the weekly Standard

AUGUST 16 / AUGUST 23, 2004

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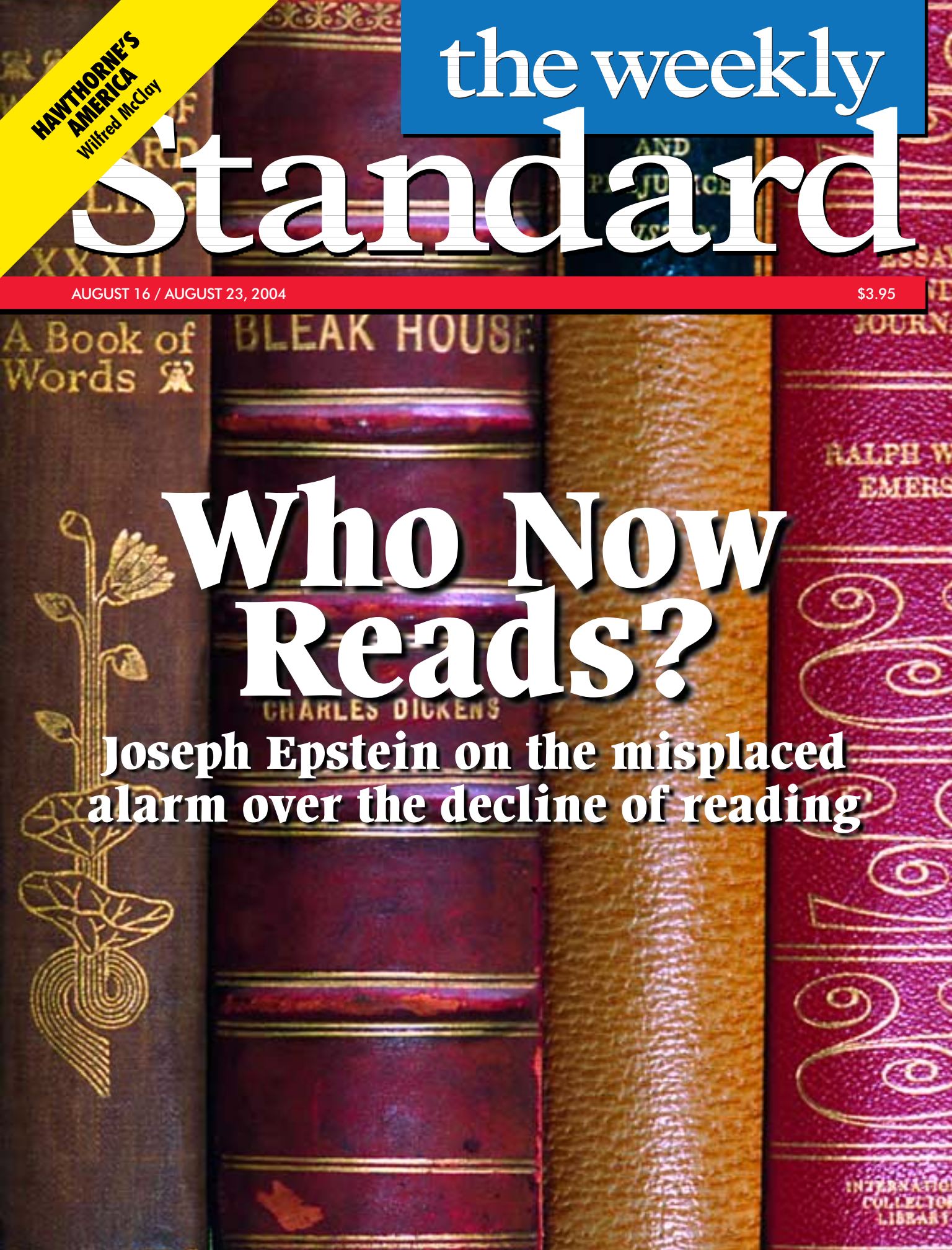
Wilfred McClay



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Feb. 8	Tuesday	At Sea		
Feb. 9	Wednesday	St. Maarten (Philipsburg), Netherlands Antilles	10:00 a.m.	11:00 p.m.
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Feb. 11	Friday	At Sea		
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Adjusting to a Post–Cold War World

The publication of the 9/11 commission's report provides an opportunity to reflect not just on the lack of preparedness for the history-altering terrorist attacks but also on the realities of the post–Cold War world.

The nearly 600-page report from the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States paints a disturbing picture of a government largely unprepared for the suicide assaults on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. But what it points to in the future is even more chilling. The report reminds us that Osama bin Laden and his fellow extremists are cold-blooded fanatics and that no negotiations, compromise, or appeasement will placate them.

The 9/11 commission report will be debated and dissected for some time to come, helping us to better understand the vast challenges we face. Perhaps it, along with the daily news from Baghdad, will at last pour cold water on the assumption that we are in another fledgling Cold War–like struggle. The current antiterrorism campaign is not about deterrence, containment, or chesslike moves on a global board.

Historical analogies are instructive. Munich and Vietnam still hold lessons about appeasement and protracted conflicts in peripheral areas. **The battle against Islamic fundamentalist terrorism is not another Cold War**, however. Yes, it will drag on for decades, like the Cold War, and resemble aspects similar to the Soviet standoff. Public diplomacy—how America spreads its message of hope, democracy, and tolerance to the world—will certainly be rekindled. Our antiterrorism struggle will necessitate alliances and occasional cooperation with unsavory regimes—all aspects of the former East-West rivalry—but it is not analogous.

The doctrine of preemption, of striking before being attacked, is a fundamentally different concept than the Cold War restraint and is here to stay no matter who wins the presidential election in November. **With American civilians and soldiers dying by jihadi bullets and beheadings, clearly we are in a hot war, not the old, icy standoff with Moscow.**

Although the degree of preemptive attack should be weighed soberly, **terrorism cannot be prevented by defensive measures. No White House occupant can simply react to events.** Nuclear and biological weapons in terrorist hands can kill far too many people for a reactive posture; jihad upends the former challenge and response formula. A glacially paced strategic response born of Cold War thinking will not cool the fires of jihad.

We may not engage in another ambitious Iraq war or even an Afghanistan intervention. America has already scaled down to smaller preemptive actions from these two major counterterrorism ventures. The United States is opening bare-bones bases from which to launch preemptive attacks. Special Forces teams have been deployed in a globe-spanning belt stretching from Latin America and the Philippines through Central Asia, East Africa, and the Maghreb to train local forces to battle terrorists.

Future strategies to nip terrorist plots in the bud might include surgical airstrikes, cloak-and-dagger operations, and even smash-and-dash commando raids to take out nuclear facilities or eliminate terrorist camps. The old Cold War business as usual is over and so should be the analogous thinking.

—Thomas Henriksen

Thomas Henriksen is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution.


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Benoit's Gall

Shortly after Bulgarian truck driver Georgi Lazov's headless body was fished out of the Tigris River on July 14, his country's NATO ambassador in Brussels, Emil Valev, proposed that the organization issue a statement condemning this and other hostage-takings in Iraq. NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer did end up releasing such a statement, on July 20, calling these incidents "abhorrent" and "revolting," and expressing "deepest sympathy" for the various victims' families.

But he did so, THE SCRAPBOOK has learned, only over the initial objections of Benoit d'Aboville, France's NATO envoy. Monsieur d'Aboville, one well-placed diplomat reports, dismissed his Bulgarian colleague's request for an expression of support as ridiculous, arguing that all countries must learn to deal with hostage-takers as a matter of course, paying them off as necessary. Here, presumably, d'Aboville was communicating only his personal views and not the formal policy of France. At least we hope so.

This same Benoit d'Aboville has since been the subject of a most revealing and excellent profile by reporter Philip Shishkin in the August 2 *Wall Street Journal*. According to Shishkin, "fellow diplomats call [d'Aboville] the most outspoken and unpredictable ambassador NATO has seen in years," a man "notorious for losing his composure at meetings."

At one such session, for example, d'Aboville first "stormed out" of the room, by itself "an almost unheard-of breach of etiquette," and then actually managed to make things worse by returning to his seat, where he "unfurled a French newspaper, interrupting his reading only to quote Voltaire to disparage the speaker."

Incidentally, d'Aboville "traces his lineage from an artillery colonel who helped the American colonies win a key battle of independence" (at Yorktown). It's something he rather "likes to joke" about, in fact. To wit: "I always say that maybe my ancestor made the wrong choice in backing the insurgents."

Figures that a man like Benoit d'Aboville would "always" like to mention his ancestors, doesn't it? After all, he "who serves his country well has no need of ancestors." Voltaire said that. ♦

Mountain Brahmin

Not citing Voltaire specifically, but grimly noting that "some European writers are beginning to call America a 'pre-fascist' society," the *Charleston Gazette*, West Virginia's largest daily newspaper, has gone on record with its concern over a "puzzling phenomenon that needs serious study." Never mind who's going to win America's upcoming presidential election, the *Gazette* advises in a July 17 editorial. Consider instead the "deeper, more troubling question" raised by the fact that the race between George W. Bush and John Kerry remains a neck-and-neck affair. That deeper, more troubling question being, of course: "Why do half of Americans want a shallow, smirking, self-righteous leader who started a needless war?"

Maybe all these people are just plain stupid, the paper's editors speculate, drawing inspiration from a "brilliant, hilarious new book" they've read that describes Republican voters as "low-income, blue-collar, evangelical, white Americans" who get "duped by the party of wealth and militarism."

In any case, the *Gazette* editorial says, "Educated, progressive people we know are unanimously disgusted by Bush. They can't imagine how anyone could vote for such a militaristic servant of the privileged class."

In which case, maybe the (self-described) educated and progressive people who run the *Charleston Gazette* ought to turn in their press badges and find some other line of work. Because by their own admission they still, with all the journalistic resources at their disposal, "can't imagine" how their own state's voters think. For the record: West Virginia awarded its electoral votes to George W. Bush four years ago—and, if recent polls are any indication, they may well do it again come this November. ♦

The *Bee* in His Bonnet

Remember how, two months back or so, THE SCRAPBOOK ran a single-paragraph-long summary of a June 3 *Sacramento Bee* story concerning Air America talk-show host Al Franken's possible 2008 Senate campaign in Minnesota? Remember how an affable but insistent Al Franken then personally rang us up to ques-

tion the accuracy of several somewhat less than crucial nuances in the aforementioned summary paragraph? (It hadn't been fair of us to suggest that the *Bee* had "quoted Franken gushing" about Hillary Clinton, for example, because "I don't think I gushed.") Remember, next, how an unusually deadpan and generous SCRAPBOOK dutifully and soon thereafter offered its readers a full account of Mr. Franken's complaint?

Well, it turns out Mr. Franken now wishes to revise and extend that complaint. And an unusually deadpan and generous SCRAPBOOK has once again decided to pass along a full report.

"I wasn't interviewed by the *Bee*" at all, Franken informed us over a shaky cell phone connection early last week. "I was actually interviewed by an Associated Press stringer for Minnesota. So you'll have to correct that." He was very nice about it, mind you. THE SCRAPBOOK was noncommittal about what it might "have" to do, advising Franken that (1) the *Bee* story in question hadn't credited anybody from the Associated Press; (2) the injured party here, if any, would thus appear to be the AP's purported "stringer" and not Franken himself; and (3) that the matter might by now be getting a little old and stale. "I totally understand" that, Franken replied, acknowledging that we might justifiably decline to pursue the issue any further. THE SCRAPBOOK nevertheless promised to look into the relevant facts, complimenting Mr. Franken on his meticulous attention to detail. And Mr. Franken accepted the compliment as appropriate: "We're very scrupulous." The conversation then ended.

THE SCRAPBOOK has subsequently conducted a comprehensive internal investigation of the *Sacramento Bee*-related paragraph published in our June 14 edition. The results are these: A story headlined "Capitol Hill comic? Franken may run for Senate in 2008" ran on page E8 of the *Bee* on June 3. That story, recounting an interview with Franken conducted "outside a New York skyscraper that hosts his new liberal radio talk show," was bylined "Rob Hotakainen, *Bee* Washington Bureau."

Mr. Hotakainen, a fine reporter who surely has better things to do, tells THE SCRAPBOOK that he is a Washington correspondent for the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, working out of the D.C. bureau offices maintained by the McClatchy Newspapers chain, which owns the *Star Tribune*. McClatchy also owns the *Sacramento Bee*, however, which not infrequently picks up Hotakainen's dispatches, crediting him, not inaccurately, as "the *Bee*'s" Washington reporter.

Moreover, so far as THE SCRAPBOOK has been able to determine, Mr. Hotakainen is in no respect affiliated with the Associated Press. Nor is he anybody's "stringer."

An unusually deadpan and generous SCRAPBOOK sincerely regrets the peculiar error Al Franken has made about all this. ♦

Casual

Take Me to Your Agent

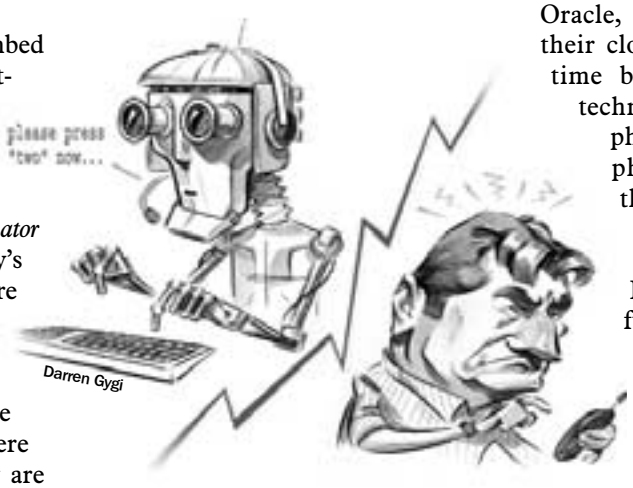
Every time I pass my lefty neighbors' car, there seems to be a new bumper sticker plastered on the back of it. There are anti-Bush slogans like "Hail to the Thief," "The Emperor Has No Brains," "John Ashcroft: The Best Attorney General the NRA Can Buy," and "Dump Dubya," as well as "Boycott Kraft" and "Kucinich for President." Well, there's one that I find myself agreeing with more and more—the paranoid "Fear Technology."

Lately, you see, I have succumbed to the outlandish fear that computers will gain self-awareness and take over the world.

Not that I believe mankind's extinction will happen in the apocalyptic manner of the *Terminator* movies, in which the U.S. military's defense system becomes self-aware and, when humans try turning it off, retaliates by triggering a nuclear holocaust. Nor do I imagine our demise will be as deceptive as in the *Matrix* trilogy, where humans don't even realize they are living in a fantasy world created by a sinister cyber-intelligence (while it secretly harvests energy from their bodies). Instead, machines will triumph over man by means of a harmless sounding innovation called "speech recognition technology."

Chances are, you have already encountered this insidious technology when you've tried calling your cable or phone company in the absurd hope of speaking to a human being. On a recent call to Verizon, I was asked by a machine (with a friendly female voice) to speak my answers to a series of questions, starting with my phone number. Second, I was asked, Was this a business or a home line? Easy enough. But then came the question, "Okay, please tell me briefly the reason for your call today." I replied, "My phone isn't working," which brought the response: "Let me just confirm. You want to report on or check on a repair problem. Is this correct?" When I affirmed this, I was transferred—to a busy signal followed by disconnection.

On my second go-around, I managed to get past the "report a problem" phase and talk to the "Repair Resolution Center." But just then the computer admitted that my records hadn't gone through and asked me to please speak my number again. And was this a business or a home line? Aggrieved, I asked sharply to speak to an operator, then went tactile, pressing the "0" button. But the computer was unfazed. It said that it would be unable to connect me to a (human) representative until I explained my problem.



When at last I was transferred to a living, breathing person, I was so exasperated I spoke to the man as if he too were a machine. Happily, he, being in fact a human, was fitted out with a full range of emotions, and so understood my frustration and told me the secret of getting out of the voice matrix: "The next time you are in the system and it starts talking, just say the word 'agent.'" (Funny, since the villains throughout the *Matrix* movies are also known as agents.)

My line was eventually fixed, but not before I'd caught a glimpse of the dark times to come, when we will talk fruitlessly to machines, as they lure us through labyrinths of questions and answers and we waste hours, unproductive and increasingly agitated. Where will it end? And, equally important, who is responsible?

Speech recognition technology has powerful backers. It uses something called VoiceXML (Voice eXtensible Markup Language) and is promoted by the VoiceXML Forum, whose board includes executives from AT&T, IBM, Motorola, Oracle, and, yes, Verizon. Given their clout, it is only a matter of time before speech recognition technology is part of all telephonic communication. The phone companies were just the beginning. How about the fire department? Or the 911 dispatcher? As the Borgs say, resistance is futile.

In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the astronauts must learn to deal deftly with the computer known as the HAL-9000. But in the end, HAL outsmarts them—indeed, it kills them all. Similarly, VoiceXML will probably get the better of us and bring an end to our existence—by annoying us all to death.

I imagine my lefty neighbors have seen this coming for some time now. These days, especially, their fear of technology must be at fever pitch (what with voting machines being rigged for the upcoming election). But all of us should look with dread toward the future of technology—a bleak future in which every single phone call will begin with those fateful words, "Please tell me briefly the reason for your call today."

Victorino Matus

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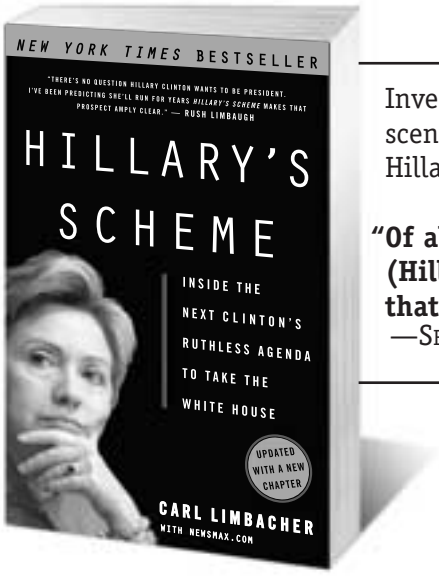
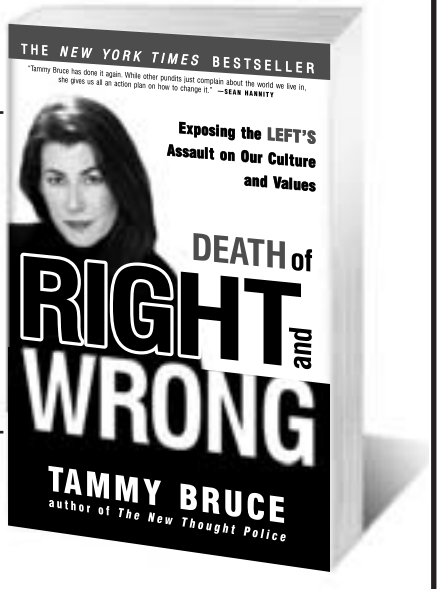
What's Left of America?



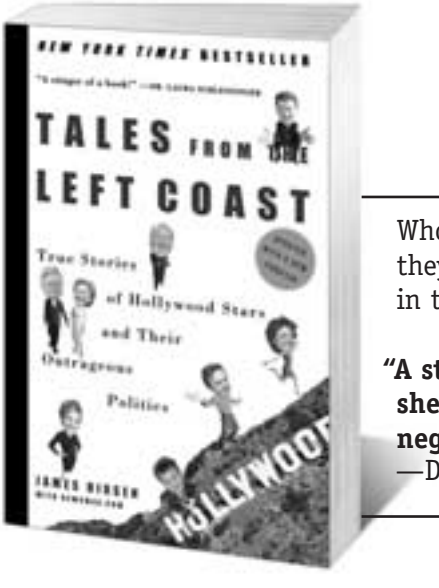
Investigative journalist Carl Limbacher goes behind the scenes to confirm the worst fear of millions of Americans: Hillary Clinton's set her sights on the White House.

"Of all the books that have been written about (Hillary Clinton), this one is the definitive book that ... the Clintons will fear the most."
—Sean Hannity



The bestselling author of *The New Thought Police* reveals how the American Left is trying to destroy the values that define our civilization—and how we can stop them.

"Tammy Bruce recounts—with brutal candor—her journey from wrong to right, along the way exposing the hypocrisy and moral vacuum of the Left."
—G. Gordon Liddy



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—Dr. Laura Schlessinger

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Correspondence

Questioning Kerry

William Kristol presents four excellent questions for John Kerry ("Four Questions for Kerry," August 2). But I would also like to see the Massachusetts senator address this question: If he were president, would he allow "Old Europe," Russia, and a variety of Third World countries on the U.N. Security Council to dictate how the United States fights the war on terror?

President Bush has emphatically asserted his right as commander in chief to defend the American people from terrorists through unilateral action. Indeed, Bush maintains that he has an *obligation* to do so. Does Kerry also consider this a presidential obligation? Or do his hyper-multilateralist instincts make him categorically opposed to the potential unilateralism implied by the Bush Doctrine?

Bill Strong
Elk Grove, CA

I thought the questions laid out in William Kristol's "Four Questions for Kerry" were reasonable—until I came to the fourth. It asked: "If Kerry were president, would marriage be redefined?"

It amazes me that a magazine that supposedly champions "conservative" causes has latched onto the issue of denying gays the right to marry. The more important question that needs to be asked of President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and the entire Republican establishment is whether they believe gay couples should have the same legal rights as heterosexual couples. Put aside the semantics of "civil unions" versus "marriage" for a moment. Does the GOP believe in equal rights under the law, or not? That is the true issue at stake here.

Jason Scorse
Santa Cruz, CA

The Rich *Are* Different

Noemie Emery's fine article "John Kerry Is Different from You and Me" (August 2) is made even more relevant by Kerry's recent trip to Wendy's. A few days after the Democratic convention, where John Edwards spoke of "two Americas," Kerry and Edwards ate lunch with their wives—and Ben Affleck—at a Wendy's restaurant in Newburgh, New York.

It was reported that the Kerrys tried chili and chocolate Frosties, while the Edwardses had burgers. Most reports ended there—but not Mark Steyn's piece in the London *Daily Telegraph*. Steyn added that, after stopping at Wendy's, Kerry and Edwards boarded their bus. There, it turned out, "the campaign advance team had ordered 19 five-star lunches from the Newburgh Yacht Club for Kerry, Edwards, Affleck and co. to be served back on the bus: shrimp vindaloo, grilled diver sea scallops, [prosciutto-wrapped stuffed chicken], etc. I'm not sure whether Ben had the shrimp and Teresa the scallops, but, either way, it turns out John Edwards is right: there are two Americas—one America where folks eat at Wendy's, another America where the elite pass an amusing half-hour slumming among the folks at Wendy's and then chow down on the Newburgh Yacht Club's specials of the day."

Yes, John Kerry is different from the rest of us—very different.

David Cruthers
Groton Long Point, CT

No Place For Playboy

I was appalled as I read Brian Murray's review of *Hef's Little Black Book* ("Bare Nekkid Ladies," August 2). Is a book by and about the man who brought soft-core pornography to mainstream America really worthy of such lengthy treatment in your magazine? I doubt it. More disturbing than your decision to review Hefner's book were the pictures that you included with it. And the quote attributed to *Penthouse* publisher Bob Guccione was over the edge.

I have always felt very comfortable letting my children read The Weekly Standard before I did, knowing that the content was generally safe. After "Bare Nekkid Ladies," I need to rethink that.

Rosanna Shenk
Plain City, OH

Loyal Bay Staters

As a transplanted Massachusetts native and a die-hard sports fan, I enjoyed Christopher Caldwell's "The Boston Diaspora" (August 2). I once tried in vain to be both a Boston Red Sox fan and New York Yankees fan. When I was a kid growing up in the Bay State, I didn't know what a Yankee was apart from the maker of bean soup. But then I went to school in New York and saw pinstripes everywhere. The Yankees were popular and I was in enemy territory. It wasn't easy to be loyal amidst that sea of strident opposition. I felt that "coming out" as a Red Sox fan might be unwise.

These days, coming out on foreign soil can be similarly daunting in the realm of politics. Indeed, I can't decide which is more intimidating—to come out as a Red Sox fan in Manhattan, or to come out as a Republican. In our ultra-partisan climate, the culture wars feature all the red-hot intensity of a Yankees-Red Sox series.

Abe Novick
Baltimore, MD

• • •

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the weekly Standard

The Antiwar Candidate

Everyone knows that John Kerry is ambivalent about the war in Iraq. In fact, he's so ambivalent that he won't say anything more definite about whether or not we should have gone to war than that, as president, he "might" have done so. Nor will he say what his plan is for the future, though he claims to have one. But Kerry doesn't mind being thought ambivalent about Iraq. The American people, after all, are ambivalent about Iraq, too. But what John Kerry does not want the American people to know is that he is also ambivalent about the war on terror in general.

Consider his acceptance speech at the Democratic convention. He concedes that "we are a nation at war," engaged in a "global war on terror against an enemy unlike any we have ever known before." Yet, despite the radical dissimilarity of this enemy to previous ones, here's how Kerry says he will fight this war: "As president, I will wage this war with the lessons I learned in war." That is, with the lessons he learned in Vietnam.

But Kerry's lessons are not, strictly speaking, lessons learned in war. They are instead the conclusions drawn by the antiwar movement about American foreign policy in reaction to Vietnam. They presumably are somewhat less extreme than the critique Kerry presented in his Senate Foreign Relations Committee testimony in April 1971, when he spoke of the 200,000 Vietnamese a year "murdered" by the United States, and when he said he had seen "America lose its sense of morality." But it is clear Kerry sees today's war on terror through the lens of the antiwar movement he helped to lead three decades ago upon his return from combat.

"Lesson one" in Kerry's speech, therefore, is that a "real and imminent" threat is "the only justification for going to war." Presumably there was no such threat in Vietnam—and thus we should not have fought there. But can we afford to act in the war on terror only when the threat is "imminent"? Is it not necessary to take action against al Qaeda before it strikes? Kerry's antiwar activism has so shaped his thinking that he doesn't want to confront the fact that preemptive action may sometimes be necessary in this war.

Now, it is true that Kerry tries to assure us in his convention speech that he "will never hesitate to use force when it is required. Any attack will be met with a swift and certain response." But what does it say about a presidential candidate when he thinks it a show of strength to insist that he would actually respond to an attack on the United States?

Furthermore, Kerry suggested on CNN last week (in the spirit of the antiwar movement) that attacking terrorists can result in "actually encouraging the recruitment of terrorists." One wonders whether a President Kerry wouldn't find reasons to hesitate in prosecuting the war on terror.

Or consider Kerry's remark that "we need to rebuild our alliances, so we can get the terrorists before they get us." Do we really have to wait to "get the terrorists" until our alliances are rebuilt (whatever that means)? Indeed, what terrorists aren't we "getting" because of alleged problems with allies right now? And what of Kerry's statement last December that he would treat the United Nations as a "full partner" in the war on terror? Again, Kerry shows little evidence of having thought at all seriously about the nature of today's war on terror, and its implications for the use of force, for the limitations of international institutions, and the like.

And consider this: "Today, our national security begins with homeland security." Doesn't it rather end with homeland security? Surely our national security begins with dealing with terrorists far away, in their recruitment centers and training camps, and in dealing with the regimes that harbor, sponsor, and fund them. But that would suggest reflecting on the lessons of our inaction during the 1990s vis-à-vis Afghanistan, and on what Bush did after 9/11. But the words Afghanistan, Taliban, al Qaeda, and Osama bin Laden are nowhere to be found in Kerry's convention speech. For President Bush, 9/11 is fundamental. For Kerry, Vietnam is decisive.

The truth is this: John Kerry began his political career as an antiwar activist. He remained one through his Senate career, opposing President Reagan's efforts in Central America and the first Gulf War under the first President Bush. And at heart he remains one still. Kerry claims he wants to fight the war on terror. But in key respects he still sounds more like a protester against, than a prosecutor of, the war on terror.

—William Kristol

No Silver Lining in the Kerry Cloud

If he wins, there will be no consolation prizes for conservatives. **BY FRED BARNES**

THE PRESIDENCY of Bill Clinton had a silver lining for Republicans and conservatives. Thanks to Clinton, they made significant political gains in the 1990s. More important, they achieved three policy breakthroughs that in all likelihood would have eluded a Republican president: serious welfare reform, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and a balanced budget. Don't expect similar successes if John Kerry is elected to the White House. The chances are exceedingly slim Republicans will be able to pull off victories on conservative issues in a Kerry era. Why? Clinton was a "new" Democrat who endorsed some of the conservative agenda. Kerry is a conventional liberal who buys almost none of it except the goal of a balanced budget.

The delirious reception Clinton got at last month's Democratic convention makes clear that Democrats believe he was good for their party. In truth, he was even better for Republicans. In reaction to Clinton's first two years as president, Republicans made extraordinary political gains in 1994, not only capturing both houses of Congress but also winning a majority of governorships and a plurality of state legislatures. And since 1994, Republicans have largely held onto these gains.

Clinton prompted a Republican landslide. Kerry won't. Even a failed Kerry presidency would be unlikely to produce sweeping electoral wins for Republicans. Sure, they could take a few more governorships and add to their slim majority of state legislators. But gaining a sizable number of House seats would be all but impossible. The maximum number of seats they could win in an America evenly divided between the two parties is around 240, and Republicans already have 227. The Senate offers slightly better prospects. Republicans need anywhere from 5 to 10 new Senate seats to cut off Democratic filibusters, depending on the issue. They'd need to pick up more than 10 to stand a chance of overriding vetoes by President Kerry. To produce such gains, there would have to be a powerful backlash against President Kerry. At the moment, there are 51 Republican senators, but only 45 or so are reliably conservative votes.

The out party—the one that doesn't control the presidency—often gains House and Senate seats and does better in state contests. What made the Clinton era so unusual, however, were the Republican victories on substantive issues. On reforming the welfare system, long a target of conservative criticism, a "Nixon goes to China" phenomenon was required, a president going against the partisan and ideological grain. Since it was a Democratic president proposing the reform, many Democrats in Congress were inclined to go along. Had it been a Republican president, they wouldn't have. In short, only a Democratic president could have delivered conservative welfare reform—and Clinton did, with some Democratic and overwhelming Republican support.

The fact that Clinton promised to "end welfare as we know it" in the 1992 campaign made it difficult for him to oppose a reform bill as president. The same was true for NAFTA. Because of strong opposition by a majority of House Democrats and organized labor, he considered abandoning NAFTA. But that would have meant reneging on a campaign promise and would have resulted in a rift with Canada and Mexico. So he stuck with the trade agreement and lobbied hard for its ratification. The key vote was in the House, where Clinton again prevailed with Republican votes.

Clinton thinks his policies alone produced a balanced budget. Hardly. Congressional Republicans were indispensable, forcing deep spending cuts in 1995 and spending restraint later. They also pressured Clinton into signing a balanced budget agreement—an act, not a constitutional amendment—in 1997. (That measure included a tax cut on capital gains and a child credit for families.) The question is whether Republicans would have insisted on sharp spending reductions with a Republican in the White House. Probably not. They certainly haven't with George Bush as president. So we're left with this conclusion: The best arrangement for holding down spending is a Republican Congress and a Democratic president.

If Kerry is elected president, this arrangement is likely to prevail, though there's an outside chance the Senate will go Democratic. Kerry's stated goal is to cut the budget deficit in half in four years and achieve a balanced budget later. Is this possible? Maybe, but don't hold your breath. Kerry has elaborate spending plans, particularly on health care. No doubt Republicans would balk at some of the spending. But on health care, an issue on which Republicans are desperate not to be viewed negatively, they might go along with Kerry. One more factor. A roaring stock market increased tax revenues dramatically in the late 1990s and wiped out the deficit. But that was a once-in-a-lifetime event.

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

Unlike Clinton, Kerry doesn't have any pet projects Republicans and conservatives favor. On trade, he's joined the Democratic—and increasingly Republican—chorus of protectionists. He's refused to back the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), saying it should include worker and environmental standards theat Latin American countries would never accept. On Iraq, what Kerry would do is anybody's guess. He claims to have a plan for Iraq but hasn't said what it is. He says he'll recruit more allies to take some of the burden in Iraq off the United States. There's good reason to be skeptical he'll find any.

Kerry has occasionally veered from liberal orthodoxy. He once called for ending teacher tenure and questioned the effects of affirmative action. But, as David Brooks wrote in the *New York Times*, "he will momentarily embrace daring ideas, but if they threaten core constituencies, he often abandons them, returning meekly to the Democratic choir."

But the "Nixon goes to China" analogy has not been lost on Kerry. In campaign appearances recently in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Cape Canaveral, Florida, he invoked it and insinuated he will part company with trial lawyers, a key Democratic constituency. He said he'd back tort reform to aid doctors facing exorbitant malpractice insurance premiums. Indeed, he and his trial lawyer running mate, John Edwards, insist in their campaign booklet, *Our Plan for America*, that they would "take steps to curb the rising cost of medical malpractice insurance."

That sounds nice, but there's a glaring omission from the Kerry-Edwards plan: a cap on non-economic damages. And it's the only thing that matters in limiting damages, holding down the price of malpractice insurance, and keeping doctors in business. Without a cap, the Kerry-Edwards plan is one trial lawyers can live with quite comfortably. Kerry is no Nixon. He's no Clinton either. And there's no silver lining. ♦

The Issue That Dare Not Speak Its Name

The candidates won't be able to avoid the gay marriage debate. BY JEFFREY BELL & FRANK CANNON

THE JUXTAPOSITION last week was startling. On the same day, (a) voters in the Missouri primary overwhelmingly approved a state constitutional amendment establishing marriage as being exclusively between a man and a woman, and (b) a state judge in Washington ruled that the 19th-century writers of that state's constitution had made exclusively heterosexual marriage unconstitutional.

The vote in Missouri was not close: 71 percent in favor of the constitutional amendment, 29 percent against. Moreover, because of a hard-fought primary that wound up ousting Democratic governor Bob Holden, turnout was weighted to the Democratic side—roughly 58 percent Democratic voters, 42 percent Republican. And the opponents of the amendment—the pro-gay-marriage side—outspent backers of traditional marriage roughly 40 to 1—$400,000 to $10,000.

Missouri, the first state to hold a referendum since the Massachusetts supreme court imposed same-sex marriage over the objections of the governor and state legislature, confirmed that nothing has changed in voters' attitude to the idea. In 1998, it was Hawaii and Alaska; in 2000, Nebraska; in 2002, Nevada. In 2004, Missouri. The vote in every one of these states was more than 2-to-1 in favor of a constitutional prohibition of gay marriage. In Hawaii, the only state more Democratic than Massachusetts when it comes to electing Democrats as governors, senators, and congressmen, the vote was 69.2 to 28.6 percent in favor of an amendment overruling that state's supreme court. Between now and November 2, as many as 12 more states will hold constitutional referendums on marriage.

John Kerry, as it happens, was in Missouri the day after the same-sex marriage vote. It is a state in which, according to the daily political newsletter *The Hotline*, two of the three most recent polls show Kerry leading George W. Bush; the third has the two candidates tied. Missouri's 11 electoral votes, won narrowly by Bush in 2000, would make Kerry president if the 49 other states stayed with the same party as in 2000.

Asked in St. Louis about the previous day's vote, Kerry said he had no problem with it. He, after all, unlike George W. Bush, is the candidate who favors letting each state make its own decision. He didn't add that he was one of 14 senators, all liberal Democrats, who voted against the Defense of Marriage Act, signed into law by President Clinton in 1996. The purpose of DOMA was to let each state prohibit same-sex marriage even if a gay couple, married under some other state's law, demanded recognition of their union by invoking the Full Faith and Credit clause of the U.S. Constitution. In his 1996 statement opposing DOMA, Kerry said he believed the law to be unconstitutional.

John Edwards was not yet in the Senate when DOMA passed. But during the primaries he stated that he, too, would have voted against it. So on this, as on so many other issues, Edwards is in complete agree-

Jeffrey Bell and Frank Cannon are principals of Capital City Partners, a Washington consulting firm.

ment with his running mate: He is in favor of the right of states to define marriage, but opposed to the federal legislation that sought to guarantee each state the right to keep its own definition.

In this straddle, Kerry and Edwards are perfectly in sync with their party's elite. The existence of the Defense of Marriage Act was the reason most frequently cited by Democratic senators earlier this summer for tabling a proposed constitutional amendment to preserve traditional marriage. Never mind that the Supreme Court is almost universally expected to rule DOMA unconstitutional some day, and that the amendment—which 46 of 49 Democratic senators voted to scuttle—is intended to let states keep traditional marriage even if the Supreme Court so rules.

Near the end of his acceptance speech at the Democratic convention, Kerry suddenly assumed a tone of high drama: "I want to address these next words directly to President George W. Bush: In the weeks ahead, let's be optimists, not just opponents. Let's build unity in the American family, not angry division. Let's honor this nation's diversity; let's respect one another; and let's never misuse for political purposes the most precious document in American history, the Constitution of the United States."

It was the biggest applause line of the speech. And it was, in its way, adroit. Everyone in the hall knew that, in the guise of calling for a civil debate, Kerry had accused the president of prostituting the Constitution by endorsing an amendment defining marriage as between a man and a woman.

Kerry was also demanding that the drive by federal and state judges to enshrine same-sex marriage not be opposed, or even debated. In a town hall meeting in Wisconsin the week after the convention, he repeated the warning: "We've got leadership that tends to try to drive a wedge between people. It picks one of the hot button, cultural issues and drives that at you, whether or not that's the most important thing on America's mind."

Events such as those last week in Missouri and Washington are making it less and less likely that Kerry, and the Democrats who cheered him in Boston, will get their wish. Kerry has made it clear that he and Edwards are personally opposed to same-sex marriage, so the debate will not be about the merits of this impending social change. Kerry, remember, has "no problem" with the Missouri vote. Yet everyone knows that, if left to themselves, judges like the ones in Massachusetts and Washington state will override the preferences of the 70 percent or so of Americans who likewise oppose same-sex marriage.

When it comes up in the fall campaign, as it certainly will, the issue will be what to do about this collision between democratic decision-making and judicial ambition. President Bush will have a clear answer: He will fight to preserve marriage, and his opponent will not. How does Bush know this? Kerry opposes changing the Constitution to preserve traditional marriage. He was one of 14 senators to vote against legislation to let states preserve it. And he is committed to appointing the kind of federal judges who created the problem in the first place.

That is the debate John Kerry can no longer avoid. ♦

Bad Headlines for Bush . . .

Though the economy is actually doing pretty well.

BY IRWIN M. STELZER

THERE WAS A FLOOD of economic data last week—and of political commentary on the data—and John Kerry had it all his way. The economy created surprisingly few jobs—a mere 32,000, 10 percent of the number Bush had been hoping for—in July. To add to the president's discomfort, the already low job-creation figures for May and June were revised downwards by about 50,000. This wounds Bush in key swing states such as Wisconsin and Ohio. And not only there. All over America, even those working will now worry a bit more about their jobs, especially when new data show that experienced workers with long records of service are among those most frequently laid off, and for long periods.

Kerry's slogan, "We can do better," will resonate more loudly. Never mind that if voters put him in the White House, he promises to push through tax increases on the wealthy and on dividends and capital gains, a variety of protectionist measures, and an expensive health care plan. Just how such measures will stimulate economic growth remains a mystery.

The president will find it difficult to continue arguing that, thanks to his economic program, "we have turned the corner" from recession to growth. He has justified the massive deficits resulting from his tax cuts (and his spending spree) as needed to create jobs, which they have been doing—until now. He can, of course, point out that the unemployment rate dropped last month to 5.5 percent from 5.6 percent, that we have had 11 consecutive months of job growth, and that the indices of weekly hours and weekly payrolls increased. But these points will be drowned out by the roar of disappointment over the jobs figures. As will the good news contained in much of the data released last week.

The most widely watched and reported figures—jobs, oil prices, and stock prices—are grist for the Kerry mill.

The Institute for Supply Management reported that its index of manufacturing activity rose in July for the fourteenth consecutive month. Eighteen of the 20 industries surveyed reported stepped-up activity. Norbert J. Ore, the chairman of the institute's survey committee, summarized the good news, "The manufacturing sector continues to grow at a rapid rate." New orders are up, and inventories are too low relative to orders, meaning that manufacturers will have to step up output to restock their customers' shelves. Even export orders rose.

The service sector is also growing rapidly. In July, activity in that sector increased for the sixteenth consecutive month, and at a faster rate than in the previous month. New orders and order backlogs also rose in the service sector.

Consumer confidence is high, probably because personal incomes have grown for three consecutive quarters. Consumers returned to the auto showrooms in July, and drove vehicle sales up by more than 12 percent from June levels. Despite high gas prices, sales of light trucks and SUVs led the way.

Wal-Mart, which accounts for about 8 percent of all non-auto retail sales in the United States, reports that net sales for the four-week period ending July 30 increased by 10.9 percent over the same four weeks in 2003. Even Target, which has been struggling, reported an 8.8 percent increase in July sales over last year's levels. These figures bode well for the important back-to-school sales of clothes, computers, and bedding, although retailers remain nervous that high gasoline prices might sop up so much consumer purchasing power that parents will rein their darlings in when it comes to apparel and other optional goodies.

Meanwhile, retail sales at the high end of the market continue strong. The shops of leather goods seller Coach and other posh retailers such as Saks Fifth Avenue (up 15 percent) and Neiman Marcus (up 14 percent) remain crowded, and not merely with curious lookers.

Most important, the housing market continues to advance. Interest rates hover around a relatively low 6 percent, making new houses affordable to the bulk of Americans. And the banks are making credit freely—well, not freely, but cheaply—available to businesses as their profits and credit ratings rise.

But the most widely watched and reported figures—jobs, oil prices, and stock prices—are grist for the Kerry mill. The jobs market is not as strong as Bush would like it to be, oil and gas prices are higher than he would wish, and stock prices are stuck somewhere between level and falling.

Those are the numbers that voters

Irwin M. Stelzer is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD*, director of economic policy studies at the Hudson Institute, and a columnist for the Sunday* Times *(London).*

see repeatedly reported on television screens, and, in the case of gas prices, feel in their pockets every time they fill their tanks. *BusinessWeek* estimates that consumers are spending an average of an extra $10 billion per month for gas and other energy products. Also, the effects of the Bush tax refunds have worn off, and a good day for stock prices is one on which they don't fall. All of this is apt to tame the animal spirits of both consumers and businessmen. That is not a recipe for reelecting an incumbent who took responsibility for the now-slowing recovery when it was steaming ahead.

The White House is hoping that Federal Reserve Board chairman Alan Greenspan will reassess his plans to continue raising interest rates. If he does, share prices might be given a bit of an uplift. The Bush team is also hoping that last week's announcement by the OPEC cartel that it will pump more oil to bring down prices proves to be more truthful than past OPEC statements. After all, the president is supposed to have close ties with the Saudi royal family. If that is true, now is the time for all good Saudis to come to the aid of their president, and tap the two million barrel per day reserve capacity that they have been claiming is available to them.

Finally, Bush's campaign advisers are counting on rising business investment to give the economy a quick and noticeable shot in the arm in the 86 days remaining before Americans go to the polls.

Voters, of course, do not live by bread alone. They worry not only about the economy, but about Iraq and whether they are secure in their homes, offices, and in the nation's shopping malls. Bush is hoping that things will break his way in Iraq, and that continued successes in uncovering al Qaeda plots will prevent a new terrorist attack in America. But that means the president is now at the mercy of events, rather than in charge of his campaign. Not exactly where he hoped to be at this late date in the election cycle. ♦

Barbarism Then and Now

Appeasement still doesn't work.

BY JOSEPH LOCONTE

THE RECENT WAVE of church bombings, kidnappings, and executions of civilians in Iraq seems to support a contested claim by the Bush administration: that radical Islam is the philosophical cousin to European fascism; that it has less to do with politics than with nihilistic rage. As Bush put it in his address to Congress barely a week after the 9/11 attacks, "By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions—by abandoning every value except the will to power—they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism." The president has asserted an Islamist-fascist link in at least a dozen speeches over the last three years.

Critics assail this argument as dangerously "ideological"—there's too much moralizing about the evil of terrorism, they say, and not enough curiosity about the "root causes" of Islamic violence. Religious liberals such as Bob Edgar of the National Council of Churches deride Bush's moral vocabulary as a way of "dehumanizing" America's enemies. Writing recently in the *New York Times Book Review*, political scientist Ronald Steel scolds administration hawks for ignoring "the essentially political causes of terrorism."

The eyewitnesses to Nazi terrorism, however, might well take exception to that view. Eric Voegelin, whose 1938 book *The Political Religions* made him a target of the Third Reich, offers perhaps the best-known critique of the moral and spiritual rationalizations of fascist ideology. A short work published in 1939 by philosopher Lewis Mumford, however, is also worth revisiting. Titled *Men Must Act*, the book grew out of Mumford's visit to Germany in the early 1930s. There he saw copies of *Mein Kampf* ("my struggle," Hitler's autobiography and political manifesto published in 1926) being snatched up in bookstores. He watched how Nazi brownshirts had taken over the streets in Lübeck, and listened at dinner parties as upper-class Germans praised Hitler's program against the Jews.

Writing when America was still in a pacifist mood, Mumford aimed to prod U.S. support for the Allied cause. His summary of fascist principles reads today like a recruiting manual for the al Qaeda network: (1) the glorification of war, (2) a hatred for democracy, (3) a hatred for civilization, (4) a contempt for science and objectivity, and (5) a delight in physical cruelty.

The sadism and irrationality of fascism have long been favorite themes among scholars, but many in America came under the spell of its pseudo-scientific arguments. Bigotry was part of the reason: From 1933 to 1941, over a hundred anti-Semitic groups appeared in the United States, many of them with a Christian hue. Some of Mumford's close friends turned against him when he argued that Nazi claims rested on racist, conspiratorial delusions. "What the leader desires is real: what he believes is true: what

Joseph Loconte is the William E. Simon fellow in religion at the Heritage Foundation and editor of the forthcoming The End of Illusions: Religious Leaders Confront Hitler's Gathering Storm.

he anathematizes is heresy," he wrote. "These fiat truths bring about a debasement of the entire intellectual currency."

How does that compare to Islamic radicalism?

The writings and statements of Osama bin Laden, and those of his philosophical mentor, Sayyid Qutb, point to the true nature of their grievances. The object of their hatred is not merely "international Jewry"—the Nazi slogan—but all "infidels," in particular the "Zionist-crusader alliance." The terrorist attacks in Iraq show that the enemies of al Qaeda include citizens not only of the United States, but of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Kuwait, Kenya, India, Bulgaria, South Korea, and the Philippines. They may be politicians, police, factory employees, doctors, relief workers—anyone supporting a decent civil society. They include not only Christians and Jews, but dissenting Muslims. Here, then, is an ideology that reviles anyone who upholds the moral norms of civilized states. As Christopher Hitchens has aptly phrased it, here is "fascism with an Islamic face."

One of the first religious figures in America to grasp the threat of German fascism was Stephen Wise, president of the World Jewish Congress. As early as 1933, when Hitler came to power, Wise was warning that Nazism challenged "the conscience of humanity" with its treatment of Jews and other non-Aryans. He insisted that Hitler be judged not only by his military aggression, but by the viciousness of his anti-Semitism—a campaign to shatter the foundations of every democratic society. "Peoples and churches permitted themselves to be lulled into unawareness, because it was only or chiefly the Jew who at the outset was hurt," Wise observed in 1938. "Men heeded not that the Jews were assailed as symbol of that civilization, the values of which Nazism was resolved to destroy."

Mumford similarly faulted America's political and religious leaders for excusing "the true stigmata of fascism," its love of sadistic violence. The roots of this pathology had little to do with political or economic grievances, as many assumed at the time. Rather, the Nazi obsession with violence and war was self-generated—and insatiable. It produced a regime in which blackmail, repression, and terror were not accidental injustices, but part of the very structure of the state.

"We had glibly assumed," Mumford wrote, "that barbarism was a condition that civilized man had left permanently behind him." The Nazis refuted all those assumptions, and no appeals to reason or diplomacy would deter them. Indeed,

although a secular thinker, Mumford came to believe in "radical evil"—that savagery is the easy way for mankind, the natural drift of things apart from some restraining force or grace. That insight is worth bearing in mind in light of the 9/11 Commission report. Its authors complain of a "failure of imagination" in the face of terrorist threats, but it's still not clear that Washington's policy elites appreciate the religious nihilism that sustains radical Islam.

In his recent book *The Third Reich*, historian Michael Burleigh argues that Hitler's Germany clung to a Teutonic myth of heroic doom, a high-stakes war for national and racial restoration—or perdition. The ideology of Nazism, he writes, "offered redemption from a national ontological crisis, to which it was attracted like a predatory shark to blood."

Today, it seems, the predators have returned. The crisis this time is not national and race-based, but supranational and faith-based. The stakes are equally high, the methods as thoroughly wicked: videotaped beheadings, the mutilation and public parade of corpses, the murder of women and children, the recruitment of boys for suicide missions. "We must keep in mind the nature of the enemy," President Bush told graduates at the U.S. Air Force Academy in June. "No act of America explains terrorist violence, and no concession of America could appease it."

Some reject that argument—such as the governments of Spain and the Philippines, which have bowed to terrorist demands to pull their troops out of Iraq. Yet the early warnings about Nazism seem eerily relevant today. "What will finally emerge, if fascism continues to prevail in Europe, will be a system of barbarism: its stunted, emasculated minds: its grandiose emptiness: its formalized savagery," Mumford wrote. "The relapse into barbarism is a recurrent temptation. Only *men* can resist it." ♦

Inside the Zarqawi Network

An interrogation memo sheds new light on the top terrorist in Iraq. BY JONATHAN SCHANZER

At least 13 Iraqis were killed in fighting with U.S. soldiers in the Iraqi city of Falluja on July 30, part of the ongoing U.S. offensive against fighters loyal to Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the man Bush administration officials claim is the most dangerous terrorist in Iraq today. Critics, however, contend that the Jordanian-born Zarqawi is a Washington-made bogeyman who is not worth the $25 million bounty on his head. They doubt the strength of Zarqawi's Tawhid and Jihad (Unity and Holy War) group, citing intelligence officials who generally agree that no more than 1,000 foreign fighters are active in Iraq.

A memo acquired by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy from Iraqi intelligence sources, however, provides a first glimpse into the configuration of Zarqawi's Iraqi network, which may be more dangerous than previously imagined. The memo, "Structure of Tawhid and Jihad Islamic Group," details several days of recent interrogations of one of Zarqawi's captured lieutenants. Umar Baziyani, Zarqawi's number four, a member of the Tawhid legislative council, and the "emir" of Baghdad, was captured by U.S. forces in late May 2004. The account of his confessions details the hierarchal structure of Zarqawi's group, its ties to Syria and Iran, the number of fighters it commands in Iraq, the names of the regional emirs, its media strategy, and more.

Jonathan Schanzer is a Soref Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and author of the forthcoming Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups and the Next Generation of Terror.

The memo explains that Zarqawi, who had allied himself with the Kurdish al Qaeda affiliate Ansar al Islam in northern Iraq, lost his lifeline to al Qaeda in January 2004 when U.S. intelligence arrested Hassan Ghul. Ghul, according to U.S. officials, was carrying a message from Zarqawi to Osama bin Laden. Ghul, who was reportedly a lieutenant of 9/11 planner Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, was considered to be the top al Qaeda operative captured in Iraq. Baziyani explains that after Ghul's arrest, Tawhid and Jihad was cut off from al Qaeda. Recent reports, citing U.S. intelligence agencies, indicate that Zarqawi may have been trying to reconnect with bin Laden "in the last few weeks."

Baziyani explains, however, that Zarqawi's group did not wither when it fell from the al Qaeda vine. He claims that there are nine regional leaders of the Falluja-based Tawhid and Jihad under Zarqawi. His deputy, also based in Falluja, is known as Mahi Shami. If U.S. intelligence manages to catch up with these two top leaders, there are still regional "emirs" fanned out around Iraq, which could make the network incredibly difficult to break. For instance, Baziyani explained during his interrogation that he had been replaced as emir of Baghdad after his arrest. There are also regional emirs in the Kurdish north (Hussein Salim), the western Anbar province (Abdullah Abu Azzam), and the city of Mosul (Abu Tallah). In this way, Tawhid and Jihad can execute spectacular terrorist attacks throughout the country. These include the Baghdad-based bombing of the Jordanian

embassy; suicide bombings against Shiites and an attack on Basra's oil infrastructure in the south; suicide bombings against Kurds in the north; attacks against police recruiting centers throughout the country; and the beheading of American Nick Berg in an unknown location.

In addition to its regional bases, Zarqawi's group has a specially designated media department. Baziyani claims that a man named Hassan Ibrahim heads this department, along with lieutenants Khadi Hassan and "Adil," who were responsible for taping and releasing the May 11 beheading of Berg.

Baziyani also details the military strength of Tawhid and Jihad. He lists seven military commanders under Zarqawi's control throughout Iraq with about 1,400 fighters at their disposal. Not surprisingly, Baziyani stated that the Falluja group, headed by Abu Nawas Falujayee, has the most fighters with 500. Second to Falluja is Mosul, with 400 fighters. (Analysts believe Mosul is a haven for former Ansar al Islam fighters.) There are also strongholds in Anbar (60 fighters), Baghdad (40 fighters), and Diyala, the province just northeast of Baghdad (80 fighters). According to Baziyani, most of the fighters in Tawhid and Jihad are Iraqi Arabs and Kurds—not foreign jihadis—which corroborates reports by U.S. intelligence that the foreign fighter presence is much smaller than previously imagined.

One senior administration official, however, doubts Baziyani's claim that Zarqawi has 1,400 fighters under his command. A more realistic figure, he said, speaking on condition of anonymity, might be 500. But the official admitted, "I'm not sure how anyone would really know. If we knew more, we would have probably rolled up this group by now. It could be wrong for us to think we know better than the man we debriefed."

Interestingly, Baziyani's interrogation reveals that Tawhid and Jihad maintains a strong military presence (150 fighters) in the town of al-Qaim, which is close to the Syrian border, just west of the Euphrates River. One Pentagon official believes that the number of fighters Baziyani put in al-Qaim is likely inflated, but says that the importance of the town cannot be overstated. Al-Qaim, to the bewilderment of U.S. officials, was where the Iraqi army put up some of its fiercest resistance during the 2003 Iraq war. A senior administration official calls Qaim "critical" and "the key to understanding how Syria is involved" in the insurgency.

With the help of Zarqawi, the town is said to be a depot for weapons, cash, and fighters supplied by Zarqawi's financiers—the bulk of whom are now believed by U.S. intelligence to be operating out of Syria. Abu Muhamed, whom the memo fingers as the military emir of the Baghdad cell, is a former Lebanese military officer who once lived in Denmark. According to Baziyani, he was smuggled into Iraq via Syria. Many other fighters, including Zarqawi's driver and bodyguard, are of Syrian descent.

AFP

Abu Musab al Zarqawi

There are other foreign links. Baziyani explained to his interrogators that the Zarqawi network received a great deal of assistance from Iran. One Tawhid and Jihad militant, Othman, was reportedly responsible for transferring former Ansar al Islam fighters and other jihadis back and forth from Iran to Baghdad once the U.S. occupation was underway. In other words, Iran has been involved in supplying fighters to tangle with U.S. soldiers. This should come as no surprise, given the 9/11 Commission's recent report that Iran was a transit state for 9/11 plotters.

Looking back, Sunni-Shia enmity has never been a concern for Iran when it comes to providing logistics to al Qaeda, or even supporting Sunni groups such as Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza. Iran, it is also worth noting, provided assistance to the Sunni and Kurdish Ansar al Islam on the eve of the 2003 U.S. invasion. Tehran allowed Ansar fighters to cross the border to escape the U.S. assault. According to several Ansar prisoners, Iran allowed fighters to remain there, and then later helped them back into Iraq to join the insurgency.

Interestingly, the Baziyani memo is not all bad news. The captured militant says that U.S. forces have hammered the Falluja bases of his organization in recent months. This, he said, has caused the network's leadership to disperse. Thus, Baziyani states, some of Zarqawi's deputies have considered Samarra as a new base. According to one Iraqi source close to the new Iraqi security cabinet, there has been some indication of "command and control in the Samarra area." Several U.S. officials, however, believe this assertion to be untrue—perhaps wishful thinking or even disinformation on the part of Baziyani.

The information in the Baziyani interrogation memo needs to be further vetted by U.S. and Iraqi intelligence. Still, the memo provides an unprecedented look into the mind of one of Zarqawi's lieutenants. It also provides a view of the small but powerful network that may or may not be at the center of the Iraqi insurgency, but has established itself as its brutal, public face. ♦

Give Them Shelter

Congress moves to help North Korea's defectors—and its people. **BY DUNCAN CURRIE**

LAST SUMMER, as Americans prepared to celebrate their independence, four refugees half a world away were dreaming of their own American freedom. On July 4, 2003, the North Korean defectors, aged between 16 and 19, entered the British consulate in Shanghai, China. Each carried a personal letter to George W. Bush requesting asylum in the United States. Edward Kim, editor of the online *Chosun Journal*, had made arrangements for them to be adopted and live in Orange County, California.

But a Catch-22 in U.S. immigration policy dashed their hopes. Since South Korea's constitution grants de facto citizenship to all North Korean defectors, those defectors are considered South Korean citizens under U.S. law—and thus cannot qualify for asylum in America. If they're "South Koreans," the logic goes, they aren't being persecuted in their "home country." Kim says his calls to the State Department went unanswered. The four teenagers were taken to Seoul, where they now reside.

Thanks to bipartisan legislation passed by the House on July 21, future defectors may have more options. The North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004, introduced by Rep. James Leach of Iowa, clarifies that North Koreans will not be barred from "eligibility for refugee status or asylum in the United States" because of any claim they have to South Korean citizenship. It establishes that, for purposes of refugee resettlement, North Koreans will be distinguished from South Koreans.

Duncan Currie is an editorial assistant at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

According to Rep. Joseph Pitts of Pennsylvania, a cosponsor of the bill, it makes North Koreans "a priority refugee group." He says its provisions were modeled on those implemented for Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s. The legislation also pressures Beijing to provide the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with unrestricted access to North Korean defectors living in China. The Chinese government, which maintains close ties to Pyongyang, regards such defectors as "economic migrants" and forcibly repatriates them to the North.

"China hasn't given the [UNHCR] any access to these people," says Debra Liang-Fenton, executive director of the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. U.N. officials are simply "not allowed to go to the border region." Consequently, we don't know how many North Korean refugees are in China. According to Liang-Fenton, estimates range from 30,000 to 300,000. Tim Peters, director of the Seoul-based Helping Hands Korea, believes the world community should focus on "rescuing these people, one person at a time."

The recently approved House legislation is very similar to the North Korea Freedom Act, a Senate bill first introduced last November by Sam Brownback of Kansas and Evan Bayh of Indiana. Both bills recognize North Korean defectors as refugees and let them apply for asylum in the United States. They also boost financial support for North Korean human rights and pro-democracy NGOs; expand radio broadcasts (including Radio Free Asia and Voice of America) into North Korea; enhance monitoring of humanitarian aid; condition non-humanitarian aid to Pyongyang on substantial human rights progress; urge China and the UNHCR to fulfill their obligations; and call for the establishment of international refugee camps. (The House bill allocates $24 million per year between 2005 and 2008, including $20 million for refugee assistance.) Suzanne Scholte, vice chairman of the North Korea Freedom Coalition steering committee, sees these measures as a breakthrough. She told a joint House subcommittee meeting in April, "Despite the frustration of being involved in this issue for so many years, I have never been more encouraged than by the introduction of the North Korean Freedom and Human Rights Acts."

"The primary thrust" of the legislation, Brownback explains, "is to get the human rights agenda in the middle of the North Korean six-party talks," the fourth round of which is scheduled for September in Beijing. The talks have focused almost exclusively on nuclear weapons; but Tim Peters stresses the intimate linkage between the North's domestic brutality and its aggressive international posture.

How bad are things in the Hermit Kingdom? An October 2003 report of the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea found as many as 200,000 North Korean political prisoners being held in slave-labor colonies known as *kwan-li-so*. It's estimated that some 400,000 North Koreans have died in the gulag over the past three decades. This winter, a defector claiming to have been a prison guard at Camp 22 in Haengyong told the BBC he'd witnessed chemical weapons being tested on detainees.

In addition, at least 2 million North Koreans have died of starvation since the mid 1990s. As Stephen J. Morris has written in the *National Interest*, "The great historical achievement of Korean communism is to have caused a famine that has killed off a greater percentage of the population than has occurred anywhere else in the world (Pol Pot's Cambodia possibly excepted)." A 2002 survey sponsored by the United Nations and the European

EPA / Landov / Adrian Bradshaw

Malnourished kindergartners in North Korea: Lacking strength, they sleep three to four hours each afternoon.

Union showed that 4 out of every 10 North Korean children are chronically malnourished. Most foreign food aid never gets to the people in need, and is instead diverted to the military and Communist party elites or sold in other markets.

The humanitarian crisis has made Seoul more generous to North Korean defectors than it once was, and the flow of refugees has increased accordingly. As the *Economist* recently noted, "About 4,000 of the 5,000 or so refugees who have gone South in the past 50 years have arrived since 1999." The exodus of roughly 460 defectors to the South—via Vietnam, apparently—in late July constituted the biggest single arrival ever.

"It's kind of a landmark," says Peters, who hopes the historic defection will prompt "a more realistic appraisal" of the refugee situation by South Korean officials. "They're on the right track," he explains, but are still hindered by fears of economic strain and by fears of upsetting Pyongyang. The South Korean government of President Roh Moo Hyun remains wedded to the North-South détente begun by former president Kim Dae Jung in the late 1990s. Known as the "sunshine" policy, this rapprochement strategy calls for dialogue and engagement, while depreciating human rights. Peters and Brownback both label it "appeasement." "The Chinese have been very disappointing, and I hope they have a price to pay for that," says Brownback. "The key country, though, that needs to make up its mind in this whole scenario is South Korea."

A number of lawmakers from South Korea's ruling Uri party have criticized the U.S. House legislation as an unwarranted "intervention" in North Korean domestic affairs. The opposition Grand National party, however, supports the bill. Not surprisingly, North Korea's foreign ministry has angrily denounced it, and threatened to boycott the upcoming six-party talks in response. But Rep. Pitts dismisses this as bluster, saying, "I don't think that China is going to let them withdraw."

Brownback's office expects Senate debate on the North Korea Freedom Act to proceed next month. Supporters hope a compromise bill can be enacted before the end of term. One Brownback staffer predicts the chief opposition will come from Joseph Biden of Delaware. Critics will likely demur along two lines: that the legislation could impede progress on the nuclear standoff, and that it is an underhanded attempt to collapse the North Korean regime.

As Peters points out, the legislation *does* implicitly encourage emigration; it assumes that North Koreans are yearning to vote with their feet. And many of its more hawkish backers no doubt *do* hope it will spark a mass exodus that hastens the peaceful collapse of Kim Jong Il's regime. The model here is Eastern Europe, where a flood of East Germans escaping to Austria via Hungary in September 1989 catalyzed the events that brought down the Berlin Wall on November 9 and toppled Erich Honecker's Communist dictatorship.

Is it quixotic to think Kim's regime might similarly implode? "I think it is a possibility," says Brownback, though he acknowledges the differences between East Germany and North Korea. "The goal of the bill is to get the human rights portfolio included in any negotiations with North Korea, [and] that's a good part of what caused the Soviet Union to collapse, when they engaged the human rights portfolio. I'm sensing myself that we're going to have a chance to put pretty aggressive pressure on North Korea." ♦

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Is Reading Really at Risk?

It depends on what the meaning of reading is

By Joseph Epstein

"Reading at Risk" is one of those hardy perennials, a government survey telling us that in some vital area—obesity, pollution, fuel depletion, quality of education, domestic relations—things are even worse than we thought. In the category of literacy, the old surveys seemed always to be some variant of "Why Johnny Can't Read." "Reading at Risk"— the most recent survey, carried out under the auspices of the National Endowment for the Arts as part of its larger Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, the whole conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau—doesn't for a moment suggest that Johnny Can't Read. The problem is that, now grown, Johnny (though a little less Jane) doesn't much care to read a lot in the way of imaginative writing—fiction, poems, plays—also known to the survey as literature. For the first time in our history, apparently, less than half the population bothers to read any literature (so defined) at all.

Such surveys are as meat and drink—perhaps pot and coke might be more precise—to editorialists, who can usually be counted upon to discover their findings anywhere from worrying to alarming to frightening. They haul out their best solemn tone; words such as "distressing" and "grave concern" and "dire" are brought into play; look for "threat to democratic society" to pop up with some frequency; nor will "crisis" be in short supply; "serious action," one need scarcely add, is called for. Nothing remains, really, but to ring up the livery service and order the handbasket in which we, along with the culture, shall all presently ride off to hell.

"Reading at Risk" reports that there has been a decline in the reading of novels, poems, and plays of roughly 10 percentage points for all age cohorts between 1982 and 2002, with actual numbers of readers having gained only slightly despite a large growth (of 40 million people) in the overall population. More women than men continue to participate in what the survey also calls literary reading—in his trip to the United States in 1905, based on attendance at his lectures, Henry James noted that culture belonged chiefly to women—though even among women the rate is slipping. Nor are things better among the so-called educated; while they do read more than the less educated, the decline in literary reading is also found among them. But the rate of decline is greatest among young adults 18 to 24 years old, and the survey quotes yet another study, this one made by the National Institute for Literacy, showing that things are not looking any better for kids between 13 and 17, but are even a little worse.

Although the general decline in literary reading is not attributed to any single cause in "Reading at Risk," the problem, it is hinted, may be the distractions of electronic culture. To quote an item from the survey's executive summary: "A 1999 study showed that the average American child lives in a household with 2.9 televisions, 1.8 VCRs, 3.1 radios, 2.1 CD players, 1.4 video game players, and 1 computer." By 2002, to quote from the same summary, "electronic spending had soared to 24 percent [of total recreational spending by Americans], while spending on books declined . . . to 5.6 percent." Up against all this easily accessible and endlessly varied fare—from Palm Pilots to iPods—the reading of stories, poems, and plays is having a tough time competing.

Many of the facts set out in "Reading at Risk" are less than shocking. Whites do more literary reading than do blacks, who do more than Hispanic Americans, though the rate of reading in all three groups goes up with family income. Concomitantly, the rich and the college-educated do more literary reading than people less well-off or less trained to read through

Joseph Epstein is a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard *and the author most recently of* Fabulous Small Jews *and* Envy.

advanced schooling. People who do such reading also tend to go to a lot more—roughly three times more—art museums, plays, concerts, operas, and other performing-arts events; they also participate more in civic affairs generally. Among the divisions of literary reading, fiction is read by roughly 96 million people (or 45 percent of the population), some form of poetry by 25 million people (or 12 percent of the population), while plays are read by 7 million people (or 4 percent of the population). The results of the "2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts" show that literary reading, then, is still a popular but declining leisure activity.

"Reading at Risk" does provide a few not exactly surprises but slight jars to one's expectations. For me, one is that "people in managerial, professional, and technical occupations are more likely to read literature than those in other occupation groups." I would myself have expected that these were all jobs in which one worked more than an eight-hour day and then took work home, which, consequently, would allow a good deal less time for reading things not in some way related to one's work. The survey also claims that readers are "highly social people," more active in their communities and participating more in sports. I should have thought that lots of reading might make one introspective, slightly detached, a touch reclusive, even, but, according to the survey, not so. "People who live in the suburbs," the survey states, "are more likely to be readers than either those who live in the city or the country." Perhaps this is owing in good part to suburbs' being generally more affluent than cities; and, too, to book clubs, in which neighbors meet to discuss recent bestsellers and sometimes classics, and which tend to be suburban institutions.

The one area in which "Reading at Risk" is (honorably) shaky is in its conclusions on the subject of television, which is the standard fall-guy in almost all surveys having to do with education. Only among people who watch more than four hours of television daily does the extent of reading drop off, according to the survey, while watching no television whatsoever makes it more likely one will be a more frequent reader. On the other hand, the presence of writers on television—on C-SPAN and talk shows—may, the survey concedes, encourage people to buy books. No mention is made of those people, myself among them, who are able to read with a television set, usually playing a sports event, humming away in the background.

In the end, "Reading at Risk" concludes that "it is not clear from [its] data how much influence TV watching has on literary reading." The survey does suggest that surfing the Internet may have made a dent in reading: "During the time period when the literature participation rates declined, home Internet use soared." But it does not take things further than that.

One mildly depressing finding of the survey is that the only increase in putatively literary activity is in the realm of creative writing. "In 1982, about 11 million people did some form of creative writing. By 2002, this number had risen to almost 15 million people (18 or older), an increase of about 30 percent." This is owing in part to the increase of creative-writing courses in universities and community colleges ("creative writing is most common among those under 25"); and perhaps, regrettably, to the increase of falsely inflated personal self-esteem, in which altogether too many people feel, quite wrongly, that they are artistic. (An earlier survey, run by a vanity-press company, claimed that 80 percent of Americans felt they had a book in them, which is also, in my view, bad news.) In any case, the rise in creative writing set alongside the decrease in the reading of literature suggests that there is some truth to the old quip that holds one can either read or write books, one can't really do both.

Two points of great importance about "Reading at Risk," and which cripple its significance, need to be underscored: first, that in its findings the *quality* of the reading being done is not taken into consideration; and, second, neither has serious nonfiction been tabulated. As for the quality of reading, the survey presumably counted mysteries, science fiction, bodice-ripping romances, and sentimental poetry as literature. The literature being read, in the reckoning of the survey, is, then, fairly likely not to be of a serious nature: More Tom Clancy than Ivan Turgenev is doubtless being registered, more Maya Angelou than Marianne Moore. The thought that 96 million people in our happily philistine country are regularly reading literature, even though it might represent a decline over 20 years earlier, would still be impressive, except for the fact that we don't know how many of them are reading, not to put too fine a point on it, crap.

The surveyors probably had no choice here, for setting a standard of what constitutes reading of genuine literary merit would entail vast complication: One can see a committee of literary panjandrums arguing into the night about whether to include, say, the novels of Alice Walker or John Galsworthy or Gore Vidal. But excluding serious nonfiction is perhaps a more radical problem. One could be reading a steady diet of St. Augustine, Samuel Johnson, and John Ruskin and fall outside the boundaries of what the report calls "literary" readers. Given this exclusion, who can be certain that, for example, George Kennan, Jacques Barzun, or the late J. Robert Oppenheimer would qualify as among the survey's readers of literature?

A great many people, of course, do a vast amount of reading, chiefly in newspapers, magazines, and on the Internet, but little of it in books and none of it in the realm of imaginative literature. For people who want merely information—just, or mainly, the facts, ma'am—there is no reason to presume that it is best available in the form of books. People bring so many motives to their reading—the need for consolation, the search for pleasure, a quest for the reinforcement of one's prejudices, the hunt for truth and wisdom—and no one can say with any certainty what they take away from it.

Still, skewed though "Reading at Risk" may be by these two items, the demographic fact remains that the audience for the reading of novels, poems, and plays, even junky ones, fell over the past 20 years from 56 percent to 47 percent of the nation's population. The decline, moreover, was across the board: "In fact," the survey has it, "literary reading rates decreased for men, women, all ethnic and racial groups, all education groups, and all age groups."

My own speculation is that our speeded-up culture—with its FedEx, fax, email, channel surfing, cell-phoning, fast-action movies, and other elements in its relentless race against boredom—has ended in a shortened national attention span. The quickened rhythms of new technology are not rhythms congenial to the slow and time-consuming and solitary act of reading. Sustained reading, sitting quietly and enjoying the aesthetic pleasure that words elegantly deployed on the page can give, contemplating careful formulations of complex thoughts—these do not seem likely to be acts strongly characteristic of an already jumpy new century.

No mention is made of those people who are able to read with a television set humming away in the background.

For all its shortcomings, "Reading at Risk" has nonetheless permitted some wild jeremiads. The most extreme reaction to the survey I have seen was in an op-ed piece by Andrew Solomon in the *New York Times*. Under the ominous title of "The Closing of the American Book," playing off Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, Solomon sets out what he feels are the frightening implications for a nation in which the reading of literature is radically in decline. The author of an autobiographical book on depression, Solomon believes that the passive activity of watching television, and not reading, is a serious factor in the spread of depression in our day. Escalating levels of Alzheimer's, too, he feels can be ascribed to the lack of engagement of adult minds of the kind that reading is supposed to provide. What the decline in the reading of literature really means, according to Andrew Solomon, is that "the crisis in reading is a crisis in national health." Not reading, I believe he is saying, is bad for your health.

If that sounds a bit loony, don't be surprised, for reading is one of those subjects that, like religion, quickly get people worked up, their virtue glands pumping. Perhaps it is not going too far to say that for some people, reading is their religion. In the July 19, 2004, *Chicago Tribune*, W. Ralph Eubanks used the occasion of the publication of "Reading at Risk" to blame the Patriot Act, through its implication that reading is dangerous, for its potential for further discouraging reading. "These two events are completely unrelated," writes Eubanks, director of publishing for the Library of Congress, who then proceeds to attempt to relate them. Eubanks reports that "at the heart of the NEA survey is the belief that our democratic system depends on leaders who can think critically, analyze texts, and write clearly." If this were true, the United States would have been done for around the time of Andrew Jackson.

W. Ralph Eubanks's statement reminds me of the time I sat on a panel on government and the arts with the playwright Edward Albee, who opened the proceeding by blithely announcing that, until such time as every member of Congress had a solid education in the arts, the country was in danger of lapsing into fascism. Eubanks himself lapses into mere self-congratulation, writing: "I learned to think clearly by reading great literature, even books that contained ideas I disagreed with or that disturbed me."

People who openly declare themselves passionate readers are, like Eubanks, usually chiefly stating their own virtue, and hence superiority, and hence, though they are unaware of it, snobbery. "So many books and so little time," reads a T-shirt that shows up occasionally at the farmer's market to which I go. "I adore reading," I have had people tell me, and then go from there to reveal that much of what they read is schlock, and of a fairly low order even for schlock. Young parents who read to their infant children are always delighted to report that the kids are mad for books; they take it as a sign, a premonition of brilliance and success ahead.

The assumption—and it is also the assumption behind "Reading at Risk"—is that reading is, *per se*, good. But is it, immitigably and always? Surely everything depends upon what is being read and the degree of perspicacity

brought to the task. Even so powerful a reader as Samuel Johnson claimed that his indulgent reading of romances deepened his plunge into depression.

The unspoken assumption of Oprah's Book Club, which has gone back into business, is that reading, like broccoli or sound dental hygiene, is intrinsically good for you. Something, albeit of minimal significance, to it, I suppose, but very minimal. When you are reading, after all, you are, *ipso facto*, not raping or pillaging. But might you as easily be wasting your time?

When Oprah Winfrey's book club, which did so much for the fortunes of those authors and publishers lucky enough to have had their books selected by the club, went out of business, a long moan was heard over the land. The novelist Jonathan Franzen, author of *The Corrections*, complained after being selected for the club (and enjoying the attendant boost in sales), and was roundly vilified as a literary snob. But what if the books that Oprah's club endorsed were mostly works of victimology—whinging, hopeless books about dysfunctional families that chiefly reinforced readers in their own self-pity and self-righteous anger?

The answer, I suspect, would probably be, So what? It's still reading, Roscoe. And reading is good, even reading books that aren't themselves all that good. The reading of less than good books, after all, can lead to the reading of superior books, right? The argument that reading even junk is intrinsically a fine thing is a reverse on the old slippery-slope argument. Instead of slipping downward, the reverse-slippery-slope argument here holds that the reading of junky books is likely to lead in time to the reading of good ones. But literary culture has no supply side; it trickles neither down nor up.

Add the general dumbing down in the culture at large, and access to the good or great book becomes rather more improbable. As part of this dumbing down, popular culture cuts a wider and wider swath through higher education. Outside universities, the *New York Times Book Review* has long run what it calls "chronicles" of mystery and science fiction books, and has now added comics (or visual novels) to its chronicles. If one ever wishes to retain one's fantasies about the good sense of the people in the realm of literary taste, one does best never to consult the bestseller lists.

As someone permitted the luxury of reading books during what for other people are working hours, I have long been surprised at the amount of reading that does get done in America, even though I believe, *contra* "Reading at Risk," that nowhere near 96 million Americans read serious books. So many other things nowadays demand time. The job, including getting to and returning from it; one's family, especially in our day when the rearing of children has become a full-time, full-court-press affair; friendships and community life; the various pleasing distractions that modern life affords the even mildly affluent in the form of sports, travel, entertainment, and much else. To me the shock isn't the discovery that Americans are reading less; it is the knowledge that we read as much as we do, though no one can say, with any precision, how much of this reading is really serious.

One of the statistical reportings of "Reading at Risk" that surprised me is the very low rate of reading which occurs among people over 65. Among the middle-classes, at any rate, adult education, which features much reading, would appear to be a highly attended activity. No doubt many older people attend such classes out of boredom or loneliness, but many more, I suspect, are trying to fill in some of the larger blank spots in their knowledge—to do, as a former student of my own once put it to me, "a second draft" of their own education.

If some people are too secure in their own virtuousness because of their reading, many more feel vastly insecure, sure they haven't read enough books, or the right books. They are even more certain that they will never catch up, and one day arrive at that august condition known as being "well-read." The bad news is that, while some people are better read than others, nobody is well-read enough, ever. Well-read is a condition that, like perpetual happiness, cannot be achieved in this life. Anyone who has been bedeviled by feeling inadequate about his reading will take comfort, I hope, in Gertrude Stein's remark that the happiest day of her life was the day on which she realized she could not read even all the world's good books.

More and more books are published every year, which further complicates things, with bad books Greshamly helping to drive out good. According to R.R. Bowker, the firm that compiles the database for *Books in Print*, the number of books published last year was a shelf-groaning 175,000, an increase of 19 percent over the previous year, despite the decline in reading generally and the reported flatness of book sales.

"Reading at Risk" breaks down its readers into Light (reading 1-5 books a year), Moderate (6-11 books a year), Frequent (12-49 books a year), and Avid (50 or more books). Alexander Gershenkron, the economic historian, who in his day passed for the most erudite man at Harvard, claimed to have read only two books a week, outside of reading required by his profession. This meant that, over a 50-year career of adult reading, he would have been able to read only 5,000 or so books, a pathetic figure when one considers how many books there are in the world.

Like all surveys, "Reading at Risk" is an example of

the style of statistical thinking dominant in our time. It's far from sure that statistics are very helpful in capturing so idiosyncratic an act as reading, except in a bulky and coarse way. That the Swedes read more novels, poems, and plays than Americans and the Portuguese read fewer than we do is a statistical fact, but I'm not sure what you do with it, especially when you don't know the quality of the material being read in the three countries. The statistical style of thinking has currently taken over medicine, where it may have some role to play: I am, for example, taking a pill because a study has shown that 68 percent of the people who take this pill and have a certain condition live 33 percent longer than those who don't. Dopey though this is, I play the odds—the pill costs $1 a day—and go along. But I'm not sure that statistics have much to tell us about a cultural activity so private as reading books.

Serious reading has always been a minority matter. By serious reading I mean the reading of those novels, plays, poems—also philosophies, histories, and other belletristic writing—that make the most exacting efforts to honor their subjects by treating them with the exacting complexity they deserve. Serious readers at some point make a usually accidental connection with literature, sometimes through a teacher but quite as often on their own; when young they come upon a book that blows them away by the aesthetic pleasure they derive from it, the wisdom they find in it, the point of view it provides them.

Merely being good at school doesn't mean people have the least interest in things artistic or intellectual.

Nor do the serious often come from places one might think. No one social class has a monopoly of them. Nor were they necessarily good students. When I was editor of the *American Scholar*, the intellectual quarterly sponsored by Phi Beta Kappa, many people assumed the magazine was read by the 400,000-odd Phi Beta Kappas roaming around the world. Not so. When the magazine attempted an intensive direct-mail campaign to get Phi Beta Kappas to subscribe, the results were dismal. What became plain is that merely being good at school didn't mean that these people had the least interest in things artistic or intellectual. More often than not they did as well as they did at school because they were by nature obedient or because they hoped to get into other (medical, law) schools, thence to earn a good living.

The final question that "Reading at Risk" avoids is the point of reading fiction, poems, and plays. It does send its readers, in its "Summary and Conclusions" section, to a perfectly sound classical statement of the case for reading, "What Use is Literature?" by Myron Magnet, that originally appeared in *City Journal* and a key paragraph from which reads:

> Literature is a conversation across the ages about our experience and our nature, a conversation in which, while there isn't unanimity, there is a surprising breadth of agreement. Literature amounts, in these matters, to the accumulated wisdom of the race, the sum of our reflections on our own existence. It begins with observation, with reporting, rendering the facts of our inner and outer reality with acuity sharpened by imagination. At its greatest, it goes on to show how these facts have coherence and, finally, meaning. As it dramatizes what actually happens to concrete individuals trying to shape their lives at the confluence of so many imperatives, it presents us with concrete and particular manifestations of universal truths. For as the greatest authors know, the universal has to be embodied in the particular—where, as it is enmeshed in the complexity and contradictoriness of real experience, it loses the clarity and lucidity that only abstractions can possess.

That is a grand statement of the case, perhaps a little too thumpingly elevated for the taste and temper of our day, but I was struck in reading it by the penetrating ending of its lengthy final sentence, where the unusual and highly interesting claim is made that reading great imaginative literature helps us to lose "the clarity and lucidity that only abstractions can possess."

Ours is supremely the age of abstractions. "Create a concept," Ortega y Gasset said, "and reality leaves the room." Careful reading of great imaginative writing brings reality back into the room, by reminding us how much more varied, complicated, and rich it is than any social or political concept devised by human beings can hope to capture. Read Balzac and the belief in, say, reining in corporate greed through political reform becomes a joke; read Dickens and you'll know that no social class has any monopoly on noble behavior; read Henry James and you'll find the midlife crisis and other pop psychological constructs don't even qualify as stupid; read Dreiser and you'll be aware that the pleasures of power are rarely trumped by the advertised desire to do good.

Read any amount of serious imaginative literature with care and you will be highly skeptical of the statistical style of thinking. You will quickly grasp that, in a standard statistical report such as "Reading at Risk," serious reading, always a minority interest, isn't at stake here. Nothing more is going on, really, than the *crise du jour*, soon to be replaced by the report on eating disorders, the harmfulness of aspirin, or the drop in high-school math scores. ♦

Not Worth a Blue Ribbon

The conventional (and unhelpful) wisdom of the 9/11 Commission

By Reuel Marc Gerecht

The 9/11 Commission says it wants to have a national debate about its report. Actually, that's not quite true. It would prefer that the Bush administration and Congress, feeling the heat of its bipartisan mandate, submit quickly and completely to its collective and deliberate judgments. The Bush administration apparently would rather not fold so quickly. Yet Senator John Kerry's immediate embrace of the lengthy document and its recommendations, and the commissioners' intention to turn themselves into a continuing, nationwide road show, have made this report, like the commission's televised hearings, into a political drama with possible repercussions on the elections in November. Senator Kerry would love to berate the president, as well as the Republican-controlled Congress, for dallying with America's security and the war against terrorism, which will probably be the decisive issue in the presidential campaign. The administration is running for cover. It has embraced the core recommendations of the commission—the creation of a new national intelligence director and a new National Counterterrorist Center—without accepting all the bureaucratic rewiring and fiscal and hiring-and-firing authority that the commission wants to give to this intelligence czar.

It might not be politically astute to play hardball with the 9/11 Commission, but the Bush administration would be on solid intelligence ground in doing so. Though one can find sound criticisms and recommendations among those made by the commission, the report overall is quintessential blue-ribbon Washington: conventional, conservative, and exuberantly bureaucratic in its analysis and solutions. Like so many earlier post-Cold War commissions and think-tank reports about the state of American intelligence, it tackles the intelligence community—particularly the Central Intelligence Agency—from the top down, not the bottom up. If we can just get the bureaucracy, ever bigger and more centralized, married to the right management, better things will follow. Operationally, the commission's report simply does not address the principal problem of America's intelligence effort against Islamic extremism—the failure of the CIA to develop a clandestine service with a methodology and officers capable of penetrating the Islamic holy-warrior organizations in Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere. And analytically, the report's bureaucratic recommendations are unlikely to improve the quality of the U.S. government's thinking about counterterrorism—indeed, they could make intelligence analysis more monochromatic and defined by groupthink than it already is.

Worst of all, the report fails to tackle seriously the overarching policy lesson from 9/11—the need to strike first. The failure to preempt—and after al Qaeda's attacks on U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998, the failure to provide self-defense—is the underlying theme of the historical narrative of the 9/11 report. The stark gravity of this theme, and the general merit of the narrative—which is well written, incisive, and politically damning (vastly more so of the Clintonites' eight years than of the Bushies' eight months)—make the conventional and sometimes sophomoric quality of the recommendations that follow all the more off-putting.

The 9/11 Commission dutifully recites all of the domestic and international circumstances conducive to the American government's failure to use military intimidation and force as the indispensable counterterrorist tools before 9/11. And it's hard to say which characters in the commission's story are the most enthusiastic in underscoring why the United States couldn't have confronted Osama bin Laden more aggressively before 9/11. Former defense secretary William Cohen, former Central Command chief General Anthony Zinni, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs Hugh Shelton, the former chief analyst at the CIA's Counterterrorism Center Paul Pillar, President Clinton's national security adviser Sandy Berger and attorney general Janet Reno deserve honorable mention. Two exceptions are the counterterrorist chief in the

Reuel Marc Gerecht is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard.

Clinton administration, Richard Clarke, and the CIA case officer Gary Schroen (with whom I once worked), who was always free of operational deceit and professional bravado. They are notable for their willingness to use force when most around them thought it unwise.

The layers of resistance to the use of military power in the American government are a constant in the years leading up to to 9/11. Overcoming that resistance—clearly identifying this timidity and rallying America's political class to a greater willingness to use force in foreign affairs—should have been a primary, clearly articulated aim of the 9/11 report. It isn't, of course, because the report is "bipartisan," and to have made that case might possibly have been to justify President Bush's preemptive war against Saddam Hussein, or some preemptive attack in the future against a state with a terrorist track record and a proven hunger for weapons of mass destruction. Thus, the antiproliferation recommendations in the 9/11 report read as if they could have been written at the close of the Cold War, before the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Pakistan's favorite "rogue" scientist A.Q. Khan, North Korea, and others made mincemeat of international-treaty regimes.

Truth be told, the historical narrative of the 9/11 report, like that of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence report on prewar intelligence on Iraq, is pretty powerful ammunition for the Bush administration to use against Clintonite critics of its wars against Islamic terrorism and Saddam Hussein. Whether the Bush administration and pro-war Republicans are agile enough to make that argument against the more rhetorically skilled Senator Kerry and the bipartisan 9/11 Commission is a different question.

Right after 9/11, the Bush administration chose not to undertake a sustained historical critique of its predecessor's counterterrorist policies and actions—or a sustained defense of its own first eight months in office. Conscious of having failed to act decisively against bin Laden (and it is distressing to learn that Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz considered the al Qaeda attack on the USS *Cole* in October 2000 "stale" just months later, and not a *casus belli* demanding a full-frontal assault against al Qaeda in Afghanistan), members of the Bush administration didn't loudly point out that they were actually developing a plan against bin Laden when the hijackers struck. It certainly was not enough. The lengthy transition at the Pentagon and Secretary Rumsfeld's overriding concern with the threats likely to face us 20 years from now unquestionably retarded the administration's early response to al Qaeda. Yet its performance was better than the administration gave itself credit for, and better than that of the Clinton administration in any eight-month period.

When President Bush remarked to the 9/11 Commission that even before 9/11 he had been "prepared to take on" the possibility of an American invasion of Afghanistan—"an ultimate act of unilateralism," the president thought some would have called it—his words cannot be easily dismissed as retrospective bravado. Such an action is conceivable from the president who led us into Iraq. It certainly couldn't have come from President Clinton. And it is utterly unimaginable from John Kerry, had he been president before 9/11. Honest Democrats might as well admit this difference in vision and will, since, after all, it is the reason many Democrats want Bush retired as a menace to a peaceful, multilateral international order.

But let us leave the spirit and politics of 9/11 aside, and look at the nuts-and-bolts of the commission's report. There are two principal issues with American intelligence vis-à-vis al Qaeda before 9/11. One is that the CIA's Directorate of Operations, also known as the clandestine service, had no human sources inside the organization's command structure. A foreign agent in the inner circles of al Qaeda would have given us a heads-up on the embassy attacks in Africa, the botched torpedoing of the USS *The Sullivans* in the port of Aden in January 2000, the near-sinking of the USS *Cole* nine months later, and the 9/11 suicide dive-bombings. The Operations Directorate, wedded to the heavy use of officers with diplomatic and military cover and culturally and operationally averse to developing training and methods to seed either foreign agents or case officers into foreign organizations, never even tried to develop John Walker Lindhs to use against al Qaeda or the Taliban. Yet even one such source could have obviated any need for Washington to "connect the dots."

According to active-duty CIA case officers, the Near East Division of the clandestine service still has not developed new programs for secreting officers or agents into radical Islamic groups. This is considered too unorthodox, difficult, and dangerous by clandestine-service management. So what is the 9/11 Commission's recommendation? "The CIA Director should emphasize . . . (b) transforming the clandestine service by building its human intelligence capabilities; (c) developing a stronger language program, with high standards and sufficient financial incentives; (d) renewing emphasis on recruiting diversity among operations officers so they can blend more easily in foreign cities; (e) ensuring a seamless relationship between human source collection and signals collection at the operational level; and (f) stressing a better balance between unilateral and liaison operations."

That's it. In a 447-page report on the intelligence failings of 9/11, the clandestine service gets nine lines. The important bit—"transforming the clandestine service . . ." —is a 10-word platitude. You can find the same recommen-

dations in numerous internal CIA reviews from the Casey era forward. Numerous external reviews, which didn't have the 9/11 Commission's extensive access to classified information or its incomparable mandate, have said the same things for 15 years. A meaningful exercise for the 9/11 Commission would have been to compare and contrast Langley's clandestine human-intelligence collection efforts against other terrorist targets. What has the Operations Directorate been doing, say, against the Islamic Republic of Iran? How does it deploy its officers? How have Iranian agents been recruited? How good has been the intelligence? Have there been problems?

One can think of other terrorist organizations to add to the review. None is exactly like al Qaeda, the first ecumenically inclined, globally motivated, anti-American Sunni holy-warrior organization. Nonetheless, the comparisons would have allowed Americans, especially senior officials who usually know little about Langley's world, to see the CIA's track-record against all the terrorist targets in the Middle East. The Iranian parallel would have been particularly disturbing, since the clerical regime, with its nuclear ambitions and affection for terrorism, is a growing problem for the United States. Such comparisons would have shown the shortcomings to be systemic.

The commission was somewhat more detailed in recounting the failures of American counterterrorist analysis—the "connect-the-dots" episodes, which if they'd gone in our favor might have uncovered the 9/11 plot. Dozens of pages tell the story of the snafus. This discussion is undoubtedly worthwhile, but the recommendations that follow don't make much sense. The primary issue at stake analytically was the failure of the U.S. intelligence and security agencies to share their information in a timely and illuminating manner. This failure is the reason for the commission's two largest bureaucratic recommendations—the creation of a National Counterterrorism Center, built on the foundation of the current Terrorist Threat Integration Center at Langley, and a new intelligence czar, the national intelligence director, who would supercede the director of central intelligence as the most important intelligence official in the government. With considerably more power than the DCI over the national intelligence budget, and the ability to hire and fire, in consultation with the president, the key office heads below him, he would be able to corral and focus the intelligence community. The new center would gather in all the bright, essential counterterrorist minds to ensure that nothing slipped through the cracks and that analytical and operational contingencies were better foreseen.

Sounds okay in theory. However, on the key issue of sharing information, all of this is probably unnecessary. Since 9/11, personnel of different agencies have been working together at the Terrorist Threat Integration Center and elsewhere in the intelligence and law-enforcement communities. Dissemination codes on cable slug lines more or less guarantee that the electronic and paper traffic is automatically shared among the agencies and among personnel from different agencies in the same organization. One can surely refine this process further. Still, the sharing problem has largely been solved.

Undeterred, the commission would have us create a big intelligence bureaucracy associated with its new director. Count on it: The ethos that would develop under him would be no more competitive than it was collegial. Differing opinions within America's intelligence community would tend to become fewer, not more, as a new bureaucratic spirit radiated downward from the man who controlled all the purse strings and wrote the performance reports of the most important players in the intelligence community. American intelligence could well become more focused on the bureaucratic gaming that would be intense as the new structure solidified. It is hard to see how the quality of American intelligence analysis would improve through this reorganization. Competitive analysis is likely to be better in organizations that are truly independent of one another. The commission appears to be in love with synergies and economies of scale. But this isn't the way it works in the intelligence business, operationally or analytically. Five hundred analysts do not necessarily do a better job than fifty. Fifty case officers deployed correctly will certainly do a better job than 500 deployed as they are now.

As the commission has detailed well, American intelligence is in poor shape. It would be a good idea to shock it. But trying to do to intelligence gathering and analysis what General Motors did to car production isn't the way to make American counterterrorism more effective against an enemy who is crafty and adaptable and going to come at us in small platoons. The great medieval historian Ibn Khaldun wrote in his masterpiece of cyclical history, the *Prolegomena*, that barbarian invasions were the key to revitalizing societies and their stale bureaucracies. In a sense, we had our barbarian invasion on 9/11. The commission's response to that invasion is to hurl wiring diagrams. These are not likely to kill al Qaeda. America's military might, combined with a determination to push political reform in the Middle East—that is, to break the deadly nexus between Middle Eastern tyranny and Islamic extremism—is the formula essential to our eventual success. Intelligence will matter along the way. September 11, however, seems not to have been the event that will shock the Washington establishment into serious reform of the intelligence community. For that, we will have to wait for other barbarians to come through the gate. ♦

Purple America

Forget polarization—the country is really an even mix of blue and red.

By Michael Robinson & Susan Ellis

On June 1, Stephanie Herseth, a true-blue Democrat, won a special election for the lone House seat in the blood-red state of South Dakota. But in a state that gave George Bush 60 percent of its vote back in 2000, Herseth's win turns out to be the rule, not the exception. The two senators from South Dakota are also Democrats. Political "blue flu" infects both Dakotas. North Dakota also elects one House member along with its two senators. Again, all three are Democrats, even though Bush did even better in North Dakota than in South.

Two blood-red states. Six true-blue congressional Democrats. Not a Republican in sight. How can this be happening in a political environment that is assumed to be polarized state by state, region by region? The answer is that the assumption is wrong. The theory of red states versus blue states is about as wide of the mark as it is widely accepted.

From the Capitol dome, one can look east into blue Maryland. But Maryland has a red governor. One can look west and see a reddish Virginia; but Virginia has a bluish chief executive. Climb down from the Capitol and travel west by southwest, through the American version of the Red Belt. Let's see how far one can go into the Red Belt and still find blue governors. Travel down toward Tennessee: blue governor. Cross the Mississippi into Missouri: blue governor. Then take your pick: Kansas or Oklahoma—two longtime red states, both with recently elected blue governors.

Drive the Oklahoma panhandle into the Sun Belt, which for 40 years has been considered not just sunny but solidly Republican. And yet once-red New Mexico now has a very blue governor, Bill Richardson. End up in Arizona, what was once Goldwater country and is still color-coded bright red on The Map. Arizona also has a new governor who is blue. California is blue, so we won't, as the Californians say, go there. But even Valley Girls know that California just installed as chief executive Arnold Schwarzenegger—a man of many colors.

And what about the other blue states? Are they as faithless to their party as the red states we just visited? In a word, yes. Al Gore wound up winning only three states by 20 points or more: Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New York. All three have Republican governors. In fact, New York has not elected a Democratic governor since Mario Cuomo in 1990; Massachusetts hasn't elected a Democrat to its top office since Michael Dukakis in 1986; Rhode Island hasn't elected a Democratic governor for 14 years. Indeed, seven of the ten states Al Gore won by the largest majorities all currently have Republican governors.

For those who prefer something a bit more systematic than a travelogue, we have checked all 50 states for loyalty to their color. Every state has at least three offices elected statewide: the governor and the two senators. A polarized state in a polarized nation, you might think, would commonly show all three officials either red or blue. Yet only 16 states have a political triumvirate that is monochromatic and matches the state's Campaign 2000 color. Thirty-three states fail the test; their statewide elected leadership is a mix of red and blue. The 50th state is unique. George W. Bush didn't break a sweat to win in hot and humid Louisiana in 2000, but in 2004 all three statewide leaders are Democrats.

So much for The States. What about The People? The best way to answer that question is to ask them. No pollster with any sense would ask people whether they see themselves as polarized. Terminology like that is

Michael Robinson retired from the government department at Georgetown University in 1993 and serves as a consultant to the Pew Research Center. Susan Ellis is a senior analyst at Market Strategies, Inc., in Livonia, Michigan.

Greek to them. But pollsters do ask voters to describe themselves politically. The Pew Research Center has been doing just that for more than a dozen years.

Pew asks, "In general, would you describe yourself as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?" In May of this year, a meager 5 percent labeled themselves "very conservative." The exact same percentage said "very liberal." Forty-one percent said "moderate." So there are *four* times as many moderates as "wingers"—right or left.

What about in years past? Consider the politically charged year of 1994, when Newt Gingrich rose from obscurity to become the first Republican speaker of the House in four decades. The numbers from 1994 are virtually identical with those from 2004. The wings accounted for 10 percent of the public at large; the moderate category contained 39 percent of the total. After ten eventful years, there's been no change in how and where the public positions itself. The watchword then and now is centrism.

KRT / Chuck Kennedy

Congressional hearings on the media coverage of the 2000 election, February 14, 2001

Pew's most recent and wide-ranging study of polarization, completed in 2003, finds that Democrats and Republicans now differ more widely on issues and values than at any time in the last 15 years. Fair enough. But we checked the 50-plus items that Pew included in that survey and found the nation as a whole was not closely divided on most issues and values. In fact, about a quarter of all those questions indicated a public closely divided, while there was something approaching national consensus on a third of them.

Politicians know all this, even if the conventional wisdom doesn't. Why else would George W. Bush have strained to pass the largest entitlement package in 40 years? Why else would John Kerry now oppose gay marriage and favor an additional 40,000 soldiers for the Army? They do all this because each realizes that for the vast majority of Americans extremism is still a vice, and moderation is still a virtue.

Why, then, the obsession with polarization? The most important reason is an error in logic. Pundits and political scientists have equated "evenly divided" with "polarized." Big mistake.

In 1860, one-third of the states were on their way to becoming the Confederacy. Two-thirds would remain in the Union. America was not equally divided then, but she was most certainly polarized. In 1960, Americans were evenly divided, at least as to presidential preference. Yet Americans were not especially polarized at the time. So, taken together, 1860 and 1960 prove that being evenly divided is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for polarization.

There's a serious definition problem here as well. Polarization is not a modest increase in differences between Democrats and Republicans. That definition is both myopic and alarmist. Polarization worthy of the name involves an intensity and hostility that engenders some level of political violence, or something akin to it. At minimum, real polarization must produce an extremist movement with significant public support.

Think 1968. Remember the ugliness of George Wallace's Independent party, a backlash movement that attracted nearly 10 million very hostile voters, and even garnered 46 votes in the Electoral College. Compared with Wallace voters, Ralph Nader's 3 million voters in 2000 are few in number and very bourgeois. Political grievances in the past have spawned the Klan, the SDS, and the Nation of Islam. Political grievances since 2000 have given us the "Deaniacs." The 1860s and the late 1960s epitomized genuine political polarization. The "50-50" politics of this decade do not.

Then there is the tyranny of "Map 2000"—the unfortunate byproduct of Electoral College realities and television's ongoing standard operating procedures. In the Electoral College, the states matter far more than the voters. In television journalism, the visuals matter

way too much. It was great for television that the blue states and the red states seemed to be oh-so-regionalized. But we have been color-blinded by The Map.

The best example is the West Coast. TV's uniformly bright-blue coloring of Oregon, Washington, and California implied that the coast was all Al Gore's. Gore did carry all three states, but not nearly as dramatically as the coloring implied. Had less than half of one percent of the total West Coast vote shifted to Bush, two of the three Pacific coast states would have turned the networks' bright red. The Gore Coast was a graphics-driven exaggeration. The Pacific states were not nearly as solid for Gore as the colors looked. The same thing happened in the Great Lakes region. The Map painted all but two of the Great Lakes states as solidly for Gore, making the North Coast appear to be Gore country. But move 2 percent of the 20 million votes cast in the Great Lakes states and the entire region would have been red instead of two-thirds blue.

The Map has become the single most indelible metaphor in contemporary electoral politics. But this graphic metaphor exaggerates almost everything about those politics.

Another factor here is political expediency. Leaders in both parties have their own reasons for pushing the polarization theme. Democrats know that since 2001 there has been a tilt toward the GOP. But calling that shift a minor realignment would be bad PR for Democrats. Better to call the phenomenon Polarization! That term characterizes Republican gains as somehow sinister, even dysfunctional.

Republicans have their own motives for embracing the myth of polarized politics. It's a good, all-purpose excuse for a party that holds the White House and controls the Congress but can't pass much of its legislative agenda. Why can't George Bush get his energy package adopted? Why can't the Republicans get 100 percent—instead of the actual 80 percent—of Bush's judicial appointments confirmed? It can't be the fault of the Republicans. So it must be the newly polarized political environment that's to blame.

For Democrats and Republicans, the new polarization is akin to the old partisanship. It's something both sides use to explain away almost anything and everything. Even the press has a self-serving motive for hyping polarization. Like partisanship, the specter of polarization gives the watchdog press a system-wide malfunction about which to bark.

Journalists aren't the only ones barking. For decades liberal academics actually argued in favor of polarization. Back then, political science labeled that prospect "responsible, coherent party politics." But now that we do have more coherent and consistent parties—even without violence or extremism—political scientists have joined the media in decrying the changes they once advocated.

This academic establishment balked when it became clear that coherence was increasing just as the Republicans were gaining ground. We suspect that if the Democrats were still the majority party and still controlled Congress and the presidency, the professoriate and the press would probably consider these changes to represent good, responsible government, not dreaded polarization.

Polarization is mostly an urban legend, imagined by the chattering classes of the metropolitan centers of politics and media. Still, as in any legend, there is truth here. But it isn't new and it isn't news. For decades white southerners have gravitated toward the Republicans. So the lion's share of conservatives are now in the conservative party. The abandoned Democrats have been left with almost all of the liberals. That's mainly how we became the "50-50" nation.

If this transformation meant that neither blue voters nor red would cross the color line, then this might be cause for alarm. That hasn't happened. If this transformation led contemporary politics to the next level *down*—back into the streets or toward extremist movements—then one might be right to raise alarms about Polarization. But that hasn't happened either. In fact, the public response to the death of Ronald Reagan implies that we are not now at war with ourselves.

More than 30 years ago, there was a popular slogan about the political crisis that was raging at the time: "We have met the enemy and he is us." Since 2001, we all know who the enemy is. And he isn't us. Americans recognize full well that their real enemy comes not from an American state that is either red or blue; he comes from a nation-state that has failed (like Afghanistan) or is failing (like Pakistan). How ironic that polarization theory should become received wisdom at a time when nationalistic fervor is greater than it has been for at least a decade.

Still, this isn't a political picnic we're experiencing in 2004. We can expect a nasty campaign and overheated rhetoric from both sides. But what was a 19th-century maxim remains a 21st-century reality: Politics ain't beanbag. Yet almost nothing the public has done since Campaign 2000 could be accurately described as antipodal or extremist, let alone radical.

How, then, best to describe the politics of the last few years? Each party has done about as well as the other in attracting voters, but the voters themselves have remained middle of the road. So we ought not to be too melodramatic in the labeling.

Kids might call this the politics of "Even Steven." Adults should prefer something more adult, but no more sensational. How about the era of Much Too Close To Call. ♦

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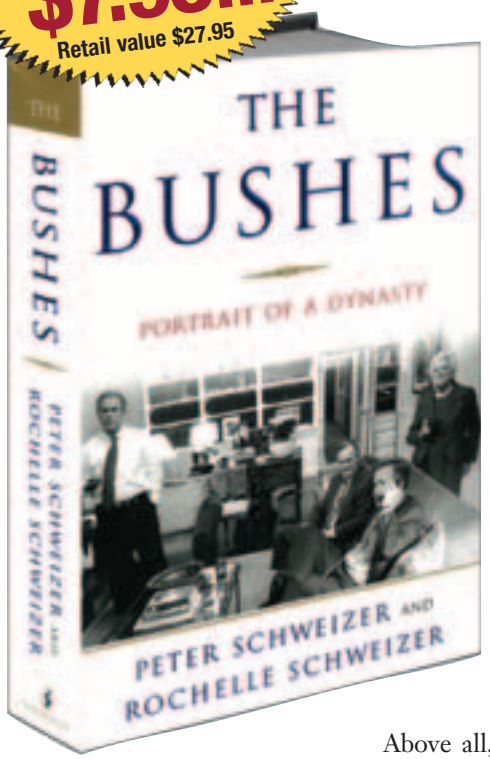

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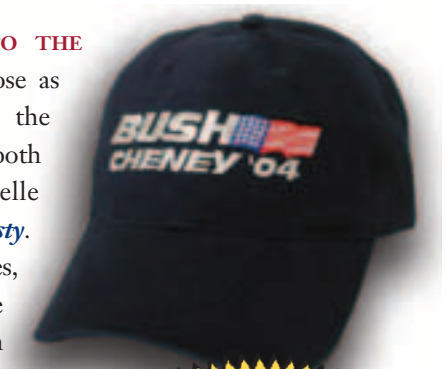

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Land of Hope and Fear

Nathaniel Hawthorne and the American past

By Wilfred M. McClay

A surviving daguerreotype of Hawthorne. Courtesy: Library of Congress.

Of all the complaints leveled at the canon of nineteenth-century American books, the hardest to credit is the charge that they are conventional and comfortable—like picturesque little pleasure boats plying the sunny surface of American life.

How then does one account for the unsettling preoccupations of those authors: the desperate God-grappling of Herman Melville, the macabre fixations of Edgar Allan Poe, the fevered omnisexuality of Walt Whitman, the nature-intoxicated anarchism of Henry David Thoreau? This doesn't sound like the stuff of which genteel outings at the lake are made. In fact, such a list makes one wonder whether there has ever been a great national literature more full of craziness and inflationary excess, more indifferent to measure and proportion, more riddled with anxiety and self-doubt.

Americans seem generally unaware of their literature's disquieting features. Take, for example, the exalted status accorded *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1850 masterpiece, the first indisputably great work of American literature. For much of the twentieth century, an acquaintance with *The Scarlet Letter* was considered an essential part of American education. But it's hard to imagine a more bizarre candidate for a literary rite of passage—or one better calculated to establish a permanent aversion to classic literature.

Hawthorne in Concord
by Philip McFarland
Grove, 341 pp., $26

Hawthorne
A Life
by Brenda Wineapple
Random House, 512 pp., $16.95

This seems especially true for students who've grown up in the age of Bill and Monica. What they find in *The Scarlet Letter* is the story of a minister and a married woman who had a love affair and feel bad about it afterward—especially the man, a sensitive fellow who also turns out to be a hypocrite and a bit of a coward. The woman, an impressively resilient spirit who bore a love-child out of that furtive encounter, is publicly humiliated. The minister chooses to conceal his part in the matter, although profound feelings of guilt gnaw away at him. The cuckolded husband schemes to get even, while degenerating into an ever-more loathsome monster in the process. In the end, everyone lives (or dies) unhappily ever after. Pretty depressing stuff, when you consider how much better off everyone would have been, if they could just have . . . well, *gotten over it* and *moved on*.

It's hard to improve on what one of my students said during a class discussion of Whittaker Chambers's passionate and gloomy autobiography, *Witness*. "The dude just needed to chill," he murmured, gazing down at his fingertips, a tiny smile playing upon his lips—affectless contempt expressed in

Author, most recently, of Religion Returns to the Public Square, *Wilfred M. McClay teaches history and humanities at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.*


Library of Congress

Hawthorne's birthplace in Salem.

perfect twenty-first-century pitch. The other students nodded agreement.

They say the same, and then some, about Nathaniel Hawthorne and his characters. Leaving aside the spidery intricacies of the prose in *The Scarlet Letter*, and the lack of action in its plot, what really dooms the novel for present-day readers is the alien intensity of its moral universe. Part of Hawthorne's message makes sense to them, the part they've been trained to hear—that the Puritan religious and social code (as he understood it) was excessive, cruel, sexist, and inhuman, that it wrung all beauty and joy from life, and that the actions of the avenging husband, Roger Chillingworth, though he was technically the wronged party, were ultimately far more sinister than those of the unconfessed adulterer, the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, and his near-blameless lover, Hester Prynne.

But what they can't comprehend is what all the fuss is about—why Dimmesdale felt so guilty, why he couldn't confess, why what he and Hester did *was* in fact a grievous sin, why our sins and the sins of our forebears are inseparable from who we are, why those sins must be paid for, why it is almost impossible to pay for them fully, and yet why sins that remain unacknowledged and unconfessed and unpaid will surely destroy our souls. The central premise in Hawthorne's imaginative world—his insistence that the weight of the sinful human past, in one's own life, in the life of one's family, and in the life of one's city and country, can never be denied or wished away—is completely lost on a generation raised on smug therapeutic platitudes.

Given such difficulties, one might have hoped that the academy at least would keep Hawthorne's reputation alive. But Hawthorne has had a rough time of it in recent years. The problem, of course, is politics. Much of the Hawthorne scholarship emanating from academic English departments during the past two decades has been dominated by "New Historicism," which has tended to reduce Hawthorne to little more than the sum of his unacceptably skeptical or reactionary positions on the burning issues of his day: slavery, abolitionism, women's rights, the conditions of the laboring classes, movements of radical social reform. To make matters worse, he was an ardent American nationalist and expansionist. Surely an author so politically benighted must have produced works that "inscribed" all the worst features of American life.

Accordingly, in an influential 1991 book, Sacvan Bercovitch disparaged *The Scarlet Letter* as an ideologically conservative work of "thick propaganda," a "vehicle of continuity" that opposed radical change and celebrated the tawdry American icons of "gradualism and consensus." Other critics, such as Jane Tompkins, concluded that Hawthorne's high literary reputation has been undeserved, having been propped up artificially by patriarchal networks of critical opinion. It increasingly seems that the only point of keeping Hawthorne around is to have him handy as a whipping boy.

Thankfully, though, an important counterbalance to these influences has come from the biographical literature on Hawthorne. Generally produced by writers operating on the fringe of the academy, that literature presents Hawthorne in a richer and more multidimensional way. It's too much to hope that the recent appearance of Brenda Wineapple's *Hawthorne: A Life* and Philip McFarland's *Hawthorne in Concord* signal a turning of the scholarly tide. But both books are well written and sensibly argued, with only a modicum of interpretive excess or psychoanalytic license. They may help keep alive the possibility of a more respectful audience for Hawthorne, during a dry season that dismisses him too easily, and may need him more than it suspects.

Born in Salem on the Fourth of July in 1804, Hawthorne was a paradox from start to finish: The isolated and brooding child of an old and rooted family, he became the first great literary voice of a boisterous, restless new nation. He found endless ways of embodying this tension, in a life that was both cautiously provincial and perpetually unsettled. He was both deeply proud of his Puritan family pedigree and deeply troubled by it, not least by the fact that his great-grandfather John Hathorne had been one of the judges in the infamous Salem witchcraft trials. It was part of the family tradition, one that formed the basis for his novel *The House of the Seven Gables*, that the family house retained a curse brought down upon it by that forebear's deeds. Hawthorne may have changed the spelling of his own surname partly to avail himself of the American promise of a fresh beginning. But at the same time he never ceased to acknowledge and even wal-

low in that heritage—in ways that profoundly affected his view not only of his own past but also of America.

His father was a sea captain who died in Dutch Surinam of yellow fever when Nathaniel was four. So he grew up with his eccentric, reclusive mother and sisters in an entirely female house. His own tendencies toward introversion and bookishness were only accentuated by a youthful foot injury, which kept him indoors a great deal of the time. By the time he went off to college at Bowdoin in 1821, he was already fairly certain that he would not aspire to any of the conventional masculine careers of business, the clergy, the law, or medicine. Instead, he was already setting his sights upon becoming "an Author, and relying for support upon my pen." But those ambitions also had a nationalistic tinge to them, for he hoped, as he told his mother, to produce works that would be regarded as equals to the "proudest productions of the scribbling sons of John Bull."

The years at Bowdoin were important for a variety of reasons. He came out of his shell a bit and initiated some of the most lasting relationships of his life, notably his friendship with Franklin Pierce, a future president of the United States. In the company of Pierce and other Bowdoin friends, he discovered a passion for partisan politics, settling easily into the political sympathies of a Jacksonian Democrat, an outlook that would stay with him for the rest of his life and help immunize him against the Whiggery and evangelical reformism that dominated his literary circles.

Such a rough-and-tumble practical-mindedness in politics might seem out of character with his authorial ambitions, but the two were united by a strong sense of American cultural destiny. The commencement address at Hawthorne's 1825 graduation—delivered by fellow graduate Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and entitled "Our Native Writers"—offered a passionate plea for a new American literature, "springing up in the shadow of our free institutions." Such words spoke directly to Hawthorne: The desire to have a hand in creating such a distinctive American literature was, as Brenda Wineapple says, "the secret ambition lodged like a thorn in his own heart."

That ambition would be a long time in the realization. After college, he returned to Salem, and spent a mysterious twelve years living in his mother's home, incubating his talent, publishing stories here and there (usually in near-complete anonymity), and struggling with the fears and loathings that such a self-imposed isolation must have imposed upon him. Others found it incomprehensible that Hawthorne, who was an extraordinarily handsome man, with captivating eyes that were, in the admiring words of Elizabeth Peabody, "like mountain lakes seeking to reflect the heavens," chose to withdraw into the blue chamber of his soul.

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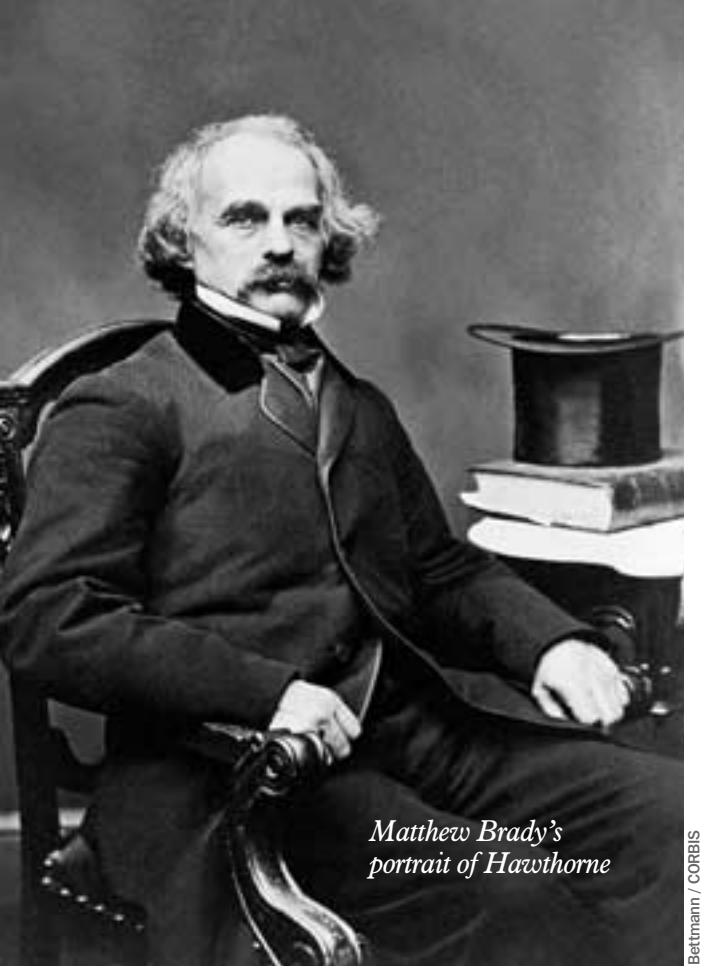
The Old Manse, Hawthorne's house in Concord.

But his exalted sense of authorial calling was accompanied by an equally powerful apprehension that the work of a writer could not qualify as "man's work." Writing became, as Wineapple neatly puts it, "a source of shame as much as pleasure, and a necessity he could neither forgo nor entirely approve." Yet out of this tortured state would finally come, slowly but surely, a body of short fiction that would eventually make up his *Twice-Told Tales* (1837), the work with which he finally emerged in the public eye. This collection of tales, all of them previously published, included some of his best-known short stories, "The Fountain of Youth" (later retitled "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment"), "The Minister's Black Veil," and "The May-Pole of Merry Mount." He had already written such classic stories as "Roger Malvin's Burial," "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," and "Young Goodman Brown," but chose, for his usual mysterious reasons, not to include them.

One could plausibly argue that Hawthorne was at his most inspired in his early short fiction. Certainly the reader can see the characteristic lines of his thought, in ways that would not be much altered or improved upon in the later work. The penchant for symbolism and allegory is there—together with the spooky echoes of past sins and the creepy defamiliarization of ordinary life, which is seen to hide strangeness and horror beneath its thin veneer. These early stories all show the typically static Hawthornian characters frozen compulsively in moral dilemmas, often self-chosen, and they all run on a prose style that conveys gauzy, dreamlike distance rather than novelistic clarity and specificity.

Take for example the baffling story "Wakefield," which had first appeared two years earlier in *New-England Magazine*. The story is presented as an imaginative reconstruction derived from scraps in an old periodical, just the kind of framing device Hawthorne loved to use. An ordinary Londoner named Wakefield—"a man of habits"



Matthew Brady's portrait of Hawthorne

Bettmann / CORBIS

—leaves his wife, allegedly on a short business trip to the country, of no more than a few days. But, for reasons that are never explained, involving some deep and inscrutable psychological compulsion, he decides not to return. He does not go to another woman, or to some faraway place to begin a new life. Instead, he rents rooms on a street near his home, and stays in them, living there incognito for twenty years. He was "spell-bound," an illustration of the principle that "an influence, beyond our control, lays its strong hand on every deed which we do, and weaves its consequences into an iron tissue of necessity."

During those twenty years, Wakefield feels compelled occasionally to spy on his wife, although always with an electrifying feeling of terror at the thought of being found out. He sees her grow old and portly, adjusting resignedly to her widowhood, a woman whose "regrets have either died away, or have become so essential to her heart, that they would be poorly exchanged for joy." Then, just as suddenly as his decision to depart, Wakefield decides to return and put an end to "the little joke" that he has played "at his wife's expense." We are left in the dark about how he was received. But Hawthorne means the story to show how easily each of us, if diverted from the comfortable and familiar, can find himself "the Outcast of the Universe."

It is vintage Hawthorne, a weird and troubling little story, filled with misogyny and bottomless despair. Yet writing such a tale, far from being an act of symbolic transgression, was surely an act of self-disclosure, and self-mortification—for Wakefield was, in part, Hawthorne himself, or Hawthorne as he feared he was becoming. "He always puts himself in his books," opined his sister-in-law Mary, wife of the great educator Horace Mann, "he cannot help it." And as Hawthorne confessed poignantly to Mary's sister, Sophia Peabody, who would soon be his wife: "Thou only has taught me that I have a heart. . . . [W]ithout thy aid, my best knowledge of myself would have been merely to know my own shadow—to watch it flickering on the wall, and mistake its fantasies for my own real actions."

He knew that the literary artist could easily become a heartless man like Wakefield, "dissevered from the world," reduced to being an observer, a wraith cut off from the world he claims to understand. Brenda Wineapple's biography adroitly traces the twists and turns in this relentless struggle of authorship, showing it as a continuously formative theme in Hawthorne's entire career.

Of course, there is more to Hawthorne's life than his years of painful and anonymous alienation. The great virtue of Philip McFarland's charming and immensely readable *Hawthorne in Concord* is to show us the writer not as the radically isolated man he imagined himself, but as a member of a lively community of writers and thinkers: Emerson, Thoreau, Fuller, the Alcotts, the Manns, and the Peabodys.

But Concord, although a place of unusual happiness for Hawthorne in the early years of his marriage, was far less important to him than Salem, and the fact that he lived in Concord on three separate occasions (and is buried there) does not appear to have translated into the town's having any particular significance for him. The more enduring reality about Hawthorne seems to have been his restlessness, his inability to be content in any setting—whether Salem, Maine, Boston, Concord, West Roxbury, Lenox, West Newton, or Liverpool, where his friend President Pierce had appointed him U.S. consul. Even Rome, a place where the past was never dead, reminded him in the end of a rotting corpse. The sense of place was, for Hawthorne, a haunted and confining thing at best.

If, however, one thinks less about place than about milieu, then McFarland's angle of vision becomes very useful, for it reminds us of how enmeshed Hawthorne was in many of the most characteristic enthusiasms of his day. It is customary to see him as the soberly pessimistic countervoice to Emerson's wild optimism, the cautionary voice of the repressed past, the unredeemed present, and the unreformable future. That is true, but not true enough. Hawthorne was a Jacksonian Democrat, not a Burkean neo-Calvinist, let alone a neomedievalist crypto-Catholic.

He shared with his longtime friend John O'Sullivan a belief in "the essential equality of all humanity," in which "all ranks of men would begin life on a fair field"—and believed that it was America's destiny to spread this doctrine across the continent. And it was he, and not Emerson or Thoreau, who was willing to go live in George Ripley's utopian experimental community

Brook Farm for seven months (and then, like any red-blooded American opportunist, turn his experience into publishable prose with *The Blithedale Romance*).

"I should like to sail on and on forever," Hawthorne mused when returning from Rome, "and never touch the shore again." But the alienated artist, with his joys and fears, is by now an exhausted, even tiresome, theme. We hardly need the assistance of Hawthorne to understand it, and if his reputation were to hang on that alone he would not really deserve the high status he is granted.

In fact, however, there are deeper themes in Hawthorne that may never before have been as salient as they are in our own times. Consider a story such as "The Birth-mark," in which a scientist insists on removing from his beautiful wife's left cheek a crimson birthmark, her sole imperfection, and inadvertently kills her in the process. Or "Earth's Holocaust," in which a fire begun to rid the world of its "accumulation of worn-out trumpery" ends up consuming everything and leaving the world no better. Or "The Celestial Rail-road," in which the hard path of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is replaced by an easy and convenient railway, which carries its comfortable passengers straight to Hell. Or "Rappaccini's Daughter," a complex allegory in which a beautiful young woman, as an experiment in the control of nature by her scientist father, has been raised on a diet of poisonous plants to make her self-sufficient—and ends up being killed by her lover when he administers an antidote to the poison.

Unfortunately, the interpretations of such stories offered by both Wineapple and McFarland fall short. Wineapple sees "The Birth-mark" strictly as a tale of sexual anxiety, in which "a man confronts marriage, and hence sexuality, with horror." And she reads "Rappaccini's Daughter" as a "biographical palimpsest" in which the evil doctor is his father-in-law, or perhaps Emerson, and the young woman "represents a woman's struggle to free herself" from confinement and "irresolute men." McFarland says that "Earth's Holocaust" is less a story than a sketch "reflecting on contemporary issues." These readings may or may not be accurate. But they are essentially trivial in comparison to the profounder meanings that leap off of these pages today.

These irony-filled allegorical tales, with their constant reversals and inversions, are also warnings about the moral perils of human efforts to gain mastery over the terms of human existence. What a bitter sadness it would be, Hawthorne reflected at the end of "Earth's Holocaust," if "Man's age-long endeavor for perfection" served only to "render him the mockery of the Evil Principle, from the fatal circumstance of an error at the very root of the matter." And what was that error? It was lodged in the heart, "the little, yet boundless sphere"; all the misery of the world derives from that "original wrong." The human heart is where the problem is, and where the only solution can be found. "If we go no deeper than the Intellect," he warned, striving, "with merely that feeble instrument, to discern and rectify what is wrong," then the result will be no more substantial than a dream.

Hawthorne's appeal to the heart over the intellect aligns him, once again, with the romanticism that was sweeping through the salons of Boston and Concord in his day. So too do the dreamy and gothic elements in his fiction. But if Hawthorne was partly a romantic, he was even more of a Hebrew prophet, a throwback to the Isaiah who reviled the hardened and self-satisfied hearts of his contemporaries—and prophesied that the hidden things would come to the light and the pitiful wisdom of the wise would be destroyed. If he was not quite able to reembrace the Christian theology of his forebears in all its details, his invocation of an "original wrong" was a long and respectful bow to the explanatory power of their most fundamental assertion.

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The House of Seven Gables in Salem.

At its best, Hawthorne's prose achieves an uncanny quality in which the fiber of familiar reality gives way. McFarland casually compares this effect to the "magical realism" of Gabriel García Márquez, but that utterly fails to capture the terrifying moral energy swirling through Hawthorne's writing. Especially in a handful of his most powerful short stories, Hawthorne's work forces us to observe the essential moral value of *fear*. This hasn't been a popular thing to notice since the Enlightenment's disenchantment of the world, and it is completely at odds with the therapeutic ethos that now reigns. If the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, however, it is so partly because such fear protects us against the fatal presumption of mastery—a fearlessness much more to be feared than fear itself. ♦

Morning in America

Rewatching the movie Red Dawn*, twenty years later.*

BY MATTHEW REES AND ROBERT SCHLESINGER

This week marks the twentieth anniversary of the first movie released with what was, at the time, the new rating of "PG-13." Called *Red Dawn*, it was a near-future tale of teenage guerrillas defending their hometown after the Soviets had invaded.

While the film was widely (though not universally) panned, it remains more than the answer to a good trivia question about movie ratings. It has endured the passing of the Cold War to occupy a niche of its own in American culture. Something of a cult classic in right-wing circles, the film has been accorded the ultimate compliment by the denizens of mainstream subversive comedy: It has been spoofed in an episode of *South Park*.

The film also endures in the military: When American troops were planning the mission that would ultimately lead them to Saddam Hussein, they called it "Operation Red Dawn"—and the two locations targeted in the raid were named "Wolverine One" and "Wolverine Two," in honor of the movie's band of teens-turned-freedom-fighters. The Army captain who came up with the label, Geoffrey McMurray, said afterward, "It was a patriotic, pro-American movie. . . . I think all of us in the military have seen *Red Dawn*." (On a less uplifting note, Timothy McVeigh was also said to have been an avid fan of the film.)

So, why does *Red Dawn* endure? Some of the appeal is the cast, which was largely unknown at the time but went on to achieve varying degrees of stardom: If you grew up in the 1980s, there's something weirdly entertaining about watching the Brat Pack mujahedeen of Patrick Swayze, Charlie Sheen, Jennifer Grey, Lea Thompson, and C. Thomas Howell wielding RPGs and heavy machine guns as they set out to kill the Commies for their mommies. "You're momma'd be real proud," a downed Air Force pilot (Powers Boothe) tells Wolverine leader Swayze.

For that matter, there is undeniable appeal about a film layered with a rock-ribbed ideology that sends it happily careening between patriotism and pure camp. Opening shortly before the 1984 Republican National Convention in Dallas, where Ronald Reagan would declare that it was "morning in America," *Red Dawn* painted a picture of a dark, stormy midnight in the nation. If Reagan was the smiling, optimistic face of the GOP, *Red Dawn* presented the party's apocalyptic, fear-mongering side, with grim glee and all the subtlety of an Al Sharpton speech. This was, after all, before the heady days of Gorbachev, glasnost, and perestroika—and the formula worked. *Red Dawn* was number one at the box office its opening weekend, displacing a somewhat less ideological film, *Ghostbusters*.

Before the opening credits roll for *Red Dawn*, the film uses stark yellow lettering against the backdrop of an all-black screen and ominous music to set up its world thrown into turmoil, a scenario straight out of an early 1980s conservative nightmare: The Soviets are set on edge by poor crop harvests; the Cuban and Nicaraguan armies sweep through Central America in a Latin domino effect that finally engulfs Mexico; Western Europe (what we now call Old Europe) goes Green and nonnuclear, and NATO dissolves. The United States, we are told, "stands alone."

In the film's opening scene, a high-school teacher lecturing on military strategy (that of Genghis Khan, no less) is interrupted when he sees dozens of parachutists landing just outside the classroom. "I would say they are way off course," he understates. (Ironically, during filming, extras in full costume actually were blown off course, and at least one had to convince unwitting locals that he wasn't a Russian invader and thus shouldn't be shot.) When the teacher goes outside to investigate, a paratrooper berates him in Russian and then mows him down. The rest of the invaders start firing on the classroom, which is still full of students. Those who aren't hit—one is left with his body hanging out the schoolroom window—try to flee as they are sprayed with gunfire.

In short order, the invaders occupy the fictional Calumet, Colorado (*Red Dawn* was actually filmed in Las Vegas, New Mexico), and the rest of the movie is the story of how eight teenagers eke out an existence in the nearby mountain range and wage an implausible (though seemingly successful) five-month guerrilla war against the occupying forces. They adopt as their name the mascot of their high school: Wolverines.

The movie's explanation of how the Communists penetrated America's defenses could have been scripted by Pat Buchanan, though it is told by Powers Boothe, the Air Force lieutenant colonel who has been shot down and brings news from *FA*—"Free America."

"First wave of the attack came in disguise as commercial charter flights, same way they did in Afghanistan in '80, only they were crack airborne outfits," he tells the Wolverines, who are sitting around a campfire in the snow-

Matthew Rees is a former staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD. *Robert Schlesinger is a freelance writer in Washington, D.C.*

Movie stills: MGM / Everett Collection.

Conquering Russian soldiers pose for a photograph in Red Dawn.

covered mountains. "Infiltrators came up illegal from Mexico, Cubans mostly. They managed to infiltrate SAC bases in the Midwest, several down in Texas—it wreaked a helluva lot of havoc, I'm here to tell ya. They opened up the door down here, and the whole Cuban and Nicaraguan armies come walking right through, roll right up here through the Great Plains."

In short, America was undone by a combination of free-traders and illegal immigrants. What about Europe? asks one of the Wolverines. "I guess they figured twice in one century was enough. [Pause for a slug of whiskey.] They're sitting this one out. All except England, and they won't last very long." The scene's highlight comes when Boothe explains who is on our side: "600 million screamin' Chinamen." When a Wolverine objects that the last he heard there were a billion screamin' Chinamen, Boothe throws his whisky onto the fire, igniting it, before observing, "There were."

Distrust of foreigners is just one ingredient in the film's apocalyptic stew. Guns are another. The review in *Guns & Ammo* described it as "one of the most potent pro-gun movies ever made." Indeed, guns (and a healthy dose of gumption) enable the Wolverines' heroic resistance, and the movie doesn't shy from going overboard to make the point: Shortly after the Commies have stormed Calumet, the camera spies a pickup truck bearing a bumper sticker with the NRA's unofficial slogan: "They can have my gun when they pry it from my cold dead fingers." The camera immediately pans down to a Calumet citizen's corpse clutching a handgun before a Commie boot steps on it and the invader pries the gun away. Later, a leader of the occupying forces orders a minion to go to the local sporting-goods store and retrieve "form 4473," which, he explains, has "descriptions of weapons and lists of private owners." The NRA couldn't have asked for a better piece of agitprop.

The film also targets politicians as sniveling bootlickers. Calumet's mayor (played by Lane Smith, who would later in the same year play nearly the same character in the short-lived television series *V*) does a first-rate impression of a quisling, collaborating with the invading forces, and standing idly by while about two dozen Americans—whom he presumably fingered as the troublemakers' families—are lined up and executed, as the Soviet national anthem plays in the background. ("This community is indeed fortunate to have a shepherd like him," the leader of the occupying forces chuckles to his assistant.) Predictably, the mayor's son—who is student body president at Calumet High—is the Wolverines' early voice favoring surrender and later turns traitor. "He's a leader, but not in a violent, physical way," the mayor explains. "He's more of a politician, like his father."

Precisely why director John Milius (who has also worked on *Apocalypse*

Now, *Dirty Harry*, and *Conan the Barbarian*), chose to include two teenage girls in the band of brothers who make up the Wolverines remains a mystery. But they're not weak sisters. Indeed, Jennifer Grey's character plants a bomb that detonates in the Soviet American Friendship Center that's been established in Calumet, and she's the first Wolverine to kill one of the occupiers. Later, when she's shot and can't keep pace with her fellow Wolverines in the heat of battle, she asks Swayze to kill her so she won't be caught and tortured for information.

Instead, they give her a grenade, which explodes when an occupying soldier finds her body and tries to move it. (Grey and Swayze apparently clashed during the making of *Red Dawn*, but that didn't prevent them from teaming up a few years later for the box office smash *Dirty Dancing*.) When Charlie Sheen tells Lea Thompson to "make yourself useful" by washing dishes, she angrily knocks them away and barks back, "Me and her are as good as any of you!" It's grrrrrrrrrrrrl power, Rambo-style.

Indeed, while the film spilled enough blood to be tagged by the National Coalition on Television Violence as the most violent ever made (134 acts of violence per hour), the machismo is offset by tears of fear. The number of scenes where various characters declare that no one should ever cry again is matched by the number of scenes where they blubber about lost family and friends. "If you didn't love anybody you'd never even be here," one Wolverine comforts Thompson after the death of a comrade. Hearts bleed figuratively as well as literally in *Red Dawn*.

Patrick Swayze, C. Thomas Howell, and Charlie Sheen fight the Communist invaders in Red Dawn.

A member of the Dutch resistance during World War II boasted on NPR that the film skillfully captured the spirit of an insurgent movement. But the movie's rhetoric is often overwrought: "All that hate's going to burn you up, kid," Powers Boothe tells C. Thomas Howell as the teen carves another notch in the stock of his AK-47. "It keeps me warm," snarls Howell in response. And much of the acting has the grace of Keanu Reeves at his most wooden. Shortly after a few of the Wolverines have fled Calumet and taken refuge in the nearby mountain range, they kill a buck for food, and then make Howell drink a cup of its blood. Once you drink the blood, they tell him, "there's gonna be something different about you." Indeed, Howell ends up the most radicalized of the group, and dies in a blaze of gunfire while defiantly screaming at his enemies, "WOLVERINES!"

Twenty years after the release of *Red Dawn*, the film takes on a slightly different hue: America's defenses *have* been brutally penetrated. And after watching the Wolverines boast of their ignorance of the Geneva Conventions as they prepare to execute an enemy prisoner, one can only wonder if perhaps a few of the soldiers serving in Abu Ghraib might have learned the wrong lesson from late-night viewings of the film.

But in the end, the story of *Red Dawn* is a story of the quest for freedom over totalitarian aggression—schlocky, but still powerful. And in the telling of this story, what emerges is history's most fiercely anti-Communist movie (an admittedly small category). There was clearly something to like about a movie that *Pravda* panned at the time as "a monstrous anti-Soviet concoction" that "poisons the audience's minds with the drug of anti-Communism." And there would, of course, have been only one appropriate response to such Kremlin-inspired belligerence: "Wolverines of the world, UNITE!" ♦

"You don't seem to understand, sir. I said this book is must *reading."*

Books in Brief

Dawn Over Baghdad: How the U.S. Military is Using Bullets and Ballots to Remake Iraq **by Karl Zinsmeister (Encounter, 237 pp., $25.95).** During the drive on Baghdad, many reporters were embedded with military units. This program gave us the best reporting of the war, and produced a number of solid books, among them Karl Zinsmeister's first book on Iraq, *Boots on the Ground*.

But then the press retreated to Baghdad's hotels, and the reporting turned negative and distanced. Feeling newspaper readers weren't getting the real story, Zinsmeister re-embedded with soldiers in the Sunni Triangle early in 2004. *Dawn Over Baghdad* is his account of our fight to establish "a free, prosperous, and democratic Iraq."

Despite press accounts that trumpet each outbreak as the start of a civil war, the United States is carrying both the military and political battles. Most Iraqis are opposed to insurgent attacks and are against both an Islamic state and a Baathist revival. "The Iraqi public," Zinsmeister says, "is more sensible, stable, and moderate than is commonly portrayed." Still, he sees Iraq as a broken land of corruptions that are the legacy of decades of state socialism: "We could pour billions into this place and make no long-run difference if we don't change attitudes."

Zinsmeister regards the media as almost as great a threat to our soldiers as the insurgents. Our troops confront a "two-front war" against terrorists and against adversaries on the world's news desks. Zinsmeister presents a depressing litany of exaggerations, selective readings, and lies, all designed to present the Iraq war as a failure. The war is too important to let it be "done in by snipers plinking from keyboards."

Ultimately, *Dawn Over Baghdad* is about those who serve. Quoting a professor who told protesters that they could be proud that they were "A students, who think for themselves," in contrast to the "C students with their stupid fingers on the trigger," Zinsmeister finds the troops are a widely diverse group, some possessing advanced degrees, and many boasting real accomplishments in military and civilian life. While no angels, they are professional, committed, and often caring. Most are capable of making good decisions on the fly in dangerous situations. Contrary to the professor, "independent thinking . . . is not only tolerated in our armed forces, it is required."

—Dan Dickinson

A Thousand Sighs, A Thousand Revolts: Journeys in Kurdistan **by Christiane Bird (Ballantine, 432 pp., $25.95).** The Kurds are one of the most important political factors in the Middle East. Spread across six countries, they number perhaps forty million—larger than the population of Canada and more pro-American. At the same time the Kurds are mistrusted and discounted. Human-rights groups that once publicized Iraq's genocide of the Kurds now ignore them. When the United States transferred power to the Iraqis in June, the State Department closed down its representation in Iraqi Kurdistan—a slight to a region that opinion polls show is over 90 percent pro-American.

Christiane Bird's well-written travelogue starts to fill an important gap in popular knowledge of the Kurds. Bird describes the suffering of the Kurds, as well as their diversity and frequent disunity. The Kurds have an interest in changing the status quo in the Middle East and a desire to see democracy forced upon the region. And some changes have happened. Since the fall of Saddam, the Kurds of Iran and Syria have openly challenged their regimes. In Turkey, the government has been forced to ease restrictions on the Kurds so that it can start negotiations for membership in the European Union.

Iraqi Kurdistan is now the most peaceful region of Iraq, a place where there has not been a single terrorist attack on American forces. The Kurds often say that they have no friends but the mountains. Read this book and you will understand why in Iraq the Americans need to give the Kurds another friend.

—Andrew Apostolou

Parody

"Volvo's recent ads . . . highlight what safety advocates say is a shift toward speed and high performance in the auto industry and the glorification of those qualities in advertising."
***—Washington Post*, August 5, 2004**