the weekly standard

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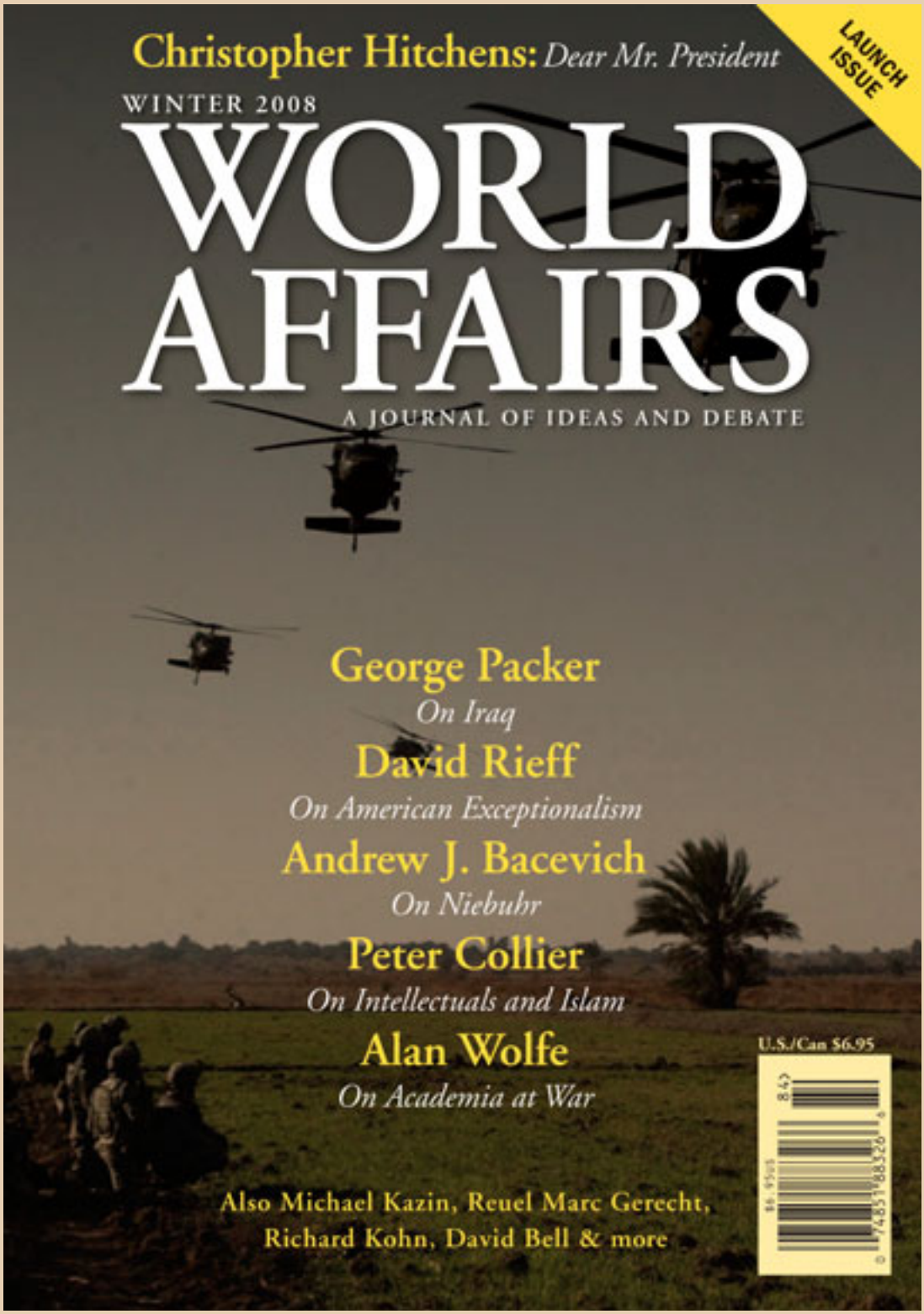
JENA:
THE AMAZING
DISAPPEARING
HATE CRIME
CHARLOTTE ALLEN

SLUGGING IT OUT

STEPHEN F. HAYES
reports from
the McCain corner

On Newsstands and Online January 22



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On the Horizon, a Climate Consensus

Why not replace the Kyoto Protocol with something that really works?

We live in what is, in many ways, a golden moment. Economic growth is globally strong, and, if security threats can be contained, this expansion is sustainable. Strong growth means increased use of energy. This raises two related, urgent issues: how to use energy without producing excess greenhouse gases, and how to reduce the threat to security from excess dependence on oil.

The Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gases, flawed to begin with, is running its course. The Montreal Protocol on ozone depletion, hammered out during the Reagan administration, offers some useful lessons on how to create Kyoto's replacement. Montreal built on wide agreement to take action; because the United States was willing, it could ask other nations to act, too. Guiding principles still make sense: strong U.S. leadership; tools like trading rights and carbon taxes; global representation at the negotiating table; and incentives so that nations like India and China can keep growing while cutting their emissions.

—By George P. Shultz

Che Guevara, Apostle of War

The revolutionary as global brand name—one that stands for violence and failure

October 9, 1967, was Che's Guevara's luckiest (and last) day. The itinerant socialist revolutionary was captured, killed, and immortalized; he was both martyred and raised in glory, to be invoked by would-be radicals for years to come. But the frozen-in-time Che is a sham, a haloed cult hero whose worship misleads the naïve, with their Che T-shirts, and makes today's world a more dangerous place.

If Che were alive, like doddering Fidel Castro, his string of failures would be obvious, and his role in the propaganda machine of Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, the latest Latin false messiah, would ring obviously hollow. For beyond his success as a poster boy for the defiant and a cash cow for hucksters, Che is an icon of what didn't work, either in Latin America or in the wider world. He failed to liberate the poor, despite thousands of lives wasted in guerrilla wars. He provoked repression and delayed democracy. And Latin America is still seeking the same fraudulent Che miracle in new clothing.

—William Ratliff

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They need more support if we want a safer food supply.

Recent events have exposed weaknesses in our nation's food safety system and shaken consumer confidence in the safety of the food supply. In fact, a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advisory panel concluded that the FDA "suffers from serious scientific deficiencies" and is not positioned to meet current or emerging food safety challenges that fall under the agency's area of responsibilities.

These results should come as no surprise. The FDA has been ignored for far too long. Over the last 15 years, the agency's budget has barely kept pace with inflation, and it is losing key staff at an alarming rate. The FDA has 800 fewer food experts than it had just four years ago – fewer inspectors, fewer scientists and fewer critical food safety staff.

Even though the FDA regulates 80 percent of America's food, it receives about one-third of the nation's food safety budget. That is unsustainable and unacceptable.

We believe Congress and the Administration need to double the FDA budget so that it can hire more highly-qualified staff and inspectors, invest in advanced technologies, build new lab facilities and expand its scientific programs. And we urge Congress and the Administration to work with the food industry and consumer groups to implement new prevention measures that will strengthen America's food safety system and protect consumers.

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the weekly Standard

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The Peaceable Political Kingdom

The Scrapbook has its sentimental moments, but last Saturday evening, January 5, in Manchester, New Hampshire, was not one of them.

We refer to the interlude between the Republican and Democratic presidential television debates when the moderator, ABC news reader Charles Gibson, asked all the candidates, from both parties, to "share the stage for a moment." On they came—Hillary and John E., Mitt and Mike, John M. and Barack—and swarmed around the stage for a few minutes, smiling, squeezing elbows, and whispering sweet nothings into one another's ears.

The Scrapbook was interested to see who's taller than whom, but ABC nearly swooned with excitement. The following day the evening news featured a segment on "that remarkable moment from last night's debate," in the words of news reader Dan Harris. It was "Charlie Gibson simply hoping for a moment of civility," exclaimed correspondent David Muir, who enlisted our own P.J. O'Rourke to share in the wonder of it all. "What are these candidates really thinking?" asked Muir, "and who do they really wanna hug?"

To his credit, P.J. took a suitably jaundiced view of the proceedings, preferring to wonder what the candidates might have been saying (Clinton to McCain: "John, I'll always love you, no matter what happens in November") than reading anything in particular into the spectacle.

The truth is that ABC News was particularly disingenuous here. Charles Gibson, who grew up in Washington, knows perfectly well that senators mingle on the Senate floor on a daily basis—do they never watch C-SPAN at ABC?—exchanging pleasantries and gossip, trading votes, indulging in the sort of meaningless small talk that's a second language for most politicians. Do Dan Harris and David Muir really believe that former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani had never before set eyes on Senator Hillary Clinton of New York, or that Governors Mitt Romney, Bill Richardson, and Mike Huckabee were strangers to one another?

The fact that these smart, calculating, ambitious politicians were able to mingle photogenically for five minutes on stage tells us nothing whatsoever except that they are practiced performers and dues-paying members of a very exclusive club.

The real problem here is not political differences between Democrats and Republicans, but the media mythology that vigorous debate about strongly held principles—in a TV studio or on Capitol Hill—is somehow "divisive," "hyper-partisan," or destructive to the nation; and that "unity," smiling faces, and embraces are the objects of democracy.

The Scrapbook assumes that the presidential candidates, Democratic and Republican, are all grown-ups, fully capable of debating their differences with vigor and passion, and practicing basic manners when thrown together in public. If we want to watch an outbreak of the Peaceable Kingdom, with real fake sincerity, and everybody crying and hugging in front of an audience, The Scrapbook will tune in to *Oprah*, thank you. ♦

The Britney Wire

The Scrapbook confesses a weakness for blogs about the celebrity-industrial complex and was amused last week to learn from several of them about an internal memo from Associated Press assistant bureau chief Frank Baker to the wire service's southern California editorial staff:

> Now and for the foreseeable future, virtually everything involving Britney [Spears] is a big deal. That doesn't mean every rumor makes it on the wire. But it does mean that we want to pay attention to what others are reporting and seek to confirm those stories that WE feel warrant the wire. And when we determine that we'll write something, we must expedite it.

Good to know that the venerable wire service is on the case; we wouldn't want to leave a story this important to the blogs. ♦

Don't Rain on my *Parade*

Last week's issue of *Parade* magazine featured Gail Sheehy's interview of Benazir Bhutto on the cover and asked of the assassinated Pakistani politician: "Is Benazir Bhutto America's best hope against al-Qaeda?" Let's hope not.

Readers may be wondering if this sounds familiar. Let's review the Sunday insert's, ahem, parade of posthumous features: An "In Step With" column profiling Gene Siskel was printed after the movie critic's death. (According to columnist James Brady, he didn't seem dead at all.) The Personality Parade section printed a reader's concern about Kentucky Derby winner Barbaro's health and answered optimistically that the horse was going to be fine—after he had already been put down. Another subscriber inquired if Lindsay Lohan would finally sober up in rehab. *Parade* quoted the head of the Promises center where the actress was staying who assured us that "Lohan

(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of October 18, 1999)

. . . seems committed to finally getting clean." Five days earlier, Lohan was charged with a DUI (her blood alcohol level was 0.12) and possession of cocaine.

Defending the decision to run the Bhutto cover story without an editor's note, publisher Randy Siegel explained that *Parade* had gone to press on December 21, six days before Bhutto's death, and that 32 million copies were already on their way to more than 400 newspapers. Besides, Siegel told the Associated Press, "We decided that this was an important interview to share with the American people."

Siegel's other concern was that the updating would cost millions of dollars and the delay would result in many newspapers not even getting *Parade*. But as Timothy McNulty, public editor for the *Chicago Tribune*, notes, "Though it is a moot question, how many readers would have complained if, for whatever the reason, the magazine was missing on Sunday?" Count us as one who would have been bereft without our *Parade*. ♦

Death of a Scoundrel

The Scrapbook notes that Philip Agee, the CIA agent who abandoned his post in 1969 to offer his services to the Soviet Union, and systematically published the names and addresses of hundreds of agents and sympathizers—resulting in the murder of several, including the CIA station chief in Athens, Richard Welch, in 1975—has died in Havana. We can't help but notice that Agee died at the comparatively premature age of 72 from peritonitis, an abdominal infection that, nowadays, is associated with botched surgery and substandard care—a cautionary note to admirers (Michael Moore, Jonathan Kozol, etc.) of the Cuban system.

Our satisfaction in speculating that Agee died of Cuban medicine in squalid exile was spoiled, but only slightly, by the Reuters story about his death, which identified Agee in its headline as a "CIA whistle-blower." As readers of The Scrapbook are painfully aware, Reuters has tended in recent years to editorialize by the use (or nonuse) of certain words—"terrorist" being one—and this is another example.

It goes without saying that a wire service ought to be particularly scrupulous about loaded language, but we'll say it anyway. And a "whistle-blower," in the lexicon of the press, is usually a heroic individual who, at some peril to himself, exposes cost overruns or corporate malfeasance. By no rational measure was Philip Agee a "whistle-blower." Of course, CIA agents are welcome to resign their jobs and publicly dissent from agency practices or American foreign policy. But Agee betrayed his oath, national security, and fellow agents—sometimes unto death—and sold out his country, for cash among other things, to its deadliest enemy during the Cold War.

There's a term for people like the late Philip Agee, and it isn't "whistle-blower." ♦

Casual

Gimme Shelter

You live, they say (usually accompanied by a sigh), and you learn. They say it; I don't. You live, I say (with an even deeper sigh), and you yearn. And I generally make it a point to yearn for things that I am certain to be unable to obtain. What's the point of yearning for the merely possible? "I call a person rich," says the character Ralph Touchett in Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady*, "when he can meet the demands of his imagination." I look at my bankbook, I consider my stock holdings, and realize that I am far from meeting those demands, and by now I am confident that I shall never meet them.

What I have found myself yearning for these days is real estate. Real estate may be the new porno. The newspapers are full of it. The back pages of the *New York Times Magazine* contain ads for estates in Connecticut and Virginia with stables and swimming pools and tennis courts and gently rolling lawns. Toward the front of the same magazine are ads for newly erected skyscrapers with condominium apartments starting at $2.6 million.

The Plaza Hotel, I note, is now being broken up into condominium apartments, the great grand Plaza, offering perhaps the most convenient location in Manhattan and lots of history. Everyone has read about that night in the 1920s when Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, the original fun couple, nicely schnockered as always, jumped into the Pulitzer Fountain in front of the Plaza.

I was once put up for five days in a suite in the Plaza, in lieu of a fee, by a magazine to whose wealthier sponsors I spoke. I felt as if I were living at Versailles, in an apartment down the hall from the Duc de Saint-Simon. I remember heavy red drapes, thick rose-colored carpets, gold-plated faucets in the shape of dolphins in the large bathroom. Unlike the Fitzgeralds, I did not take a refreshing dip in the Pulitzer Fountain but instead walked down to Lexington Avenue, where I bought a hot-pot so that I could make my own tea in the morning. Keeping a *pied-à-terre* in the Plaza does not seem to me at all a bad idea.

DARREN GYGI

The Weekend Journal section of the *Wall Street Journal* carries ads for four-story townhouses on near-north-side Chicago streets named Goethe, Schiller, Astor; 14,000-square-foot palazzos, with eight bedrooms and nine baths (and two half-baths), all for a mere $12 million. Eleven bathrooms might take some getting used to, since I have never lived in more than seven rooms, but I'm sure I could work this out.

Meanwhile I also have my eye on the Hamptons estate of the late Howard Gittis, described in the *Wall Street Journal* as the "right-hand man of takeover artist Ronald Perelman." Along with 15 acres of property, it has a renovated 15,000-square-foot house, with seven bedrooms, a staff apartment, and "a living-room fashioned out of a former ballroom." My staff—not yet hired—would be pleased to have use of the apartment, and would cotton, too, to the tennis court and swimming pool on the property. The only problem I can see is the asking price, which is $59 million. Still, it's lower than the price of the Forbes family ranch in Colorado, which is going for $175 million. Cunning negotiator that I am, I feel sure I could get the Gittis place down to $57.6 million.

Big-time players seem to have apartments and houses all over the world. Apartments in Manhattan and London and Paris, houses in Palm Beach, Barbados, Tuscany. One assumes that, while their owners are elsewhere, there are servants and agents and security firms looking after all this valuable real estate.

I, on the other, much grubbier hand, seem destined to be a single-domicile man. Twenty or so years ago I had the chance to acquire, as a second residence, my late mother-in-law's lovely two-story house on an artificial lake in Michigan for the beggarly sum of $45,000, and chose not to do so. I feared calls in the night telling me that the sump-pump had gone on the fritz, the windows needed replacing, the small pier had sunk.

Which doesn't stop me from noting an ad in the current *Town & Country* for Rendezvous Bay, in Anguilla, in the Lesser Antilles, that has residences in the works—occupancy in 2010—for from $3 to $20 million. Sounds promising. When I wake in the morning I shouldn't at all mind looking out on a vast panorama of water and islands and ever changing tropical skies.

Not going to happen, of course. Simplify, simplify, always simplify, is my motto, with the proviso that, while simplifying, it doesn't hurt to fantasize.

Joseph Epstein

the weekly Standard

The Surge Effect

The match is almost perfect. As the surge in Iraq has succeeded, the presidential campaign of John McCain has risen from the ashes. This is no coincidence, and the message is simple and unmistakable. The surge is now a powerful force in American politics. In the jargon of the 2008 presidential race, it's a game-changer.

The surge effect is the result of gains in Iraq well beyond the most optimistic dreams of the surge's advocates. The American military, led by General David Petraeus, has underpromised and over-delivered. Violence has dropped precipitously. So have attacks on Americans and combat deaths. Baghdad has been virtually secured, al Qaeda crushed, and sectarian bloodshed significantly reduced. Provinces once controlled by insurgents are scheduled to be turned over to well-trained Iraqi forces, starting with Anbar in the spring. The war, in short, is being won.

The media now say that Iraq is a secondary issue. But the voters, so far mostly on the Republican side, disagree. In New Hampshire last week, two-thirds of Republicans who voted in the primary told exit pollsters they support the war in Iraq. Oddly enough, they like the war more than they like President Bush.

For obvious reasons, McCain is the chief beneficiary of the surge effect. He has relentlessly promoted increasing the number of troops in Iraq and adopting a counterinsurgency strategy that stresses the protection and safety of Iraqi citizens. And a year ago, Bush bucked tremendous antiwar pressure, much of it from Republicans, and announced the surge strategy. Like McCain, he emphatically rejected the notion that the war was lost.

Last summer, when his campaign for the Republican presidential nomination was at a low point, McCain was urged by some of his advisers to downplay his support for the war. McCain rejected that advice. He knew how to evaluate a military plan, understood that the counterinsurgency strategy was different from what had been done before in Iraq, and knew what it could accomplish (and has).

Now other Republican candidates are jumping on the surge bandwagon. At last week's debate in South Carolina, Rudy Giuliani said he had endorsed the surge, just like McCain. "Not at the time," McCain responded, referring to the time before Bush's announcement. McCain said he had "called for the change in strategy. That's the difference." It's an important difference politically.

Democrats haven't felt the surge effect yet, and it shows. Democratic congressional leaders insist the surge has achieved little that matters. Until questioned in a televised debate in New Hampshire, the Democratic presidential candidates had largely ignored the surge.

Barack Obama was the most disappointing in the debate. He offered an imaginative excuse for dismissing the surge: that the embrace of American forces in Iraq by Sunnis, the ruling ethnic group under Saddam Hussein, had been prompted by the Democratic election victory in 2006. The Sunnis were suddenly fearful of an American pullout that would leave them vulnerable to Shia oppression.

But the Sunni Awakening was a rebellion against the brutality of al Qaeda, the one-time ally of the Sunnis in the insurgency. And it began well before the American election. Indeed Sunni leaders have made clear that the Awakening happened because of their confidence the Americans would be sticking around to protect them from al Qaeda reprisals.

Hillary Clinton's response was equally amazing because she passed up a chance to disown her indefensible suggestion last September that General Petraeus was lying about the surge's success. At a Senate hearing, she told him that believing his testimony required the "willing suspension of disbelief." Asked if she still feels that way, Clinton said, "That's right."

This level of denial about the surge among Democrats is politically dangerous. Democratic voters may be immune to the surge effect, but independents are not. If the surge continues to bring stability to Iraq, independents—who produced the Democratic triumph in the 2006 election—almost certainly will begin to shift their support. They have no partisan commitment to defeat in Iraq. Like most Americans, they prefer victory.

Democrats are gambling on two things. One is that the Shia-led Iraqi government won't take steps toward reconciliation with Sunnis. The other is that the withdrawal of the five American surge brigades will lead to a renewal of violence. There's a chance this will happen, just not a very good one. Reconciliation is proceeding rapidly at the provincial level in Iraq. And now that Sunnis have mostly given up their insurgency, violence is unlikely to return to anything like pre-surge levels.

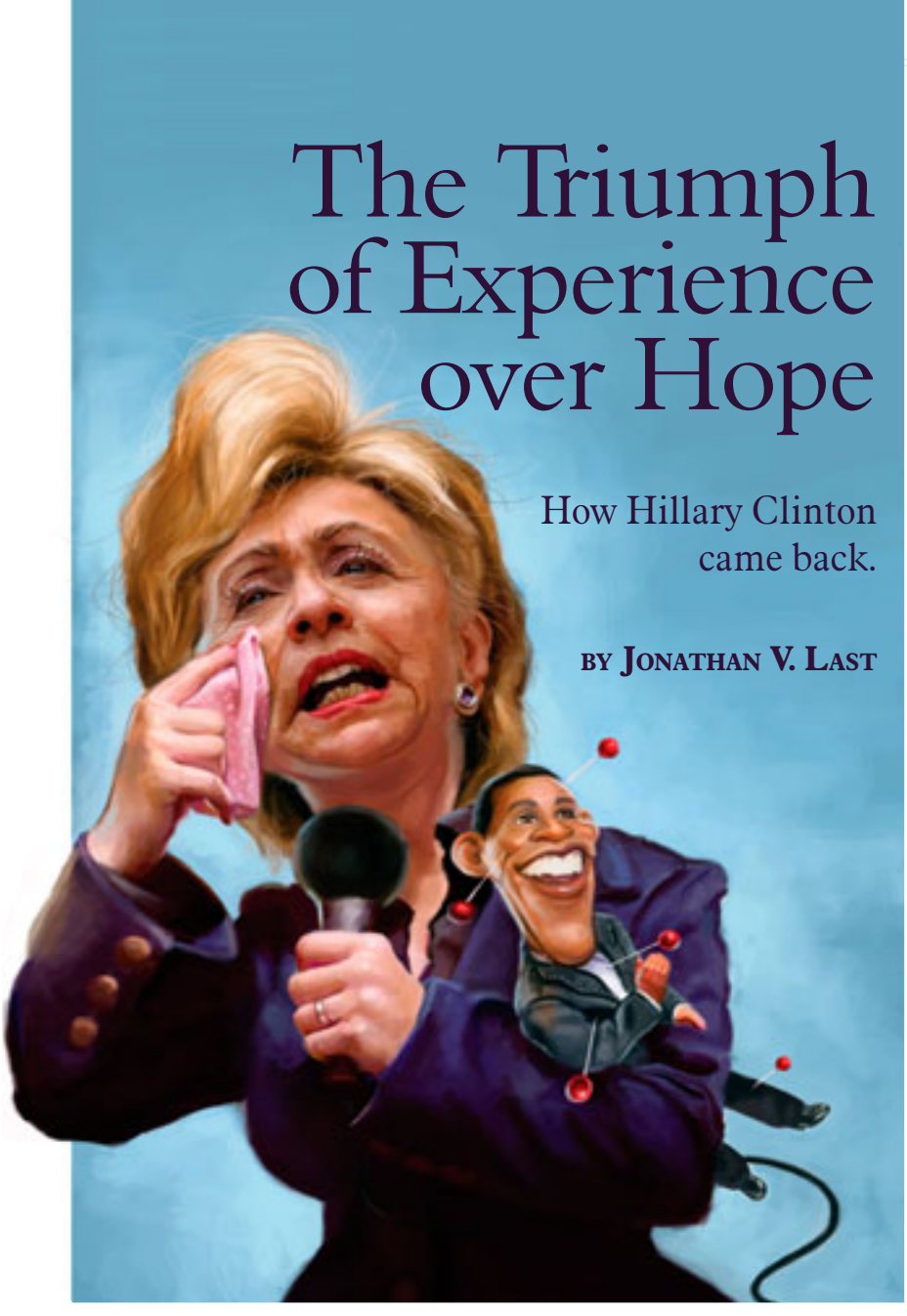
Of course McCain and Bush have gambled, too. McCain has staked his campaign and Bush his presidency on a victory and a free and independent Iraq that promotes America's national security. From the evidence of the growing surge effect, their gamble is paying off.

—Fred Barnes

The Triumph of Experience over Hope

How Hillary Clinton came back.

BY JONATHAN V. LAST



Manchester, N.H.

It is popular to attribute Hillary Clinton's poll-defying surprise victory in New Hampshire to a moment 24 hours before the voting began when she got all misty talking about how "personal" the election was for her. The data suggest otherwise.

As Jay Cost of *Real Clear Politics* astutely points out, Clinton and Barack Obama had an almost even split among voters who decided just before the election. Obama won voters who decided a month to three days before the election. And Clinton won easily among voters who decided more than a month before they went to the polls (48 percent to 31 percent). In other words, Clinton's victory wasn't the result of voters' changing their minds at the last minute; it was the result of Clinton voters' being mobilized.

The candidate's moist eyes might have helped put a few more bodies in the voting booths. But in the last 72 hours of the race, the Clinton campaign radically altered its message to voters, and these changes probably had at least as much of an effect on her turnout.

As Obama surged in Iowa, Clinton focused heavily on her biography and tried, clumsily, to snatch the mantle of "change" from him. The closest she came to attacking her rivals was to say that "some people think you get change by demanding it and some people think you get change by hoping for it."

She used this same formulation at a gathering of 3,500 New Hampshire Democratic party donors the night after Iowa and was booed by Obama supporters. The next day, Clinton began trying out different messages on the campaign trail. At the Saint Anselm debate, she sketched out a critique of Obama as being untrustworthy, noting that he had "changed positions within three years on . . . a range of issues." Clinton noted that Obama had changed his mind on the scope and kind of health care reform he favored. As a Senate candidate, Obama had said he would vote against the Patriot Act and would oppose the Iraq war, Clinton pointed out; once in office, he voted for both the Patriot Act and the appropriations bill for the war.

Later in the debate, Clinton directly attacked Obama's theme of hope, saying that voters needed a "reality check" and that it was wrong to give them "false hope." And during a discussion about withdrawal from Iraq, Clinton observed, "I don't think anyone can predict what the consequences will be, and I think we have to be ready for whatever they might be."

The next day, Sunday, Clinton held a rally in Nashua where she expanded on these themes. Prefacing her remarks by stipulating that her opponents were "good people," she proclaimed, "If you give a speech saying that you are going to vote against the Patriot Act, and you don't—that's not change. If you say that you are working to prevent members of Congress from having lunch with lobbyists, but they can have meals standing up—that's not change. If you say you passed a patient's bill of rights but you forget to add that it never got turned into law—that's not change." Clinton went on painting Obama, and to a lesser degree Edwards, as unreliable over-promisers, using specific examples. She would repeat this litany many times on the stump over the next 48 hours.

JASON SEILER

Jonathan V. Last is a staff writer at The Weekly Standard.

In Nashua she also began trying to use Obama's oratorical skills against him, claiming that there was a difference between "rhetoric and reality." Quoting the old Mario Cuomo line, she insisted that "you campaign in poetry . . . you govern in prose."

Monday began with the near-tear incident at an early-morning event in Portsmouth. A few hours later, Clinton was in Dover where a local voter named Francine Torge introduced her, saying, "One of the other candidates has been compared to JFK. And he was a wonderful leader who gave us a lot of hope. But he was assassinated. And Lyndon Baines Johnson actually did all his good work and got Republicans and Democrats to pass a lot of his measures."

The campaign disavowed Torge's bizarre remarks. Yet the Hillary-LBJ comparison seems to be the Clinton campaign's concept. That same afternoon, Clinton praised Lyndon Johnson for passing the Civil Rights Act. Still later in the day she brought up Johnson again, saying, "You know, today Senator Obama used President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to criticize me. He basically compared himself to our greatest heroes because they gave great speeches. President Kennedy was in Congress for 14 years. He was a war hero. He was a man of great accomplishments and readiness to be president. . . . Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led a movement. He was gassed. He was beaten. He was jailed. And he gave a speech that was one of the most beautifully, profoundly important speeches ever written in America, the 'I have a dream' speech. And then he worked with President Johnson to get the civil rights laws passed."

During her Dover appearance, Clinton also talked about the world being a dangerous place. She cited the example of Gordon Brown and the two U.K. terrorist attacks which followed his taking office. She claimed that it was not an accident that terrorists decided to "test" him just after he came to power. "I hope I don't face any of those" types of tests, she said. "But if I do, I'll be ready."

While Hillary Clinton was in Dover, Bill Clinton was in Hanover, complaining that Obama had gotten a free ride from the press. In a fit of pique, President Clinton called Obama's antiwar posture "a fairy tale." On the next day, voters went to the polls and gave Hillary Clinton a victory.

The campaign's wild, almost blind, swinging looked desperate because it was. And some of Clinton's messages (warning against "false hope"; holding up the legislative accomplishments of Lyndon Johnson) are easily ridiculed. Yet they were effective in motivating voters—particularly the women, who gave her the decisive edge in New Hampshire.

It's unclear which messages worked best: the warnings about Obama's inexperience; or perhaps the charges that he is less of a change agent than he appears. What is clear is that Hillary Clinton can take a punch—and throw several in return. We still don't know if the same can be said for Obama. ♦

Unity08, We Hardly Knew Ye

The death of another third-party dream.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

"Your torch has been lit!" read the email I got last summer. And now my torch has guttered out! Yours too, maybe.

The email came from a political organization called Unity08. "Organization" may not be the right word. I think Unity08 had a small office somewhere, but I was never certain that it had anything like a corporeal existence. Mostly it existed in the vast, virtual world of pure possibility that we call the Internet, where an ever-increasing number of people, I've noticed, spend an ever-increasing portion of their lives. Unity08 was a creature of cyberspace, made up of just such people.

"Our mission is difficult," admitted Doug Bailey, the group's co-founder, in that introductory email. But, he said, it was readily achievable: "We will determine the crucial issues that our country must face, we will attain ballot access in all fifty states, and we will elect the next president and vice president of the United States in 2008."

I admired Bailey's authoritative tone, which he had evidently acquired as a former aide to President Gerald Ford, a onetime Republican political consultant, and an impossible-to-shake Washington hanger-on. A number of journalists from the nonideological media were wowed too, and when he and his colleagues—including former Maine governor Angus King and Carter administration insiders Gerald Rafshoon and Hamilton Jordan—launched their movement at a press conference in May 2006, they were showered with positive reviews and heartfelt atta-boys. Yet it was not to last. Late last Thursday night another email went out, announcing that Unity08 was shutting down. (I almost wrote "shutting its doors," but the Internet doesn't have doors.)

In truth there was always reason to be skeptical about Unity08's future as a new independent political party. The idea behind it was nearly as old as our democracy itself. For as long as we've had two parties, someone has been trying to invent a third. It never works.

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

But in keeping with the doe-eyed utopianism that accompanies every nonpornographic Internet enterprise, Bailey and his colleagues were certain that this time the old idea would be made new, and plausible, by virtue of being placed on the Internet. They would enlist party members online, write the platform online, and then, at last, hold a convention online, with nominees for president and vice president chosen by people sitting at home in front of their Dells.

"You'll vote, you'll decide," said the Unity08 spokesman, the actor Sam Waterston, in a TV ad. "Not the consultants and spin doctors. Not the special interests. Not the lobbyists." Just you. At home in your PJs.

The Internet wasn't the only innovation in Unity08's approach, or even its most important one. Third-party movements are usually born in a mood of hyper-partisanship—the feeling that, in the words of the 1968 third-party presidential candidate George Wallace, "there's not a dime's worth of difference between the two parties." Unity08, by contrast, would be a new partisan entity founded in a mood of *non*partisanship. A third party was necessary because there was *too much difference* between the two parties: Republican and Democratic politicians were so busy appealing to their ideological soul mates in their political "base" that they had ignored the voters who were neither conservative nor liberal, or who were liberal on some things and conservative on others, or vice versa, or wishy-washy on everything. Centrists, they were called. In moving so far to their respective extremes, the parties had abandoned the precious center and thereby corrupted democracy. In an ideal world, according to Unity08, there really wouldn't be a dime's worth of difference between the two parties.

Unlike other party manifestos, Unity08's manifesto declined to take positions on political issues. That would be divisive. Instead it categorized issues. There were "crucial issues"—education, the national debt, terrorism, nuclear proliferation—and merely "important issues": gay marriage, abortion, gun control. The manifesto's central contention was that politicians should concentrate on the crucial issues and leave the merely important issues for later. Unity08 was another one of those "single-issue" parties, in other words. But its single issue was that politicians should deal with the issues.

You don't have to be a political scientist to predict the problems built into Unity08's approach. Even if the party had succeeded in its mission, transcended partisanship, overcome ideology, united the American public, and placed the new agenda of crucial issues before the voters, we would still face the knotty business of figuring out what to do about, say, the national debt or nuclear proliferation. And then what? Bickering might have ensued, divisions opened up, sides would be taken—and then: partisanship. We'd be right back where we started.

Lucky for them, Unity08 never got that far, and it's just as well; the rancor might have spoiled the idealism of Unity08's members, who are men and women of delicate sensibilities. There aren't a lot of them, either. By the time it shut down, Unity08's online mailing list numbered 124,000, acquired after 18 months of lavish press coverage and ubiquitous web presence. The figure was far below the 20 million that Rafshoon had once predicted.

"It's absolutely discouraging," Robert Bingham, Unity08's last CEO, told me Friday. "You can build a movement around a person, around a big idea. But around a process? That's pretty hard." He put on a brave front, of course, mentioning how far the presidential campaign had moved in Unity08's direction. "Our message is starting to resonate. You can definitely see people moving toward a unity option." As for now, he said, "we'll close down the website, go back to the P.O. box, stop answering the phone, and see what happens."

I asked about Bailey and Rafshoon. "They're moving on," Bingham said. "They're looking at a draft Bloomberg movement."

The dream will never die. ♦

The Giuliani Implosion

From frontrunner to also-ran in eight short weeks.

BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

It's a good thing for Rudy Giuliani that he believes in the power of optimism. These days his campaign needs some. For most of 2007 the former New York City mayor led the Republican field in national polls, some state polls, and money raised from individual contributors. He appeared to have convinced at least some conservatives that his opinions on abortion rights (he's for them) and gun control (he supports "reasonable restrictions") were less important than his tough stance against terrorism, his unabashed support for supply-side economics, and his promise to appoint what he called "strict constructionist" judges to the federal bench. Poll after poll showed that Republicans believed Giuliani was the GOP's best chance to hold the White House in 2008.

Those days are over. In about eight weeks Giuliani has gone from frontrunner to second-tier candidate. He lost Iowa and New Hampshire, finishing nowhere close to first. His campaign is pulling resources from this week's contests in Michigan, South Carolina, and Nevada to focus on the January 29 Florida primary, where polls still show him in the lead (by a shrinking margin). The news late last week that senior staff are working without pay put the Giuliani campaign on the defensive, causing it to release cash-on-hand figures showing it isn't broke. On the campaign trail, Giuliani is asked most often about his campaign strategy of not seriously competing in all the contested primaries and caucuses before Florida, then using the momentum from winning that contest to do well in large states like California and New York that vote on February 5. Giuliani says he isn't worried. Conceding New Hampshire, he said, "Maybe we've lulled our opponents into a false sense of confidence now." "Maybe" is right.

What explains Giuliani's slide into irrelevance? Fred Siegel, author of a Giuliani biography and an editor at *City Journal*, says the former mayor's fate is largely out of his control: "Rudy got caught in a windshear—the fall of Hillary, and the rise of Huckabee and McCain." In this view, Hillary Clinton's missteps in the Democratic race removed the chief rationale for Giuliani's candidacy—that he was the best candidate to face down the Clinton machine. Clinton was also Giuliani's chief foil on the campaign trail, providing the mayor with an opponent against whom he could rally Republicans who might otherwise have been wary of the thrice-married New Yorker. Meanwhile, the success of the surge policy in Iraq revived John McCain's candidacy, drawing national security hawks away from Giuliani. And Mike Huckabee's appearance on the national stage provided social conservatives with a likable champion on the issues they think are most important.

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Yet the "windshear" doesn't account for the horrible spate of publicity for Giuliani beginning in mid-November—after which publicity the Giuliani campaign began to tank. The indictment of former New York City police commissioner and Giuliani protégé Bernard Kerik on corruption charges, and a report in the *Politico* that the mayor's office may have paid improperly for trips Giuliani took to visit then-girlfriend Judith Nathan in the Hamptons, forced the mayor into a defensive crouch. While the Kerik story has subsided and an investigation by the *New York Times* showed the mayor's office paid for the Hamptons trips properly, Giuliani was unable to recover before the Iowa caucuses.

The result in Iowa wasn't anything for Giuliani to brag about—and that's putting it charitably. The Giuliani campaign once hoped to finish a surprise third in Iowa, but ended up in sixth place with 4 percent of the vote. Gadfly antiwar congressman Ron Paul won 7,000 more votes than Giuliani. On caucus night Giuliani campaign aides circulated a research document arguing that the Iowa GOP caucuses are unrepresentative of the electorate in Iowa and nationwide. They had to argue that because Giuliani's defeat in Iowa was comprehensive.

According to the Iowa entrance poll, Giuliani won 2 percent of the caucus-goers who said they were born-again or evangelical Christians. And he did little better among non-evangelicals, drawing only 6 percent support. He took 4 percent of caucus-goers who said they were Republicans, and just 1 percent of independents. (Most independents who voted in the Iowa Republican caucuses voted for Ron Paul.) Giuliani's highest number in the entrance poll—16 percent—came from the 7 percent of caucus-goers who said the most important candidate quality was "electability." Mitt Romney drew the most support from those voters, however, with 51 percent.

Giuliani performed little better in New Hampshire, where he finished fourth, two percentage points behind former Arkansas governor Mike

Matthew Continetti, associate editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD, *edits the* CAMPAIGN STANDARD *at weeklystandard.com.*

Huckabee and one point ahead of Representative Paul. Here, too, Giuliani's performance was lackluster among all demographics. According to the New Hampshire exit poll, not only did Giuliani lose the pro-life vote, he also lost the pro-choice vote—a surprising result, since he is the only pro-choice Republican running this cycle. Giuliani drew support from only 6 percent of independents. The most liberal Republican in the field had the support of only 9 percent of self-described liberals voting in the Republican primary. According to the exit poll, an overwhelming majority of voters in the Republican primary said they were worried about terrorism. Only 8 percent of them supported Giuliani.

The New Hampshire defeat was particularly biting, because Giuliani made a play for the state in late 2007. He visited New Hampshire more than any other state. His campaign spent $3 million in advertising in New Hampshire during the last two months of 2007. All this failed to move his numbers. People close to the campaign say Mitt Romney's attacks on Giuliani on guns and immigration doomed the former mayor. So the Giuliani campaign abandoned its New Hampshire effort.

Meanwhile, Giuliani often seemed disconnected from the national political debate. "You have to be engaged in the dialogue," says a consultant. Giuliani rarely was. Instead he looked backward, discussing his record in New York.

That record is impressive, of course. But it is also moderate-to-liberal in many respects. Which means that Giuliani can't discuss his achievements without creating a space for his opponents to bring up those parts of his record—guns, immigration—that conservatives most dislike.

This is, in the end, what hurt Giuliani in Iowa and New Hampshire. In order to correct for his social liberalism, Giuliani tacked as far right on national security and economic issues as he could. But the social liberalism turned off conservatives, and the foreign policy and economic conservatism turned off moderates and liberals. And Giuliani was left alone. ♦

Symbolitics as Usual

A guide to non-instant election analysis.

BY JOHN J. DIIULIO JR.

For those who thought that Hillary Clinton was through because Barack Obama won the Iowa caucus, or because the polls supposedly proved she would lose in New Hampshire, or because they let the personal, ideological, or partisan wish be father to the thought—and for those who made proclamations about John McCain being kaput, Mike Huckabee having no chance, and Ron Paul staging a surge—herewith a political science recovery plan.

But first, to sugarcoat the academic pills, swallow a catchall election-analysis concept that might help to discipline the discourse from now through November: symbolitics.

The term was coined during the 2004 election season by David Kuo, former deputy director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives at the White House, and it complements nicely an important contribution by the late, great political scientist Donald E. Stokes, coauthor of the 1960 classic *The American Voter*.

That book was the first systematic, scholarly look into how Americans vote in national elections. As the data-bearing punch-cards whizzed through first-generation computers, Stokes, the junior member of a University of Michigan research team, noticed that the results of the elections of the 1950s could not be adequately explained by the usual variables: party identification, ideological orientation, and candidates' positions on the issues that mattered most to voters. Another factor, harder to categorize or quantify, loomed large: namely, the degree to which candidates were linked in voters' hearts and minds with conditions, goals, or symbols that were almost universally approved or disapproved by the mass electorate.

Stokes's key insight was that Americans increasingly were choosing parties and candidates not solely or even mainly by their real or perceived differences on policy questions, even questions that powerfully divided the electorate, but, instead, by the candidates' perceived association with broader conditions, goals, or symbols that virtually all voting-age adults either embraced or rejected.

For instance, nearly everybody is for "public safety" and against "lawlessness." No candidate has ever run on a platform promising "more crime" or "less prosperity." Almost everyone resonates to "resolute leadership" and rejects its opposites, including "flip-flopping." There is never one party advocating "corruption" or "special interests" while the other excoriates the corrupt and the greedy. There is no candidate who campaigns against "change" or admits being light on "experience" or scoffs at calls to make government "work better" or "cost less."

In post-1950s national campaigns, the difference between steady electoral success and sudden electoral disaster has increasingly turned on each contender's ability to strengthen voters' perception of his link to what the public generally considers good and weaken their perception of his link to what the public deems bad. Kuo dubbed this symbolitics, and

John J. DiIulio Jr. is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD *and the author of* Godly Republic: A Centrist Blueprint for America's Faith-Based Future *(2007).*

today, with television and 24-hour cable news networks and the Internet, it matters more than ever.

For starters, think about Ronald Reagan's 1984 "morning in America" (patriotism, peace, prosperity) popularity among not only "Reagan Democrats" but also some issue-minded political progressives who nonetheless liked his strong, sincere, and sunny public persona. Recall how George H.W. Bush dinged Michael Dukakis for wavering on flag-waving. Revisit the volatility in the 1992 polls that at various points gave "outsider" H. Ross Perot ("You see, you just look under the hood and fix it!") a plurality. Or analyze the content of John Kerry's 2004 speeches ("reporting for duty") and count how often he made "security" his tough-on-terrorism mantra.

Again, it's not all pure symbolitics. Stokes took pains to stress that presidential elections always blend symbolitics ("I'm the candidate of change!") with position-taking ("I'll give health care coverage to the uninsured!"). Thus, even if Obama should turn out to be not merely the latest, but truly among the greatest masters of symbolitics, he will still have to take positions on the issues in the end. Will this weaken or widen his symbolitics appeal? Probably weaken it—but stay tuned.

Overestimating Obama—if, indeed, he has been overestimated—can at least be chalked up to the fact that he has been in the public eye for only a few years, and that even many conservative cold fish warm a bit to his uplifting rhetoric. What is amazing, though, is that after Clinton's loss in the Iowa caucus by nearly 8 points, veteran Clinton watchers, longtime friends and foes alike, discounted or disregarded the Clintons' proven skill in symbolitics.

Recall the image makeover Bill Clinton's campaign undertook in 1992, as revealed in an internal document uncovered some months later by Michael Kelly and reported in the *New York Times* shortly after the election, on November 14. After five months of adverse publicity and sagging poll numbers, the Clintons' advisers "proposed the construction of a new image for Mr. and Mrs. Clinton: an honest, plain-folks idealist and his loving wife." As Kelly documented, this symbolitics strategy "required a campaign of behavior modification and media manipulation so elaborate that its outline ran to 14 single-spaced pages." It explicitly called for depicting Bill Clinton as an "agent of change," plus holding town-hall style forums and events "with her friends where Hillary can laugh, cry, do her mimicry." This year it took the Clinton operation only five days to react to bad news.

Whoever the candidates are this fall, the general election campaign will see unprecedented spending on television ads. Ted Brader, a young political scientist at the University of Michigan, has analyzed thousands of ads produced by presidential and congressional campaigns. In *Campaigning for Hearts and Minds* (2006), he details how most ads appeal either to voters' fears or to their enthusiasms. Among his many fascinating findings, it turns out that emotion-tugging ads are more, not less, effective among voters who are fairly well informed about and attentive to particular policy differences between the candidates.

In the current primary campaign, Obama is like a nonstop enthusiasm ad. Hillary hit back in New Hampshire with some teary enthusiasm of her own (sincere, I think), even as she pushed the symbolitics fear button via references that seemed calculated to get voters worrying over whether Obama will combat terrorists. Obama is gifted at speaking "poetry" on the stump, but he has probably seen the last of an uptight Hillary mumbling wonkish "prose" in reply. Indeed, he is almost certainly in for a symbolitics counteroffensive the likes of which we have never seen.

But symbolitics isn't everything. Even given all the great firsts that Obama's electoral success would represent, if he beats Hillary for the Democratic nomination, he will still need to flesh out his intelligently left-leaning (as opposed to boilerplate liberal) positions. Obama will need to rebut, say, a conservative John McCain's policies on Iraq, border security, school reform, tax cuts, abortion rights, and other matters. Hand-to-hand combat on policy details may or may not turn out to be another Obama strength.

This much, however, is certain: Spirited sermons echoing Obama's book *The Audacity of Hope* (2006) will soon wear thin, and above-the-fray appeals to bipartisanship will ring ever more hollow. At present, compared with every other major hopeful in both parties, Obama does seem short on policy-relevant, change-making experience. The analogy with the young John F. Kennedy will carry him only so far (see PT 109), nor can he coast indefinitely on narrative notes from the *Harvard Law Review*, his years as a community organizer and state legislator, his support for congressional ethics legislation, or even his opposition to going to war in Iraq.

Next, to free oneself from excessive deference to opinion surveys, it is also necessary to really and truly understand that no poll is perfect, and that averaging results from polls taken by different organizations, at different times, in different ways, with different samples and sample

LES STONE / SYGMA / CORBIS

sizes is no sounder than relying on what the few biggest, best, and latest polls record.

Consider a poll's margin of error. Keep in mind that "plus" and "minus" count, as it were, on each side. To wit: If a legitimate poll—one with an adequate sample size, nonbiased wording, and so on—finds that Obama leads Clinton by 8 points, with a margin of error of plus or minus 4 points, it has ascertained something significant but far from oracular: to wit, that on the date the poll was taken, Obama would have beaten Clinton by 16 points (plus 4 for him, minus 4 for her) or tied her (minus 4 for him, plus 4 for her) or reached a result anywhere in between.

Polling, including exit polling, has improved, but sampling is still an art, not a science. It may happen only rarely, but Election Day factors like door-to-door canvassing and other turnout tactics can beget actual returns that deviate from forecasts based on even the finest "likely voter" survey.

Finally, the ostensibly pivotal moments in recent electoral history weren't actually the product of huge electoral swings. For example, the Republicans' victory in the 1994 House elections—the Gingrich revolution—wouldn't have happened but for narrow victories in 13 House districts, while nationally GOP House candidates took just 52.4 percent of the votes cast. Similarly, the Democrats' 2006 victory in the House occurred even though most voters liked or trusted Democrats only slightly more than they liked or trusted Republicans. Each and every electoral-analysis bromide since 1980—the "new conservative bloc," the "angry white males," the "soccer moms," the "security moms," the "NASCAR dads," to name a few—has proven to be bogus as an explanation of election outcomes.

In sum, symbolitics is a clarifying concept, not a predictive explanation or theory. Political science tells us that polls are imperfect. There is, alas, no substitute for state-by-state, election-by-election analysis, undertaken with well-informed circumspection. The prerequisite is patience. ♦

Living in a Dream World

The political fantasies of foreign service officers.

BY MICHAEL RUBIN

As pundits begin to write their obituaries of the Bush presidency, much ink will be spilled over foreign policy. As always, the victors will pen the history. And in the case of the Bush administration, those victors are the permanent bureaucracy at the State Department—the Foreign Service. Presidents come and presidents go, but the labor union that manages foreign relations is forever.

Washington has always been a place where down is up, but nowhere is the world quite so inverted as at the State Department. While American forces fight wars in Afghan mountains and Iraqi deserts, train counterterror troops in Philippine jungles, and stare down North Korean soldiers across the Demilitarized Zone, Foggy Bottom remains as removed from reality as Lilliput, Brobdingnag, and Laputa ever were.

The State Department's in-house magazine, *State*, records the sheer inanity that is a staple of Foreign Service thinking. Each issue highlights a "post of the month" in which diplomats describe their home away from home. The essays would make local tourism boards proud, but they also provide a mirror into the alternate universe inhabited by all too many U.S. diplomats.

Here's a classic from the June 2004 *State*: The economic-commercial officer at the U.S. embassy in Colombo, Sri Lanka, writes that "What's been billed as 'the best place in South Asia to live' is also the site of a brutal 20-year war that's left approximately 64,000 dead." Still, "if Sri Lanka could settle its conflict peacefully, it could be a model for the region and the world." Indeed. And if North Korea gave its people freedom and embraced democracy, it could be as successful as South Korea.

Certain diplomats evince a strange nostalgia: "Armenia was once considered the Silicon Valley of the Soviet Union, providing advanced avionics for Soviet aircraft and supercomputers," the public affairs officer in Yerevan explained in February 2005. Ah yes, things were great for the Armenians under Soviet rule. Housing for diplomats under communism? Less great.

Take Mongolia: "Until 2002, embassy staffers lived mainly in a Communist-era apartment block near the chancery affectionately known as 'Faulty Towers.' Today, almost all staff members live in Czech-designed townhouses or apartments in a modern, gated housing compound 15 minutes from the embassy," the political and public affairs officer wrote in a June 2007 feature. Diplomats there, we learn, can even enjoy pizza delivery.

Others flail a bit when it comes to meting out praise. In October 2001, the wife of a security officer in Bangladesh wrote, "Another benefit of living in Bangladesh is its proximity to other fascinating lands." Something like the benefits of living in New Jersey—so close to New York.

Not all in *State* is fluff, though. The bearers of the American standard are vigilant for democratic progress. Like the crucified in *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, they are

Michael Rubin is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

in a quest requiring that they always look on the bright side of life: In a February 2007 feature on Cambodia, the family member of a diplomat noted that "Cambodia is enjoying a measure of peace and stability it has not seen in more than a generation"—a low hurdle, if ever there was one. Yes, Cambodia is in the bottom tier of Freedom House rankings, but "criminal charges were dropped against some political opponents."

Things are likewise looking up in Africa. In February 2006, for example, the public affairs officer at the U.S. embassy in Maseru opined that "Lesotho is a good fit with U.S. policy goals in Africa such as promoting democratic values, free market economies, and health." Too bad that the average Lesothan, because of AIDS, does not live past 40. Too bad, also, that "married women are considered legal minors" by law. Happily, "in practice, professional women are on equal footing with male colleagues." Perhaps this is why the writer concludes that "Lesotho has the potential of becoming a model in Africa during the 21st century."

Meanwhile, "Transition is the best word to describe Angola today: transition from war to peace, from humanitarian assistance to development, from trailers to a new $40 million chancery," writes the political officer in nearby Luanda in September 2004.

Some of us remember good old Angola, playground of the Cold War, scene of horrendous battles between the Soviet-backed MPLA and the U.S.-backed UNITA, as a place where regime opponents were executed and elections routinely stolen. But not our political officer. Perhaps peace would have come earlier, he notes, had not "the Reagan administration supported those opposed to the communist-led MPLA, making Angola a major Cold War battlefield." That Ronald Reagan: He failed to understand that those Cuban troops and their Russian advisers were merely helping the Marxist president "[fight] off coup attempts."

Radical Islam too often causes our U.S. diplomatic rhetoricians to avert their eyes. The public affairs officer at the U.S. embassy in Mali, an impoverished democracy, airbrushes its growing problem with intolerant Islamism: "Mali's moderate Islam also serves to dilute the harsh rhetoric of fundamental Islam that is spread by itinerant preachers," he wrote in April 2003. Perhaps, but it was not itinerant preachers that built the King Fahd Bridge, the main crossing point over the Niger river in the capital, Bamako. Likewise, itinerant preachers did not build the Muammar Qaddafi Islamic Center, Bamako's largest mosque.

And the beauties of moderate Islam cannot hold a candle to our many, many allies in the Global War on Terrorism. To listen to U.S. diplomats posted abroad, almost every country is a trusted ally in the war on terror. Some are truthful. "Azerbaijan gave the United States its unqualified support in the wake of September 11 and offered assistance to U.S. efforts against international terrorism," wrote two diplomats in March 2003. Others less so: "Oman is a strong ally in the global war on terror," wrote the U.S. ambassador there in January 2005. That same year, Muscat voted with the United States at the United Nations 9 percent of the time.

If our diplomats are tickled by the camaraderie of the Global War on Terror, they are less enthused by George W. Bush's freedom agenda. Some pay lip service to the notion: Diplomats at the U.S. embassy in Cairo boast that, "The U.S. Mission to Egypt reaches out to the Egyptian people to advance peace, democracy, and prosperity . . . through a variety of programs with the government of Egypt and Egypt's growing civil society." Less on the reaching out to those on the outs with the government of Egypt, including independent civil society organizations, proponents of (now canceled) municipal elections, free political parties, and an impartial judiciary.

The public affairs officer at the new U.S. embassy in Tripoli puts Foggy Bottom's struggle with democracy promotion more eloquently: "Promoting democracy in Libya is the work of a generation," he wrote in a March 2007 essay. Tunisia, a police state that rivals Libya for lack of political freedom is, in the assessment of the community liaison officer there, "standing on the brink of becoming a modern, First World nation."

Not all *State*'s correspondents are enamored of smoke and mirrors, nor are all diplomats willing to apologize for autocracies. Ramón Negrón and John Vance, respectively the political-economic officer and public affairs officer at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, did not gloss over the difficulty of life in Cuba.

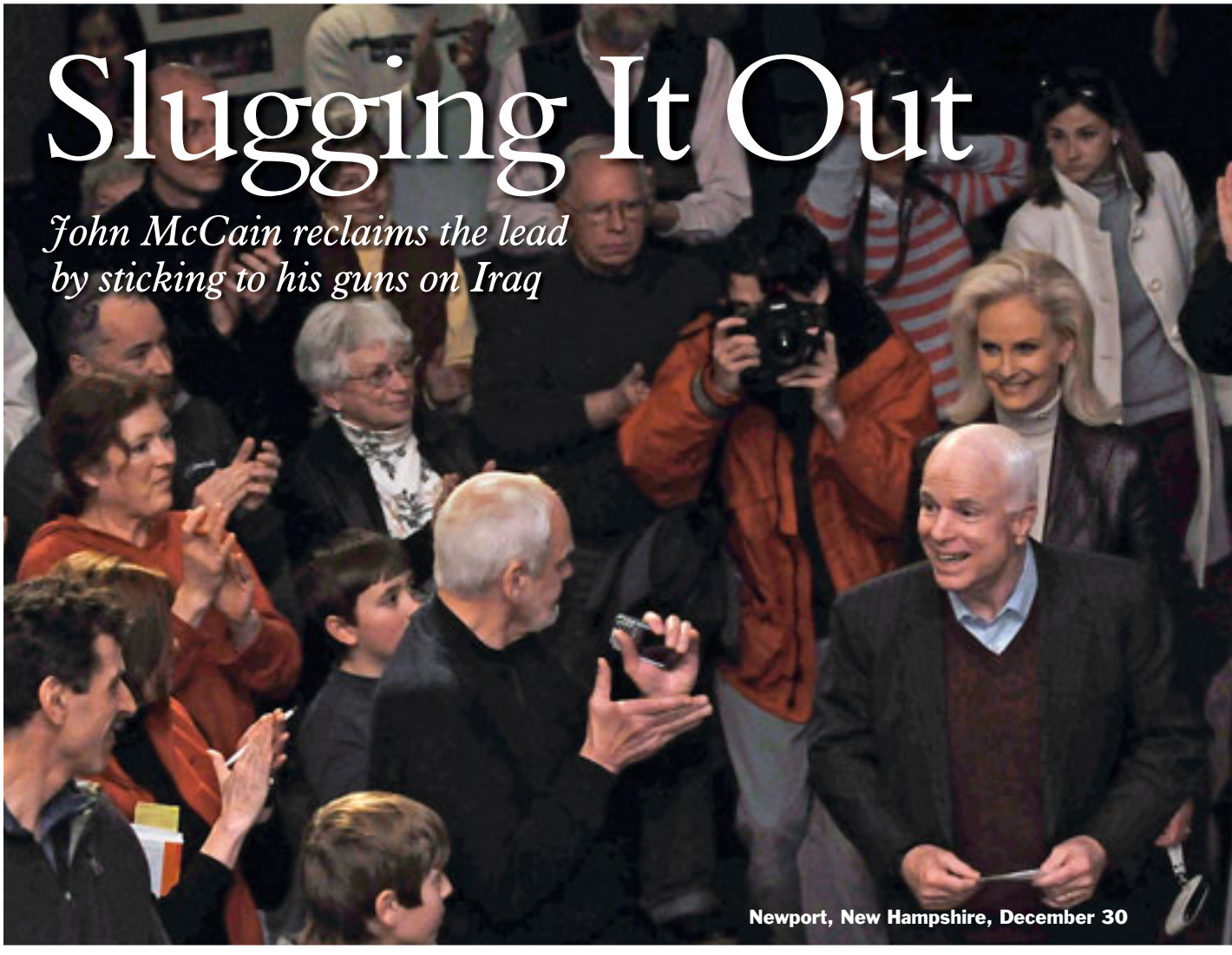
"Being a U.S. diplomat in Havana has long meant living under difficult circumstances," they wrote in a stunningly honest October 2007 essay. "Listening devices in all USINT [U.S. Interests Section] spaces, vehicles and homes mean one can never escape Cuban government scrutiny. The pervasive intelligence-gathering effort directed at USINT has garnered Havana the dubious honor of being the U.S. government's sole non-fraternization post."

While the U.S. embassies in Chad, Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya are content to interact only with government-approved interlocutors or government-operated NGOs, the diplomats in Havana recognize the difficulties ordinary Cubans face in meeting them. "For Cubans, interaction with USINT officials can bring unwanted attention from an omnipresent state security apparatus dedicated to squelching all potential opposition."

Messrs. Negrón and Vance: You seem to be honorable exceptions to the rule. Somehow you have managed to avoid the blinders worn by so many of your colleagues. It would be interesting to know how. Perhaps we could discuss this over pizza some day, should we ever meet in Ulan Bator. ♦

Slugging It Out

John McCain reclaims the lead by sticking to his guns on Iraq



Newport, New Hampshire, December 30

CHRIS FITZGERALD / CANDIDATEPHOTOS.COM

By Stephen F. Hayes

Peterborough, New Hampshire

Wearing the uniform of the young Republican male—navy sport coat, white oxford, khakis, and loafers—a flustered staffer for John McCain turned to a policeman standing at the back of the Peterborough Town Hall.

"What's the capacity of this place?"

"I have no idear," the cop responded.

The young man dashed off, still looking anxious.

He had reason to be nervous. It was 11:25 A.M. the Saturday before the New Hampshire primary, and the Peterborough Town Hall was full. McCain was not scheduled to arrive for another 50 minutes. The rapidly growing crowd of McCain supporters, many of them wearing duck boots and North Face outdoor gear, spilled onto the street and stood perched on snow drifts. They mixed with supporters of Dennis Kucinich (who had an event nearby) and Ron Paul (whose supporters were everywhere). Down the street, a corpulent Kucinich supporter, wearing a Flavor Flav-sized button featuring a sassy Dennis Kucinich headshot, chased would-be voters carrying a wooden stake with three Kucinich yard signs duct-taped together. ("Dude, how many drugs did you take this morning?" asked one man he accosted.)

The McCain crowd struck up a chant of "Mac is back" and waited for a glimpse of the 2008 version of the Straight Talk Express. It arrived—with another bus for press behind it—to wild cheering.

Once inside, McCain told the crowd that he was

Stephen F. Hayes is a senior writer at The Weekly Standard.

happy to be there, and he looked like he meant it. He was clearly energized by the size of the crowd. To his left, hanging onto the railing of a short stairway leading up to the stage, Fox News Channel's Bill Hemmer crouched next to former congressman Charlie Bass and congressman Chris Shays, craning his neck to get a better view of the candidate. Other big name journalists from big name media outlets had come to see McCain. There was Joe Klein from *Time* magazine and Jeff Greenfield from CBS and Dana Bash from CNN. In the back of the spacious hall is a set of risers with a large bank of cameras.

The speech was short, and McCain took more than a dozen questions from the audience. When he was finished, McCain shook hands on the way to the back of the room, where he was quickly engulfed by reporters, cameras, and microphones. McCain spoke just above a whisper and was very hard to hear unless you happened to occupy a spot directly in front of him. This complicated matters for journalists, now standing eight deep, trying to time their shouted questions to the end of his last answer. Reporters yelled over one another and the candidate. And all of this before his five-point win in New Hampshire last Tuesday.

Things were different back in early September. Few national media outlets were interested in McCain after an abysmal summer that left him with a depleted staff, very little money, and dwindling support in the polls. When I came to see him in New Hampshire a week before the "No Surrender Tour" that would help reinvigorate his campaign, there was no Straight Talk Express, just a plain white Ford Econoline van with two McCain bumper stickers. Instead of shouting questions to him from the back of a pack of national journalists, or even sitting with him in a group interview aboard the Straight Talk Express, as reporters do now, a campaign staffer casually asked me if I wanted to join McCain and his family for Thai food in Concord.

Thanks to one of the most remarkable turnarounds in recent political history, John McCain is now back to exactly where he started this race and exactly where many people thought he would be from the beginning. He is the frontrunner.

McCain is leading in some polls taken in each of the next two primary states, Michigan and South Carolina. His chief rival to this point, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, is weakened after two losses. Having pulled many of his resources from South Carolina and Florida, Romney is betting his candidacy on a win in Michigan, the state his father once governed. McCain's friend and erstwhile supporter, former senator Fred Thompson, is coming off an excellent debate performance in South Carolina and is counting on a strong finish in the state to invigorate his campaign. Mike Huckabee, former governor of Arkansas, has seen his post-Iowa momentum slowed by New Hampshire and by the emerging reality that his motivational-speaker bromides cannot forever hide his ignorance of foreign policy and national security. (A proponent of "vertical leadership," Huckabee seems to believe that a good attitude and pleasant platitudes will help him reach higher altitudes.) And Rudy Giuliani, who snatched the frontrunner mantle from McCain earlier this year, has handed it back by skipping Iowa, fading expensively in New Hampshire, and waiting for Florida.

The McCain campaign leadership is confident, not cocky, about the prospect that their man will accept the Republican nomination in Minneapolis this summer. But they understand on an intensely personal level how quickly things can change.

Baghdad's Shorja market in April 2007

AP PHOTO / SGT. MATTHEW ROE, US ARMY

In early 2007, McCain's campaign seemed to be humming along nicely. He and Rudy Giuliani were the best-known Republicans in the race, and the two men almost always appeared at the top of national polls. McCain was raising money at a respectable, if not spectacular, pace. And he was enlisting many of the Republican party's biggest stars in his cause, with top quality consultants and advisers and an early wave of endorsements.

But McCain had two major problems: the Iraq war and conservatives. The war was not going well. On January 10, the president announced a change in Iraq strategy that included a "surge" of more troops, something McCain had been calling for consistently in one way or another since before the war. In November 2006, Bush had cashiered Donald Rumsfeld, something else McCain had been pushing for more than two years. Even though these adjustments allowed McCain to claim that the White House was finally listening to him, they came at a price. His constant criticism of the conduct of the war—he calls it "mismanagement"—reinforced with many conservatives his reputation as a maverick, even as disloyal. Conservative groups such as the Club for Growth criticized McCain for his opposition to the Bush tax cuts. Pro-life groups were angry about his aggressive intervention in a campaign finance case involving Wisconsin Right to Life, and most other conservatives shared their frustrations with McCain over his willingness to regulate political speech with campaign finance laws. Movement conservatives have long mistrusted McCain, and his early campaign did little to change their perceptions.

By April there were signs of growing trouble. In the first quarter of 2007, McCain raised about $12.5 million, less than both Romney and Giuliani. But he spent lots of money to raise money, and he racked up significant expenditures on his growing team of campaign consultants and staff. Of that $12.5 million, slightly above $5 million was left, and McCain had accumulated almost $2 million in debt.

As spring gave way to summer, things got worse. Inside McCain's campaign, there were deepening divisions on nearly everything: campaign strategy, fundraising, and, importantly, policy. Several of McCain's top advisers believed his candidacy was doomed as long as he was closely identified with Iraq. This influential group included Bush 2000 alumni Russ Schriefer and Terry Nelson, as well as pollster Bill McInturff and top McCain strategist John Weaver.

Congressional Democrats were intent on making Iraq the central debate of the summer, and congressional Republicans were telling the White House—in private and sometimes in public—that they could not stop their opponents from passing legislation calling for a withdrawal of American troops. Several McCain advisers thought such a legislative defeat was inevitable and recommended that McCain reverse himself and lead Republicans away from Iraq.

(These McCain advisers were hardly alone. Mitt Romney and Rudy Giuliani were getting precisely the same advice. And the Washington press corps was virtually unanimous that the Iraq war meant political disaster for the GOP.)

As the campaign cast about for a policy focus, Schriefer presented plans to make McCain the candidate of energy policy. Just as McCain had owned the "reform" issue in 2000, the thinking went, he could make his stand in the early primary states on energy.

The proposal did not sit well with some of his colleagues, who believed McCain was finished politically if he tried to distance himself from Iraq. This second group—which included gregarious longtime aide Mark Salter, Sen-

ator Lindsey Graham, and aides Dan McKivergan, Brett O'Donnell, and Randy Scheunemann—urged McCain to invest even more heavily in Iraq—to "own the surge," as one memo from O'Donnell put it. Campaign manager Rick Davis embraced this view.

As that debate continued out of the public eye, another fight made the papers. McCain's second quarter finance numbers were abysmal, and when they were released, senior campaign officials traded blame anonymously in the media. McCain was furious. According to Graham, he ordered them to stop and then made a series of phone calls firing several of his closest advisers and asking many others to work without pay or at least for a steep discount. McCain took responsibility for the problems publicly and mandated that the campaign spend no more than $1.5 million per month, at least for the time being.

But with top strategists leaving campaign headquarters in bunches and advisers in key states going with them, the campaign was in meltdown. McCain's problems, exacerbated by his stubbornness on Iraq and relatively forgiving views on illegal immigration, meant that he dominated the news about the presidential race for several weeks.

"The speed and severity of the unraveling of John McCain's bid for the presidency is nearly impossible to capture," wrote John Heilemann in *New York* magazine. Members of Congress who had once enthusiastically endorsed McCain were now refusing to return his calls. A phone call with outside policy advisers, called to reassure them that the campaign would continue, had only one participant.

"It was like, John who?" says Graham. "We were the living dead."

The prospects for improvement were bleak. "It would be pleasingly counterintuitive to declare that McCain, at this, his lowest moment, is now poised for a miraculous recovery," Heilemann continued. "A more sober assessment of his predicament suggests the Straight Talk Express may be up on blocks before 2008 arrives—and that, in turn, raises a blunt question for a man who prizes bluntness above all: Why not walk away right now and avoid further humiliation?"

McCain got a respite from all of this in, of all places, Iraq. In early July, he traveled there with Graham, who sought to buck up his friend. Graham posed a question to McCain. "Name one person you can't beat," he said, before listing the candidates one after another. The two men agreed that the field was eminently beatable, so long as no one "caught fire," as Graham puts it today.

In Baghdad, McCain and Graham spent time with General David Petraeus and received an on-the-ground assessment of the surge, which had begun in full force just one month earlier. Petraeus, always cautious, was careful not to oversell his gains. Still, in methodical fashion he laid out for the senators why he was confident that his changes had created the conditions for a dramatic turnaround in Iraq. McCain had come to Iraq with confidence in Petraeus, and he left with even more.

Back in the United States, he sharpened his attacks on critics of the Iraq policy—including Hillary Clinton and MoveOn.org—and resolved to block any and all Democratic efforts to withdraw troops. The result? Democrats (especially the candidates for the nomination) began derisively referring to the change in strategy as "the McCain surge."

Virtually everyone regarded McCain's position as disastrous. "Republicans' intensity of support has waned as the war has become an albatross around their party's neck," wrote Charlie Cook, the highly regarded political analyst. "They cannot afford to nominate a presidential candidate whose name has become synonymous with the surge."

McCain was dead.

"For all intents and purposes, McCain's campaign is over," Cook continued. "The physicians have pulled up the sheet; the executors of the estate are taking over. Paying bills and winding down—not strategizing, organizing, and getting a message out—will be the order of the day."

Undeterred, and with very little to lose, McCain decided to gamble. McCain, who is legendarily superstitious, told reporters traveling with him last week that he has been known to contribute to the economy of Las Vegas, Nevada. Like many blackjack players, he considers the number 11 very lucky. This was like doubling-down on 12.

Campaign adviser Steve Schmidt suggested that they call the effort the "No Surrender Tour," and McCain started using a new line in his stump speech. "I'd rather lose an election than lose a war." Not everyone liked it. "I asked him: Why don't you stop saying that?" recalls Charlie Black, a senior McCain adviser. "People are beginning to think you are going to lose."

Black was right. "We all thought that was going to happen," says one reporter for a prominent newsweekly who spent time with McCain during those days.

But McCain refused. "He said, 'No. I mean it,'" says Black, with a laugh. "And it turns out he was exactly right."

The situation on the ground in Iraq improved dramatically, and by early fall some of the most outspoken opponents of the surge had to concede that it was working. McCain's poll numbers slowly began to move. Back in July, several polls had him in fourth place nationally, behind Giuliani, Romney, and Thompson. By late December, McCain was leading one national poll and was competitive in all the others.

Things would change dramatically by the time people actually started casting their votes in January. At the Fox News debate in New Hampshire on January 6, Mitt Romney and Mike Huckabee, both candidates who refused to endorse the surge when it was first proposed, vied to see who could appear more pro-surge. And at the ABC News debate the previous night, Romney paused from his near-constant attacks on McCain to give him credit for his early support of the surge.

After New Hampshire, McCain's campaign chartered a 757 to fly to the upcoming primary states. Following stops in Grand Rapids and Pontiac, Michigan, where voters will cast ballots on January 15, McCain pushed on to South Carolina, where the Republican primary will be held four days later.

As the airplane departed Pontiac for Charleston, McCain wandered back to a clearing between the emergency exits on each side of the plane. There were no seats in the emergency exit row, so there was a lot of space to stand around and chat. McCain began talking with several reporters, and the group soon expanded.

So much has been written about McCain's relationship with the media that it is hard to say anything fresh. But McCain's way of engaging with journalists is so different from that of other candidates that it is worth dwelling on it for a moment.

On a typical campaign trip, time with the candidate—"the principal," in campaignspeak—is severely restricted. Anytime a typical candidate agrees to speak to the press, it's a big deal, and journalists are often competitive about access and proximity. Because candidates speak so infrequently their words take on added importance, and journalists spend much of their time trying to trip candidates up or force them to say something that will make news. For the candidate, a press conference is often a matter of avoiding mistakes, more than a chance to communicate a message to the public.

None of this is true with McCain. He engages journalists at every opportunity. He speaks informally and does not labor over his words. He is quick with a joke and likes to make fun of the reporters covering him. He sometimes says that he does not want to talk about a subject, but this is rare, and chances are good that if you ask him again an hour or two later, he will answer your question. More often, he talks about things that other politicians prefer to avoid.

He is so accessible that reporters often decide to sit out a chat with the candidate on the plane or take a pass on an opportunity to ride with him on the "Straight Talk Express." At one point in New Hampshire, a McCain press aide notified a reporter that it was his turn for time with the senator. He shrugged, waved his hand, and said, "I've got to do some work. I'll catch up with him later."

On the plane, when I joined the circle around McCain, who looked relaxed in a navy suit, a blue shirt, and a light blue tie, he stopped the conversation to bring me up to speed.

"Hey, Steve. We're talking about spontaneity."

McCain saw that I was perplexed. "How my line about change in the last debate was spontaneous," he said, rolling his eyes in self-mockery. (At that debate, McCain had poked fun at Romney's flip-flops by saying: "We disagree on many issues, but I agree that you are the candidate of change.")

"It was so spontaneous that you started laughing before you even finished delivering it," I reminded him.

"I know," McCain laughed. "I know."

Over the next 30 minutes, McCain took questions about everything from Iraq to South Carolina, his superstitions to Hillary Clinton. He was asked about the possibility of New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg entering the race as an independent, and McCain had nice words to say about his potential rival. Someone asked if Bloomberg would make a good vice president, and McCain thought aloud about the potential positives and negatives of such an arrangement. "I don't know how you could nominate a pro-choice VP without a real backlash from the party," he said, specifically raising concerns that a pro-choice vice presidential nominee would run counter to a "fundamental" principle of the Republican party. Rick Davis, who appeared mildly concerned about the direction of the discussion, jumped in to clarify. Then he wandered off leaving McCain alone with the journalists.

When Davis returned a few minutes later, he joked about the candidate's proclivity to say things he shouldn't. "What's he doing now, naming his vice president?" Davis asked, shaking his head.

A few moments later, someone asked McCain about comments Lindsey Graham had made earlier in the day. The South Carolina senator had suggested that it would be better for McCain to face Barack Obama in a general election than Hillary Clinton.

McCain rolled his eyes and shook his head. "Ahhhhh, thanks Lindsey! How could you possibly determine that when it depends on how they come out of this campaign. . . . You know Lindsey. He has a degree of clairvoyance that I am not gifted with. You know one thing about Lindsey, he's always right."

Listening to McCain respond to questions, it is clear that he thinks his national security credentials will be his greatest asset in the final weeks of this Republican primary and going forward in the general election.

Democrats, he says, lack the experience and judgment to govern in these times. "I think they've gotten them-

selves out on the far left on national security. . . . Yeah, I'd bomb Pakistan," he says, mocking Democrats. "Okay, yeah, I'd bomb Pakistan. I want the troops out. No, I want them out next week. No, I want them out today. I'd have had them out yesterday!"

Responding to another question, he singles out Hillary Clinton and her claim last fall that to concede the surge was working would require "a willing suspension of disbelief."

"I know this: If I was debating her you'd certainly hear that phrase again—you'd have to 'suspend disbelief in order to believe that Petraeus strategy is succeeding.' I'd say, 'How's your disbelief factor today?' I mean really! We're all responsible for what we say. That's just a difference, a fundamental difference, about where we are on Iraq. So that's where I'm at, and it's why nearly 4,000 American lives have been sacrificed. I don't think that's partisan. I don't think there's anything wrong with ventilating that issue. They were wrong! And they still haven't admitted we were right. So I think our strength is national security."

That he also believes this is his own competitive advantage over the four Republicans he must beat to win the presidential nomination became clear shortly after we landed in Charleston.

Senate colleagues Joseph Lieberman and Lindsey Graham

PAUL J. RICHARDS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

A small caravan of SUVs and a bus for the press made their way to The Citadel for McCain's first post-New Hampshire speech in the Palmetto State. The grounds of the famous military college were virtually empty other than a couple of female cadets in matching gray shirts and navy shorts returning from a jog. At 6 P.M., the tones of "Retreat" and then "To the Colors" echoed through Summerall Field, a large rectangular lawn surrounded by white buildings that appeared imposing in the slightly haunting dusk.

McCain made a couple of light jokes, but he seemed much more serious than he had earlier in the day, at his stops in Michigan. His remarks focused almost exclusively on national security, and he made them without lurching from subject to subject, as he sometimes does in his extemporaneous stump speech.

"The challenges that we face are long and tough and difficult. I think you know that we are in a struggle with an enemy that is implacable and unpardonable and they will commit any evil, any atrocity, to try to gain their way and destroy everything we stand for. Believe me, they'll cut off the head of a person just because they're American and Jewish and put it on the Internet." His voice was filled with disgust. "A few months ago Lindsey and I, actually it was about a year ago, while we were in Iraq. And there were two guys in a car with two small infants in the back seat. They go through a checkpoint, they were waved through, they got out of the car, walked away, blew up the car." The audience murmurs in horror. "If they'll kill their own kids, what do you think they'll do to our kids?"

He added: "I will never, ever, ever, ever, ever surrender."

The words sounded almost childish, like something that might come out of the mouth of a three-year-old trying hard to sound emphatic but incapable of coming up with words to do the job. A couple of people in the crowd even snickered. But at that moment something very powerful was coming from the former prisoner of war who endured severe torture after repeatedly refusing to accept offers from his North Vietnamese captors to release him.

It was a political pitch to the South Carolinians he wants to vote for him, yes. But it also felt like a promise McCain was making to his country, to never surrender, and to himself. Ever. ♦

JENA

THE CASE OF THE AMAZING DISAPPEARING HATE CRIME

Jena High School cheerleaders marching in the town's annual Christmas parade in December 2007

The Jena Six became a national symbol of racism not because of an unequal justice system and the rise of a 'new Jim Crow,' but because that's what a civil rights organizer and a complacent media wanted them to be.

BY CHARLOTTE ALLEN

Jena, Louisiana

In early December the case of the "Jena Six"—the six African-American high school students in Louisiana accused of viciously beating a white classmate in 2006—collapsed dramatically with a felony guilty plea by one of the defendants. As something that was going to trigger "America's next great civil rights movement" (to quote National Public Radio) and grassroots protests against the "new Jim Crow" and the systematic discrimination against blacks in the criminal justice system, this was quite a letdown. The Jena Six were supposed to be the new Scottsboro Boys, the nine black youths railroaded to death sentences by all-white juries in 1930s Alabama on charges of raping two white women.

But the best known of the Jena Six, Mychal Bell, appeared with his team of lawyers at the parish courthouse in this tiny Central Louisiana town of 3,000 on December 3 and pled guilty to second-degree battery, to intentionally inflicting serious bodily injury on another person. In doing so, Bell—who will turn 18 this month and who had repeatedly denied any involvement in the attack—admitted that on December 4, 2006, he hit 17-year-old Justin Barker from behind, slamming Barker's head against a concrete beam outside the gym at Jena High School and knocking him unconscious, and that he then joined a group in stomping and kicking Barker in the head. Bell agreed to serve 18 months in juvenile custody for the offense and to "testify truthfully" concerning the involvement of the other five members of the Jena Six should their cases come to trial.

A protester in Jena on September 20, 2007

OPPOSITE, LEV NISNEVITCH ; AT RIGHT, GETTY IMAGES

Three months before the attack on Barker, on the morning of August 31, teachers and administrators at Jena High School had discovered two crudely constructed hangman's nooses made of nylon rope hanging from an oak tree in the center of the campus. The nooses were promptly cut down so that few students of any race actually saw them, and the perpetrators, three white male students, were identified and disciplined—fairly severely, school officials later revealed, with nine-day suspensions during which they had to attend classes at an alternative school off-campus and go to extended counseling sessions with their families.

The August incident was the first of a wave of highly publicized noose-sightings on campuses and business premises across the country. But the three Jena High perpetrators said they had no idea that nooses hanging from tree limbs could be interpreted as symbols of white-vigilantism and the lynching of black men in the post-Reconstruction South (in Louisiana alone there were more than 200 lynchings) or as a warning to blacks to know their place. Given the current state of historical illiteracy among young people, such ignorance certainly is conceivable. The three students maintained that the nooses were a school spirit-prompted prank directed at a rival school's Western-themed football team (the youths said they were inspired by a hanging in the 1980s television miniseries *Lonesome Dove*).

Charlotte Allen, a writer living in Washington, D.C., is the author of The Human Christ.

Justin Barker, photographed in the hospital, after he was attacked outside the Jena High School gym on December 4, 2007

This explanation, although belittled by Jena Six supporters, does not seem entirely implausible. The nooses were in Jena High's school colors—one black, one gold—high-school football is a major fall event in the rural South; and inter-school pranks, such as draping rival campuses with toilet paper, are frequent. Still, the tree in question was one under which members of Jena High's overwhelmingly white student population customarily sat (some called it the "white tree," although blacks sat under the tree, too), and the day before the noose incident, a black student had jokingly asked at a school assembly whether blacks were allowed to sit under the tree (the answer from a school administrator was that blacks could sit anywhere they liked). It is thus possible that the nooses were intended as a joke (although certainly in appalling taste) aimed at the previous day's joking comment. The high school's principal recommended expulsion for the three students involved (their names have never been made public), but the school board for LaSalle Parish settled on the lesser punishment on grounds that the three youths had no prior disciplinary records and seemed genuinely remorseful.

No one who subsequently investigated the noose incident—and that included sheriff's deputies for LaSalle Parish and the U.S. attorney for Central Louisiana, Donald Washington, who is black himself and led a behind-the-scenes FBI probe of the Jena nooses within days of their discovery—found any connection between the nooses and the attack on Barker in December. Nonetheless, the nooses—and the supposedly unduly lenient punishment meted out to the boys who hung them—became the causal linchpin of the twin demands of the Jena Six cause: that the noose-hangers be criminally prosecuted for hate crimes and that all criminal charges be dismissed against the six defendants in the attack on Barker. Catrina Wallace, sister of a Jena Six member, summed up the reasoning at a rally in front of the Jena courthouse on July 31: "For them to say it was a prank left those kids to do only one thing: defend themselves." This interpretation gained wide currency among Jena Six sympathizers. One of them, rocker John Cougar Mellencamp, released a recording in early October with the chorus, "Jena, take your nooses down." The video accompanying the song includes footage of 1960s civil rights marches, police beatings from that era, and sheet-draped Ku Klux Klanners.

So it was that the attack on Barker—which, viewed from any other angle, was simply a brutal and potentially lethal six-against-one pile-on at a high school—became a civil rights cause célèbre. The Jena Six affair generated more than seven months' worth of national news headlines and scolding op-eds; became a pet cause of the Reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, the rapper Mos Def, the Congressional Black Caucus, and dozens of black bloggers, commentators, and talk-show hosts (one notable exception was the black contrarian sportswriter Jason Whitlock); provoked a September 20 march through Jena by some 20,000 people (setting a record for a post-1960s civil rights demonstration); and inspired a BBC documentary titled *Race Hate in Louisiana*; and catapulted Jena into the dubious standing of "the most racist town" in America. Jackson called the charges against the Jena Six a "miscarriage of justice," while Sharpton labeled Bell "a fine young man" and vowed to keep returning to Jena until "the charges are dropped on these young men and until Mychal walks out of that jail." A strange logical inversion had occurred in which Barker became the aggressor in the December 4 incident and his six alleged assailants the victims.

Bell, the Jena Six member who pled guilty last month, was the focus of the efforts because he remained in jail for all but a few weeks of the time between his arrest shortly after the attack and his guilty plea a year later. Most of the other five were released within a few weeks of their arrests: One of them, Jesse Ray Beard, age 14 at the time of the attack, was back in school, while the other four—Robert Bailey Jr., Carwin Jones, Bryant Purvis,

AP PHOTO

Al Sharpton attacking the LaSalle Parish criminal justice system on August 5, 2007. He is flanked by Mychal Bell's parents, Marcus Jones and Melissa Bell. Behind him stand four of the Jena Six: (left to right) Bell, Jesse Ray Beard, Carwin Jones, and Theo Shaw.

AP PHOTO / RICHARD ALAN HANNON

and Theo Shaw, all ages 17 and 18 at the time and thus legally adults under Louisiana's criminal-justice laws—had made bail. Bell's parents, however, could not or would not raise the necessary 10 percent cash deposit on his $90,000 bail (later reduced to $45,000), and so he remained in custody. And, according to Bell's father, Marcus Jones, the incarceration and subsequent expulsion from school of his son, who had been a star running back on the Jena Giants football team, ended Mychal's hopes of winning an athletic scholarship to any of the numerous colleges that his father said were courting him.

Adding to Bell's list of grievances was the fact that he had been charged under a Louisiana statute that permits juveniles over the age of 15 to be tried as adults for certain crimes. Bell and the four adults among the Jena Six were originally charged with one of those listed crimes: attempted second-degree murder. The theory was that the repeated kicks to Barker's head could have killed him had not students—white and black—and teachers at Jena High managed to pull the assailants off him. The prosecutor, LaSalle Parish district attorney Reed Walters, ultimately dropped that charge just before Bell's trial.

Walters also offered Bell the opportunity in June to plead guilty as an adult to second-degree battery—a deal nearly identical to the one that Bell would accept in December—but Bell, against the advice of the public defender representing him, turned down the offer. On June 28, after a three-day trial, an all-white jury (the lack of blacks on the jury was another miscarriage of justice, according to Bell's supporters, although it was due to the fact that only 50 of the 150 residents of LaSalle Parish who had been summoned for jury duty actually appeared and none of those who showed up were black) that was supposedly tainted by the presence of jurors with ties to the prosecution (which consisted of the fact that five of the six jurors were acquainted with some of the witnesses, as was inevitable in such a small community) found Bell guilty of aggravated second-degree battery. This was a more serious felony than the one he had declined to plead to, involving the use of a "dangerous weapon," in this case the sneaker Bell was wearing when he kicked Barker in the head. Jesse Jackson afterwards made fun of the idea that a sneaker could be a "weapon of mass destruction," as he called it, but a ruling by the Louisiana appellate court had made it clear that a sneaker, like any other ordinary object, can constitute a "dangerous weapon" under Louisiana law if it is used to inflict serious bodily injury. The jury also found Bell guilty of conspiracy to commit aggravated second-degree battery.

The public defender, Blane Williams, called no wit-

LaSalle Parish district attorney Reed Walters

nesses, limiting himself to cross-examining the 17 prosecution witnesses, who were drawn mostly from the two dozen or so Jena High School students who had seen the attack and given statements to sheriff's investigators. Bell's supporters branded Williams as incompetent, although a reading of the trial transcript suggests that Williams, who is black himself, was doing the best he could with a slam-dunk case against his client, with the hope of winning a reversal on legal grounds on appeal. Had Williams put Bell on the stand, for example, the defendant's handwritten witness statement, in which he asserted that the lights had gone out in the hallway shortly before the incident so that he could not see who attacked Barker, would have provided rich impeachment fodder for Walters, since none of the other students or teachers at the scene had reported such a blackout. Bell's imaginative statement also asserted that Barker had used the "N-word" shortly before the attack—a detail found in no other witness statements, including those of other Jena Six defendants.

Immediately after Bell's battery and conspiracy convictions, which exposed him to the possibility of a 22-year prison sentence, he fired Williams and hired a team of four private-practice lawyers from Monroe, in northeast Louisiana, who signed on to his case for no fee and promptly blitzed various courts with motions. In early September, the LaSalle Parish's district judge, J.P. Mauffray, vacated Bell's conspiracy conviction on the ground that Bell had been improperly tried as an adult as Walters had dropped the attempted-murder charge before the trial. Then, on September 14, a week before Bell's scheduled sentencing hearing, Louisiana's Third Circuit Court of Appeal reversed the battery conviction, ruling that this charge did not belong in an adult court, either. With no convictions hanging over his head, Bell was released from jail on reduced bail on September 27. The rulings, however, merely paved the way for a second trial of Bell as a juvenile, which would have started on December 6 had not Bell's guilty plea rendered it moot.

It is hard to say how much Bell's legal team accomplished for him in practical terms. The plea offered him in both his adult and juvenile proceedings was the same: second-degree battery (Bell's mother told a reporter that the adult-court plea bargain that Bell rejected would have had him serve a four-year sentence, with three years to be suspended and credit given for the time Bell had already spent behind bars). In addition to serving 18 months in juvenile custody as part of his December 3 plea bargain and agreeing to testify in the trials of the other five of the Jena Six, Bell promised to pay $935 in court costs and partial restitution to Barker's parents for their son's medical expenses. Emergency-room treatment for Barker's head injuries cost at least $5,000. Barker's parents have asserted that the total medical expenses for their son, who said he lost the sight of one eye for three weeks and suffered permanent damage to both his vision and his hearing, were upwards of $19,000. The day after Bell's plea, Barker and his parents filed a civil lawsuit against the adult Jena defendants, the parents of the minors, and the LaSalle Parish school system seeking full compensation for their losses.

What is clear is that some of Bell's new lawyers' ostentatiously aggressive representation backfired. A bail-reduction motion the legal team filed for Bell while the appeal of his June 28 conviction was pending resulted in an August 24 hearing (pertinent parts of the transcript can be found online) revealing that Bell was not exactly the innocent victim of racist prosecution that his supporters had made him out to be and a credulous national press had duly reported. (For example, the *Washington Post*'s Darryl Fears had asserted in an August 4 article that Bell had "no prior criminal record" and had looked "frightened and numb" in his jail cell, asking, "Can they really do this to me?")

The August 24 hearing revealed that Bell was in fact already on juvenile-court probation for four previous convictions of violent offenses—two involving battery and two for intentional destruction of property—all committed between December 2005 and September 2006. The records of those earlier juvenile proceedings are sealed, but it is widely believed in Jena that the victims of all four crimes were black and that the victim of the first battery, committed on Christmas Day in 2005, was a 17-year-old girl.

VERNON BRYANT / DALLAS MORNING NEWS / CORBIS

These new disclosures made it reasonable to wonder why, if Jena was such a racist town, school officials allowed Bell—and his co-defendant Carwin Jones who had an aggravated battery charge on his record—to continue to play football despite a criminal history that would automatically disqualify a student-athlete at most high schools. The disclosure of Bell's full criminal record also suggested that the supposedly incompetent Blane Williams, who had represented Bell in all four prior matters, had done an admirable job of keeping his client out of jail as the convictions mounted.

Mauffray ruled on August 24 that the sum total of Bell's convictions for acts of violence—five in less than two years, counting the Barker case—constituted sufficient grounds to let the youth's bail stand. Then, on October 11, with Bell now free and back under juvenile jurisdiction after the Court of Appeal's ruling, Mauffray revoked his probation entirely and sentenced him to 18 months in juvenile lockup (under the plea bargain reached on December 3, he is to serve that sentence concurrently with his 18-month sentence for the Barker attack).

Suddenly the story of the Jena Six was starting to look more like "Thug4Life" than "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." According to a story in the *Town Talk*—a Gannett-owned daily newspaper published in nearby Alexandria (pop. 46,000), the largest city in Central Louisiana—both Bell's parents and the parents of the other members of the Jena Six expressed visible "shock" and "unease" in the courtroom when Bell accepted a plea bargain in which he admitted his guilt and agreed to testify, if called upon, against his five co-defendants. They had all repeatedly asserted their sons' innocence and insisted that they would accept nothing less than complete exoneration.

But, by the time of the plea bargain, Jena Six supporters were already tiptoeing away from the case, as revelations about Bell's criminal history and the lack of any connection between the attack on Barker and the nooses began to filter into the press. The September 20 demonstration, far from marking the beginning of a massive grassroots movement actually marked its high point. Even that rally drew fewer than half the 50,000 attendees that had been expected. (Mos Def delivered a rambling excoriation of the large number of his fellow rap musicians who had failed to join him at the protest.)

A call for African-American students to stay home from school on October 1 as a show of solidarity with the Jena Six fizzled. A "National Black Out Day" scheduled for November 2, on which African Americans were supposed to keep the Jena Six momentum going via a nationwide spending boycott, attracted little noticeable response and almost no press coverage. An anti-hate crimes rally on November 3 in Charleston, West Virginia, drew only

LEV NISNEVITCH / THE WEEKLY STANDARD

U.S. attorney for Central Louisiana Donald Washington

a few hundred demonstrators (Sharpton did not make a promised appearance), even though the triggering incident in West Virginia—involving a black woman allegedly kidnapped, beaten, and sexually assaulted by six whites—smacked far more of interracial wrongdoing than anything in Jena. Only about 5,000 people showed up on November 16 for a March Against Hate Crimes at the Justice Department in Washington, D.C., despite a relentless nationwide publicity campaign by the same bloggers and radio hosts who had urged African Americans to flock to Jena in September. Even Jesse Jackson, who had accused black Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama of "acting like he's white" for failing to condemn the Jena Six prosecution sufficiently, quietly disappeared from the scene in the late fall.

Nearly all the symbolic themes—hate crimes, Jim Crow justice, rogue prosecution, and the ghosts of the Old South that were supposed to be alive and well in Jena—that attached themselves to the Jena Six case as the months rolled by can be traced to the work of a single man: Alan Bean, a white American Baptist minister who operates an organization called the Friends of Justice in Arlington, Texas.

During the late 1990s, Bean and his group drew press attention to a criminal-justice scandal in Tulia, a town of 5,000 in the Texas Panhandle. Forty-six people, most of them black, had been convicted of various drug crimes on the sole basis of the uncorroborated testimony of an undercover police officer whose dubious credibility, troubled law-enforcement career, and unorthodox methods did not

come to light until after the trials and guilty pleas. Prosecutors, defense lawyers, and a judge all agreed in 2003 that 38 of the convictions should be overturned. Ever since, Bean has been searching for another Tulia. He thought he had found it in Jena, which he visited in early 2007.

The attack on Barker, the arrest of the six defendants, their expulsion from school, and the efforts throughout December 2006 by Jena's black and white pastors to calm racial tensions with a series of prayer services had all been thoroughly reported in the local papers: the weekly *Jena Times* and the *Town Talk*. Some of the national black media—notably syndicated radio talk-show host Tony Brown, who coined the phrase "Jena Six"—had already taken up cudgels for the defendants. As had the ACLU's Campaign Against Racial Profiling and the New Orleans chapter of Sharpton's National Action Network. Caseptla Bailey, mother of Jena Six defendant Robert Bailey Jr., set up a LaSalle Parish branch of the NAACP in March with herself as president (a position she no longer holds) and her daughter Catrina as secretary-treasurer.

Bean decided that it was his job to fire up the interest of the mainstream press in the story by connecting the hanging of the nooses and the attack on Barker in a coherent and dramatic narrative whose overarching themes were institutional racism and systematic injustice. "I knew the nooses were going to be the selling point," Bean told me in a telephone interview. "All I did was put the facts together in a way that a journalist would understand. I think people in the press followed it because it was the most common-sense interpretation of the facts."

Bean's narrative, in both a long and a short form so as to cater to reporters of varying attention spans, appears on the Friends of Justice website. It is a dramatic tale that was clearly based—as Bean readily admits—almost solely on interviews with the defendants and their family members, chiefly Caseptla Bailey and Mychal Bell's mother, Melissa Bell. (Bell's father, Marcus Jones, who later proffered to reporters his own colorful versions of Jena events, is not married to Melissa Bell, has not lived with her or his son for seven years, and did not return to Jena from his residence in Texas until February 2007.) Many of the elements of Bean's narrative appear in no contemporaneous news reports about the Jena events or in any court records pertaining to the case.

For one thing, Bean's narrative inflated the noose incident into a major civil rights confrontation at Jena High School with a peaceful "protest" (Bean's word) under the tree by black students on September 6, 2006, followed by an appearance at a school assembly by the district attorney, Reed Walters, at which Walters (according only to Bean) specifically warned black students that "additional unrest would be treated as a criminal matter." Walters was supposed to have looked directly at some black students during the assembly and said, "I can make your lives disappear with a stroke of my pen." If there was such a protest under the tree, no teacher or administrator at Jena High School recalls it. More significantly, the Alexandria *Town Talk*, which covered the noose incident exhaustively, failed to report any demonstration on campus the next day, or any other day. After U.S. Attorney Donald Washington finished his investigation of the case, he told the *Town Talk* that there was no evidence of a protest by black students under the tree.

What the *Town Talk* did report was a series of five race-related fights on campus during the first week of September 2006—the week after the nooses incident. As for Walters, he testified under oath at a June 13 hearing on a motion filed by Robert Bailey's lawyer to have him recused as prosecutor (the motion was denied by Mauffray for lack of evidence and upheld by the Third Circuit Court of Appeal), that he had attended the school assembly, not in connection with the tree, but at the request of a sheriff's deputy. A student had struck a teacher, and the deputy invited Walters to the school to help calm the tension after the fights. At the June 13 court hearing, Walters testified that he told the entire assembly, not just the black students, that the campus violence had to stop or he would do everything in his power to make it stop. Walters told the students (according to the transcript), "I hope to be your best friend, but I can be your worst enemy if you don't behave yourself."

Again, if reports in the *Town Talk* are accurate, Tracy Bowens, the black mother who spearheaded the effort by black parents to have the noose-hangers expelled from Jena High, made no mention of Walters or any alleged anti-black threats by him when she appeared before the school board on September 18 to urge it to reconsider its decision. The *Town Talk* reported no further incidents of violence at Jena High School, racially instigated or otherwise, during the three months between the meeting and December 4, although Melinda Edwards, the LaSalle Parish school system's child welfare administrator, later revealed that two members of the six had been sent to the principal's office more than ten times apiece during those three months and one had been summoned before the school's expulsion committee but given a reprieve.

Bean's task in shaping his narrative was not just to connect the nooses to the assault on Barker, but also to cobble an overarching theme of race-based unequal justice out of several incidents that occurred in Jena in the days before the assault. On the night of November 30, a Thursday, the main academic build-

ing at Jena High School was completely destroyed by fire. The fire, which was clearly the result of arson (it appeared to have started in three different places), had nothing to do with the nooses or racial tensions. On December 27, 2007, after an investigation lasting more than a year, the LaSalle Parish sheriff's department announced that it had arrested three adult men, none of whom were related to the Jena Six, and three juveniles in connection with the crime. The suspects' motive, sheriff's spokesmen said, seemed to be an effort to destroy records of bad grades. Bean's narrative, however, cast the fire as a precursor to "a stream of white-initiated racial violence" (his words) that weekend in 2006.

On Friday, December 1, one of the Jena Six, Robert Bailey Jr., attempted along with some friends to crash a party at the Fair Barn, a for-rent social hall in Jena. The hostess and the majority of the guests were white, but some of the guests were black ("mostly white" is the way the party became typically described in the press). While Bailey was seeking admission, Justin Sloan, a 22-year-old white guest at the party, emerged from the festivities and, according to Bailey's own victim-impact statement made to the district attorney's office, hit Bailey in the face, knocking him down. Sloan was arrested, pled guilty to misdemeanor simple battery, and apologized to Bailey as part of his probation.

Bean's narrative raised the stakes on Sloan's act considerably, stating that Bailey "was assaulted by white students wielding beer bottles and was punched and kicked before adults broke up the fight." These details were not in Bailey's victim-impact statement, nor was a subsequent claim, aired at the June 13 hearing on Bailey's lawyer's motion to have Walters recused as prosecutor, that Bailey had gone to a hospital emergency room for stitches. (No medical records have ever emerged regarding Bailey's claim of emergency-room treatment.) The beer bottles served a narrative purpose, however; they made Bailey into the victim of a race-based group attack that could be seen as nearly as serious as the attack on Barker—except that Bailey's assailant had walked away with only a slap on the wrist.

DOMINIC BRACCOO II

Texas Baptist pastor Alan Bean decided that it was his job to fire up the interest of the mainstream press in the Jena story by connecting the hanging of the nooses and the attack on Barker in a coherent and dramatic narrative whose overarching themes were institutional racism and systematic injustice. "I knew the nooses were going to be the selling point," Bean said.

The next night, Bailey (apparently recovered from his alleged injuries of the previous evening), fellow Jena Six member Theo Shaw, and 17-year-old Ryan Simmons—another black student at Jena High School—encountered Matt Windham, a young white man, outside the Gotta Go, a convenience store/gas station adjacent to Jena's black neighborhood. The matter has not been adjudicated, and the parties involved have told conflicting stories about what happened. But Windham claims that Bailey and his companions attacked him outside the Gotta Go, whereupon he reached for a shotgun in his truck that was subsequently wrested away from him by the three blacks, who beat him and fled the scene with the gun. As Bean told the story, Windham, without provocation, "pulled a pump-action shotgun on three black high school students as they exited the Gotta Go." The three were arrested shortly afterwards in possession of Windham's rifle and charged with second-degree robbery, theft of a firearm, and disturbing the peace. Two witnesses, a cashier at the Gotta Go and a customer, corroborated Windham's side of the story, but both witnesses, as reporters seemed never to tire of pointing out, were white.

The charges against Bailey, Shaw, and Simmons were more evidence, in Bean's view, of "ethical lapses" and a loss of "professional objectivity" on the part of the district attorney. One of Bean's stated aims was to get Walters removed from all Jena Six-related cases. Bean seemed to be trying to paint Walters, a veteran prosecutor who

had served for 16 years as LaSalle Parish's district attorney, as another Mike Nifong, the North Carolina prosecutor disbarred last year for knowingly pursuing false rape charges against three Duke University lacrosse players. Bean claimed a connection between the two incidents of the weekend and the attack on Barker the following Monday—a connection beyond the persistent presence of Bailey. According to Bean, Windham had been involved in the claimed beer-bottle bashing at the Fair Barn, and Justin Barker had taunted Bailey at school about that episode the following Monday (a claim that Barker denied in his testimony at Mychal Bell's trial).

Bean told me that his next step after composing his narrative was to contact three journalists whom he deemed likely to be sympathetic and supply them with the names and telephone numbers of his sources. The three were Wade Goodwyn of National Public Radio; Tom Mangold, a BBC producer who had made a documentary about the Tulia case; and Howard Witt of the *Chicago Tribune*. Witt, the *Tribune*'s Southwest bureau chief, had written a series of sympathetic stories about Shaquanda Cotton, a 14-year-old black girl in Paris, Texas, who had been sentenced to an indefinite stay in juvenile hall in 2006 for pushing a 58-year-old teacher's aide to the ground. Cotton's teachers both black and white had testified to a string of prior disciplinary infractions committed by the girl, but her supporters portrayed her as a victim of a racist criminal justice system because a 14-year-old white girl who burned down her parents' house had merely received probation. Cotton was released in April 2007 after pressure from civil rights advocates, although a Texas appellate court upheld her conviction, observing in a footnote that although the case had been characterized in the media as involving racial discrimination, neither the girl nor her lawyers had raised any claims of discrimination in the appeal papers. Witt, in an interview posted on the Dallas South blog, took credit for having created a "civil rights beat" for himself via the Cotton and Jena Six stories, and for firing up black bloggers' interest in what he called in one of his news stories a "civil rights protest literally conjured up out of the ether of cyberspace." Witt told Dallas South that "there was a lot of unseen nastiness going on in small southern towns."

Mangold's documentary, *Race Hate in Louisiana*, and Witt's first Jena story, "Racial Demons Rear Heads," appeared nearly simultaneously in late May. The film interspersed footage from the 1988 movie *Mississippi Burning*—about the murder of three civil rights workers in 1964—with clips from Jena blacks claiming social ostracism by whites, and interviews with white Jena residents that, they later complained, were edited so as to make them look like racist dolts. In a May 20 article in the London *Observer* titled "Racism Goes on Trial Again in America's Deep South," Mangold (who did not respond to an email requesting an interview) described Jena "as an example of the new 'stealth' racism" and predicted that Jena would go down in history "alongside the bad old names of the Mississippi Burning Sixties such as Selma or Montgomery, Alabama." His article painted a lurid picture of Jena as a town where whites lived on wealthy "Snob Hill" in the company of their SUVs, while blacks were relegated to shacks and trailers along rubbish-strewn streets. Witt's reporting was more temperate, but his own May 20 story used some of the same images: "Old South racial demons" and "a pattern of uneven justice in the town."

Both Mangold's documentary and Witt's stories hewed closely to Bean's original narrative: the hanging of the nooses as the pivotal event, Walters's alleged threats directed at black students at the assembly, the allegation that Barker had been "taunting blacks" (as Witt wrote on May 20), and a claim that black youths had been "targeted . . . for some unusually harsh treatment" (as an ACLU official told Witt) with the attempted-murder charges. The reports seemed designed to elicit sympathy for the Jena Six (Mangold called them "schoolboys") and to minimize the injuries to Barker, who "spent only a few hours in the hospital" (Witt's words) and had participated in a class-ring ceremony at a church that evening (at which he looked dazed and which he left early, the *Jena Times* reported).

Bean's narrative, though, contained an interesting factual error: It stated that there had been three nooses, not two, hung from the tree at Jena High School. The error was not material, and the truth did not exonerate the perpetrators (one noose would have been too many), but to an observer examining the numerous stories about the Jena Six that flooded newspapers, radio, television, and blogs, the three nooses, which appear again and again, are a kind of journalistic dye-marker signaling a tendency on the part of the reporters to rely on Bean's narrative, his handpicked sources, and the reporting of Witt—whose frequent stories appeared nationwide in Tribune Co.-owned papers like the *Los Angeles Times* and *Denver Post*—instead of doing their own legwork by consulting court records and other documents, or even the Alexandria *Town Talk*, which accurately reported the number of nooses from the very beginning.

The beer-bottle attack on Bailey similarly appeared—sometimes in the form of a single bottle, sometimes multiple bottles—over and over, despite the evidence

CHRIS GRAYTHEN / GETTY IMAGES

in Bailey's own victim-impact statement strongly suggesting that it had never occurred. Reporters seemed to throw aside the skepticism that is supposed to be their stock in trade and accepted at face value the uncorroborated word of criminal defendants, their relatives, and their lawyers. Witt, for example, told me in a telephone interview that he had learned about the beer-bottle attack directly from Bailey himself, who "showed me his scar."

Reports by National Public Radio's Goodwyn and stories from the Associated Press, the McClatchy News Service, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times* all listed three nooses. The *Post*'s Darryl Fears, in his August 4 story about Mychal Bell, channeled the claim by Bailey that "a white man broke a beer bottle over his head after jumping him at a party, but there was no immediate investigation." He also reported Walters's supposed threat to black students at the assembly and described the attack on Barker as "a schoolyard brawl." (ABC News also called it a "schoolyard brawl," one that left "a white teenager with a black eye and concussion," while the *New York Times* preferred a "confrontation outside the school gymnasium.") Goodwyn, in a July 30 story on National Public Radio's website, similarly took at face value Bailey's version of the Gotta Go episode, termed Barker's injuries "superficial," and, in a unique interpretation of the events, described the three incident-free months between the noose discoveries and the beating of Barker as a "truce" arrived at between black and white students because it was football season and blacks were among Jena High's star athletes.

The September 20 demonstration, far from marking the beginning of a massive grassroots movement, actually marked its high point. Even that rally drew fewer than half the 50,000 attendees that had been expected.

A September 23 op-ed piece in the *Washington Post* by Beverly Daniel Tatum, president of Spelman College, also included an incident unreported elsewhere: that Walters, at the school assembly, had told Jena High's black students to stop complaining about the "innocent prank" of the noose-hangings. Furthermore, Tatum wrote, the Jena Six had been "treated much more harshly than white teenagers who beat up a black student in the town." Her article was accompanied by a large photograph of angry white adolescents protesting integration at a Little Rock high school in 1957. A September 2 op-ed by *Chicago Sun-Times*

reporter Mary Mitchell declared that the charges against the Jena Six were "trumped-up" and asked readers to send money to a defense fund that had been set up by the parents of the defendants.

A noticeable feature of all the news stories about the Jena Six was the almost-complete absence of interviews with any black residents of Jena beyond the Jena Six and their family members. Both the *Jena Times* and the *Town Talk* reported that few Jena blacks who were not related to the Jena Six attended a series of courthouse protests that preceded the September 20 demonstration. This suggests that Jena's black population was not so enthusiastic about the Jena Six as their out-of-town supporters (some black Jena ministers, for example, refused to let Sharpton preach at their churches), and, possibly, that Jena blacks feared reprisals—the criminal history of Bell, for instance, was well known locally. One of the Jena High School students who said in her witness statement that she saw Bell deliver the knock-out blow to Barker was a black female who refused to give her name. It certainly suggests that the case of the Jena Six might not have been all the national press hoped.

Sparsely populated Jena, clustered around the intersection of Louisiana State Highways 84 and 127 amid the bayous and pine forests of Central Louisiana, has a culture that can seem quite alien to journalists from the urban and suburban North. For one thing, very few blacks live in Jena or elsewhere in LaSalle Parish, whose population is 86 percent white and only 12 percent black. The reason is geographical: Very little of the land in LaSalle Parish is suitable for agriculture, so the parish, unlike much of the rest of the South, never had a plantation economy. Residents of the area were once known as "piney woods people," living off hunting, fishing, and logging, and practicing an austere Christianity. Traces of that culture persist in the ubiquitous Baptist and evangelical churches and the fact—which would undoubtedly horrify the ACLU and others on the pro-Jena Six left—that public meetings often begin with a Christian prayer. Northerners whose sole exposure to Louisiana might have been booze-soaked Bourbon Street at a pre-Katrina Mardi Gras would be further surprised to learn that, although beer can be bought at convenience stores in Jena, it is impossible to order an alcoholic beverage to accompany a plate of barbecue or Gulf shrimp at any of the family-run buffets along Highway 84.

Also certain to horrify genteel northern liberals, for whom gun control is an article of faith, is the fact that practically everyone in Jena owns a rifle and also a pickup truck for transporting what they shoot. During the fall hunting season, the pickups roar down Highway 84 as early as 4 A.M., headed for the duck blinds of nearby Lake Catahoula, and parents proudly display photographs of their school-age children clad in hunting camouflage standing with their guns next to the deer they have killed. The fact that Matt Windham had a shotgun in his truck—or that Justin Barker was expelled from Jena High School in May 2007 after a loaded rifle was found behind the seat of his pickup—can convey sinister racist messages to northern journalists, but is nothing out of the ordinary for locals.

Jena is not a wealthy town. "Snob Hill" is at best comfortably upper-middle-class: housing high-school teachers as well as bankers and lawyers. LaSalle Parish, whose total population is only 14,000, has lost about 20 percent of its residents since 1980 due partly to the shrinking of the logging industry. Many LaSalle residents work at Wal-Mart or at blue-collar jobs in nearby oilfields, and only about 37 percent of high school graduates go on to college. The median household income, according to the 2000 census, is only $27,000—just 60 percent of the U.S. median.

Jena, like the rest of the South, was once officially segregated, and there are remnants of racism. There is a white part and a black part of Jena, although in this respect, it is scarcely different from any other part of America, whether city or suburb. (The racial self-segregation at Jena High School, in which white and black students tend to hang with members of their own race, is similarly indistinguishable from the racial self-segregation practiced at nearly every other high school and college in America.) But Jena's black community, huddled on the south side of Highway 84, does look distinctly shabbier and isolated. It is also plagued like many poor communities with fatherless families. Its modest wooden churches contrast with the imposing brick First Baptist Church in downtown Jena whose congregation is nearly 100 percent white.

"There definitely is racism in Jena," said Eddie Thompson, white pastor of the evangelical Sanctuary Family Worship Center in Jena. "It's an unconscious racism, something that most white people here aren't even aware of. You see it in income disparities, the fact that blacks live in a lesser part of town and are a lower socioeconomic group. For the black community, there's been a lack of ownership, a feeling that they weren't part of the town."

With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to see that Jena officials might have averted the tarring their town has taken. The notion of prosecuting the high-school noose-hangers for hate crimes was at best far-fetched. Louisiana's hate-crime statute comes into play only when a violent crime—murder, battery, sexual assault, or arson, for example—accompanies the manifestation of racial or other hatred. There are also serious First Amendment problems with turning a symbol into a hate crime: a noose, like a swastika in Skokie, that is

not directed at a specific individual may simply be an ugly display of free expression that the Constitution protects along with other unpopular speech.

And Walters's initial charge of attempted second-degree murder against the Jena Six was probably prosecutorial overkill—although it was not an entirely unreasonable charge given that repeated kicks in the head by shod feet can result in death. Jena High's administrators could have called an assembly at which they explained why hanging a noose was deeply offensive to blacks and warned that further incidents of that nature would result in expulsion. Had they done this, much tension in Jena's black community could have been averted.

Finally, many of the whites in Jena, including school officials, refused to talk to the press, especially after the airing of Mangold's documentary. This allowed wrong impressions to fester: that the noose-hangers had gotten off with just "a few days' suspension," for example, was widely reported. The silence made it seem that Jena's white residents had something to hide.

But the fact remains that the Jena Six case climbed to its rickety position as a national symbol of racial injustice largely because a lot of people, some professional activists and many members of the press, wanted it to do so.

The greatest dread of Jena's citizens right now is a planned march through the town by members of a Mississippi-based white supremacist group on January 21, Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.

As time passed during the fall of 2007, even some of the black bloggers who had initially rallied to the cause of the Jena Six became less enamored of their poster children. It did not help when Witt filed a story on November 11 pointing out that at least half of the $500,000 that supporters had sent to the Jena Six defense fund—controlled by the parents of the Jena Six—and similar funds set up to cover the group's legal expenses could not be accounted for. A photograph posted by Robert Bailey Jr. on his MySpace page showing him with wads of $100 bills stuffed in his mouth did not help, nor did an appearance by Jena Six members Carwin Jones and Bryant Purvis in full rapper attire as presenters at Black Entertainment Television's Hip Hop Awards in Atlanta on October 18. "Seriously, what the hell are you people thinking?" complained the black blog Cincy Report as the facts about Mychal Bell's past criminal history began to air. In a post on BlackAmericaWeb titled "Jena Six, My Foot," Gregory Kane wrote, "Some of us even went overboard, comparing what happened to the Jena Six to what happened to the Scottsboro Boys."

The Congressional Black Caucus, which in September had called for a Justice Department investigation into the Jena Six case as a "shocking" example of "separate and unequal justice," sent a request just before Christmas to Louisiana's outgoing Democratic governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco to have Bell released and to pardon the Jena Six, not on grounds that they were innocent, but because they had "suffered enough." (She demurred.) Al Sharpton, for his part, is maintaining that a federal investigation into possible tax fraud amounted to government retaliation for his role in the Jena Six and other cases.

The greatest dread of Jena's citizens right now is a planned march through the town by members of the Nationalist Movement, a white supremacist group based in Learned, Mississippi, on January 21, the celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. (On January 3, the group filed a federal suit against the town alleging that some of the conditions of its parade permit—that its members not bring along firearms, for example—violate its constitutional rights.)

Meanwhile, Jena's mayor, Murphy McMillin, has appointed a multiracial community relations committee to help heal the black-white rifts in Jena, staffing it partly with—more horrors for the ACLU—prominent black and white ministers in the town. A November 18 service at the First Baptist Church presided over by a team of black and white ministers drew an overflow crowd that was, amazingly for Jena, 40 percent black. "We're a Christian community here in Jena, and I think we can bring about healing on our own," one of the participating ministers, Jimmy Young, pastor of the black L&A Missionary Baptist Church, said in a telephone interview.

Even Bean, who could be said to have organized the whole debacle, expressed some regrets, maintaining that his Jena Six publicity campaign had never intended to minimize either the injuries to Barker or the enormity of the crime committed against him. "When we said, 'Free the Jena Six,' we only meant that they should be free on bail and should get a fair trial," said Bean. "But I warned people in Jena that once the media got hold of this case, I couldn't control what they said about it, and they were going to give Jena a black eye." "What happened in Jena was a Greek tragedy," he said.

A Greek tragedy indeed, but one in which the hubris that precipitated the town's downfall was largely on the part of Bean himself and the many in the media who wanted so badly to believe that the version of the events he fed them was true. ♦

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A George Cruikshank cartoon (1820) depicts King George IV in a rage against family members unwilling to support his Bill of Pains and Penalties and his divorce from Queen Caroline.

Nasty, Brutish, and Funny

The satirist's London of the 18th century BY HENRIK BERING

Judging by his expression, of all of suffering humanity, the Prince of Wales may be the one who suffers most. He cannot for the life of him understand why the papers are so beastly to him. Here he is, speaking on weighty matters such as the plight of the inner cities, the joys of organic gardening, or the need to accommodate Islam in Britain, and all the hacks are interested in are rumors from valets of how his toothbrush is preloaded with toothpaste for him, or how six differently cooked eggs are set out for breakfast so he can choose according to his royal mood.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Henrik Bering is a journalist and critic.

Well, Prince Charles can take comfort from the fact that his trials seem trite compared with the abuse heaped upon his predecessor, King George IV, when *he* was Prince of Wales and most unhappily found himself living in the heyday of British graphic satire. As the Cambridge historian Vic Gatrell reminds us in his magnificent book, this was a very elegant time, as the portraits of Reynolds and Gainsborough testify. It was also a very robust age, determinedly scatological and obsessed with chamber pots, which derived its entertainment from watching executions or the insane at Bedlam. The prevailing mindset was one of "tough-minded cynicism," and very amenable to satire. Cruelty and satire do tend to go together.

City of Laughter
Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London
by Vic Gatrell
Walker, 695 pp., $45

London was very much a man's world, where the pugilist was a revered figure and the libertine's code of conduct ruled in the clubs, with their drinking and gambling. As Gatrell notes, there were certain shared traits between society's top and its bottom, notably a lack of responsibility and self-restraint:

At night, aristocratic rakes—"savage nobles"—would be on the prowl breaking shop windows with their riding whips. He cites Boswell for gleefully dressing up as "a blackguard" when going out in search of strumpets. Satire, writes Gatrell, was preeminently regarded "as a manly art form, deeply opposed to gushing female sensibility."

Much of what was produced was not really satire, as the term was understood by Dr. Johnson, the purpose of which (in his definition) was to expose "wickedness or folly" in generalized terms for the improvement of mankind. Indeed, it is hard to discern any deeper didactic purpose in many of the illustrations reprinted here. Rather, they fall under the heading of lampoon, or "personal satire," the aim of which (again, according to Johnson) was "not to reform, but to vex." Gatrell sees it as a kind of "celebrity voyeurism," where the satirist enjoyed the position of licensed jester, tolerated as long as he did not become subversive to the established order.

The print shops where fashionable people met were Fores in Piccadilly, Hannah Humphrey in St. James Street, William Holland in Oxford Street, and Ackermann in the Strand, which would display the latest specimens in their windows. Some shops had discreet sidelines in pornography. Some 20,000 prints were published during 1770-1830, and they were expensive. (This was before lithography and steel engraving made huge print runs possible for a broader audience.)

Three names stand out: Rowlandson, Cruikshank, and Gillray. Of these, the most original was James Gillray, a manic-depressive with a fondness for flagellation. His favorite topics were the Napoleonic wars and everything French. The greater the threat, the smaller Napoleon became in his huge boots and scraggly feathered hat. And the ragged Parisians were cannibals who feasted on aristocrats' livers and hearts. His other great theme was the aforementioned Prince of Wales who, in an unforgettable caricature, indolently cleans his teeth with his fork, surrounded by unpaid bills, rolling dice, and, not to forget, an overflowing chamber pot.

According to Gatrell, great satire is fueled by anger and hatred, and Gillray's caricatures possess a feverish intensity and inventiveness reminiscent of Brueghel or Bosch. His loathing is all-encompassing: Tories, Whigs, the aristocracy, the rabble—all are subjects of his wrath. All, that is, until he was bought off by the Tories, which induced him to ease off on *them*.

Despite his inventiveness, Gillray's savagery could be excessive as it dipped into sheer misanthropy. It is no wonder that, in the last years of his life, he went insane and had to be cared for by his publisher, Hannah Humphrey. He would furiously engrave on the copperplate without removing the metal shavings, with the result that his hands were covered with bleeding sores.

Gillray's colleague Thomas Rowlandson was of a more genial disposition. His areas of expertise were the human appetites: food, booze, and sex. As Gatrell notes, while the father of British pictorial satire William Hogarth never seemed to enjoy the London he depicted, Rowlandson celebrated the city and its vitality. He had a keen sense of the ridiculous, and relished disaster and disorder. He possessed a friendly "rotund" line, capturing what Gatrell calls his "ironic, but life-affirming fascination with accident."

What gives Rowlandson's prints their special flavor is the fact that he is very much a participant in what he satirizes and, as Gatrell drily notes, parents would be unwise to leave the moral edification of their offspring to Rowlandson. But even his more pornographic efforts cannot be called misogynist, as the girls always look sweet and alluring while the men invariably are the butt of the humor, as it were. What detracts from his stature, in Gatrell's judgment, is an "absence of highs and lows in his work." The basic mood in his prints is one of even-handed jollity. He is one of those artists whose gift came a little too easily.

George Cruikshank was very much a drinking man who would "turn up at his friends' houses at unseasonable hours in the morning, unkempt and unwashed and smelling of tobacco, beer, and sawdust," in Charles Dickens's disapproving words. Cruikshank was often taken in by the police after having passed out in the street. As one would expect, many of his scenes are from London taverns, where high and low mix in sensuous pleasure.

After Gillray's death in 1815, Cruikshank took over as the chief scourge of the Prince of Wales, who had become prince regent in 1811 when George III's madness became rampant. Of 230 prints of the prince that appeared during 1812-19, Cruikshank was responsible for 94, with the result that, during the Regency, the future George IV hardly showed his face outside his palace. As king, he finally managed to buy off Cruikshank with a hefty bribe, who then turned respectable and went on to become a book illustrator, among others of Dickens's *Sketches by Boz* and *Oliver Twist.* In time, he even became a teetotaler.

By the 1830s, satire was fast becoming endangered, though there are, of course, still elements of it to be found in Dickens when he sets out as a novelist in 1836. But the mood had changed. The emphasis was now on respectability. The new middle class did not want to be reminded where it came from, and with the emergence of an industrial proletariat, low life was no longer seen as charming or jolly; the underclass was perceived as threatening. This was the age of the harmless humor of *Punch* where, in Thackeray's words, "the comic muse has been washed, combed, clothed, and taught good manners."

What was lost, according to Gatrell, was a certain candor and incorrectness, as opposed to the new "age of cant," *cant* having been originally defined (yet again, by Dr. Johnson) as "a whining pretension to goodness," and now associated with Victorian feminine blushing and excess piety.

Satire has never regained its pride of place. The closest anyone gets today to satirical anger in Britain is found in the jagged and spiky line of the *Sunday Times*'s Gerald Scarfe, with its savage depictions of Mrs. Thatcher as a meat cleaver in heat or Tony Blair as a snarling little rat face. But impressive artwork notwithstanding, Scarfe's trite pacifism and facile Third World sympathies become tiresome in their vegetarian fury. ♦

BCA

Ford, Not a Lincoln

Post-White House table talk of the 38th president.

BY ROBERT WHITCOMB

Somehow the idea of a scoop and the name Gerald R. Ford do not mate. And indeed, the subtitle of this work is misleading.

Few people who followed the career of Jerry Ford (and I did in a modest way as a baby editor and fill-in World-Wide column writer at the *Wall Street Journal* at the time) will find anything astonishing here. The revelation being pushed hardest by the marketers—that then-Vice President Ford blurted out to DeFrank in April 1974 that he knew that events would soon remove Richard Nixon from the White House and make the former House Republican leader the new chief executive—now seems small beer, though it might have been nitroglycerine at the time. (Nixon, of course, resigned in August.)

Write It When I'm Gone
Remarkable Off-the-Record Conversations with Gerald R. Ford
by Thomas M. DeFrank
Putnam's, 272 pp., $25.95

In any event, DeFrank, a longtime White House correspondent for *Newsweek* and now the *New York Daily News*'s Washington bureau chief, promised the then-veep that he wouldn't report that remark until Ford was dead. And from then on, and especially between 1991 and 2006, the politician and the reporter, by now great pals, had numerous off-the-record chats in which Ford would ruminate freely and securely.

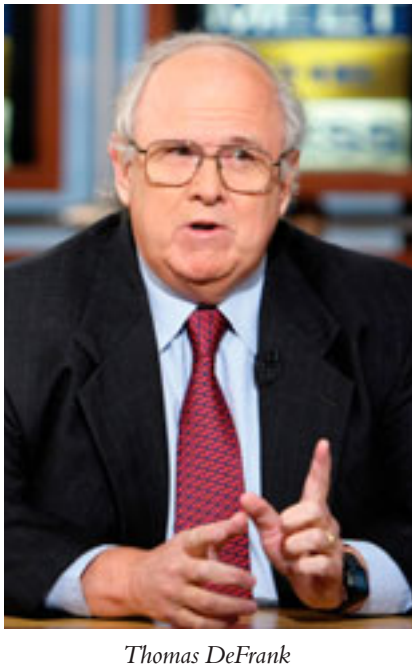
The former president didn't want to deal with the recriminations or, apparently, the hurt feelings that would flow from the premortem release of his observations. He generally loved to be liked. So DeFrank had to wait until December a year ago for Ford to go to his reward and the reporter to his computer to polish up his many, many conversations with the Giant of Grand Rapids.

Of course, readers must bring skepticism to postmortem works of this kind: The subject is not around to comment on the accuracy of the quotes. Still, DeFrank is an honorable man, and we can take the book on faith. But there may be too many conversations here, which might have worked better as a long magazine article. And there's an odd randomness about it: a quotation about this, a quotation about that, then a quotation about this yet again. It's not really pulled together, and kind of flops around.

Which isn't to say there isn't a lot that's engaging. With so many years of remarks by such a genial public figure, there almost has to be. For example, referring to John F. Kennedy, Ford said: "John [Ford didn't call him Jack] was great, but all John had was the press. He was still an elitist; he didn't like the rope line. This guy [Bill Clinton] loves the rope line—and the rope line loves him."

Ford was a famously nice man, with a moderately good sense of humor, and capable of making some perceptive and interesting remarks about his times. But there is much tautology in this volume, as the author insists on repeating what are effectively the same remarks. And some of them are simply boring, even to an admirer of Ford (including me). The Man from Michigan was a smart politician, but rarely prone to eloquence, and sometimes to such verbal gaffes as not seeming to realize in the disastrous 1976 presidential debate with Jimmy Carter that the Soviets dominated Eastern Europe. (What he meant, I think, was that they didn't accept the domination.)

Write It When I'm Gone has been selling remarkably well for a volume about a politician all too often considered plodding and, lamentably, without scandal. Which may be one reason for its success after the foreign and domestic churn of the past few years. Jerry Ford seems a comforting historical figure these days, as the economic and political traumas of his time in power have receded in memory. He had the benefit of a very long political retirement, during which his charms expanded in the public mind and his flaws virtually disappeared. Toward the end, even the likes of the Kennedys were giving him an award for pardoning Nixon! The pipe-smoking Ford seems almost out of Currier & Ives.



GETTY

Thomas DeFrank

Nevertheless, he had his tart moments, too. Ford expresses dismay over Jimmy Carter—saying, in 1980, "God help us" if he were reelected.

Robert Whitcomb, editor of the editorial pages at the Providence Journal*, is the coauthor of* Cape Wind: Money, Celebrity, Class, Politics, and the Battle for Our Energy Future on Nantucket Sound.

Ford didn't like or respect Ronald Reagan, whose choice not to campaign for him in 1976 he considered "one of the four reasons" for his loss to Jimmy Carter. For that he never forgave Reagan, although he showed compassion when the latter developed Alzheimer's disease. He said of his rival for the 1976 nomination: "Totally off the record, he was not what I would [call] a technically competent president," considering him a lazy showman. And regarding the Monica Lewinsky scandal, Ford said of Clinton: "He's got a sex sickness; I mean that." (As for Al Gore: "He's such a bore.")

Many of the final pages are a sometimes-tedious description of Ford's declining health, the clinical details of which will surprise few people of a certain age. Ford lived to be 93 years old, and was in good health until near the end. His death was no tragedy. But what *Write It When I'm Gone* does evoke more than any other thing is a certain kind of "normal," stolid, kindly Main Street Republican of the first three-quarters of the 20th century: leery of big change, affable in a certain way, generous and quietly confident that a traditional Middle American upbringing would produce competence for any duty that could be thrown at him, including the presidency. (In Ford's case, that upbringing was by a mother and a stepfather who was a far better father-figure than Ford's biological father, whom the former president castigates as a notably selfish, infantile, and nasty man—one of the best passages in the book.)

I remember many such figures from my own Midwestern/small-town New England families, and miss them in this frantic, attention-deficit-addled age. Not that things were particularly soothing in Jerry Ford's brief vice presidency and presidency. Does anyone remember the high inflation, the first energy crisis, the ignominious evacuation from Saigon, the Communists' mass murder in Cambodia? And of course, some of my middle American relatives were every bit as nasty as Jerry Ford's father. ♦

BCA

What Hath God Wrought

When an elderly philosopher meets a Dallas business consultant. **BY LAWRENCE KLEPP**

Whether or not He has taken the trouble to exist, God seems to be safely beyond clinching arguments. Debates on the question, in the absence of secure definitions, indisputable axioms, and recent sightings, tend to go in circles, occasionally pausing to get entangled in leftover anthropomorphic metaphors.

There Is a God
How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind
by Antony Flew
with Roy Abraham Varghese
HarperOne, 256 pp., $24.95

They can still be fun, as full of brilliant gambits and clever traps as a good chess match. (See, for instance, the transcript of the 1948 BBC confrontation between Bertrand Russell and the Jesuit scholar Frederick Copleston.) But they always end in a draw, because in matters of religion, the usual order is first the conclusion, then the arguments to get you there—something like the Queen of Hearts' preference for sentence first, verdict afterwards.

There Is a God, the foregone title of this new contribution to the perpetual debate, promises questionable arguments, and it doesn't disappoint; but there are several other questionable things before you even get to them. There is a God? Maybe—though this book, like all books, can't be said to prove it. But the immediate question is whether, as the subtitle suggests, there is a notorious atheist who changed his mind and wrote a book called *There Is a God*.

Antony Flew is a distinguished British academic philosopher, but he was never the world's most notorious atheist, and he didn't write this book. Flew, who is now 84, established, in some 30 books, a reputation as a modest yet formidable skeptic, but Russell, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ayn Rand, and Madalyn Murray O'Hair collected far more notoriety as atheists during his lifetime. And recent books by a phalanx of "new atheists"—Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*), Sam Harris (*The End of Faith*), Christopher Hitchens (*God Is Not Great*), Daniel Dennett (*Breaking the Spell*), and Michel Onfray (*Atheist Manifesto*)—have outsold and outscoffed Flew's best-known book, *God and Philosophy* (1966), a nuanced, careful case for doubt.

He appears to have changed his mind a few years ago to the extent of thinking that a detached deist sort of deity got the universe going. But as he admitted when interviewed by Mark Oppenheimer for a recent article in the *New York Times Magazine*, this book was written not "with" but entirely by a Christian apologist named Roy Abraham Varghese, a business consultant and author based in Dallas who has known Flew for over 20 years.

Varghese claims in the article that the book was partly composed out of Flew's remarks in conversations and letters, and that he had read the manuscript and approved it. But when asked by Oppenheimer, Flew seemed unfamiliar with several writers quoted extensively and praised in the book, and his limited participation is suggested to a reader of any of his earlier books by the subtlety, style, and wit that have suddenly gone missing.

It does offer some interesting biographical details that the philosopher himself must have provided. He grew up as the son of an eminent English

Lawrence Klepp is a writer in New York.

Methodist preacher and theologian and lost his childhood faith while still in secondary school. Flew insists (unless it's just Varghese insisting) that he argued himself into the skeptical wilderness in the first place, and arguments finally delivered him out of it. It was a purely rational mode of metaphysical transportation. But the arguments are essentially the same as the ones he had spent a half-century dissecting and rejecting while teaching and debating on both sides of the Atlantic, and there's an obvious prodigal son aspect to the story, even if Flew hasn't made it all the way back to his father's devout Methodism.

You suspect that Pascal's remark about the heart having its reasons that reason doesn't know applies, without Flew, or reason, knowing it.

The book rests its case for God on a scientific makeover of the traditional "argument from design" (in which the rational order of the cosmos entails a divine designer). For Varghese/Flew, the fact that the vast expanse of galaxies and time has been reduced in modern physics to a few laws and equations that can be written on a blackboard suggests supernatural ingenuity as opposed to just scientific ingenuity at doing all the math that comes with a large universe.

Varghese, like other theists, makes much of the set of narrow parameters needed to nudge the white-hot chaos immediately following the Big Bang toward the formation of stars and planets and molecules that allowed the emergence of carbon-based life as we know it. Throw off the coordinates a little and we aren't here, and neither is much of anything else.

Theoretical speculation among physicists about what is known as the anthropic principle seems to have moved well beyond his providential account of it. But for Varghese and, apparently, for Flew, it can only mean fine-tuning by an omnipotent being with a keen mathematical mind who generously created the entire universe for the sole purpose of establishing (after a waiting period of about 13 billion years) occasionally intelligent life—us—here on earth.

Antony Flew

All this amounts to no more than Flew's newly professed deism, an encore for the Enlightenment's divine watchmaker who meticulously fashions the universe, winds it up, and lets it run without miracles or other meddling. But Varghese can't resist offering, in Flew's persona, tentative but eager endorsements of Christianity that can sound a bit like a pitch for some double-action detergent: "No other religion enjoys anything like the combination of a charismatic figure like Jesus and a first-class intellectual like St. Paul. If you're wanting omnipotence to set up a religion, it seems to me that this is the one to beat!"

If you're wanting a question-begging assertion, it seems to me this one is hard to beat. I lost my own mild-mannered, small-town Protestant faith at about the same adolescent age that Flew lost his, but you don't have to be a skeptic to be put off by the complacent, comfortable tone of this book. It's the sort of thing that incensed Kierkegaard.

For instance, there's the analogy that Varghese offers to make his point that the universe was divinely devised just for us. Suppose you arrive at a hotel in some place you've never visited. You're amazed to get to your room and find your favorite music playing, your favorite snacks and beverages laid out, the latest book by that writer you like on the desk, and so on. You would "certainly be inclined to believe that someone knew you were coming."

The actual Hôtel de l'Univers we find ourselves in looks a little different. It has billions of empty rooms inimical to us and to all life, many of them on fire. We occupy a corner of the obscure room assigned to us, much of it being uninhabitable or under water, and while managing pretty well there at the moment we know that, in the fullness of time, if we succeed in sticking around that long, the source of the room's heat and light will fry us to a crisp just before going out, and that the whole hotel will finally go to pieces, as will the pieces, leaving a pitch-dark nothingness where no reservations are accepted.

If I were Varghese, I'd call the front desk and complain. Maybe an omnipotent agent did thoughtfully arrange these accommodations for us, and the reason they're so dicey and dangerous is—well, Varghese recruits a Panglossian theologian or two to assure us that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Voltaire being unavailable, I will offer on his behalf a few equally plausible possibilities. Maybe a designer deity exists, but He doesn't resemble the God of the theologians. He resembles Rube Goldberg, because a better exercise in elaborately precarious and ironic indirection can't be imagined. Maybe the universe was designed by a quarrelsome committee of gods, in which case the wasted space and the delays and cross-purposes and the eventual collapse of the whole project are just what we might have expected.

Maybe the Epicureans were right. The gods exist, but they are serenely unaware of our existence. Being infi-

nitely more intelligent than ourselves, they have no interest in us and our prosperity, opinions, or sexual habits, just as we have no interest in the private lives of the gnats that live for a summer's day in the woods at the edge of town. Or maybe, "god" being "dog" spelled backwards, the ultimate reality is a Supreme Canine who pensively excretes universes capable of giving rise to similarly perfect, productive creatures. We are just here to walk them.

Drawing inferences about a supernatural orderer and His (Her, Its, Their) characteristics from cosmic order (and from our little cliffhanging niche in the midst of that vast impersonal order) is hazardous work, as David Hume demonstrated more than two centuries ago. Flew made it look even more hazardous in *God and Philosophy*, and as recently as the new introduction he wrote for the book, reissued by Prometheus in 2005, he was still saying that such cosmological arguments will seem persuasive only to someone who already believes in God. If he's finally been bowled over by them, it's worth noting that they leave eminent cosmologists like Steven Weinberg as unmoved as the Unmoved Mover.

We are all up against the fact that, as J.B.S. Haldane once put it, the universe is not only queerer than we imagine, it's queerer than we *can* imagine. Orthodox atheists are left guessing, too, having to pull life and consciousness out of a hat made of matter in motion, or chemical soups, or God-knows-what. There's plenty of room for conjecture.

Some scientists, including Einstein, have thought that if modern theoretical physics were to blur into something vaguely religious, it would have to be some version of pantheism, like Spinoza's, or Eastern religions like Taoism and Buddhism, not Western monotheism with its dualistic matter/spirit baggage. And since the uncertainty principle established by Heisenberg and Schrödinger leaves subatomic particles in a quantum quandary until we observe them, others have detected the shades of metaphysical idealists like Berkeley and Schelling lurking in the more rarefied precincts of physics.

Are we somehow cocreators of a universe that returns the compliment by creating us? Instead of arguing, philosophers might be better off adopting the open-minded curiosity of a William James and looking into mystical or aesthetic experiences. (Even the scathing skeptic E.M. Cioran said that, when he heard Bach, he believed.) Like arguments, they prove nothing, but they assume less.

We might as well let Einstein have the last word. He did metaphorically mention God frequently ("God does not play dice with the universe," etc.), but he offered no arguments and he sharply rejected traditional notions of a judging, intervening, miracle-working personal God. He despised dogmas and fanaticism, but thought that a modest, open-ended religious approach to the cosmos was better than a completely irreligious one. His remarks about the uncanny intricacies of the universe convey awe combined with deep humility. He compares us to a small child entering a vast library full of books in strange languages, dimly perceiving there is an order there but unable to grasp its significance. And he remarked, "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science."

Luckily, there's plenty of it to go around. ♦

BCA

True Love Waits

Abstinence leads to all kinds of adventures.

BY REIHAN SALAM

Ever since Tom Perrotta struck comedy gold with *Election* in 1998, he's been a reliable guide to the zeitgeist, and more specifically to the shifting moods, receding hairlines, and expanding paunches of Blue America.

The Abstinence Teacher
by Tom Perrotta
St. Martin's, 368 pp., $24.95

So it makes sense that his latest novel deals more or less directly with the "culture war"—the central preoccupation of Blue America's novel-readers—as it plays out in one suburban town. Ruth Ramsey, one of the two protagonists in *The Abstinence Teacher*, is a liberated sex-ed teacher who finds herself besieged by (in her decidedly uncharitable view) a band of crazed American Taliban who dare to preach abstinence. And volunteer youth soccer coach Tim Mason is a down-on-his-luck, reluctant American Talib. An ex-rocker and ex-junkie, he dutifully struggles through a loveless marriage and miserable job in the name of leading a strenuously Christian life.

The stage is set for Culture War Comedy!

Back in September, Perrotta kindly shared his "playlist"—the songs he was listening to most—with Dwight Garner of the *New York Times*. Because Perrotta was gearing up to promote *The Abstinence Teacher*, you can be sure he was telegraphing us a message about what to expect. Two songs tied for first place.

There was "First Night" by The Hold Steady, an instant classic from the latter half of 2006. It's a boozy ballad that, in Perrotta's very apt characterization, "is an ode to youthful nostalgia, that realization you can have even in your 20s that the best, most intense moments have already occurred." And then there was Bruce Springsteen's "Fourth of July, Asbury Park," the kind of song that makes grown men weep. Both songs are populist and accessible, yet smart. The selection is thus almost perfectly upper-middle-

Reihan Salam is an associate editor at the Atlantic Monthly.

brow. But there's more to it than that.

Like Springsteen, Perrotta has been grasping in the general direction of the Great New Jersey Novel since the publication of his story collection *Bad Haircut*, a sad and funny look at the 1970s through the eyes of Buddy, a bright working-class kid. *Joe College*, Perrotta's best novel by far, follows a strikingly similar kid, named Danny, as he half-heartedly compromises his way to adulthood.

Some see *Joe College* as an extended riff on the themes raised by Jersey giant Philip Roth in *Goodbye, Columbus*: status anxiety, young love … more status anxiety. It's no surprise that smart young novelists write novels about smart young men, but while *Bad Haircut* and *Joe College* rarely reach Rothian heights, they are consistently affecting. The question is, what happens *after* Buddy and Danny leave their hometown and go off to Yale? Do they outgrow the parochialism of their decent-yet-narrow upbringings and ascend new heights? That's the hope. But some, inevitably, discover new and sometimes more noxious ways of being parochial.

Which leads us back to *The Abstinence Teacher*. Like *Little Children*, a breezy read turned into a movie loved by the smart set, *The Abstinence Teacher* is notably unspecific: We're somewhere in affluent smugburbia. But whereas *Little Children* was about the thrill of sexual infidelity—or rather, the thrill of sexual infidelity for the boring, pathetic, and not-so-bright—and paranoia over the abuse of children, *The Abstinence Teacher* is explicitly about religion and politics. The aforementioned Ruth, a divorced mother of two, goes ballistic when soccer coach Tim leads her daughter and other teammates in a celebratory postgame prayer.

She's already at wit's end after the school district forces her to teach a pro-abstinence curriculum, and it doesn't help that she's plagued by loneliness and sexual frustration. (Before you send in an angry letter, please note that I didn't write the book.) So she decides to take up a new crusade: to fight for the separation of church and youth soccer. The only trouble is that longhaired Tim is just handsome and self-effacing enough to complicate matters.

The Abstinence Teacher's Ruth is a lot like Sarah, the feminist housewife at the heart of *Little Children*. Both are grown women who've never gotten over high school. For Sarah, it's the pain of being overlooked by the likes of "the Prom King" that stings most. For Ruth, it is the vague memory of her pudgy teen paramour Paul.

Tom Perrotta

GETTY

Like all of us, Ruth just wants to be loved, and as she enters the fullness of middle age, she fears that she never will. Her daughters are moody and distant, and it doesn't help when they both get religion. Ruth's best friends, a gay couple with a relationship on the rocks, can only give her so much of the attention she desperately needs.

Now, of course, there's something to this. Almost all parents at some point feel keenly underappreciated, but Ruth takes this understandable sensitivity a step further. Somehow she is never to blame for her own misery. It's not too surprising that she decides to lash out, and the fact that she lashes out politically, against her Christianist enemies, reflects the tenor of our times as much as her own self-importance.

It's easy to dismiss Ruth as an unflattering caricature, but there are plenty of Ruths in the world: sad, misguided people who let youthful nostalgia cripple them for life.

Tim, another nostalgia victim, is the more sympathetic of the two leads. After hitting rock bottom and losing his wife and daughter to a more stable, prosperous man, Tim is transformed by the healing power of Christianity as preached by former Best Buy salesman and neighborhood zealot, Pastor Dennis. The Tabernacle—Pastor Dennis's church—is not portrayed unflatteringly, exactly. It's easy to see why Tim finds comfort there, in a nurturing, multiclass, multiethnic milieu so atypical of affluent smugburbia.

At the same time, Pastor Dennis is very clearly an authoritarian running what amounts to a cult of personality. Tim is one of its victims. Out of sincere gratitude, Tim hews closely to Pastor Dennis's path, even when the pastor tries to make Tim the instrument of his small-town holy war. But he continues to lust after booze and, rather more urgently, after his ex-wife. Tim is definitely flawed, yet he comes across as a little Jesus-like in his good-natured humility and kindness. Tim represents a bohemian, nonjudgmental Christianity that is all about the love, man. Pastor Dennis does not.

It's pretty clear which side Perrotta falls on, and the plot draws Tim closer and closer to Ruth, his unlikely ally. The conclusion is not exactly a shocker. It is romantic-comedy neat, in fact; and in truth, it really makes you pine for *Joe College*.

So while *The Abstinence Teacher* is far from the best example of culture-war lit—for that I enthusiastically recommend Walter Kirn's brilliant *She Needed Me*—it is a welcome addition to a fast-expanding genre, not least because it provides a solid primer on the politics of resentment. ♦

Farewell to Flashman

The singular creation of George MacDonald Fraser, 1925-2008. **BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS**

Looking back over the nearly 40 years since I first found myself immersed in a Flashman story, perhaps the single most striking thing about the experience is the date. It somehow didn't seem to "fit," amid all the feverish enthusiasms of the late sixties, that one should be so thoroughly absorbed by the doings of a racist-sexist-imperialist-you-name-it military officer. I can remember the mingled shock and glee with which my radical friend Andrew Cockburn and I discovered, over a steaming curry that was another colonial legacy, that we had both recently fallen for the same author and character. I have met that look, of the confirmed addict and fellow-sufferer, many times since.

Maybe it was partly the period that explained the fatuity by which a dozen British publishers greeted George MacDonald Fraser with rejection slips. But he eventually found a home with Herbert Jenkins, the independent house that had already earned itself immortality by bringing out P.G. Wodehouse. And there is charm in the fact that Wodehouse himself, who seldom commented on other writers, said, "If ever there was a time when I felt that 'watcher-of-the-skies-when-a-new-planet' stuff, it was when I read the first Flashman."

Not unlike Wodehouse, the Flashman novels transport one into a ready-made alternative world, populated with an extraordinary cast of characters. In bold contrast to Wodehouse, however, almost all these characters are real-life historical ones, with only the chief protagonist being annexed from an earlier fiction. It took nerves of steel for Fraser to pit Flashman against Otto von Bismarck, or to pitch him into the sack with Queen Ranavalona of Madagascar, but the upshot was that good historians found themselves praising his verisimilitude, and many people owe all their knowledge of, say, Afghanistan to the voluminous footnotes that accompany each adventure.

Managing to patrol the frontiers of fact and fiction in an almost postmodern fashion, Fraser always insisted that he was merely the editor of a trove of papers discovered ("wrapped in oilskin") at an English country-house auction, while daringly inserting his hero, in *Royal Flash*, into the action of Anthony Hope's *The Prisoner of Zenda* or, in a later story called *Flashman and the Tiger*, bang into the middle of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Adventure of the Empty House*. Just as many people more than half-believe that Sherlock Holmes was a real person, so Fraser used to get letters from people offering to put him in touch with distant Flashman descendants.

"Pot boiler," said John Updike, rather wince-makingly, about the Fraser formula. There was some element of truth in this. Every tale had a super-villain, a super-minx, and a harrowing escape from torture or death. If that reminds you of Ian Fleming, perhaps it's no disgrace. (Fraser wrote the screenplay for *Octopussy*.) But his plots were far more credible than Fleming's, because they were based on the scarcely believable facts about high-Victorian empire, and his characters were much more authentic because, well, because they *were* authentic. In addition to this, he was extremely and consistently funny. Flashman affronts Benjamin Disraeli with anti-Jewish taunts and teaches a slave girl to say "Me Lady Caroline Lamb," and his extraordinary lack of sensitivity is done with exquisite care. Meeting Oscar Wilde at the theater, Flashman describes him as looking like "an overfed trout in a toupe," which is about as much damage as one could hope to inflict in six words.

Of Fraser's robust Toryism there can be no doubt. He described the British Empire as "the greatest thing that ever happened to an undeserving world" and bore arms for it in Burma (admittedly against another empire—the Japanese one—that was infinitely worse). But he does not romanticize or airbrush the gruesome and exploitative aspects of imperialism. What he writes about the slave trade, say, or about the horrific British destruction of the Imperial Palace at Beijing, is unvarnished and accurate. What he writes about the Zulus and the Sikhs and the Afghans is full of respect and admiration.

Unlike most old-school Tories, also, he shows an admiration for the nascent power of the United States and sets a good deal of his narrative in this country, with two excellent portrayals of Abraham Lincoln and one unsettlingly vivid depiction of John Brown. Flashman himself always remembers to be properly contemptuous of any grand overarching theories, bluffly opining, "In my experience the course of history is as often settled by someone's having a belly-ache, or not sleeping well, or a sailor getting drunk, or some aristocratic harlot waggling her backside."

HARPER COLLINS

Christopher Hitchens is a columnist for Vanity Fair *and the author, most recently, of* Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*: A Biography.

In later years, and partly for purposes of tax exile, Fraser withdrew to the Isle of Man: one of the better-preserved of the British Isles and a place which reminded him, as he said, of England as it used to be. I talked to him by phone on his 80th birthday—"Same day as Charlemagne, Casanova, Hans Christian Andersen, and Kenneth Tynan," as he stoutly told me—and found him suitably reactionary. In 1969, when Flashy first stepped onto the page (or should I say back onto the page where Thomas Hughes had left him?), it would have been wellnigh impossible to imagine that British soldiers would be again in action in the historic battle-honor territories of Afghanistan and Mesopotamia. But now that they *were* back, George MacDonald Fraser was not in the least bit delighted: "Tony Blair is not just the worst prime minister we've ever had, but *by far* the worst prime minister we've ever had. It makes my blood boil to think of the British soldiers who've died for that little liar."

It is an illustration of historic irony, and of the bizarre operations of fortune's wheel, that that very tone of voice should now be an indicator of the outlook of the British Right. ♦

BCA

America Divided

A historian sees three phases in the life of the Republic.

BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

As Americans, we are used to seeing the 220-year stability of our constitutional system, unique in modern history, as a homogeneous narrative, interrupted by crises like the Civil War and the Depression—and perhaps, Vietnam and its aftermath—but essentially consistent. Typically, the American story is broken down into brief intervals associated with leading personalities, from Thomas Jefferson to Ronald Reagan and beyond.

But close analysts of the evolution of the republic have (according to various criteria) sought to distinguish longer periods in American political development. The establishment of successive "ages" in world history has been a significant, and at times fruitful, enterprise, undertaken by historians of various cultures over the past millennium. Professor Morton Keller of Brandeis has performed an important service with this brilliant, engaging new book, which convincingly identifies three discrete configurations of the American commonwealth.

America's Three Regimes
A New Political History
by Morton Keller
Oxford, 384 pp., $27.95

Keller names the three stages "the deferential-Republican regime," "the party-Democratic regime"—which comprises two subperiods, political and industrial—and "the populist-bureaucratic regime." This perceptive theory provides an excellent tonic for citizens who empirically observe that civic expectations and idioms have changed dramatically in America after two centuries, but who are confused as to how such contradictions emerged.

Such an examination is especially important today. We live in a country where a term such as "progressive," originally applied to opponents of party corruption, has come to be associated with leftist ideology. Rhetoric against foreign intervention is heedlessly reintroduced into the political discourse without regard for context, and diatribes against democracy are commonplace—either from leftists dissatisfied with an agenda for global transformation, or in the mouths of dogmatic conservatives in favor of the "virginal" republic.

In prefatory remarks to each of the book's four parts, Keller explains the background of each phase in the long American transmutation. He writes that the first American regime, beginning in the early 17th century—that is, under British colonial rule—and extending to the early 19th century (soon after independence) "both derived from and reacted to" the Old World social background. The English environment was the place of origin for the majority of colonists who would create the United States. It featured a legacy of Protestant-Catholic conflict, followed by a fusion of monarchy and parliamentary authority, but with maintenance of aristocratic power and a gentry, a "fiscal-military" state originating in continuous war against the French, and common law.

From these European patterns, Americans forged a "deferential" authority organized as a republic. In earlier works, this system might have been simply defined as feudal, based in landed privilege, and stratified. Keller provides a thorough inventory of the customs and institutions that appeared in the English colonies, many of them clearly imitative of European models. But, like prior scholars, he notes that the rigid structures of the Old World were mitigated by the greater land resources available to white colonists with the removal of the American-Indian population. With so much territory open, the legal restrictions represented by inheritance soon became elastic.

Keller has adroitly included in his narrative many fascinating, but now obscure, details of life in the new conditions of the American colonies. These include local rebellions and attempts at authoritarian rule, in addition to such better-known incidents as the Massachusetts witch trials and the affirmation of press freedom in the case of John Peter Zenger. Keller portrays an American colonial system in which "adaptation and innovation" necessarily replaced the tradition and precedent of the European past.

Stephen Schwartz is the author of the forthcoming The Other Islam: Sufism and the Road to Global Harmony.

This genius for adjustment of political philosophy to practical needs produced an American Revolution that was unlike its predecessor in England, the Puritan Revolution. The latter produced the rule of Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector, and its successor in France ended in the Reign of Terror and the dictatorship of Napoleon.

As many have noted, the American overthrow of the old order did not produce an absolutist ruler. But a gap in political thinking had become visible: Rousseau's belief that social benefit was brought about by governmental power, against the affirmation of John Adams that "government ought to be what the people make of it." In addition, George Washington, the chieftain of the American revolutionaries, did not harbor the expansionist ambitions of Cromwell or Bonaparte, whose wars are still vivid in the world's collective memory. In the 19th century, new nation-states such as a unified Italy, previously broken into a constellation of imperial, aristocratic, and religious states, had to create an Italian identity, which remains diffuse and disparate today. By contrast, Americans knew who they were, but had to create a country to fit their cultural and spiritual ambitions.

In revolutionary America, human nature reshaped institutions, while in radical France, institutions were destroyed in an attempt to found a new human existence. In Keller's words, "past, present, future: all was grist for the American revolutionary mill."

In fulfillment of this principle, the interests and capacities present in the foundation of the American order assured that the "deferential" republic would give way relatively soon to the dominance of parties over classes and the rise of democratic politics. For the Founders, parties had been an object of anxiety, as agencies of division. Keller refers to the triumph of political parties as a "regime change in American public life."

Party-democracy in its early form reflected a turn in America's orientation from issues involving Atlantic commerce to a growing internal market, the expansion of capitalism, and the influence of slavery. Each of these impelled the arrival of new political trends and conflicts. One of the most remarkable described by Keller was the debate over internal improvements, such as roads and canals, in which federal planning was replaced by the initiative of local legislators—the standard with which we still live. But westward expansion stimulated the consciousness of Americans as a people, and a political idiom devoted to the pioneering ideal of the log cabin, in contrast with the elitism in the personalities and discourse of the Founders. It also animated such ugly phenomena as anti-Catholicism and nativism.

To Keller, the Civil War and Reconstruction represent no more than an interlude in the history of party rule. Race, the essential problem driving both the armed confrontation and its disastrous sequel, not only survived, but in some respects was strengthened.

The first articulation of the democratic regime collapsed in the Civil War which, as Keller indicates, is universally regarded by historians as "the great divide" between "the early Republic and urban-industrial modern America." Keller, however, declares that the direct effects of the conflict on the American polity were "ephemeral and superficial." Most notably, the Civil War and Reconstruction represented no more than an interlude in the history of party rule. Race, the essential problem driving both the armed confrontation and its disastrous sequel, not only survived, but in some respects was strengthened.

In Keller's view, the industrial chapter in the course of party-democracy—a continuation of the second regime rather than a new system—was marked by sociological more than political change. Where early democracy contended with contradictions between the power of federal and state authorities, democracy after the Civil War faced the challenges of industrial transformation. Along with the triumph of American industrial organization came a new supremacy of the political organization. The industrial ascendancy in American democracy generated progressivism which, like the Civil War, promised to preserve the essence of the republic. Where northern opposition to southern secession represented a successful effort to maintain the primordial union, progressivism, in Keller's words, "sought to preserve an older America from the transforming power of big business and politics."

But progressivism, like the Civil War and Reconstruction, was merely an interlude, and as Keller indicates, by the 1920s the party system had been reestablished. The final shift in American politics came during the 1930s with the triumph of "the populist-bureaucratic regime." Keller is notably eloquent in his analysis of this new and seemingly permanent style of politics, writing that the country has remained "under the sway" of this regime since its inception.

"Today," he affirms, "this regime is in its full maturity: as distinctive, and as pervasive, as its party-democratic predecessor."

The contemporary regime is dominated by interest groups rather than party politicians; the welfare state has generated new relations between the government and the citizenry. Finally, a long epoch of obliviousness to the outside world, punctuated by brief foreign wars, ended with a new American global engagement.

In *America's Three Regimes*, Morton Keller has produced a valuable, highly readable survey of American political history that answers many of the questions about government and the people that we ask today. This is the epitome of pleasurable reading: It makes you want to go back and reread page after page, not because the text is difficult but because it is filled with genuine insights. Kudos to Professor Keller and congratulations to those lucky enough to encounter his book. ♦

Touch of Evil

'As painful as a root canal,' but worth it?

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Over the course of three decades, from 1898 to 1927, we watch an admirable and indomitable man slowly but relentlessly decline into a despicable and indefensible monster. That is the arc of *There Will Be Blood*, the justly celebrated but very difficult new film. Its protagonist is a prospector and entrepreneur named Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis), who begins as a lone miner digging for gold in the California mountains and ends as a rich oilman drunk and alone in the bowling alley inside his Hollywood mansion.

There Will Be Blood
Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson

Plainview is, like the movie that contains him, profoundly eccentric and very interesting. And because of how singular a character he is, Plainview does not seem to be a symbol of anything. He is not the personification of capitalism run amok, or the oil business, or America in the 20th century. For that reason alone, *There Will Be Blood* rises above the model of socialist agitation provided by Upton Sinclair, who wrote the novel on which it is loosely based.

But as conceived by writer-director Paul Thomas Anderson, and acted to a fare-thee-well by Day-Lewis, Plainview doesn't symbolize anything other than the human soul's tragic capacity to shrivel away. The spellbinding first 15 minutes of the movie feature only a few words of spoken dialogue, as Anderson works with riveting force to establish Plainview's great personal strength and iron determination. We begin with him literally in a hole 50 feet deep, a mine he has dug with his own hands. He effortlessly swings a pickaxe and scratches at the mine walls for gold.

He climbs out, drinks coffee, sets a dynamite charge, loses his footing, and tumbles into his own hole, shattering a leg. Seizing a rock of gold, he manages to hoist himself out of the mine and onto his back on a rocky mountainside. Whereupon the 38-year-old Anderson, in a single moment proving himself the finest director of his generation, pulls the camera back to show Plainview's isolation. He is alone, in the middle of nowhere. He will have to drag himself on his back for miles and miles on jagged rock to save his own life and secure his fortune.

Here and throughout, as he did in his Oscar-winning turn as a quadriplegic in *My Left Foot* and an 18th-century woodsman in *The Last of the Mohicans*, Daniel Day-Lewis demonstrates a physical commitment to performance that makes American method actors look like dilettantes and hacks.

As Plainview journeys through life, he shows signs of a nobility of spirit, in particular by taking in a child left orphaned and raising him with great kindness as his own. He also gives contradictory indications of being a bamboozling hustler, talking poverty-stricken Californians out of their share of the oil fortunes he is shrewd enough to see on their lands. He is a strange and unfathomable person, defiantly uncategorizable. The problem is that the movie probably would have benefited from a conscious and obvious effort on Anderson's part to turn Plainview into a symbolic representation of America at its worst. Such a decision would have been artistically questionable and politically noxious. But it would have made watching *There Will Be Blood* a more satisfying experience because it would have given the movie a broader and more mythic scope.

Instead, Anderson and Day-Lewis force us into an uncomfortably intimate embrace with Plainview, and Plainview alone, for two hours and 38 minutes, and the embrace becomes suffocating. There are, I believe, only two scenes in which Lewis does not appear, and there are only three other characters in the movie who have even minimally defined personalities.

One of them is his antagonist, a suspect Pentecostal preacher named Eli Sunday (Paul Dano) with whom he finds himself unwillingly intertwined for years. But there isn't much in the way of contest between them. Plainview is a tower of a man while Sunday is a twitchy mouse, and too odd to be of much interest. Their final confrontation, in the movie's controversial coda, is as lopsided as a Harlem Globetrotters showdown with the Washington Generals.

Many critics enthusiastic about *There Will Be Blood* are highly critical of this final scene, and think the film would have been improved by its elimination. But the movie charts a course for Daniel Plainview, one that requires him to manifest the satanic evil on display at its conclusion. To do otherwise would be to betray the film's own moral logic. Plainview sacrifices all the goodness that was in him, and the movie's audience must sacrifice any hope of him finding redemption.

I can't remember a movie about which I've felt quite so divided. I write this a week after having seen it, and I still don't know whether *There Will Be Blood* should be hailed as a landmark accomplishment, or condemned as an ultimately pointless exercise. And I can't decide whether Daniel Day-Lewis's performance is among the greatest ever committed to film, or a flagrant piece of hammery.

There Will Be Blood offers a remarkable study of degeneration, but to what end? There are moments nearly as painful as a root canal, but at least at the conclusion of a root canal one has been improved by the experience. Are we improved in any way by *There Will Be Blood*, this Calvinist sermon of a film? ♦

John Podhoretz, editorial director of Commentary, *is* THE WEEKLY STANDARD*'s movie critic.*

"I've always thought that . . . pollsters who call people up and ask them how they're going to vote, speak in perfect English, and standard English; they speak with a kind of politically correct manner and it encourages a politically correct answer. I've often thought that [if] an Archie Bunker voice were to come over the phone, and ask people how they're going to vote, you'd get a more honest answer."

—Chris Matthews, MSNBC, January 8

ZOGBY INTERNATIONAL

901 Broad Street, Zogby Heights, New York 13501
1600 J Street, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20006
NY phone 315.555.0200
zogby.com

To: Callers

From: Mr. Zogby

Re: South Carolina primary poll

Here is the question tree for Democratic voters in South Carolina. If you have any trouble approximating Carroll O'Connor's voice or accent, DVDs of All in the Family *and* Archie Bunker's Place *are available in the library. Do not—I repeat, do NOT—listen to DVDs of* In the Heat of the Night.

Greeting and Question 1: Hey! How ya doin'? I'm callin' from the Zogby people, ya know, dem poll guys? Ya have a good Noo Year's? Youse guys down South, down there in Carolina, youse got a much better way o' celebratin' the noo year—more civilized, if ya know what I mean. We got too many Porta Rickans up here shootin' off firecrackers 'n' beatin' their wives 'n' girlfriends 'n' such like; it ain't right. Anyhoo, ya plannin' to vote in the primary?

If answer to Q1 is "No": Well, thanks for your time, and God bless ya.

Question 2, if answer to Q1 is "Yes": So, this Clinton dame—whew! Whaddaya think o' the piano legs on that broad, huh? She's a piece o' work, that senator o' mine, lemme tell ya. I can see why that husband o' hers thinks he's gotta dip his pen in the company inkwell, as we used to say. You gonna vote for her?

If answer to Q2 is "Yes": Well, OK, my missus tells me it's time we had a woman president. But as I tell her, those Ay-rabs better not start sendin' missiles over this way when it's Hillary's time o' the month, right?

Question 3, if answer to Q2 is "No": Boy, I couldn't agree with ya more. She's bad news. But who ya gonna vote for instead? They got this Maback Bommarama, or Bamak Omarosa, or whatever his name is—ya know, the colored guy with the big ears—I mean, c'mon—you're not gonna actually vote for de guy, are you?

If answer to Q3 is "Yes": Well, OK, my little girl she thinks these United States is ready for a colored president, but I don't know if my neighborhood is all that whipped up about it, ya know?

Question 4, if answer to Q3 is "No": Yeah, I didn't think so. They gotta be kiddin'. Anyhoo, you bein' from Carolina 'n' all, you must be salivatin' over that Edwards guy—ya know, the one with the haircut who keeps talkin' about how he's gonna sue the big cooperations 'n' hand everything over to the unions and