*. He founded a website of his own and soon occupied a number of high positions in the relatively tiny world of white-nationalist intellectual life: executive director of the race-obsessed Washington Summit Publishers, founder of the white-nationalist journal *Radix*, director of the National Policy Institute, a racist think tank supported by William Regnery II. Playing a game of Six Degrees of Separation between mainstream conservative institutions and white-nationalist nuttery is an uncomfortable exercise for many on the right. There's a great deal of political and intellectual space between a traditionalist Christian conservative such as Rod Dreher of *The American Conservative* and a guy waving a swastika flag and raving about "white genocide," and Richard Spencer inhabits some of that space, with a foot and a history in both camps. He is frank—more than frank—about his white-identity politics, but he does not so much as mention Jews, blacks, or any other traditional target of fringe-right hatred. "What's misunderstood is that people think our movement is about hate, that it can be equated with past movements and cartoon versions of past movements, with Nazis and the Klan foaming at the mouth about hatred. I would not do what I do if I were dominated by hate. Hate is an emotion we all feel. I hate *injustice*. But what is truly motivating is hope: a vision of a better, more beautiful world." What's important for Spencer isn't winning elections or changing public policy but changing the culture, developing a new and publicly acceptable ethic in which "white people think of themselves as part of a greater story and broader community." He went on Israeli television and described himself as a Zionist for white Americans.

It is all but impossible to argue someone out of a perception, and the 'mimetic warfare' of the alt-right, all that Internet ugliness and trollery, is designed to *change* perceptions.

What Spencer gets—and exploits—is the American sensitivity to unfairness, real or perceived. That deeply rooted sense of justice as fairness, combined with the American tendency to universalize principles, is why, for example, gay-rights groups have been so successful in adopting the rhetoric of the African-American civil-rights movement. The American fairness ethic is basically good-for-the-goose-good-for-the-gander-ism. And so Spencer, and others like him, ask: If blacks are permitted pride in themselves as black people, and if we accept a collectively self-interested black politics as legitimate, why are whites not permitted pride in themselves as white people, and why is a collectively self-interested white politics not also legitimate? Spencer says that it is inaccurate to describe him as a "white supremacist" in that he has no interest in seeing whites dominate other races. What he wants, he says, is a "safe space." If the Jews can have a physically secure ethno-religious state, Spencer asks, then why not white Americans, including "cultural Christians" like him?

Highlighting these perceived hypocrisies and acts of unfairness is what the *style* adopted by Spencer and the rest of the alt-right—he coined the term "alt-right"—is intended to do. It is all but impossible to argue someone out of a perception, and the "mimetic warfare" of the alt-right, all that Internet ugliness and trollery, is designed to *change* perceptions. It appeals to the

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adolescent appetite for transgression, the *épater les bourgeois* ethic of radical youth movements around the world. A generation ago, when Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols performed wearing a swastika T-shirt, no one thought it was because punk rock was anti-Semitic or that the Sex Pistols hated Jews—it was shocking for the sake of being shocking. That is the shelter into which the alt-right retreats when it is challenged—the Kekistani guy at the city hall protest shouting "It's a parody!" while wearing his Nazi-inspired flag. But the act of being shocking, as the Sex Pistols' accountants could tell you, is effective. The Sieg Heil stuff may be done partly—not entirely—tongue in cheek, but the next part of the pitch—"Let me tell you why the white-nationalist movement is like Zionism"—is deadly serious. It's a performance, but not one without a purpose.

In other words: "Let's put on a show!" And there's no business like show business, until somebody gets killed.

HEAR, oh hear, this tale of woe, this poetical lament:

Many of us have student loans on degrees that are worthless.
Many of us fought in wars for Jews.
Many of us have struggled with substance abuse.
Many of us are out of shape.
We feel emasculated.
Many of us feel we have never had power.
We crave power.
We lust after power. We want to be part of a group, which will give us power. A group that will confirm our worth as men.
We do not have identities.
We want identities.
We want to be productive. All men want to be productive. We want to build things. We want to build, we want to create, we want to be needed.
We have problems with women. All of us do. We lie to each other and claim that we don't.
We are a generation of throwaways, which (((those who write history before it happens))) have slated to be the last generation of Heterosexual White Men.
We are angry.
There is an atavistic rage in us, deep in us, that is ready to boil over.
There is a craving to return to an age of violence.
We want a war.

Andrew Anglin is the founder of the *Daily Stormer*, a now-defunct neo-Nazi website that served as a clearinghouse for alt-right white nationalism and also as a bellwether for its aesthetic. The above complaint, written for some reason as though it were lines of verse, is his confession, his *apologia pro* sad little *vita sua*. The *Daily Stormer* has been disappeared from the Internet by the Corporate Powers That Be, but Anglin is still moping around.

Anglin is more frank about the Nazi stuff than is Spencer, and once wrote that he asks himself "WWHD"—"What Would Hitler Do?" But get what he means by that: "I ask myself what Hitler would do if he'd been born in 1984 in America and was dealing with this situation we are currently dealing with and also really liked 4chan and anime," he writes. Anglin, like Spencer, says that he thinks it is important for the alt-right to forgo the old style of "White Nationalism 1.0," as he puts it, and try to be, in his word, "cool." But what you really find in Anglin is the cultural intersection that is the home to the alt-right, the nexus between the transgressive and provocative politics of white identity and the saddest and uncoolest and cringiest of all American social movements: the men's movement. It's easy to make jokes about how all this fringy rage is just the natural outcome of a bunch of 4chan geeks who couldn't get laid in a sex-doll factory, but their own rhetoric and discourse continually returns to that theme. It is an ancient story: The sons of the effete white ruling class feel emasculated in comparison to the swarthy high-testosterone primitives from . . . that part gets kind of interesting, inasmuch as there was a time when the American WASP felt sexually intimidated by Asians, Jews, and Italians, though it is the mythic sexual rapacity of the African that has most kept them up at night.

Muppet News Flash: A bunch of under-employed animé nerds marching with tiki torches in rage-fueled sausage fests have trouble with women.

After the protest in Charlottesville—in which a woman was murdered by a white nationalist—Anglin advised his fellow knuckleheads to go out to bars that night, because "random girls will want to have sex with you." One wonders whether Charlottesville is home to very many women who are quite that random. The men's movement has moved on from *Iron John* and suburbanite drum circles and virile weeping and all that business, and its new spokesmen are the pick-up artists, whose appeal to men (put an asterisk there) such as Andrew Anglin is pretty obvious. Like Islamic jihadists promised an eternity with a harem of virgins, white-identity jihadists believe that they can elevate themselves through conflict and confrontation and, by proving their value to the tribe, finally get some nookie.

"We want a war," writes Anglin.

He is barely five feet tall.

But everybody is ten feet tall on the Internet, and that is why the Internet is where the alt-right really lives, one big online group-therapy session masquerading as a political movement. A few sad specimens will occasionally sally forth into the public square in Charlottesville, Boston, or Dallas, and there will always be an opening for a charismatic racist such as Richard Spencer, who holds a position in American life that once belonged to David Duke and to George Lincoln Rockwell before him. Some roles in our common life are passed down from generation to generation. And some kinds of sadness are passed down from generation to generation, too: The substance abuse that Anglin bemoans tends to run in families, as does divorce—and the failure to form marriages and families in the first place. The young men to whom Anglin addresses his lament often are themselves the sons and grandsons of similarly disappointed men, living in communities left behind by globalization and other social changes, with those who have the wherewithal to move on already having done so long ago. Without prestigious jobs, solid incomes, or happy families to provide them with a sense of social status, they understand themselves to be failures not only as people but specifically as men. In reaction to the "rootless cosmopolitanism" of the age, they seek to reverse 21st-century deracination with blood-and-soil *racination*: Consider that Richard Spencer's journal is called "Radix," i.e. "root." Their longing for community is authentic—and it is legitimate, in spite of the horrifying direction in which they take it. But like all men who are missing something necessary at the center of them, they are born to be marks, and it is easy to sell them almost anything—how-to-meet-women books and seminars, conspiracy theories, daft white-identity politics—so long as what you are really selling is hope. NR

The Case for Cultural Nationalism

It's time to start taking E pluribus unum *seriously again*

BY MICHAEL LIND

President Donald Trump's feeble and vacillating response to the violent confrontation that white nationalists provoked in Charlottesville has emboldened those on both the alt-right and the radical left who claim that racism and American nationalism are the same thing. Most Americans of all races think otherwise. Unfortunately, the ability to promote or even discuss a common American identity that transcends race and religion is weakened by confusion about four terms: "nation," "culture," "race," and "ethnicity."

"Nation" can refer to a state, a purely political entity, whose citizens may belong to various ethnicities (Switzerland). It can also refer to the exact opposite—a stateless ethnic group (the Kurds). "Culture" in American parlance can refer either to actual culture (English as the primary language) or to the categories of the U.S. Census, such as "non-Hispanic white," which refer to race or biological descent. To compound the confusion, "ethnicity" can refer both to acquired culture (Amish culture) and to inherited DNA (white or Caucasian).

This confusion is natural and persistent, because the identities of most people everywhere in the world come as part of an inherited package that unites race or biological descent with culture (and also creed, that is, a religious or secular way of life)—what I'll refer to as "ethnicity" here. Ethnicity is a permanent feature of human life because of the family. The question is how inherited ethnic identity should relate to political identity.

As Azar Gat, Anthony Smith, and other scholars of nationalism have shown, the claim of the postmodernist Left that all ethnonational identities are recent and "socially constructed" is false. Even the modern nation-state, with rough congruence between a nation and a state, has precursors in kingdoms with a common ethnicity, such as ancient China and Egypt, when they were ruled by native dynasties, as well as in smaller ethnic states such as ancient Israel and Judah.

Even so, until recently much of the world's population lived either in multi-state nations or in multinational states. A multi-state nation is one, such as ancient Greece or Renaissance Italy or premodern Germany, in which a single ethnic nation is divided among many political units such as city-states. In contrast, a multinational empire, such as the Roman empire or the Hapsburg empire, is an arbitrary collection of many ethnic nations, cobbled together by force by a ruling nation, aristocracy, or royal family.

Mr. Lind is the author of The Next American Nation.

The modern nation-state has two parents. One is Enlightenment republicanism, which requires a sovereign people as the source of the state's legitimacy and usually has found it in a preexisting ethnic nation with a shared identity. The other is industrialization, which, by lowering the cost of communications and policing, allowed populations much larger than cities or cantons to be governed by constitutional and representative government, not just by local satraps answering to remote despots.

Almost all contemporary states are fragments, created by secession or partition from a larger and more diverse multinational empire. The United States, born as a fragment of the 18th-century British empire, is no exception. Whether they have been built on the ruins of dynastic empires in Central Europe or of European colonial empires in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, few if any modern states have been completely homogeneous in ethnicity.

In the first wave of nationalism, the new state is usually captured by one of its ethnic groups, often a majority (Anglo-American Protestants in the post-colonial United States) but sometimes a minority (Afrikaners in South Africa, Alawites in post-colonial Syria, Sunni Arabs in post-colonial Iraq). Where an ethnonational state has democratic institutions, it is what sociologist Pierre van den Berghe has called a *Herrenvolk* ("master people") democracy, with government of the dominant ethnic nation, by the dominant ethnic nation, and for the dominant ethnic nation.

Until the civil-rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s, the United States was a *Herrenvolk* democracy, with the informal definition of the *Herrenvolk* broadening gradually from British-American Protestant to white Christian or white Judeo-Christian. Law and custom—from legal racial segregation to the recitation of Christian prayers in public schools—signaled that "real" Americans were white Christians. Non-whites and non-Christians were considered by most of the white Christian majority to be resident aliens in the U.S., whether they possessed American citizenship or not. From the 1790s, when the first Congress limited naturalization to "free white persons," through late-19th-century bans on Asian immigration, to the quota system of the 1920s, which favored northwestern Europeans, U.S. immigration policy sought to reinforce the white and Christian aspects of American national identity.

America's white-Christian ethnonationalism was always at odds with republican ideals of equal treatment under law and the separation of church and state. In addition, it defied the reality of lived experience.

Remember, ethnicity is a compound of race, creed, and culture. But in the United States, black Americans in the South largely shared the culture, dialect, and Protestant religion of fellow southerners who were white. The result was an American caste system defined by the racial or descent component of ethnicity alone. A European immigrant who could not speak a word of English was granted more privileges than an American with "one drop" of African "blood" whose ancestors had lived in U.S. territory for centuries and whose native language was a dialect of American English.

America's version of *Herrenvolk* democracy was dismantled by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965. In the half century since the civil-rights revolution, the question of what it is to be American has been contested by four schools: racial nationalism, creedal nationalism, multi-ethnonationalism, and cultural nationalism. Each school tries to create an alternative to the older white-Christian ethnonationalism by rooting American identity in one of the three unbundled components of ethnicity: race, creed, and culture.

So-called white nationalism—the racial nationalism of alt-right neo-Nazis, Klan members, and others—is distinct from old-fashioned American ethnonationalism because it emphasizes the racial strand in the white-Christian American bundle. Like German National Socialism, it views humanity through a zoological lens, indifferent to national cultural differences within gene pools and frequently hostile to Abrahamic religions (which Odin- and Thor-worshiping neopagans on the "white Right" deride because of their Semitic origins).

Pan-white identity can hardly be the basis for an inclusive American national identity, because a growing number of Americans are not white as conventionally defined, while most whites on earth live outside American borders. Logically, white nationalists should call for the unification of all Caucasians in a single empire or federation, echoing Hitler's hope that a racially purified, German-led Europe would be allied in the future with a pro-Nazi, racist British empire against supposed race enemies—mongrelized, Jew-controlled America and the non-whites of the world.

Recognizing that a Caucasian caliphate is not in the cards, the racist Right has long speculated about dividing the U.S. into racial homelands—the United Bantustans of America. While white nationalists might, in public, justify this lunacy using the rhetoric of progressive multiculturalism, not even the most ardent multiculturalist on the left endorses racially pure white, black, and Latino states.

Another possible successor to moribund white-Christian American *Herrenvolk* nationalism is what is sometimes called "creedal nationalism" (in my 1995 book *The Next American Nation*, I called it "democratic universalism"). This is the familiar argument that Americans are defined as Americans solely on the basis of their shared commitment to the creed of the American Founding, with articles of faith including belief in liberty, democracy, equality, and natural rights.

A shared commitment by the citizens to republican values is to be desired in a republic. But creedal nationalism, like racial nationalism, succumbs to the objection that most of the people who share the liberal-democratic creed live outside U.S. borders, while not all Americans believe in liberalism and democracy. A Norwegian who reveres the Declaration of Independence is not for that reason an American, and an American who decides that the Founders were wrong and that the ideal form of government is a Tibetan-style Buddhist religious polity is still an American, if an eccentric one.

Further, creedal nationalists who try to distinguish "patriotism" (good) from "nationalism" (bad) are confused—and not just because their preferred universalistic term, "patriotism," is based on a Latin word meaning "fatherland." Patriotism is loyalty to the state as a political entity, while nationalism is fraternal (and sororal) solidarity with the sovereign nation or people (however defined) whom the state exists solely to serve.

Nationalism is more fundamental than patriotism. This is not some illiberal Central European doctrine: It is the basic Lockean republican theory that underlies the Declaration of Independence and the very existence of the United States, as well as other modern democratic nation-states.

Think of the nation as a condo association and the state as the condo management. The members of the condo association/nation owe their chief loyalty not to the state (their collective servant) but rather to one another, on the basis of their mutual contract. The condo owners cannot unilaterally break condo rules, but as a group they can fire the manager and rewrite the rules as they see fit at any time. The implication of creedal nationalism—that believing in American ideals is what makes you a member of the American nation—is as unworkable as saying that approval of a particular condo building's management automatically makes you a member of that particular condo association.

If we reject racist white nationalism and abstract creedal nationalism, what remains are American multiculturalism, or, to be more precise, "multi-ethnonationalism," and post-ethnic American cultural nationalism.

The adherents of each of these two schools agree that the U.S. should be a liberal constitutional democracy. They disagree on whether the U.S. should be thought of as a nation-state with a predominant majority nation and rights for minority groups or as a single government shared by several identifiable and permanently distinct nationalities.

Modern democratic nation-states are based on a majority language or culture (not necessarily a common ethnicity or race). But a democratic state can also be organized to formally reflect the existence of two or more constituent ethnic or cultural nations within its borders. Examples of multinational democracies, in which multiple ethnic nations are formally recognized and represented, include Canada (Anglophones and Francophones), Belgium (Flemings and Walloons), and Switzerland (ethnic Germans, French, Italians, and Romansch).

In theory, America could be organized along multi-ethnonational lines like Canada or Belgium or Switzerland. But there are two big problems with a liberal-democratic version of multi-ethnonationalism in America.

First, conventional multiculturalism in the U.S. confuses race or genetic descent with culture, equating American "cultures" with our arbitrary and somewhat absurd U.S. Census categories. In bi-national Belgium, the Flemish and the Walloons are genuine ethnic groups combining descent and culture. Likewise, the Québécois in Canada are a genuine ethnic nation.

But there is no common "non-Hispanic white" ethnicity that recent immigrants from Ireland share with old-stock German Americans and Italian Americans, any more than there is a common "Asian and Pacific islander" ethnicity shared by Indian Americans, Chinese Americans, Korean Americans, and Filipino Americans. Meanwhile, successive generations of Latino immigrants are adopting American English as their native language at about the same rate as

previous generations of European immigrant groups. And rates of out-marriage among immigrant groups rise with each generation. You can't have a formal Swiss, Belgian, or Canadian group-based system if ethnic differences are either arbitrary, like Census racial categories, or quickly erased by assimilation or blurred by intermarriage.

The black–white divide, the deepest divide in American society, is a caste divide, not a cultural divide. It is impossible to separate white and black cultures. African-American vernacular English, with African trace elements, is classified by most linguists as a variant dialect of American English originating in the South. For its part, the culture of the American South has always been hybrid and transracial, even when southern states outlawed racial intermarriage. Think of an all-white bluegrass band, playing the banjo, an African instrument, using a style influenced by black guitarist Arnold Shultz, while dressed in cowboy clothes borrowed from north-Mexican culture. The idea of separating out the elements of America's national culture and assigning them to different descent groups is almost as mad as the white-racist vision of American Bantustans.

What remains as a plausible basis for a widely shared American identity, after we reject racial nationalism as stupid and repulsive and creedal nationalism and multi-ethnonationalism as unworkable, is American cultural nationalism—the idea that there is an American national majority defined by a common culture, but not by common racial descent or common secular or religious beliefs.

How big is the American cultural majority? Americans of all races who speak a dialect of American English as their first language are, as a rough approximation, about 80 percent of American citizens. The remainder are divided between recent immigrants and some of their children, and self-segregated linguistic minorities such as the German-speaking Amish.

The U.S., like Brazil and Mexico, is a multiracial and mixed-race nation with a predominant national language and national vernacular culture. Racial diversity does not necessarily lead to linguistic or cultural diversity. Indeed, as the descendants of recent immigrants grow up speaking American English and losing touch with ancestral traditions, the linguistic and cultural majority in the U.S. might increase as a share of a population that is more diverse in ancestry.

The purpose of defining and defending American national identity in this way, as a matter of common culture but not common race or creed, is not to promote a new version of *Herrenvolk* democracy, privileging some Americans above others on the basis of language or customs. It is simply to point out the obvious. There is and long has been an American cultural majority that is much larger than the shrinking, descent-defined "non-Hispanic white" majority.

Twenty-first-century conservatives, progressives, and centrists have many subjects for legitimate debate. But one area that should be the basis of consensus is the recognition of the American majority not as an ethnonational tribe but as a cultural nation whose members have diverse ancestries and creeds. It is time to take our national motto seriously: *E pluribus unum.* NR

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Monumentally Naïve

For the Left, taking down Confederate memorials is just the beginning

BY KYLE SMITH

THERE'S a fever in the August air, a thick, swampy fever of righteous stupidity. At the University of Southern California, the Black Student Assembly raised a ruckus by pointing out that the school's equine mascot, Traveler, the ninth in his line, had almost the same name as Robert E. Lee's horse, Traveller. It's unclear whether there is any tie between the two horses' names, but Saphia Jackson, the group's co-director, touted the similarity as proof that "white supremacy hits close to home."

In Atlanta, an angry mob attacked and desecrated a statue called the Peace Monument. It depicted a Confederate soldier laying down his arms at the behest of an angel of peace over the inscription, "Cease firing, peace is proclaimed." A masked protester was photographed trying (unsuccessfully) to pull the massive statue down with a chain.

In a Times Square subway station, a group of tiles formed a blue X on a red background to symbolize the area's nickname, the Crossroads of the World, and no one among the tens of thousands of non-equine travelers who pass by every day seemed to care. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority nevertheless announced that the design would be removed for its supposed resemblance to the Confederate battle flag.

It was left to Charles Barkley, the longtime NBA star, to convey thoughts that would have struck everyone as obvious a few years ago: "I'm 54 years old. I've never thought about those statues a day in my life. I think if you ask most black people, to be honest, they ain't thought a day in their life about those stupid statues." According to an NPR/PBS/*NewsHour*/Marist survey released August 17, Americans backed keeping the statues by a margin of 62 percent to 27 percent. Black Americans agreed, by a 44 percent–to–40 percent margin.

Let's mull that finding for a moment: On August 14 and 15—immediately after the horrific events in Charlottesville, where an alt-right march in favor of keeping a Robert E. Lee statue in a public place culminated in an actual charge of murder being laid against a man on the pro-statue side who'd driven his car into a crowd of his ideological adversaries, and during the ensuing nonstop maximum-volume media coverage inveighing against the statues—Americans *still* supported them by an overwhelming majority.

On what conceivable issue, besides motherhood and maybe Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, do so many Americans line up on the same side? And how much more lopsided might the polling be in a more sedate moment, when everyone has returned to his senses and hate and fear and blood are no longer in the air? The statues are as popular as air conditioning. They're as popular as dogs.

The clamor to remove the statues is a minority movement, and though many thoughtful commentators—including NATIONAL REVIEW editor Rich Lowry and senior editor Ramesh Ponnuru—have said the statues should come down to signify that America has moved on from the divisions associated with the Civil War, the Left is not signing up for any implicit bargain. Ponnuru is correct to note that the failure of others to draw a distinction between Confederate traitors and flawed heroes such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson does not mean that conservatives can't draw it. We can, we must, and we will do so.

Nevertheless, an urge to destroy icons, once unleashed, can be a mania that proves too powerful to easily arrest.

THERE are more than 700 Confederate monuments in public places all over the country. For conservatives to support tearing down the statues now, in such a heated moment, strikes me as pouring kerosene on a brush fire whose path is unknown. It's like inviting a tiger to nibble on your little finger but expecting it to stop there. If conservatives are saying, "Take the statues of anyone who rebelled against the Union, but go no farther," that message is not being heard, much less accepted, by the Left.

If you're like Charles Barkley and me (an inveterate northerner), you don't much care about the statues. But the Left doesn't much care about them either, at least not in the way they claim. If they did, you would have heard Nancy Pelosi's opinion about the Confederate statues in the Capitol before now. The Obama administration would have made this an issue, too. But only now does Jeh Johnson, Obama's secretary of homeland security for three years, declare that removing Confederate memorials is a matter of "public safety" and "doing what's right."

Yet if a statue of General Lee can be a rallying point for racist demonstrators, a depression in the ground where Lee once stood will be an even more incendiary one. Hitler fanboys are unlikely to be mollified as the country carries out exactly the acts whose possibility they have been using to inflame their supporters.

Rather, the Left sees an irresistible opening to indulge its glee for denouncing and destroying things associated with the Right. The more sagacious ones among them counsel that now is not the time to mention that the Washington Monument and Jefferson Memorial are homages to slaveholders, because when you're upending institutions you have to take them in the proper *order*. You have to mow down the front ranks before you can jump into the enemy's trenches.

Once most of the Confederate statues are down, as they might well be in very short order, that will be the time for the Left to do what it always does—push on to new frontiers so boldly defined that they would have shocked even its own diehard partisans just a generation earlier. The Teddy Roosevelt protests are coming. (Indeed, there has already been one, at the statue of the Rough Rider outside the American Museum of Natural History last October. It seemed like a fringe thing at the time.) The Woodrow Wilson protests are coming. (Indeed, they too have already started.) The Christopher Columbus protests are coming. (Same.)

The Mount Rushmore protests will come in due course. "Let's Blow Up Mount Rushmore," read a tweet from the Millennial-progressive Web journal *Vice*. Oops, that sounded a bit too terroristic in 2017, though it may be standard progressive rhetoric in a few years. So *Vice* amended the headline to "Let's Get Rid of

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Mount Rushmore." The pride of South Dakota was, by the way, principally sculpted by Gutzon Borglum, a white supremacist and reputed member of the Ku Klux Klan.

The chief sin the Left associates with Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, meanwhile, is not insurrection but the much more broadly committed and forever contemporary one—racism. "Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson will be removed from the CUNY [City University of New York] hall of great Americans because New York stands against racism," Governor Andrew Cuomo tweeted. Racism can be linked to most of America's historical figures, not excluding Abraham Lincoln, who in 1858 said, "I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters of the negroes, or jurors, or qualifying them to hold office, of having them to marry with white people." The Lincoln Memorial was vandalized three days after the Charlottesville unrest.

It may take some time for progressives fully to turn their ire on Lincoln. But then again, a year is "some time." Who would ever have guessed that the policy toward transgender individuals that obtained for the first seven and a half years of the Obama presidency would be declared vile, hateful, and retrograde a year later? In June, *Salon* ran the mocking headline "Armed right-wingers rally in Houston to defend statue—that nobody is attacking." On August 20, the *Houston Chronicle* reported that near Sam Houston Park, where a Confederate monument stands, "more than 400 socialists, liberals and Black Lives Matter activists showed up to demand the monument's removal, while a few dozen counter-protesters—some carrying Confederate flags—showed up in opposition." The park was actually closed as two Texans tried to have a normal wedding. "Women in heels and men in summer suits snuck out of the park just before 2 P.M. to be whisked around the barricades in police vans," the *Chronicle* reported.

Unable even in the Obama era to win much in the way of economic redistribution, the Left today trains its batteries on cultural issues. Disrupting Americans' everyday lives thrills them.

THE obsession with cleansing and sanitizing our past is becoming frantic. In Brooklyn, a plaque was removed after it stood by a tree for 105 years bearing the legend "This tree was planted by General Robert E. Lee while stationed at Fort Hamilton from 1842 to 1847." This wasn't a tribute to the Lost Cause. The plaque didn't depict Lee striking a hero's pose on horseback. It didn't depict him at all. It simply gave information you might or might not find interesting. Who could be offended?

Yet the tactic of the Left is: Claim to be triggered, then claim your prize. Let nothing as drab as social norms or even the law stand in your way.

After Corey Menafee, a dishwasher at Yale University, broke a stained-glass window with a broomstick last year because it depicted slaves picking cotton, he explained his thinking: "I just said, 'That thing's coming down today. I'm tired of it. . . . It's 2016, I shouldn't have to come to work and see things like that.'" It turned out that Menafee had been working near the window for six months and had taken no notice of it, owing, he said, to his nearsightedness. When a visiting alumnus told him about the window, he didn't believe it at first.

Menafee was arrested and fired for attacking the window, but then Yale asked for the charges to be dropped and re-hired him after a protest had made him a folk hero. Is it reasonable to be that angered by a stained-glass window? If it is reasonable, is vandalism a fitting response?

The tendency to lash out against things you deem offensive used to be a disagreeable tic of undergraduates. Now the impulse is spreading. The mob led by a cop-hating North Korea sympathizer that pulled down a 1924 statue of a generic Confederate soldier in Durham, N.C., was acting out of a well-justified sense that authorities were not in the mood to maintain order. Police did nothing except take pictures; Governor Roy Cooper meekly tweeted that "there is a better way to remove these monuments"; Durham County's public-information office made Cooper sound like John Wayne when it declared, even more mildly, that "our elected officials and senior staff understand the unrest in our nation and community." Only after a nationwide uproar about the lawlessness did the sheriff begin making arrests (eight as of this writing).

The ringleader of the mob declared, "Anything that emboldens those people and anything that gives those people pride needs to be crushed." Anything? A statue of Hank Williams? The Jack Daniel's distillery? A NASCAR track? If destroying stuff that makes other people proud is your goal, you've signed up for a never-ending culture war. Writing in the *Washington Post*, columnist Christine Emba denounced the statues by saying they represent "privileged status, not history, that's being protected." The dusty old statues of the Confederacy are just an opening to the much juicier and very 2017 war on "privileged status."

The tendency to lash out against things you deem offensive used to be a disagreeable tic of undergraduates. Now the impulse is spreading.

If I were a coldly cynical political analyst, I'd say the controversy is a gift of a wedge issue. For instance, to win a primary—to triumph in an arena filled exclusively with hyper-partisans—Georgia Democrats may now have to take an extreme stance on Stone Mountain, which bears gigantic images of Lee, Jackson, and Jefferson Davis that were sculpted by Borglum at a Klan meeting ground. Despite the monument's history, destroying the state's own Mount Rushmore sounds insane to the average voter, but gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams has already called for the images to go.

Similarly, when Charlie Rose asked Al Sharpton this summer whether the Jefferson Memorial should be torn down, Sharpton didn't say, "Absurd, no one wants that." He instead dodged the question and called for defunding the memorial, a startling option that seemed calculated to leave even more extreme choices open. That kind of talk must strike the median Rust Belt voter as a chilling harbinger of culture battlegrounds to come.

Woe betide the pol who is on the short end of a 62-to-27 split, and yet safe-seat Democrats such as Pelosi, who speak only to fellow true believers, will gravitate toward it. Conservatives can only hope that Michael Moore will soon start musing about renaming the Washington Monument after Maya Angelou. NR

Athwart

BY JAMES LILEKS

Rated PC

THERE'S a certain sort of person who feels a merry little thrill when the banning begins. Oh good, the statues are coming down? Now we can do something about that historical plaque I don't like. As if nothing happened here before 1855. Who knows what the Native Americans did on this spot? We may never know, so let's stop pretending history began when General Killian McGenocide slept here. GET A CROWBAR.

If someone objects because you're crowbarring off a historical marker, hit him with the crowbar. It's self-defense, after all: The people who object to your objecting are preventing a future in which you'll be happier. Why, they're *assaulting* you.

Statue-banning brings out the ridiculous people who get a moment of media exposure when they insist the entire past must be hidden under a tarp. Let's welcome the Reverend Hal Shrapten:

"I think we should take down the statue of Lincoln, who was, after all, president of a country in which slavery was legal. I know there's no chance of this happening, but just being here on TV spouting this twaddle bolsters my political fortunes and inflates my rapacious ego—and yes, I am utterly indifferent to my contribution to the Left's ongoing estrangement from the center of American thought. Buy my book."

Perhaps the best example of ordinary folk getting giddy about our bold new era came after the Charlottesville episode, when an actual Yale-educated TV producer tweeted:

"Now that we're talking, there are casually racist + sexist + homophobic moments in classic movies that don't need to be classics any more."

This makes it sound as if there's a National Classic-Movie Designation Board, where a panel of gouty white men decide which films are classics. The term means "old and pretty good," and nothing more. But, apparently, we shouldn't call those movies classics because they have wrongthink embedded in their narrative DNA. Anyone who says "*Citizen Kane*? My favorite of all the classics" would get a raised eyebrow. *Really*? You don't find it problematic that one of the actors, Joseph Cotten, is named after the crop most often associated with slave labor? I mean, in this day and age.

Perhaps all the good old movies could be moved from Turner Classic Movies channel to Turner Diaries Classic Movies channel, named after the white-separatist garbage novel enjoyed by people who move their lips while reading and trace the sentences with their finger so they don't lose track. You could have a federal blue-ribbon committee that decides which movies go to TDCM, but it would be easier to put everything made prior to 2008 into the bin of Degenerate Art and have exquisitely sensitive people screen them for offense. That would be fun:

"Stop! STOP! Can this movie BE anymore homophobic? The prissy, nervous, artistic guy has to live with a real-man-type slob, and we're supposed to think the slob's annoyance isn't shrieking homosexual panic?"

"It's called 'The Odd Couple.' The prissy guy is straight. He's just a typical neurotic archetype of the era, common to major East Coast areas. See, his wife—"

"Oh, so he's not gay? They're negating the experience of actual gay men and straight-washing out their existence? At a time when Stonewall was still fresh in everyone's mind? Seriously?"

"Would you rather watch a documentary about the Stonewall gay-bar riots?"

"And think about Stonewall Jackson and the Civil War? Do you want me to report you to the block officer?"

Note: This sort of conversation takes place only when there's someone to harangue and silence. When a person is watching a movie alone, it can be taken on its own terms—but if there's anyone who needs to be reminded of his complicity in All the Bad Things Ever, then everything's a problem. Another screening of a Bad-Thought UnClassic might go like this:

"Okay, I can tell I don't like this movie already. It has Nazis."

"They're the bad guys. Relax."

"Don't you tell me to relax when Nazis are marching in the streets today."

"These are historical Nazis who numbered in the millions, backed by a powerful war machine. The current Nazis couldn't fill a minor-league baseball stadium, and half of them would be there to ogle cheerleaders, because the only women in their daily lives are calling 'Dinner's ready' from the top of the stairs."

"What's this—oh, a black man. Movie's set in Africa, and there's one black man. And he's an entertainer."

"First of all, he's a musician. An artist. He's the only one who brings beauty and joy to this place—"

"So, he has magical soul, on account of his people are so spiritual. Right. And didn't he just call the white man 'Boss'? BOSS?"

"Well, the white man is his employer, yes, but they're old friends and clearly regard each other with deep respect—"

"Respect? Did you just hear the white guy order him to play it again? You played it for the white lady, you can play it for me, Sam as in 'Sambo.' What's this mess called again?"

"*Casablanca*."

"Right. 'White house.' Okay, you can call it a classic, but this is insulting to anyone who's not a white male."

"You're a white male."

"Yeah. But I get it. I understand embedded structures of supremacy, both coded and explicit. I hate everything about the past except for the fact that it led us here, where we can denounce it with utter finality."

"Okay. What would you like to watch?"

(Pause.) (Looks around, gets up, draws the shades, whispers.)

"Please tell me you have *Blazing Saddles*." NR

Mr. Lileks blogs at www.lileks.com.



The Long View

BY ROB LONG

"The Kellyanne Conway Show"

Episode 203: "New Boss, Same as the Old Boss"

FADE IN: INT. WHITE HOUSE—DAY

Kellyanne enters in a rush.

KELLYANNE: So sorry I'm late! You would not believe how hard it is to get here through all of those awful protesters. I mean, I guess it's a First Amendment thing, but—

She stops. She notices the empty desk next to hers.

KELLYANNE: Uh oh.

She crosses over to Mr. Bannon's office, takes a deep breath, smooths her dress, breathes into her hand to check her breath, and is about to knock on the door when Donald Trump enters from the Oval Office.

DONALD TRUMP: Hi guys! (STOPS, SEES KELLYANNE) Gals. Gal. Hi gal!

KELLYANNE: Good morning, sir!

DONALD TRUMP: Super cute outfit! (THEN, SEEING EMPTY DESK) What's with the empty desk?

KELLYANNE: I don't know, sir. We were supposed to have a communications director here last week. You know, to replace the one you—

DONALD TRUMP: What do you call that kind of sleeve? Is it a ruffle? Is it a Dolman sleeve? I think it's very attractive.

KELLYANNE: Thank you, sir. But as I was saying, the comms director. I really think we need to get someone into that job as soon as possible. I'm going to ask Mr. Bannon if we can maybe move a little faster on—

DONALD TRUMP: Mr. Bannon? Steve Bannon?

KELLYANNE: Yes.

DONALD TRUMP: Oh boy. Look, I have some bad news, Kellyanne. I think you'd better sit down.

KELLYANNE: Sir? You're scaring me.

DONALD TRUMP: It's just that . . . it's just that . . .

General John Kelly enters.

DONALD TRUMP: Tell her, John!

JOHN KELLY: Mr. Bannon has been relieved of his duties. Let's all get back to work.

KELLYANNE: But . . . but . . .

JOHN KELLY: Kellyanne, you and I don't know each other well. While I was in uniform, fighting for this country, you were . . . you were . . . you were where, again?

KELLYANNE: Working for Frank Luntz?

JOHN KELLY: Right. The guy with the hair?

KELLYANNE: Well, that's sort of hard to answer. It's more like the guy —

DONALD TRUMP: With the weird hair! Am I right? (OFF THEIR LOOKS) Hey, I get the irony, okay? Hey, is Luntz Jewish? Or is he just Jew-*ish*? I ask because I'm getting more flak for the whole Charlottesville thing and I want to maybe ask some actual Jews if they're okay with what I said about those Nazi guys down there not being so bad.

JOHN KELLY: Sir, you're dismissed for the moment.

DONALD TRUMP: Seriously? Terrific. I've been collecting some really fun Confederate-statue memes and I want to tweet them while I take my morning—

JOHN KELLY: Sir, please hand over your device.

DONALD TRUMP: Hey, that's what she said!

Beat.

DONALD TRUMP: Get it?

John Kelly extends his hand. Trump reluctantly hands him his smartphone.

DONALD TRUMP: Great. So now what am I going to do when I'm in the—

John Kelly hands over a sheaf of papers.

DONALD TRUMP: As my daughter says, Oy!

He exits. A beat. Trump re-enters.

DONALD TRUMP: That's funny, right? I should use that at one of my rallies, right?

JOHN KELLY: Mr. President—

DONALD TRUMP: Got it. I'm gone.

He exits quickly.

A pause.

KELLYANNE: He's not at his best in the mornings. When you get to know him better—

Kelly holds up his hand.

JOHN KELLY: I don't plan on doing that. Now. Mrs. Conway, I will be frank with you. This is not a shipshape operation, and if there's one thing General John Kelly, USMC, expects and demands, it's a shipshape operation. Do you know why I took this job, Mrs. Conway?

KELLYANNE: Um, the convenient parking?

JOHN KELLY: Is that some kind of witty remark, ma'am? Some kind of humoristical joke designed to create a warm rapport between you and your new boss?

KELLYANNE: Kinda.

JOHN KELLY: Well, then, I regret to inform you, ma'am, that those kinds of satirical asides do not work on me. I have spent most of my life trying to rid myself of any trace of a sense of humor, and I'm proud to say that I've succeeded at that mission. We have work to do here, Mrs. Conway. This administration is a chaotic mess. The chain of command is broken. And our commanding officer is, if I may speak frankly, probably unfit for his duty. Our mission, ma'am, is to do what we can to right this sinking ship, corral and contain the irrational and self-destructive impulses of our commander, and achieve clarity and effectiveness in the work that we do. And I believe, one hundred and ten percent, that we can do that.

A pause.

KELLYANNE: Are you sure you don't have a sense of humor? Because what you just said is pretty freakin' funny.

JOHN KELLY: Drop and give me fifty, Mrs. Conway.

KELLYANNE: You can't be serious.

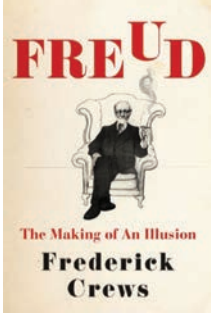
JOHN KELLY: You want to make it a hundred?

Kellyanne looks around, then gingerly, in her heels, starts doing pushups.

END OF ACT ONE

The Death Of Freud

E. FULLER TORREY



Freud: The Making of an Illusion, by Frederick Crews (Metropolitan, 768 pp., $40)

THIS is the longest but most engaging obituary I have ever read. Although it has been known for several years that Sigmund Freud has been on life support, the final demise of the man responsible for popularizing the unconscious comes nevertheless as a shock. As W. H. Auden once noted: "To us he is no more a person / Now but a whole climate of opinion." Frederick Crews's new biography demonstrates not just that this "climate of opinion" has disappeared but that psychoanalysis, as a specific method for the treatment of mental disorders, is also dead. Crews systematically and convincingly autopsies the corpse to prove it.

But wait—why should we even care? Much of Crews's book concerns the details of self-absorbed young men in 1890s Vienna debating whether men are really anxious about having their penis cut off because, as children, they wanted to kill their father so they could marry their mother. What does that have to do with 21st-century America? Surprisingly, much more than most people realize. Freud's ideas influenced America more than they influenced any other country, from Benjamin Spock's admonitions about toilet training to Margaret Mead's pronouncements on sexual freedom to Norman O. Brown's advocacy of political activism (he claimed to have read Freud's writings "six and ten times"). Freudian ideas came to dominate the publishing and film industries as well as—according to a 1961 article in *The Atlantic Monthly*—"sociology, anthropology, legal thought and practice, humor, manners and mores, even organized religion." And this is not merely of historical interest. The current disastrous mental-illness-treatment system in the United States is a direct consequence of Freudian ideas about treating children so as to prevent the emergence of serious mental illness in adulthood. The 20th-century architects of the system, such as William Menninger, claimed that Freudian theory "serves as the only logical basis for preventive psychiatry." We are now experiencing the consequences of these mistakes.

One of the people who were seduced by Freud in the 1970s, as he acknowledges in his book, was a young English professor at Berkeley named Frederick Crews. In his 1975 book *Out of My System: Psychoanalysis, Ideology, and Critical Method*, Crews praised psychoanalysis as "the only thoroughgoing theory of motive that mankind has devised." A decade later, Crews had become skeptical and began systematically examining Freud's ideas. This led to a series of encounters with Freudian true believers and extensive literary battles fought largely on the pages of *The New York Review of Books*.

Crews continued his mission and became probably the most respected of Freud's many critics. *Freud: The Making of an Illusion* is the culmination of more than 40 years of research and was eleven years in the writing. It is doubtful whether it will be surpassed as a scholarly work on Freud as a person or on the origin of his ideas.

Ascertaining the historic truth about Freud and his ideas turns out to be a difficult task. Freud himself destroyed many papers and letters that cast doubt on the myth he had created, and others were destroyed by his daughter Anna or various keepers of the Freud archives. Other papers and letters were locked away in bank vaults to be made available in the distant future. Crews documents his sources carefully and gives proper credit to other Freud scholars (including Peter Swales) who patiently tracked down the truth.

Regarding the origin of psychoanalysis, Crews shows it to be one of Freud's many schemes to make money and become famous. Freud appears to have been obsessed with economic and social success. When he officially announced his new therapy in 1896, according to Crews, it "was little more than a brand name for a product in beta development. His subsequent aim would be to protect and promote his brand, irrespective of its run-ins with evidence and logic." Initially Freud claimed that most cases of neuroses were caused by molestation of the child by the parent, but in 1897 he abruptly dropped the molestation ("seduction") theory in favor of the Oedipal theory, thereby moving the origin of the problem from the parent to the child.

Exactly what Freud was doing with his patients in 1896, when he publicly claimed to have discovered a new therapy, is unclear, since the use of free association would not be described for another eight years and the problem of transference for yet one more year. What is clear is that whatever Freud was doing was not working. "Freud lacked a single ex-patient who could testify to the capacity of the psychoanalytic method to yield the specific effects he claimed for it," Crews writes. "Freud knew that his claims of healing power for psychoanalysis lacked any basis in fact." That did not stop Freud from publicly claiming that psychoanalysis was "the only possible method of treatment for certain illnesses." Privately, however, he told one of his disciples: "Patients only serve to provide us with a livelihood and material to learn from. We certainly cannot help them."

Mr. Torrey is a medical doctor, the founder of the Treatment Advocacy Center, and the author of Freudian Fraud: The Malignant Effect of Freud's Theory on American Thought and Culture.

Freud scholars have argued at length regarding the origin of Freud's ideas. Some were most certainly borrowed from others, according to Crews, "with only the most glancing gestures of acknowledgment." Crews also quotes Freudian scholar Paul Roazen: "The theme of plagiarism can be found almost everywhere one turns in Freud's career." Many other ideas appear to have come from Freud himself during the 15-year period—from 1884 to 1899—when he was using cocaine heavily. As described in detail by Crews, Freud was one of the earliest and most enthusiastic promoters of cocaine, giving it to his fiancée, friends, and patients, and continuing to claim that it was non-addictive even after his friend, Ernst von Fleischl-Marxow, had clearly become addicted. Thus Freud was using cocaine during the same years that he was developing his ideas regarding the origins of mental disorders and the use of psychoanalysis to treat them. As Freud wrote in 1895: "I need a lot of cocaine." Crews cites Freud's cocaine use as being "of cardinal importance for our study," since "it follows that his writings were typically influenced by cocaine." (Unfortunately, Crews fails to provide any specifics about what effect he thinks cocaine had on Freud's work.)

The bottom line of Crews's book is that psychoanalytic theory and therapy were based not on any scientific foundation, but rather on the meanderings of a cocaine-addicted but economically ambitious mind. Although Freud had been trained as a physician and had even carried out some early neuropathological research, by the time he developed psychoanalysis, according to Crews, Freud "had retired his microscope for good and replaced it with a crystal ball." He made no attempt to test any of his psychological theories. In 1911, Freud joined the Society for Psychical Research and later consulted a soothsayer. Crews further notes that Freud "attended at least one séance with his daughter Anna, frequently exchanged 'thought reading' with her," and believed in "visitations from departed spirits."

In addition to the origins of psychoanalysis, a major theme of Crews's biography is the character of Sigmund Freud. He is not a sympathetic figure, emerging on the best of days as ethically challenged. His relationship with his daughter was bizarre: "In person and in correspondence, the teenage Anna kept Sigmund apprised of her unsuccessful attempt to stop masturbating, and fantasizing about being beaten by him. . . . And at 22 she began the first of two secret analyses on her father's couch, six days a week, lasting a total of four years." Crews also assembles data that confirm what many scholars had long suspected—that Freud had a long-running affair with his wife's younger sister, Minna, who lived with them, and that on one occasion he got her pregnant (she apparently got an abortion).

Freud was also an inveterate self-promoter, comparing himself to Copernicus and Darwin. In his later years, he demanded complete conformity from his followers, denigrating those such as Jung who broke away. According to one psychoanalyst: "Freud was often deceptive, manipulative, and Machiavellian. He schemed with his favorites to get rid of others for whom he expressed contempt, riding roughshod over them when they got in the way of his grand design." Freud's obsession with money, which he called his "money complex," was also prominent. He selectively took rich patients, whom he referred to as "goldfish," and colleagues were "shocked by his willingness to keep affluent patients in treatment for as long as five years without signs of consistent improvement." The number and consistency of such stories collected by Crews leaves little doubt regarding the character of Freud.

Finally, Crews details some of Freud's most unsavory clinical cases, among them that of Emma Eckstein, a young woman he treated in 1895 for hysteria. Freud's closest collaborator at the time was Wilhelm Fliess, an otolaryngologist, and the two shared a belief that "genital spots" within the nose influenced the reproductive system. With Freud's encouragement, Fliess operated on Eckstein, removing a piece of turbinate and causing her almost to bleed to death after the operation. Also included is the story of Horace Frink, a New York psychoanalyst who had bipolar disorder and came to Freud for treatment. Frink was having an affair with one of his patients, a very wealthy heiress. Freud therefore ordered Frink to divorce his wife, which he did, and also ordered the heiress to divorce her husband, which she also eventually did. Freud told Frink that, by marrying the heiress, he would have his psychoanalysis completed, and that Frink could repay Freud by making him a "rich man." Freud never got his money, since the new marriage went badly and both Frink and the heiress blamed Freud for having ruined their lives.

What are we to conclude from 768 pages on Freud and his psychoanalysis? Freud's reputation has suffered gravely in recent decades and Crews's book will certainly accelerate that decline. As for psychoanalysis as a treatment modality, it seems likely that it will continue to wither away, joining other dead approaches, such as primal-scream therapy, as museum curiosities. What Freud is likely to be remembered for is popularizing the unconscious—*The Interpretation of Dreams* and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. People enjoy the idea that their dreams, and Freudian slips, have meaning, even if most of the time they don't. **NR**

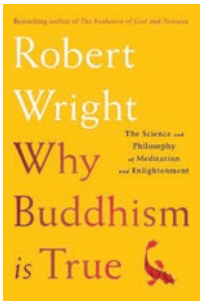
HOME

When I left here I was young;
I return—a target for stares.
Though my temples are gray
I still speak the local tongue.
Kids smile at me as I pass
And ask me where I'm from.

—LI PO (701–762)
translated by Richard O'Connell

Illuminations

MICHAEL BRENDAN DOUGHERTY



Why Buddhism Is True: The Science and Philosophy of Meditation and Enlightenment, by Robert Wright (Simon & Schuster, 336 pp., $27)

THE last time Bob Wright and I discussed religion was almost two years ago, on an episode of his video podcast on MeaningOfLife.tv. Wright is a perceptive journalist but seems to have moved beyond the typical world-weariness of that type to something else, something wiser and more alive. It feels woo-woo to say it, but the short conversation we had after the recording stopped left me feeling as if the world temperature had cooled by three to five degrees and I had lit one of those scented candles that wives like to buy, eucalyptus or persimmon. He was solicitous, generous, and, in his lapidary way, compassionate. We got off the phone, and suddenly the world seemed fresh again. I made a firm purpose to amend a particular wrong in my life.

And so, I read Wright's new book, *Why Buddhism Is True*, with trepidation, fearing another round of unwanted edification—or possibly even conversion. I'm a Catholic and often rather snippy about it. But as I've embarked on parenthood, I've felt the consolations of my religion less often. The profound fervor of youth has long since given way to the quotidian onset of midlife. Long devotions are replaced with logistical overmanagement of small children. With the addition of midlife sins such as greed and pride to the usual lusts and gluttony, no one would describe me as having overflowing reserves of inner peace or tranquility. I'm a setup either for the devil or for conversion. And if anyone could persuade me to get into a lotus position and focus on my breath for half an hour every day, I think it would be Bob Wright.

I'm not the only one experiencing a sense of danger. In this book, Wright sets out to show how recent findings in psychology and other sciences rhyme with the philosophy and insights of Buddhism. He begins by considering his own "futile pleasure seeking," in the form of a powdered-sugar doughnut. You may sense another danger already—that Wright might end up trivializing Buddhism as a kind of super self-help system. Too fat? Try detachment. Struggling to achieve your career goals? You'll achieve them when you discover that ambition is an illusion. But this is a danger Wright succeeds in avoiding.

For Wright, the pleasure found in a powdered-sugar doughnut reveals the slippery way that our conditioning by evolution fools us. Our imperative to pass on our genes, bequeathed to us in a much harsher environment than 21st-century America, has made our desires disproportionate to the pleasures we get from indulging them. Our desires mislead us, leave us crashingly unsatisfied. Presumably, if they run wild with us, we get diabetes or destroy our relationships. Wright then describes how meditation allowed him to see his desires and his feelings from a different angle, and to increasingly escape their mastery over him.

Wright's book is particularly interesting when marshaling psychological studies and experiments in order to prove the truth of Buddha's contention that there is no "self," or at least not the type of self that we usually describe. "This is a matter of nearly unanimous agreement among psychologists: The conscious self is not some all-powerful executive authority," he writes. After a successful meditation retreat, "some of the contents of your consciousness that you normally think of yourself as generating seem to be getting generated by something other than you." Wright reviews psychological experiments, some of them involving brains that have had their hemispheres separated, and in which human will and intention seem to operate completely shorn of each other. He cites others in which subliminal images bring about different "modes" or "modules" of non-rational reaction. Psychologists can manipulate how people respond to stimuli by subtly priming them to think in terms of self-protection or mate acquisition.

"The closest thing to a self would be the algorithm that determines which circumstances put which modules in charge," he writes. "And that algorithm can't be what we mean by the 'conscious self' in humans—the CEO self—because humans don't consciously decide to go into romantic mode or fearful mode." In other words, brain chemistry conditioned by evolution meets happenstance and produces our reactions; as a side effect, this generates the illusion of our "selves" reacting authentically and consciously.

Wright eventually comes around to describing his life-altering breakthrough in meditation. After having spent days at a retreat beating himself up for his poor meditation, experiencing in concentrated form the kind of self-reproach he had tortured himself with for years, he finally experienced some detachment from the critical, self-hating voice inside his own head. This sense of detachment from that voice was accompanied by "narcotic-caliber bliss . . . enveloping me with growing warmth as the experience unfolded." And as he contemplated

Wright sets out to show how recent findings in psychology and other sciences rhyme with the philosophy and insights of Buddhism.

the prospect of a life in which that voice was no longer his master, he cried. Reading this gave me a jump: My own religious conversion had all the same physical and emotional components as Wright's breakthrough. In this moment, Wright realized that his inner tormentor was in some sense an illusion. He was translated into a life in which his guilt was no longer primordial, inescapable, and oppressive—born again, you might say.

There is a modesty to this book that serves Wright very well, though I'm not sure it serves Buddha. While Wright does a very respectful job of teasing out different aspects of Buddhism that jibe with careful reasoning about ourselves and with the insights science gives us, it is admittedly a highly selective reading of Buddhist sources, one that doesn't seem grounded in an authoritative tradition. In other words, Wright is a cafeteria Buddhist, and it isn't clear how many other Buddhists are dining with him. It might be difficult for potential converts persuaded by his arguments for meditation to sift through these religious traditions and philosophical texts themselves without experiencing the romance that comes in adhering to an authoritative tradition.

Wright's concluding list of the reasons he meditates is also modest but subtly persuasive. Although its mix of quickly conveyed scientific research and friendly-faced spirituality might appeal to people who watch TED Talks, the book does not reduce Buddhist meditation to a productivity hack, helping you to get what your unenlightened self wanted out of life. It's a selective reading of Buddhism but not, in my view, a sacrilegious one.

So, is it time to convert? I found little to dispute as Wright explained how elusive the "inner CEO" is, but I do not feel tempted to doubt my "self" itself. The sense of self would begin to disappear from me if I looked for it the way Wright does, searching for it in signs of an observable integrated character beneath the thoughts and feelings I experience. But the self becomes undeniable if I look for it in my mirror, or in my journal, or in the memories of friends. While it is sometimes generally hard to know what it is that I really want or really feel in any given moment, the self reappears when seen in the light of history. It might be a confused self that I drag around: It might be subject to psychological manipulation, vulnerable to the delusions of motivated reasoning, or tripped up by its own weakness.

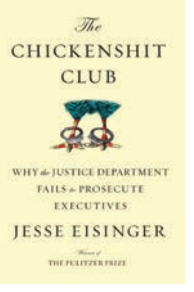
What else but my self is doing the things I do? Whatever the genesis of my desires or thoughts about a powdered-sugar doughnut, on August 11, 2017, I bought one and ate it—because of this book. Then I finished this book review just before the deadline set for it, and resolved to have a better diet (again). The circumstances of the universe in which I find myself, and which influence the operation of what Wright calls "the algorithm" that determines my responses, I trust to be designed by Providence, conscious of my fallen human nature.

In some ways, I wish that Wright had ventured beyond what he describes as "Western Buddhism"—his version of the faith, which focuses on Buddhist philosophy and meditation and is denuded of the various gods, prayers, and worship that are the focus of the religion of the vast majority of Buddhists. At midlife, with young kids, a day job, and a hobby business, I find that my religious practice now rarely involves deep readings of the saints or long uninterrupted prayers that will one day open the door to mystical experience. Instead, when obliged by the calendar, I get dressed up and drag the little ones to church. There I wrestle my squirming children, who are animated by their own infernal algorithms. But at some point, the bell rings, my knee bends, the Host is lifted up, and I whisper, "My Lord and my God." Wherever my thoughts strayed, however pathetically distracted I was, whatever delusions clouded my judgment that week, in that moment, in the light of history, I slip out of my own subjectivity and am a witness to the truth of all existence.

So, no, I'm not becoming a Buddhist. Or a Wrightist. But you might. I'm not unchanged from reading his book. The piles of mind research, illumined by Wright's funny and sometimes searching personal reflections, have convinced me to wake up earlier than my kids and, according to the light of my own tradition, meditate. NR

Unjust Prosecution

DAVID BAHNSEN



*The Chickensh** Club: Why the Justice Department Fails to Prosecute Executives,* by Jesse Eisinger (Simon & Schuster, 400 pp., $28)

Perhaps no recent occurrence stirred leftist-populist angst as much as the lack of any criminal prosecutions in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Many analysts believe that a few sacrificial lambs would have pacified angry Americans and helped to stave off public discontent. It's a plausible-sounding thesis, and Jesse Eisinger's new book seeks to explain where the blame lies for the lack of what he and many others believe would have been worthy prosecutions.

The phrase "chickensh** club" comes from a sort of inaugural speech that James Comey (yes, that James Comey) gave in 2002 upon his arrival as U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York. Comey was calling out prosecutors who have never lost a trial as a "chickensh** club" of those who are unwilling to take on risky cases; the implication was that a gutsy prosecutor will lose a couple along the way.

Eisinger then recounts the Enron case and celebrates not only the prosecutorial successes that that debacle generated, but the prosecutors' tactics and their holistic approach to the fraudulent Enron ecosystem. The Enron prosecutors had a perfect conviction record and took down the whole chain of actors involved in that rather clear case of direct fraud. But it was the Enron case that

Mr. Bahnsen is the managing partner of the Bahnsen Group, a wealth-management firm, and the author of the forthcoming book Crisis of Responsibility.

Eisinger believes started to send things astray, through the government-forced shutdown of the famed accounting firm Arthur Andersen.

Eisinger's thesis is that Arthur Andersen's winning of the PR war in that case, even as the government succeeded in destroying it, led to new burdens on prosecutors of white-collar crime. A company of 28,000 law-abiding and extremely gifted tax and finance professionals was forced to close because of the deviant actions of perhaps half a dozen people; in 15 years of studying the Arthur Andersen prosecution (eventually thrown out by the Supreme Court, but not until it was too late to save the company), I do not believe I have ever read a single analysis that defends that abusive overreach . . . until now. Eisinger thinks society was wrong to condemn the Arthur Andersen shutdown and identifies it as a turning point in our expectations of prosecutors.

If my patience for Eisinger's worldview was wearing thin during his treatment of the Arthur Andersen case, he permanently lost me by the time he got to the infamous KPMG prosecutions. In the KPMG case, the court system lambasted prosecutors in the strongest way possible for their perverse threats: They had warned the company that it would be treated more harshly if it paid the legal bills for its key executives and officers who were then under investigation. The courts, quite reasonably, ruled that this was an egregious violation of due process and constitutional rights, and the entire case was thrown out as a result. To Eisinger, this was yet another indication that the deck was being stacked against prosecutors who were trying to take down white-collar criminals.

Eisinger dedicates a grand total of one paragraph to what is perhaps the most significant factor in the lack of criminal prosecutions in the financial crisis. The U.S. government did indeed try to prosecute two high-profile actors: the two famed hedge-fund managers at Bear Stearns whose failure preceded the crisis. The jury trial resulted in acquittal, and for good reason: It is not illegal to be bad at investing. Prosecutors did not become "chickensh**" after that failed attempt; rather, they were provoked into a sober reflection that public anger would not give them a pass for a lack of evidence that a crime had been committed at all, let alone committed by particular people. The acquittal of the Bear Stearns defendants was the turning point in this story, but it merits barely a footnote in Eisinger's book.

Surely a 400-page book dedicated to telling us what went wrong in the pursuit of justice after the financial crisis would provide a smoking gun—a clear and obvious case of a crime that was not sufficiently prosecuted? Sadly, no. After 200 pages of throat-clearing, we get to the first case in which Eisinger believes the people responsible for the crisis were inadequately prosecuted. But there's a problem: The case had nothing whatsoever to do with causing the crisis.

The case involved the process in which Bank of America swept up a beaten-down Merrill Lynch. The prosecutors alleged that, in the closing of that transaction, there was a troubling effort by leaders at both Bank of America and Merrill Lynch to downplay, in a deceptive manner, the bonuses that would be paid out at Merrill and the nature of the losses Merrill had incurred. But that transaction was the *result* of the financial crisis, not its cause. For years, hype has been built up to the effect that criminal actors committed illegal acts of fraud and corruption that caused our society to enter a great housing meltdown, recession, and financial crisis. That the lead "case in point" in Eisinger's book is nothing of the sort, but an anecdotal story that took place months after the crisis, out of a transaction that took place only *because* of that crisis, is extremely telling.

If Eisinger and I agree on anything, it is that using "deferred-prosecution agreements" to shake down corporations for financial settlements, instead of pursuing actual individual lawbreakers, represents a deeply regrettable shift in the philosophy of American justice. It forces us to address a foundational question, one that has as yet not been adequately answered: Do companies break the law, or do people? Because a person has a face, and enjoys constitutional rights, including such arcane ones as "innocent until proven guilty," prosecuting individuals is not easy. But it is not easy because it is not supposed to be. Our legal tradition demands a high burden in prosecuting the accused, and this entire cultural context is exactly why. Innocent or potentially innocent people should not be the sacrificial lambs when a thirst for "Old Testament justice" (Treasury secretary Tim Geithner's famous phrase) overcomes the desire for genuine justice. To give in to the political temptation to take down real people in order to make a purely symbolic statement is wholly unbecoming of our republic.

It is also, of course, unbecoming for guilty people to walk away scot-free. And to the extent that a real individual commits a real crime and there is real evidence that requires his prosecution, no reader would disagree with Eisinger's plea that prosecutors be equipped with the tools necessary for an aggressive effort to secure such justice. The problem is that Eisinger's book started as a conclusion in search of support, and that the support he provides is based entirely in emotional assertion. The financial crisis was so severe that *there just had to be* someone to put in jail for it. Eisinger's inquiry was never focused on ascertaining who committed criminal infractions or what criminal infractions he might have committed. It began with a presupposition that some guilty bastards were walking free and a case needed to be made against the "chickensh**" prosecutors who allowed it.

The pain of the financial crisis will be with American society for a long time to come, and for good reason. From Main Street to Wall Street to K Street, there were a plethora of bad actors and an entire set of policies that did extraordinary harm to the American economy. It is an irreversible fact of human nature that, after such a large and traumatic event, we want someone to suffer. But populist rage shouldn't drive legal decision-making in a society ruled by law. Only a simplistic and inadequate account of the financial crisis would assert that what we have missed is a legal prosecution of its worst culprits. And perhaps that will be the real achievement of Eisinger's book: After reading this first thorough work making the case for such crisis criminalization, readers are left realizing how naked that emperor really is. NR

A Salzburg Trio

JAY NORDLINGER

Salzburg, Austria

THE recital in the Great Festival Hall had the air of an occasion, an event. The hall was packed, and there were even extra seats on either side of the stage. This is rare here. A big pianist was going to play a big program: a demanding, virtuosic program.

Our pianist was Evgeny Kissin, born in 1971 (Moscow). He came to the world's attention at age twelve, when he recorded the Chopin concertos. He was curly-headed and cute, wearing a red Young Pioneers scarf.

An émigré, he became a British citizen in 2002. In 2013, he became an Israeli citizen. Why? Anti-Israeli protesters had been disrupting the concerts of such groups as the Jerusalem Quartet. If they were disrupting *those* concerts, Kissin wanted them to disrupt his own. "Israel's enemies are *my* enemies, and I do not want to be spared." Kissin received his Israeli passport from the hands of Natan Sharansky, who, as Anatoly Shcharansky, had been one of the foremost prisoners in the Soviet Gulag.

Here at the Salzburg Festival, Kissin took the stage wearing formal concert attire, though with a white jacket, in acknowledgement of the summer heat. Not for him those black pajamas that are standard concert wear today. I sometimes refer to these pajamas as a "Mao suit," reflecting "proletarian chic." These days, Kissin reminds me of Anton Rubinstein, who had a broad forehead and a terrific mane.

This Rubinstein was the great Russian pianist who lived from 1829 to 1894. He is not to be confused with another great pianist, the Polish-born Artur Rubinstein, who lived from 1887 to 1982. When he was a boy virtuoso, the second Rubinstein had cards printed up that included the words "No Relation."

In the Great Festival Hall, Kissin opened his program with the mightiest Beethoven sonata: that in B flat, Op. 106, known as the "Hammerklavier." In the first movement, Kissin did some of his thudding. He committed some unattractive accents. In reviews, I often find myself saying that a pianist "wrestled manfully" with the "Hammerklavier." Kissin wrestled manfully too.

The second movement is Beethoven's scherzo, and here Kissin was a little mechanical, and sober. The music has more impishness and charm than Kissin allowed it. His preference was for the big and blunt. I have to tell you something else I occasionally say, when reviewing a pianist in this sonata: "He put the hammer in 'Hammerklavier.'"

In the third movement, the Adagio, Kissin was duly reverent. But he did not show much of a singing line. Rather, he thudded out the melody. The fourth and final movement, however, was a clear success. It is a great and formidable fugue—and Kissin was great and formidable in it.

From the beginning of the sonata to the end, he always evinced a sense of the architecture of the piece, and the importance of the piece. I liked Kissin better as a forest, so to speak, than as trees.

The second half of his recital, he devoted to Rachmaninoff: twelve preludes. He began with the Prelude in C-sharp minor, which was brave, I thought: Long ago, this prelude became a chestnut, a cartoon, a stereotype. Yet it is a beautiful and interesting piece, and Kissin played it that way.

His Rachmaninoff at large, he played beautifully, and interestingly, and virtuosically. The singing line that I found absent in the Beethoven was present in the Rachmaninoff. Only the Prelude in D major, I thought, was ruined by thudding. The Prelude in D minor had some lovely, subtle blurring. And in the B-flat-major prelude—that stirring storm of notes—Kissin was a glorious lawn mower.

Rachmaninoff includes a nobility, and Kissin includes it too. These preludes sometimes have a storytelling quality, which Kissin brought out. There were some clinkers—some wrong notes—but this only proved that we were not listening to a studio recording, thank heaven.

I do not always like Kissin's playing. But I always want to hear him, which says something about an artist.

The next night, also in the Great Festival Hall, the Salzburg Festival presented *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, Shostakovich's opera from 1934. It almost got him killed, this opera. Stalin and the Party didn't like it. But Shostakovich survived, and his opera resurfaced decades later, to take its place among other masterpieces.

Lady Macbeth is based on a novel by Nikolai Leskov, written in 1865. The story is cruel: a story of love, hate, betrayal, murder, suicide—a natural opera. In Salzburg, the stage director is Andreas Kriegenburg, from Germany. He has fashioned a production that is in concert with the libretto and the music—which is what a production ought to be. This one is very hard to watch. But then, it's *Lady Macbeth*.

In the opening minutes of the opera, I thought, "Uh-oh: This is all wrong." The problem was, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra was in the pit, and they are an exceptionally, famously beautiful band. They were playing in accordance with their tradition and reputation. I am used to *Lady Macbeth* somewhat steely, and abrasive, and raw. This opera is definitely *ohne Schlag*—without cream. And the Viennese orchestra can lay on *Schlag* like no one's business.

And yet, my ear adjusted, and I realized how much beauty there actually is in this score. It does not have to be ugly. The action onstage is ugly enough.

Conducting the VPO, and assembled other forces, was Mariss Jansons. He was born in Riga—the Riga ghetto—in 1943. His mother was in hiding. Her father and her brother had already been killed by the Gestapo. Mariss's father was Arvīds Jansons, a conductor who worked under the legendary Evgeny Mravinsky in Leningrad. Mariss would do the same. He is a superb conductor, full of humanity, and he had an outstanding night in the Great Festival Hall.

He conducted *Lady Macbeth* with intelligence, mastery, musicality, and sympathy. I have heard crazier, more intense accounts of this opera. Never have I heard one more understanding and beautiful, with power to spare.

The title role, Katerina, a.k.a. Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District, is one of opera's most demanding roles. From the soprano, it requires strength, lyricism, stamina, theatrical range, focus, and sheer nerve. Nina Stemme, the Swede, met all demands. So did her tenor, portraying Sergei, Brandon Jovanovich. He is from Billings, Montana, and he has made a specialty of Sergei. Last



Nina Stemme in Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District

SALZBURGER FESTSPIELE/THOMAS AURIN

season at the Metropolitan Opera, he was the Prince in Dvořák's *Rusalka*. He excels in these Slavic-language roles, as perhaps befits an American named Jovanovich.

Dmitri Ulyanov was Boris, Katerina's father-in-law. Ulyanov comes from a long line of Russian basses, and he is an exemplar of that line: a booming, beautiful singer. Without straining, he filled the Great Festival Hall as though it were a phone booth.

A good performance of *Lady Macbeth* will leave you rattled for a while. This one was *really* good.

The next night, some players from the Vienna Philharmonic went to the Great Hall of the Mozarteum, to play a chamber concert. All orchestral work and no chamber music makes Jack a dull boy. (Or would that be Hans?) Nine of the VPO's best participated in this concert, captained by one of the orchestra's concertmasters, Rainer Honeck (brother of Manfred Honeck, the conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra).

Their concert began with Richard Strauss: the sextet from his opera *Capriccio*. From the VPO's six, it was relaxed and poised. Rainer Honeck makes a beautiful sound—as you would expect, given his position.

Then came one of Mozart's most sublime works, his Clarinet Quintet, K. 581. Playing the clarinet was Daniel Ottensamer, a principal of the orchestra. He made a smooth and burnished sound, and he was seamless. There were no registers to his "voice"; it was one voice, top to bottom. He sang as much as he played. His soft playing, or singing, was remarkable. It was genuinely *piano*, not disembodied. He caught the poignancy of the music. And all through the work, he demonstrated Mozartean purity. From everyone involved, this was a performance worthy of the work.

After intermission, six players gathered for a suite by Hans Werner Henze, the German composer who lived from 1926 to 2012. This was his Fantasia for String Sextet, drawn from his score for *Young Törless*, a 1966 film based on the notorious novel of Robert Musil, published in 1906. Henze's suite is varied, skillful, and intriguing.

The concert ended with one of the most famous chamber works of all, Mendelssohn's Octet in E flat. What were *you* doing when you were 16? Mendelssohn was writing this octet. I'm not sure he ever wrote anything better. The Vienna players rendered it with brio and savvy. There was some sour intonation along the way, and some technical stumbles—but, as with Kissin's clinkers, it was a reminder that we were listening to the real McCoy, not a studio recording.

A discreet paragraph in our programs informed us of something jarring: Ernst Ottensamer, one of the principal clarinets in the orchestra, had died two weeks before. The concert was being dedicated to him. His son Daniel had been one of his co-principals. Another son, Andreas, is a principal clarinet of the Berlin Philharmonic. (These are the two best orchestras in the world, mind you.)

In America, I guarantee you, there would have been at least one speech from the stage. It would have been maudlin. No one at this concert in the Mozarteum said a word. Players and administrators knew, I'm sure, that Mozart's quintet would say far more than words could. And Daniel Ottensamer's playing—which required some bravery, I think—was painfully good. **NR**

Film

Love and Its Complications

ROSS DOUTHAT



Zoe Kazan and Kumail Nanjiani in The Big Sick

LIONSGATE

THE dog days of summer are a good time to catch up on the season's counterprogramming, the movies that somehow found an audience while competing against superhero sequels, commercial juggernauts, and the deserved success of *Dunkirk*. This year, the best of the rest has the worst possible title: It's *The Big Sick*, a romantic comedy that escapes that genre's present exhaustion by the novel method of putting its leading lady in a coma.

That lady is Emily (Zoe Kazan), a Chicago grad student who becomes an object of affection for Kumail (Kumail Nanjiani), the son of Pakistani immigrants who's disappointing his parents by pursuing a career in stand-up comedy while driving for Uber to pay the bills. They meet after she offers a friendly heckle during one of his stand-up performances and have a cute young-broke-urbanite courtship that ends, abruptly, when she discovers a cigar box filled with headshots of young Pakistani ladies in his apartment. What we already know, and what she discovers, is that Kumail's parents (and particularly his steely mother, played in a great if underwritten turn by Zenobia Shroff) expect him to marry a woman who is both South Asian and Muslim, and while he's rebelling against them he isn't ready to imagine actually marrying outside his tribe.

No sooner has Emily dumped him, though, than she is suddenly hospitalized, and for under-explained reasons her friends order Kumail to her bedside just as she disappears into an induced coma, while the hospital staff struggle to figure out what's wrong. At which point her parents, played by Ray Romano and Holly Hunter, show up, and suddenly the meet-cute comedy about escaping parental rules and pressure turns into a somewhat more old-fashioned story in which, to win his ex-girlfriend back, Kumail first has to woo her parents.

This setup might feel a little over-engineered, but it's easier to accept if you know that (in some form) it really happened. The movie's joint screenwriters are Nanjiani himself and his wife, Emily V. Gordon, the movie-Emily's real-life counterpart, and the coma-romance is basically how they ended up together—which helps explain why the movie has an agreeably human, lived-in quality that doesn't require too much stretching from the cast.

Nanjiani, known mostly for being a put-upon ethnic straight man on *Silicon Valley*, is well matched with Kazan, not least because they both have faces that are pretty/handsome about one-third of the time. He is also well matched with Romano, who wears his famous sitcom and stand-up past lightly (and also wears a beard); their characters, the anxious sort-of boyfriend and the fretful dad, are basically different comedian-types, each turning inappropriately to jokes during the crisis but in styles that clash before they mesh. And then Romano and Hunter together are even better still: The movie gives them an implicit backstory like their daughter's with Kumail—they're a mixed North-South marriage, with her twang and his hangdog outer-borough look, dealing with a betrayal he committed, and their scenes together are some of the best in the film.

What's not good about the movie is its length, rooted in the obvious desire of its personally invested writers to shoehorn in all kinds of extra business they find fun—which means we have long interludes with Kumail and his friends at the comedy club, which play like middling outtakes from Judd Apatow's *Funny People* (Apatow is a *Big Sick* producer), plus a subplot about Kumail's one-man show about growing up Pakistani that never pays off, plus one too many mini-endings on the way to the (effective) very end.

I also have some sympathy for one of the left-wing #hottakes offered online about the film—a piece noting that Kumail's whole immigrant-in-love arc effectively promotes the idea that the essence of Americanization is secularization, that the good assimilated Muslim isn't just the one who might watch horror movies and do stand-up and marry a white girl, but also the one who doesn't pray anymore (we watch Kumail pretending to pray to appease his folks, and in the end boldly confessing his agnosticism) or take any of his religion's moral precepts seriously. There is no sense of what an assimilated and *believing* American Muslim might look like—a fairly important question in the West these days—and I did find myself, at times, wishing that the movie had allowed Kumail's parents to be a bit more than stereotypes, a bit more like the fuller characters inhabited by Hunter and Romano, and had made their appeals to traditions more interesting and less rote.

But it asks a lot of a shaggy romantic comedy to also wrestle effectively with the deepest questions of religion, identity, and modernity. I am reviewing *The Big Sick* after its summer of relative success, so the tendency is to nitpick and note its weaknesses. The basic truth is that this is a good movie, flaws and all, with a story of love and anxiety in everyday life that—after so much summer bluster—the moviegoer can enter and relax into with relief. **NR**

City Desk

Down These Lonely Streets



RICHARD BROOKHISER

We live in a white brick building, 19 stories tall (there is a 20th floor but no 13th), from the Kennedy administration. We are the second tenants of our apartment. Before we moved in, we met the homesteaders, an old couple, moving on to assisted living or Florida. The apartment occupies a corner; looking out one window, the wife could see, across the street and down the block, the brownstone in which she had grown up.

Younger tenants leave because of promotions, reproduction, or both. Years ago we had a friend our age, genial, single, Wall Street. We asked him once, before throwing a party, if we could store something in his refrigerator, and found it empty, almost showroom-floor clean, except for champagne and beer. Excellent man! Then he married and left for an even better job elsewhere, from which he annually sends us cards picturing his family and wishing us Season's Greetings. But for city dwellers already fixed in life, the rent laws encourage stasis. The old leave to go to the nursing home or the grave.

The only departures that are accorded formal notice are those of the staff. The oldest doorman when I first moved in was Eddie, an Irishman, tall, competent, sometimes given to melancholy. He was dusting a breakfront that stood in the lobby several decorating schemes ago, when he said, "We used to have books the tenants could borrow. No more!" He spoke as if mourning the flight of the earls. When he retired, there was a party for him in the lobby, his domain. Soon after, as if life were work, he died. Vinnie, his most notable junior colleague, was Italian, ebullient, a Yankees fan, regularly greeting my wife with a great, joyous "Hi, doctor!"—and rightly, for she has a Ph.D. (New School for Social Research). But so he also greeted me (no school, for nothing) and everyone. He ran the easiest defense of a dissertation in the world. He died of diabetes; a notice in the mailroom announced a wake in the Bronx.

The passing of tenants—our neighbors—is more elusive. You see a face every, or every other, day, and then you don't, preceded perhaps by seeing it altered for the worse. The first such change I noticed came upon an elderly man, with a habitually sweet expression, always dapper in a black suit and fedora. Then I saw him in the neighborhood supermarket, making repeated loops past the cash register, then back and past again, back and past. The checkout girl scolded him, he smiled on. Dementia. Soon he was gone. There was an older lady—lady was how you instinctively thought of her—bright-eyed, well spoken, well turned-out. The city removed a traffic sign that stood near our awning, but left a stub of the metal post sticking out of the sidewalk where everyone jaywalked across. Next thing the lady had a wheelchair and an attendant, which she kept for several years. Philosophical systems, wrote Henry Adams, especially those which justify God's ways to man, must account for catastrophes worldwide and accidents in corners.

A dramatic departure happened on our floor years ago. An older woman and her middle-aged son lived together. He played the piano in an Italian restaurant in the neighborhood, which never had a single customer (if you are thinking money laundering, you are probably thinking right). Mother and son drank and fought, audibly. You're drunk! You're dead! Shut up! etc. Once they left a pot on the stove, which filled the hall with smoke, then firemen. One day there was yellow KEEP OUT tape across their door. They were heard no more.

Just the other day my wife came up in the elevator with three cops, in full uniform, pistols on hips. This looked more serious than shushing five kids in a modified one-bedroom who have invited 25 of their best friends over for a beer blast. (The cops hardly ever come for that; five kids to one apartment is how the building makes money.) Gossip supplied the explanation: An elderly mother and daughter had been found dead in their own apartment, after two weeks.

I inquired of the doorman (Moroccan-French). From his description, I could not picture them. You know a lot of faces in a 19/20-floor building, but not all. If they were there undiscovered for two weeks, evidently I wasn't the only one who didn't know them. Hadn't their family missed them? Maybe they were their entire family. Hadn't their friends? Maybe they met their friends once a month for lunch and an organ recital (my heart, my feet) and died in the gap.

At moments like this, whether we live in the city or the wide-open spaces, we dream of community. Nostalgists, romantics, anthropologists, communitarians, and op-ed writers making grist from all the above encourage the feeling. Jane Austen is everyone's pet novelist—also a very great one, but we love her for her toyland villages and the costumed inhabitants. Think again. Living in those little communities can be like having a 24-hour anal probe. Everyone knows everyone else's business and has known it for years, if not generations. The Reverend (later Father) Richard Neuhaus (d. 2009) was driving Will Herberg (d. 1977) through Brooklyn. They passed a Hasidic neighborhood. Isn't it wonderful, Richard said, seeing old and young together? Herberg reproved him: You have no idea how *rigid* those communities are.

Pursuing happiness instead, we created a continent of runaways, whether we live in the badlands, with wild horses and opiates, or among the millions of the city, in buildings full of faced but nameless near-strangers. When we go, apart from family and friends, there will be a few words in the elevator or the mailroom, a few words from the doorman, then back to nods and talk of the weather. The day of our death will be, as Auden put it, a day when one did something slightly unusual. **NR**

Happy Warrior

BY HEATHER WILHELM

Home on the Ranch

YEARS ago, as enthusiastic new Texans, my husband and I moseyed into the Lone Star State with a vague and dusty dream: We wanted a ranch.

Here's where things get tricky, for in Texas, "ranch" can mean a lot of different things. The term is rather fast and loose, a verbal grab bag used to describe everything from small hobby farms to 50-acre "gentlemen's parcels" to mind-blowing sprawls of land and cattle and oil.

Furthering the confusion, it is widely considered ill-mannered to ask a casual acquaintance how large his ranch might be. This is unfortunate, given that said acquaintance might own something like the King Ranch, an 825,000-acre marvel larger than Rhode Island, or something like Buck's Ammo Hollow, which would be a few unkempt acres with a yurt, some guns, and a longhorn. (If it's the former, promptly start weaseling your way into an invitation, because there's probably a chef and a pool. If it's the latter, I guess it depends on how you feel about yurts. Who doesn't love guns and a longhorn?)

In any event, some dreams do come true: We now have a "ranch." In keeping with the grandest of ranch traditions, I shall shroud its size in mystery. And while I regret to inform you that there is no chef or pool onsite, the ranch does boast one extremely important trait: It is remote enough to make cell-phone service difficult and obtaining Internet access a sometimes fruitless chore.

In other words, in this day and age, it is paradise.

Imagine a summer largely unplugged. Friends, I lived it! At the ranch, I faced no daily dose of Trump-related media panic. I followed no frantic political ten-tweet pileups. When Anthony "The Mooch" Scaramucci blasted in and out of the public consciousness for approximately ten flaming hilarious seconds—a foul-mouthed Icarus, he was, plummeting from the sun—I paid little heed. When one of my daily political e-mail newsletters informed me that one-third of our nation's cats have body-image issues thanks to our troubling celebrity culture, did I snap to attention? Please. With my cell service, that e-mail would have taken a full half hour to download, and I don't even have a cat.

At first I felt unmoored, as any political junkie would. Soon enough, the unmooring became a thing of wonder. As the summer rolled on, I read more books. I hiked. I finished my multi-year backlog of family-photo albums. (Just kidding. That's an obvious lie.)

I dodged black-widow spiders, found a baby rattlesnake curled up on the front welcome mat, and, on one particularly exciting morning, discovered a startlingly fresh trail of gigantic mountain-lion pawprints leading right up to our front door. Later, I learned that the prints circled the entire house. It was staking out the place, leaving only a muddy trail, like some bizarro wilderness episode of *Scooby-Doo*.

Nature, as it turns out, does not mess around. Through it all, I kept coming back to a quote from that wise old philosopher, country legend Willie Nelson: "Fortunately, we are not in control."

Modern technology makes this age-old truth awfully easy to forget. The great outdoors, however, are more than happy to offer frequent reminders. One wonderful example came in the form of America's recent solar eclipse, which tore through the usual news cycle, inserting some much-needed wonder and awe. "Just when we thought we run the show down here," MSNBC's Brian Williams quipped, opening his coverage of the sun's mesmerizing disappearing act. Indeed we don't.

"The curious task of economics is to demonstrate to men how little they really know about what they imagine they can design," Friedrich Hayek wrote in *The Fatal Conceit*. Hayek was warning of the folly of command-and-control economies, but man, oh man, when it comes to human hubris, unexpected consequences, and the pitfalls of central planning, he would have had a heck of a time at my ranch this summer.

Want to craft an amazing hiking path? Giant trees will fall, blocking your way. How about a charming little trail of stepping stones crossing a creek? Weeks later, you'll find you've accidentally diverted the entire water flow, sprouting a crop of mysterious tough-as-nails weeds with a gurgling mud pit on the side. I recently read that it takes about $900,000 a year and a staff of two dozen to keep the Grand Canyon National Park looking "natural." Boy, do I believe it.

"You've got to be patient in the country." I was told this more than once, and it's certainly true. It's good advice for just about anywhere. And while my largely unplugged existence was glorious in its own way, my countrified life wasn't wholly innocent of the hearsay and whosay and wild speculation that currently plague social media.

For instance, on the subject of snakes, I was told the following, each from a seemingly credible source: 1) "Well! One thing to be happy about, there sure aren't any water moccasins around here!" 2) "Are you kidding? Of course we have water moccasins. They're all over the place! One fell into my canoe as a kid!" 3) "Lady, all I have to say is this: Watch where you walk. I once almost stumbled into a nest of water moccasins. They were wound into a giant seething ball! Stuff of nightmares! Chased me over land for 20 yards!" 4) "Pfffffffft. A *snake ball*? Who told you that? You could poke a cottonmouth with a sharp stick 13 times and it *still* wouldn't come after you!"

And finally . . . drumroll, please . . .

5) "One thing to be happy about, there sure aren't any water moccasins around here!"

Political Twitter, eat your heart out. At that one moment, it was like I was never gone. NR

Heather Wilhelm is a National Review Online *columnist and a senior contributor to the* Federalist.

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