the weekly
Standard
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AN ECONOMIC MESSAGE FOR McCAIN
IRWIN M. STELZER

Carrying a Torch for China

The predictable consequences of giving Beijing the 2008 Olympics

BY ETHAN GUTMANN

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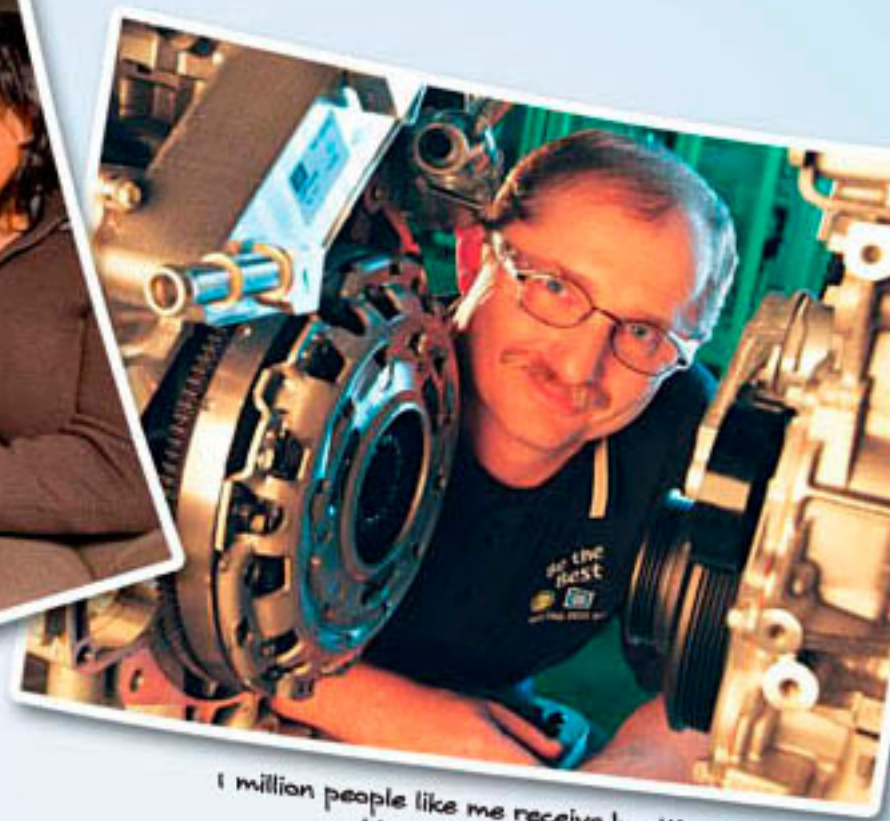

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In the new issue of the Hoover Digest . . .

The Moral Authority to Fight

As the world sees it, America is prone to bullying. How we could change that view.

Barack Obama has proclaimed that as president he would talk directly even to America's worst enemies. One can imagine a president as a kind of superhero taking off in Air Force One for Tehran, there to be met on the tarmac by the villainous Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Is this a serious foreign policy proposal or simply campaign fodder? Hillary Clinton, Obama's rival, considers it naive.

History has given Obama's idea a rather bad reputation, but in one case it makes sense: the buildup to wars where national survival is not at risk. We fight such "wars of discipline" to restore a balance of power that best ensures peace and to preempt a rising menace. America does not do so well in its disciplinary wars. We begin with an unclear moral authority and then lose it to uncertainty and a sanctimonious antiwar movement—even when we fight for the sake of others. Perhaps Obama's idea is mere mushy idealism, but building a painstaking moral framework for America's great power is our greatest foreign policy challenge

—Shelby Steele

Night of the Living Boomers

Longer, healthier lives—graying populations aren't the economic time bomb we fear.

A calamity promises to devastate the global economy, overwhelm hospitals, and decimate armed forces. Not a killer virus, a deadly terrorist attack, or a natural disaster—it's the aging of the world's baby boomers, the coming tidal wave of senior citizens who will live longer, consume more, and produce less. These menacing seniors are set to terrorize America, Europe, Japan, even China.

Except that they're not. The gloomy projections rely on a definition of "old" that is itself old-fashioned. Consider that when Social Security was designed seven decades ago, 65 was deemed the age when Americans moved "beyond the productive period" and into dependency. A 65-year-old American man in 1940 could expect to live 11 more years. Today, thanks to medical advances, a man of 65 can look forward to nearly 17 more years. Using mortality risk, not the calendar, as a yardstick, the wave of elderly shrinks. If benefits and retirements were governed by mortality risk instead of age, the costs would shrink, too.

—John B. Shoven

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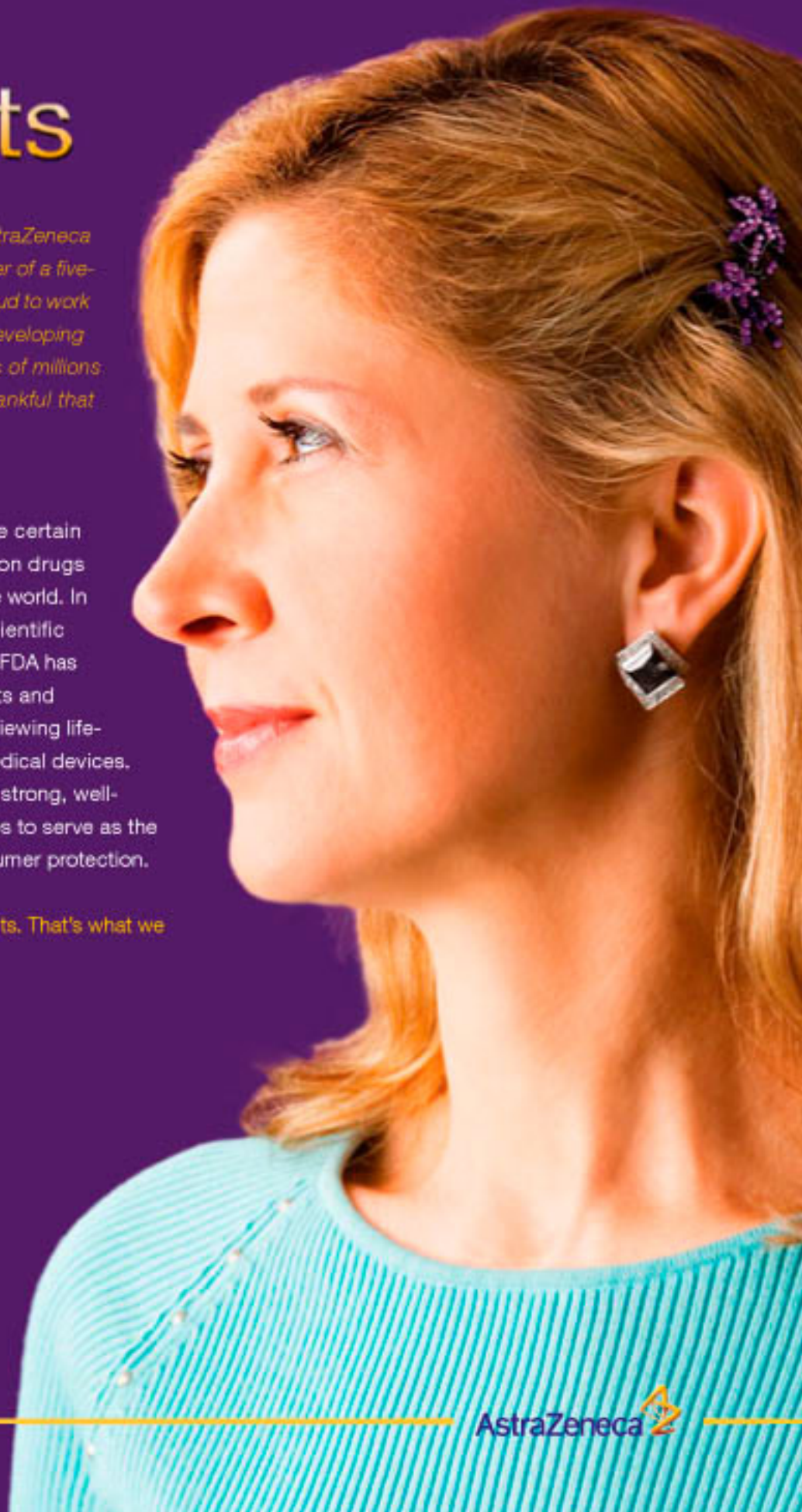

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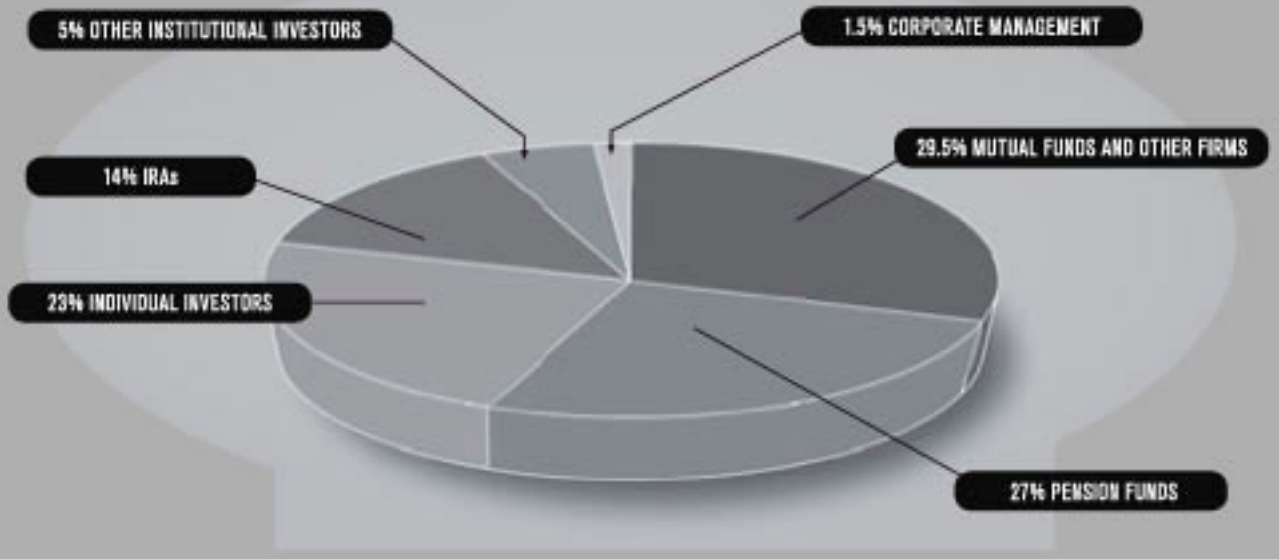
Do you own an oil company?



U.S. Oil and Natural Gas Company Ownership, 2007

If you own mutual funds or a retirement account, chances are you're among the tens of millions of Americans with a stake in the oil and natural gas industry. A recent study* by economist and former Clinton Administration official Robert Shapiro found the majority of oil and natural gas company shareholders are "middle-class U.S. households with mutual fund investments, pension accounts or other retirement accounts and small portfolios."

So when Congress starts talking about raising energy taxes or taking "excess profits" from U.S. oil companies, look at the facts and ask yourself, "who does that really hurt?" Read the full study at EnergyTomorrow.org.

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*SONECON: *The Distribution of Ownership of U.S. Oil and Natural Gas Companies*, September 2007

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the weekly Standard

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Farewell, Charlton Heston

The Scrapbook notes with particular sadness the death last week of Charlton Heston, age 84. We have a proprietary interest in the great actor, since Heston was a faithful subscriber to The Weekly Standard and once wrote us a delightful letter to the editor (May 19, 1997), agreeing with our reviewer's pan of a book claiming that somebody else wrote Shakespeare's plays. Most of the letter, though, was an explanation of why actors love the Bard. ("Shakespeare leaps alive in air, in the spoken sound of his words. Only actors really understand this, though audiences sense it subliminally, in performance. . . . He created those men and women to live on a stage, seen in light and sudden dark, heard in cries and whispers.")

In his later years Charlton Heston's politics got equal billing with his long and storied career in show business. He was an early and ardent supporter of the civil rights movement, picketing a segregated theater that would not admit black customers to see *El Cid* (1961) and, as he liked to remember, standing on the podium behind Martin Luther King when he delivered his "I have a dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial.

Later, as a defender of free speech, he was a caustic critic of political correctness ("tyranny with manners") and for several years served as president, and public face and voice, of the National Rifle Association. Like another famous actor with an interest in politics, Heston was a fair and fearless chief executive of the Screen Actors Guild.

Above all, Heston was an actor, with a craftsman's devotion to his work and an artist's dedication to public performance. He began his career on the New York stage but, in the early 1950s, found fame in Hollywood. Hardly anyone thinks of Moses anymore without picturing Charlton Heston in *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and he won the Academy Award for Best Actor in *Ben-Hur*. For many years he specialized in epics—*El Cid* (1961), *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1965), *Khartoum* (1966), *Julius Caesar* (1970)—character roles—*Planet of the Apes* (1968), *The Omega Man* (1971), *Airport 1975* (1974)—and even a cult classic or two (*Soylent Green*, 1973). But our particular favorite is *Touch of Evil* (1958) where, under Orson Welles's direction, Heston played a Mexican narcotics agent in a battle of wills with a malevolent sheriff (played by Welles) in a scruffy border town. *Touch of Evil* neatly combined Heston's understated skills as a player with his emphatic physical presence in a film noir masterpiece.

The last of the old-style movie stars, Charlton Heston kept on acting—on stage, in movies, on television, even doing voice-overs—practically up to the end, and professional success never spoiled the character of a man whose personal decency and loyalty to principle were his signature roles. ♦

Beware Sailors Named 'Jihad'

Last week in London, FBI director Robert Mueller mentioned a case that caught our eye: the strange story of Hassan Abu-jihaad. Abu-jihaad was convicted by a federal jury in early March of providing material support to terrorists and disclosing classified national defense information while he was a U.S. Navy sailor serving on the USS *Benfold*, in the Persian Gulf.

Hassan Abu-jihaad didn't always go by that name. He was born Paul R. Hall and he lived in Phoenix and worked for UPS until the mid-'90s. Then, in 1997, Hall converted to Islam, took the name Abu-jihaad ("father of Holy War"), and, eight months later, joined the Navy. In January 1998, the Navy granted him a secret security clearance and for the next four years he was stationed on the guided-missile destroyer *Benfold*, where he served as a signalman. In 2000, Abu-jihaad began communicating with an extremist website in London, Azzam Publications, using both his private Hotmail account and his Navy dot-mil email.

He praised Osama bin Laden and cheered the bombing of the USS *Cole*. Shortly after that October 2000 attack, he began passing information about his battle group's movements and pointing out weaknesses that could be exploited. In one particularly chilling email, he described the group's formation during a planned trip through the Strait of Hormuz and noted that they would be particularly vulnerable to "a small craft with RPG"—rocket-propelled grenades.

But that's not the most disturbing part of the case. What's most troubling is that Abu-jihaad was honorably discharged in 2002. (He went back to work for UPS in Phoenix and began planning land-based terrorist attacks with another Muslim friend.) And no one in the U.S. government would have been the wiser were it not for British law enforcement. While investigating a terror suspect in 2003, the Brits stumbled upon a computer disk that mentioned Abu-jihaad. They passed it on to the FBI and only then did the pursuit of Abu-jihaad begin. He could spend up to 25 years in federal prison. ♦

Scrapbook

(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of April 2, 2001)

Give This Man Another Pulitzer

Sure, he already has two. But there are few reporters more deserving than the *New York Times*'s former Baghdad bureau chief John F. Burns, who spent five years covering Iraq before he was transferred to London. His long experience in war-torn countries has given Burns keen insight on the stakes in Iraq as well as America's global responsibilities. Here he was on *Charlie Rose* the other day:

> The United States and its predominant economic, political, and military power in the world have been the single greatest force for stability in the world, such as it is now, certainly since the Second World War. If the outcome in Iraq were to destroy the credibility of American power, to destroy America's willingness to use its power in the world; to achieve good; to fight back against totalitarianism, authoritarianism, gross human rights abuses. . . . It would be a very dark day.

Couldn't have said it better ourselves. ♦

Holy Courvoisier, Batman!

Understatement of the week: "When you're having dinner with customers, it's normal to have a drink."

—U.S. Postal Service spokesman Gerry McKiernan responding to a Government Accountability Office report which revealed postmen had spent $13,500 in government funds at a 2006 dinner at a Ruth's Chris Steak House in Orlando, Florida, that included, according to the report, more than "200 appetizers and over $3,000 of alcohol, including more than 40 bottles of wine costing more than $50 each and brand-name liquor such as Courvoisier, Belvedere and Johnny Walker Gold." ♦

Congratulations, Michael Ramirez!

Speaking of well-deserved Pulitzers: In an event of surpassing rarity, the board has given a leading conservative his due, for the second time. We refer to Michael Ramirez of *Investor's Business Daily*, whose superlative political cartooning was recognized by the Pulitzer board in 1994, and again this year. Ramirez's work, which was justly recognized for its "detailed artistry," appears frequently in these pages. Two tips of THE SCRAPBOOK homburg to Michael. ♦

Casual

O Canada

Last weekend, I happened on a recording of the Scottish traditional "The Bonnie Lass of Fyvie" played by the Pipes and Drums of the 48th Highland regiment. It's a catchy tune and, though I couldn't recall the last time I'd heard it, the words of the chorus popped into my head—thanks undoubtedly to my repeatedly playing a copy of the Black Watch's bestselling *Scotch on the Rocks* album back in the 1970s.

I had a sudden curiosity about the 48th Highlanders, a Canadian regiment. For many years, the best Canadian pipe band was the 78th Fraser Highlanders (the first non-Scottish band to win the World Pipe Band Championships, in 1987). But the name is merely honorary. The 78th was disbanded in 1763 after the Seven Years' War. It was revived in 1967, not as a military unit but as a bit of costume history for the Montreal tourist trade during the Expo. I wondered if the 48th Highlanders still bore arms.

I remembered notes of their valor at the lovely memorial park for the Canadian dead of World War I at Vimy Ridge in northern France. It's hokey looking in pictures, with the maudlin sculpture of a hooded and cloaked woman representing "Canada Mourning" and the large symbolic pylons representing France and Canada. Yet the whole is deeply moving. At the bottom of each pylon is an inscription, in English and French:

> TO THE VALOUR OF THEIR COUNTRYMEN IN THE GREAT WAR AND IN MEMORY OF THEIR SIXTY THOUSAND DEAD THIS MONUMENT IS RAISED BY THE PEOPLE OF CANADA.

Canadians think of Vimy the way we think of Yorktown. The 1917 battle was the first time that Canadians ever fought as a national army—rather than as scattered units in a British one. It was a defining moment in the formation of the Canadian identity. After the war, a grateful French government gifted the ridge to Canada, and if you visit Vimy you stand on Canadian soil, not French.

REUTERS / PASCAL ROSSIGNOL

Thanks to the Internet, I had but to wonder about the 48th to be able to satisfy my interest. They are still a fighting force and have their own website—*www.army.dnd.ca/48highlanders/main.html*. It's a fancy government one, aimed at recruitment, with lots of attention to the unit's weaponry and equipment. I clicked on the "history" button expecting tales of valor past and got something that makes the regiment sound like the Toronto chapter of the Kiwanis rather than warriors who left comrades on some of most hallowed ground of the 20th century:

> The 48th Highlanders formed in 1891 and have had a long standing tradition of participation in the life of its parent city, Toronto. The Regiment has participated in all aspects of community functions for well over 100 years, in addition to fulfilling its operational duties around the world. Since its inception, the men and women of the regiment have been among the first Canadians to step forward and answer their nation's call. The Regiment's service includes Operation Recuperation, the Golan Heights, Korea, South Africa, Cambodia, Cyprus, Bosnia, both the World Wars and the Boer War to name a few.

The regiment carries 49 battle honors—something I learned on websites not created by the Canadian government. These include the Boer War—termed the "South African War" in the citation—a roll call of the Great War's legendary places—Ypres, Festubert, the Somme, Pozières, Thiepval, Arras, Vimy, Passchendaele—and more than two-dozen from the Second World War. And the 48th fought at Ortona, the brutal eight-day battle in December 1943 between Canadian troops and German paratroopers for possession of a tiny town on the Adriatic Coast. Ortona is called the "Little Stalingrad" for the ferocity of its house-to-house fighting. Thanks to news reports, the battle became an international symbol of Canadian valor. (In another miracle of the Internet, I found the original Canadian army newsreel of the battle on YouTube.)

Vimy and Ortona are representative of something important. Something symbolized by the 48th's motto: "*Dileas Gu Brath*" ("Faithful Forever"). I'd have thought that mentioning those hard-won victories would be the way to encourage young men to join up. But apparently the Canadian government thinks that young boys dream of playing policeman in the Balkans rather than of winning the Victoria Cross.

In 1940, after the fall of France, Canadian wrath was stirred up by a story that the Germans had bombed the Vimy Memorial. I wonder if such a story would stir outrage today.

Robert Messenger

The price at the pump

Where does your gasoline dollar go?

In 2007, the industry earned 8.3 cents on each dollar of sales.**

* U.S. Department of Energy data for February 2008
** API calculation based on the *Oil Daily*

According to the Federal Trade Commission, the global price of crude oil is the single most important factor in what you pay for fuel at the pump. Since 1992, America's oil and natural gas industry has invested more than $1.25 trillion in exploration, development, production and distribution of oil and natural gas.

To learn more about fuel prices, what the oil and natural gas industry is doing and what you can do, visit EnergyTomorrow.org.

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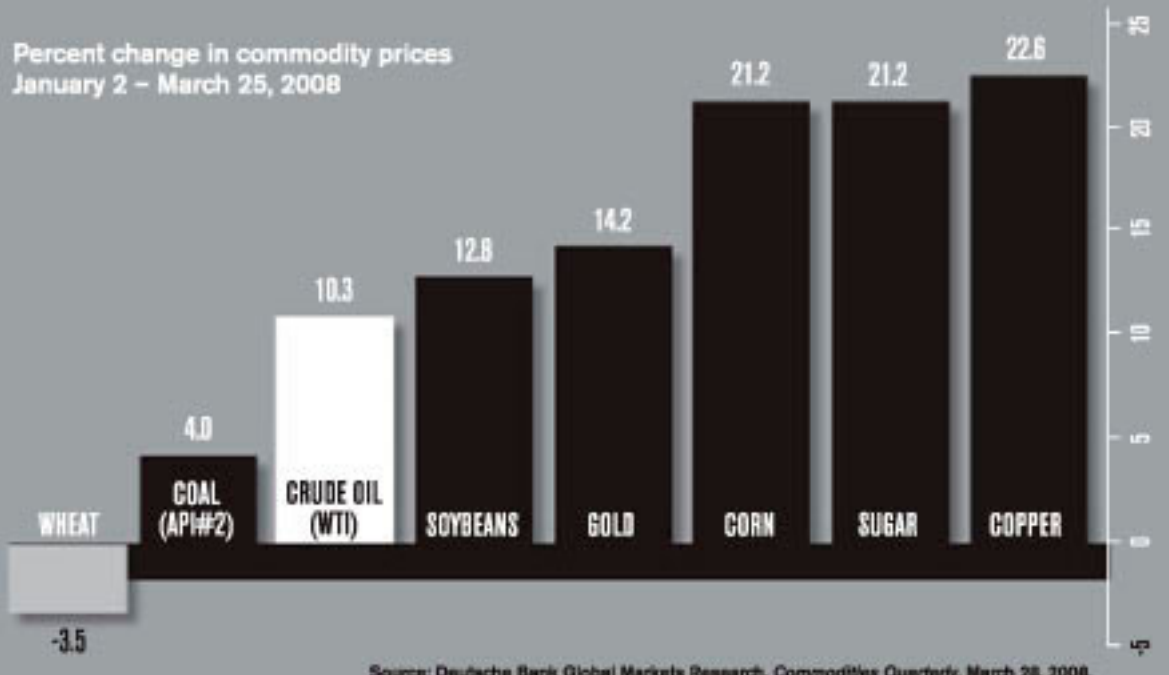
[Global demand, weak dollar have driven up oil prices]



Source: Deutsche Bank Global Markets Research, Commodities Quarterly, March 28, 2008.

Filling your gas tank hasn't been very pleasant lately, and Americans are understandably asking why. According to the Federal Trade Commission, one factor is more important than any other: the price of crude oil in the world market. That's the price oil refiners pay for the raw material to produce the fuels that make America mobile.

Today, the market price of crude oil accounts for nearly 70 percent of every dollar you pay at the pump, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. And federal, state and local taxes are on top of that.

A combination of global factors is driving world crude prices to record highs. Though the U.S. economy has softened, others – such as China's and India's – continue to grow strongly, driving crude oil demand higher. Political tensions in oil-producing nations introduce potential supply risks that create upward pressure on crude oil prices.

Importantly, the recent decline in the value of the U.S. dollar and the flight of investors into commodities has put pressure on prices, making commodities, including oil, more expensive for U.S. consumers than for consumers in countries with stronger currencies.

In these challenging times, it's more important than ever to know the facts, even if that doesn't make the reality of volatile energy costs any easier. Learn more about crude oil and gasoline prices at EnergyTomorrow.org.

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the weekly Standard

Progress, Actually

The last time General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker reported to Congress on the state of the Iraq war, "benchmarks" were all the rage. Congress had established 18 criteria in early 2007 both to pressure the Iraqis and to keep score on their progress. And in September, Congress faulted the Iraqi government for failing to meet many of those measures. Concocting a checklist of laws and actions that would lead to national reconciliation in Iraq was always a fool's errand and misunderstood the complexity of the situation. But having laid down this marker, Congress would want to hear an update, surely. Not so. The word "benchmarks" was scarcely heard last week when Petraeus and Crocker reappeared before Congress. Crocker testified that the Iraqis have actually met about two-thirds of the benchmarks, including four or five of the six key legislative benchmarks and all of the benchmarks measuring their contribution to their own security. In reply, the congressmen who insisted on legislating these benchmarks now say benchmarks are a poor way to measure progress in Iraq.

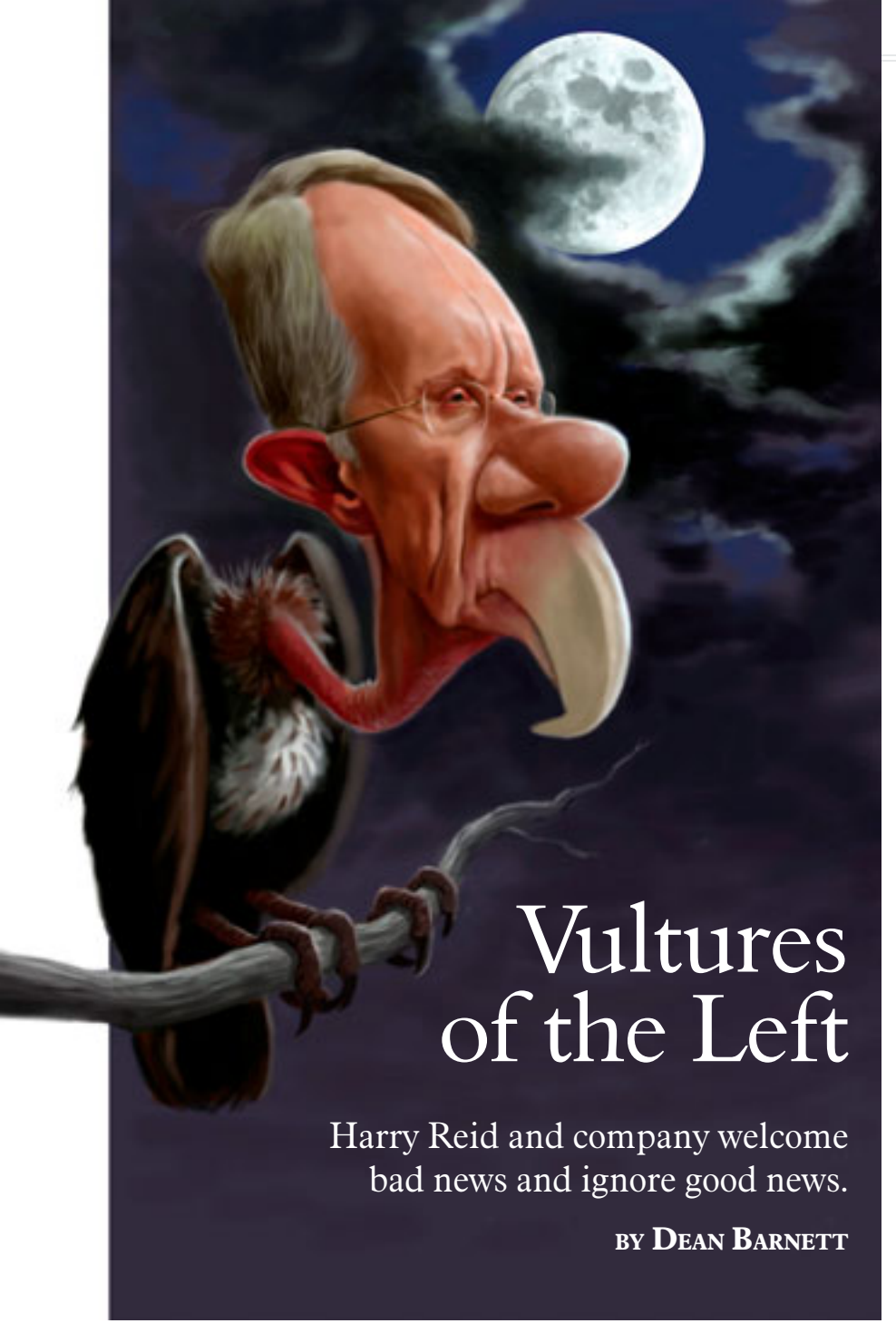
Their disingenuousness is monumental—but they are right. So by all means, let's look beyond the benchmarks. Let's look instead at the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Sunni Arab community turned against al Qaeda and the Baathist insurgents in 2006 and 2007 and opted for political engagement instead of armed struggle. The Sunni militias who were previously fighting against us and the Iraqi government have been reconstituted as the Sons of Iraq (SOI) and have enlisted in the fight against al Qaeda. Polls show that about 90 percent of them mean to vote in upcoming provincial elections. One of the most overlooked developments of 2007 was the flood of volunteers from Anbar province into the Iraqi Security Forces themselves, not just into the SOIs, or "concerned local citizens," as they were previously called. The behavior of the SOIs in Baghdad during the recent violence has also been instructive: They did not leave their posts, they did not seize the opportunity to kill Shia; they behaved professionally, and helped maintain order at a very fraught moment. The Shia Iraqi government, as a result, has a new sense of the value the Sunni SOIs add in Baghdad and that sense is likely to lead to even greater integration and cooperation.

Now let's look at the Shia side. Since the seating of the Maliki government in May 2006, a constant criticism has been that it is eager to send money to Shia areas and send troops against Sunni fighters, but not the other way round. Well, the Sunni leadership in Anbar province has succeeded in drawing $100 million from the central government while Shia provincial governors in Karbala, Qadisiyah, and Babil complain that they're not getting what they need from Baghdad. Similarly, the Iraqi Security Forces are now fighting with Anbaris against common enemies, and an Iraqi army unit was just deployed from Anbar to Basra to fight against Shia militias. General Petraeus testified that about 20 percent of the Sons of Iraq are Shia, and Maliki has announced new plans to develop SOIs in Shia areas. So much for the notion that SOIs are a militia-in-waiting for the next Sunni takeover. Taking a step back, we can identify an even more important dynamic. In late 2006 and 2007, Shia, Kurds, and the majority of Sunni Arabs formed a political and military bloc to defeat al Qaeda and the Baathist insurgents and negotiate their differences peacefully. In early 2008, Shia, Kurds, and Sunni Arabs strengthened this political bloc while using it to strike against illegal, Iranian-supported Shia militias and terrorists. That is the most important and positive sign of reconciliation of all.

At the same time, Ambassador Crocker testified (and almost everyone who has been watching politics in Baghdad concurs) that there is a new fluidity and willingness to compromise and act politically rather than in a sectarian way, even within the badly flawed Council of Representatives. Last year, the council could not even debate, let alone pass, laws. In February it passed three at once as part of an omnibus logrolling package that would have made any American congressman proud.

So we have significant progress within the Iraqi government. We have significant grassroots political development. We have Sunni and Shia Arabs fighting together against both Sunni and Shia enemies that they now see as common foes. We have the central government distributing its funds both to Sunni and to Shia areas. Despite the supposed flaws in the de-Baathification reform law, excellent Sunni commanders who could theoretically have been purged remain in key positions in the Iraqi military and police forces. The only groups that remain outside of the political process are al Qaeda, the Baathist insurgents, and the Iranian-backed Special Groups. If this isn't dramatic progress toward reconciliation, what would such progress look like? One congressman last week had the gall to complain about Iraq's "intransigent political leaders." The more intransigent political class is here in Washington.

—Frederick W. Kagan, for the editors



Vultures of the Left

Harry Reid and company welcome bad news and ignore good news.

BY DEAN BARNETT

On April 18, 2007, a series of five car bombs hit Baghdad, killing almost 200 people. Showing his customary lack of restraint and his trademark political opportunism, the Senate majority leader, Harry Reid, attempted to score partisan points. Seeking out a gaggle of press microphones the next day, Reid proclaimed, "This war is lost, and this surge is not accomplishing anything, as is shown by the extreme violence in Iraq this week." Reid's comments, so close on the heels of a massacre, provided a tidy snapshot of how the vultures of the left operate. Whether in the blogosphere, the mainstream media, or even the U.S. Senate, they wait for bad news from Iraq and then swoop in with abandon to derive political benefit from a tragedy.

Reid's declaration of defeat would be an especially poignant embarrassment were the left capable of embarrassment. First of all, the intemperate and ludicrously premature comments in question came not from some 20-something blogger but from the Senate majority leader. And Reid was audaciously careless with the facts. When he declared the surge a failure in April 2007, it hadn't even fully begun. A large portion of the surge troops had yet to arrive in Iraq. The strategic changes that General David Petraeus was implementing were still in their nascent stage. Reid doubtless knew all of this, and yet still called the surge a failure.

But Reid's cravenness in this episode plumbed still greater depths. A ranking member of the U.S. government, Reid responded to a major terrorist attack by calling for surrender. If Reid had any concerns about how our enemies might take such a response and how it might incentivize their future actions, he didn't let those concerns slow his rush to criticize the Bush administration.

The vultures of the left habitually hover, waiting for bad news from Iraq. Whatever bad thing happens becomes their propaganda item du jour. For instance, the 4,000th American casualty in Iraq triggered a paroxysm of "commemoration" in the leftwing blogosphere and other anti-Bush outposts.

Some people insist that those on the left who mark such "grim milestones" do so because they are sincerely grieved. While it's impossible to know what lies in the hearts of the vultures, an objective look can't help but raise questions about just how grief-stricken they are. In the days before the 4,000th casualty occurred, one could almost sense the anticipation. When the time came, some leftwing websites chose to "honor" the fallen by running a portrait of George W. Bush and John McCain composed of tiny pictures of the 4,000 fallen. One wonders whether those involved in the project asked the families of the fallen if they felt this was an appropriate use of their loved ones' images.

PAUL MOYSE

Dean Barnett is a staff writer at The Weekly Standard.

What Reid and his fellow vultures reveal is that much of the American left reached its conclusions about Iraq long ago, even though the picture was fluid. These people won't let new facts disturb their settled view. Regardless of any results of the surge, Reid had his story and he was sticking to it. Even if the surge reduced civilian casualties by, say, 80 percent, Reid knew he would never concede its effectiveness.

In an astute piece in *World Affairs* that was every bit as hard on war supporters as war critics, war correspondent George Packer took note of this phenomenon at a less lofty level:

> Once, after a trip to Iraq, I attended a dinner party in Los Angeles at which most of the other guests were movie types. They wanted to know what it was like 'over there.' I began to describe a Shiite doctor I'd gotten to know, who felt torn between gratitude and fear that occupation and chaos were making Iraq less Islamic. A burst of invective interrupted my sketch: *none of it mattered—the only thing that mattered was this immoral, criminal war.* The guests had no interest in hearing what it was like over there. They already knew.

It's one thing for a bunch of movie types to cherish a reckless ignorance. The worst they can do is make execrably boring movies that no one will pay to see. But it's quite another thing when this attitude finds a home among leading politicians.

After the fighting in Basra wound down last week, the vultures of the left once again took flight, and once more Harry Reid led the flock. While people of good will on both left and right were trying to figure out what the fighting in Basra meant, Reid needed no time to gather facts. Instead, he leapt to his usual conclusions, insisting that the Basra fighting foretold disaster and exposed Bush administration mendacity and incompetence. "Instead of making our own country safer," Reid droned, "we are greasing the pockets of corrupt Iraqi politicians and buying their temporary cooperation."

Elsewhere, other observers were trying to add something constructive to the conversation, an act that holds no interest for the vultures of the left. Writing in the *New York Times*, Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, one of the authors of the Army's counterinsurgency manual, for example, offered a sober description of what lies ahead in both Iraq and Afghanistan. "The American people must continue to be patient," Nagl wrote. "In the 20th century, the average counterinsurgency campaign took nine years. The campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan are likely to run longer, and other commitments loom in this protracted struggle against Al Qaeda and its imitators."

Nagl is an expert on counterinsurgency and a supporter of the war, but his piece was no exercise in cheerleading. It was a good faith effort to level with the American people. It is precisely this kind of dispassionate and informed analysis that the events in Iraq require and that the American public deserves.

Unfortunately, analyses like Nagl's have a hard time competing for attention in a marketplace dominated by the hyper-partisan squawking of the vultures of the left. ♦

They Really Do Plan to Surrender

Don't put your hope in Democratic statesmanship.

BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

This time there were no peace marches. There was no MoveOn.org ad in the *New York Times* calling the commander of coalition forces in Iraq "General Betray Us." There was no suggestion from Senator Hillary Clinton that crediting the commander's report on military progress in Iraq required the "willing suspension of disbelief." There were no votes on cutting off funds for the war. No expectation of passing a timetable for withdrawal.

All of which happened last time, when General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker first reported to Congress in September 2007 on the Bush administration's "surge" policy. But not this time. When Petraeus and Crocker returned to Washington last week, Congress was stymied. Subdued. Cowed. And the congressmen's "frustration," reported the *Washington Post*, "appeared to stem from a realization that there was little they could do to affect policy in the administration's final nine months."

The *Post* was right. Listening to congressmen meander through various lines of questioning over the two days of hearings, one detected a certain resignation to the idea that U.S. forces will remain in Iraq in substantial numbers at least through January 2009 and possibly well into the future.

Why the shift from an emboldened antiwar movement in 2007 to a despondent one in 2008? Democrats in Congress would say the reason is structural. They don't have the votes to overcome GOP filibusters or override presidential vetoes of antiwar legislation. But they do not say why this is the case. The reason they do not have the votes is the success of the surge. If the surge had not forced Al Qaeda in Iraq into retreat,

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stanched the ethnosectarian conflict in Baghdad and surrounding provinces, and created the tenuous sense of security that has accompanied and encouraged ground-up reconciliation and national political progress, GOP support for the war would have collapsed. The Democrats would have had the votes to force a withdrawal. And Bush would have been unable to stop the rush to the exits.

That didn't happen. The surge's success so far has defanged the antiwar movement—for the moment.

Petraeus and Crocker have until January 20, 2009, to build on the recent gains. Their plan, endorsed by President Bush, is to withdraw the surge troops by July, then to consolidate and take stock, with any further drawdown of the remaining force of about 140,000 dependent on conditions on the ground. If John McCain is elected president, Petraeus and Crocker will probably have the backing of the new administration. But no matter who is elected in November, a large-scale American military and economic commitment to Iraq may outlast the Bush presidency. As former Bush adviser Peter Feaver noted in *Commentary*, Iraq may not look the same to a Democratic president in the Oval Office as it did to a candidate on "the stage of a college gymnasium filled with delirious Democratic primary voters."

In this scenario, a President Obama or a President Clinton assumes office, listens to the Joint Chiefs and the director of national intelligence, and—presto!—realizes that despite what was said on the trail, there is no easy way out of Iraq. For strategic and security reasons the American presence must continue for some time. Then the new president recalibrates plans for withdrawal, perhaps abandoning them altogether, and in a televised address from the Oval Office, coolly explains to the country that the difficult realities of a dangerous world require the commander in chief to renege on campaign promises of an orderly and timely "redeployment" from Iraq.

Fat chance. Some wishful thinkers may not believe the Democratic presidential candidates are serious. They may think that these savvy pols are playing to an antiwar primary electorate and will become more "responsible" if one of them becomes president. They misunderstand the Democrats.

For most Democrats, leaving Iraq as soon as possible *is* the responsible course of action. Hence Hillary Clinton's statement during the Petraeus hearings last week: "I think it could be fair to say that it might well be irresponsible to continue the policy that has not produced the results that have been promised time and time again." Would a President Clinton suddenly decide otherwise? Would she argue that U.S. security requires a large American force to remain in Iraq indefinitely? Do pigs fly?

Yes, both Obama and Clinton have been vague about how they plan to "end" the war. And Obama advisers have been in the news backtracking from promises to end the war swiftly (Samantha Power) or writing memos envisioning tens of thousands of Americans in Iraq through 2010 (Colin Kahl of the Center for a New American Security).

But these are distractions. What matters is that both Obama and Clinton promise to end the war regardless of conditions on the ground. In a March 19 speech in North Carolina, Obama said that as president he will "immediately begin" to "remove our troops from Iraq" at the rate of one to two combat brigades "each month." He then promises to "remove all of them in 16 months" while leaving "enough troops" to "guard our embassy and diplomats and a counterterrorism force to strike al Qaeda if it forms a base that the Iraqis cannot destroy."

At George Washington University in February, Clinton promised to begin removing troops "within 60 days" of taking office, also at a rate of one to two brigades a month. So far Clinton has resisted making a promise to have all U.S. troops out by a date certain. But that is simply to allow her room to maneuver; she understands that a date certain is a promise to voters she may be unable to keep. Her main promise, like Obama's, is to leave Iraq. Which is a promise either one must keep. They must keep it because (a) each believes it's the right thing to do and (b) any Democrat who is elected will face unrelenting pressure to withdraw.

This pressure will take two forms. The first is institutional. The Pentagon brass believe the Iraq war has stretched U.S. forces to the breaking point. They already think the Bush administration is drawing down our troops too slowly. So they are unlikely to resist an Obama or Clinton administration's plans to withdraw more rapidly.

Meanwhile, in 2009 Democrats will retain control of Congress, perhaps with expanded majorities in both chambers. The Democratic caucus's antiwar bonafides are well established. Senate leader Harry

Reid declared the war "lost" in April 2007, and Speaker Nancy Pelosi has long held that Iraq is a "problem" to be "solved" by withdrawal. You can be sure that the Democratic Congress will try to legislate timetables or reduce funds for combat next year, especially if the new president is a Democrat. Would a President Obama or Clinton veto a bill calling for withdrawal? Would either lobby against legislation enacting political timelines for "strategic redeployment" from Iraq? Not likely.

The second form of pressure will be political. The election of a Democratic president will be interpreted as a mandate to end the war. The pro-withdrawal faction will have energy and momentum. Failure to follow through will risk a collapse in public support. This happened to the Democratic Congress elected in 2006, which promised to end the war in Iraq and saw its approval ratings sink when it failed to do so. A president requires public approval in order to enact his policy agenda. Obama or Clinton will not want to repeat Congress's folly.

So the drawdown will begin. One hopes—one prays—that by January 2009 Iraq will have reached a point where security gains can be maintained with fewer U.S. troops. But that may not be the case. It may be that security will deteriorate as Americans leave, that militias will rearm, and Al Qaeda in Iraq will regroup as the central government fumbles to quell a situation spiraling out of control. Violence may spike. Ethnosectarian conflict may flare. The Sunnis may walk out of the government. The chaos may spread. What then? Will a President Obama or Clinton halt the withdrawals—or, more likely, accelerate them? After all, Obama and Clinton have long argued that the United States should not "referee" Iraq's "civil war."

Petraeus and Crocker's achievements in Iraq notwithstanding, Obama and Clinton have promised to leave. Either one, if elected, will most likely follow through. And it won't be pretty. ♦

A Debt That Can Never Be Repaid

Michael Monsoor is awarded the Medal of Honor.

BY MICHAEL FUMENTO

COURTESY MONSOOR FAMILY AND U.S. NAVY

Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Monsoor

Spring 2006: The Mulaab district of Ramadi, Iraq. Graffiti boast that this is "the graveyard of the Americans." Leaving your base camp virtually guarantees a fight, and I'm in one the first day of my embed. When shots ring out, I jump into the street to start snapping pictures. I look back and see a tall Navy SEAL seemingly pointing his MK48 medium machine gun right at me.

In fact, he was protecting me as well as his teammates. SEALs don't wear identification—even on dress uniforms—and I would never have learned his name if, six months later, he hadn't sacrificed all to save those same teammates.

Last week I looked on as President Bush, tears glistening on his face, presented the parents of Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class (Sea, Air, and Land) Michael Monsoor our nation's highest award—the Medal of Honor. "Mr. and Mrs. Monsoor: America owes you a debt that can never be repaid," he said. "This nation will always cherish the memory of your son."

Before the shooting began in Ramadi, the SEALs made clear their disapproval of my presence. Two journalists had previously embedded with my unit, first battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). Snipers shot and wounded them both because they stood too long in one spot. This forced soldiers and SEALs to run to where they knew a sniper scope was trained

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Monsoor (center) during a fight in the Mulaab district of Ramadi, 2006

and drag the men to cover. A 101st sergeant was seriously wounded during one rescue. As far as the SEALs were concerned, I was just another casualty waiting to happen.

As it became clear that day in Ramadi that this was a full-fledged attack, 19 men from two platoons of SEAL Team 3 split into two groups, each grabbing a rooftop—the "high ground" in urban warfare. The attackers never had a chance. "Those SEALs fight like machines," I later wrote in these pages ("The New Band of Brothers," June 19, 2006). But machines don't die, and within weeks a member of the platoon, Aviation Ordnanceman 2nd Class Marc Alan Lee, became the first SEAL killed in Iraq.

Six months later, when I returned to the same part of Ramadi, it was already tamer, in part because of the actions of 1/506th and of the SEAL platoons. Yet there was terrible news: A second SEAL had just been lost.

On the morning of September 29, 2006—St. Michael's Day—the 25-year-old Monsoor was standing as lookout at a sniper post on a rooftop outcropping between two other SEALs who were lying in the prone position. They were helping drive back an attack, and had already taken out two enemy.

Suddenly a grenade bounced off Monsoor's body armor chest plate and fell at his feet. Monsoor knew that by then the fuse was too short to allow the grenade to be tossed out. He also knew the prone SEALs couldn't move. He was the only one in a position to save his own life; but he did the opposite. Without hesitation he smothered the blast with his own body. The other SEALs still sustained serious wounds, but Monsoor had saved their lives.

Regarding both Lee and Monsoor, upon my return I wrote of the reaction I'd gotten by email from their teammates. "Anyone who harbors the notion that SEALs are as tough on the inside as they are on the outside is wrong," I said. Indeed, the losses were especially heavy blows for the nation's toughest warriors. At a pub after the White House ceremony, one of the SEALs confessed: "You know, we really *had* become convinced we were invincible."

Now in one of the most secure areas of the world, the White House, it was time for this strange reunion, to celebrate the third Medal of Honor given for actions in the Iraq war—all posthumous. The California-based survivors of SEAL Team 3 showed up, including one blind in both eyes. Another was blind in one eye and appeared to be missing a chunk of his left arm. At a later ceremony, the teammates of "Mikey," as they called him, would receive 11 Silver Stars—the Navy's third-highest honor. It made them the most decorated SEAL unit since Vietnam. Representatives of 1/506th were present, as well as dignitaries, to hear Bush praise Monsoor's actions.

"By his undaunted courage, fighting spirit, and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of certain death, Petty Officer Monsoor gallantly gave his life for his country, thereby reflecting great credit upon himself and upholding the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service," the citation reads in part.

The SEALs have their own ways of honoring their fallen. Three weeks after my rendezvous with him, Mikey saved yet another SEAL's life by dragging the severely wounded man to safety with one arm while using the other arm to keep the enemy back with bursts from his powerful (but heavy) MK48. He earned a Silver Star in the field for that action. Mikey's aunt and godmother Patty O'Conner sent me a photo she'd received of a tattoo the rescued SEAL had imprinted on his torso. It shows Mikey with his machine gun and in full battle dress, but also wearing angel wings. Alongside it is the prayer to Saint Michael (the Archangel), which some Catholics (Monsoor's religion) recite in defense against the forces of darkness.

The prayer entreats the Archangel to "defend us in battle" and "be our protection" against wickedness. A Medal of Honor is not beatification. But the prayer fits. And it's not just those men who were in that sniper post who owe thanks to Michael Monsoor. ♦

MICHAEL FUMENTO

The Year of Taking Offense

Foot-stamping demands for apologies aren't presidential. BY FRED BARNES

The McCain campaign was offended last week, mightily offended. Democratic senator Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia said McCain didn't care about the people he dropped bombs on during the Vietnam war. "You have to care about the lives of people," said Rockefeller, who supports Barack Obama for president. "McCain never gets into those issues."

This was tough criticism. Almost instantly it triggered emails from McCain's campaign headquarters expressing just how deeply offended McCain's allies were. First Orson Swindle, McCain's fellow POW in Vietnam, demanded that Obama "denounce" Rockefeller's statement. Then campaign flack Tucker Bounds zinged Obama for not "personally" condemning Rockefeller. Bounds was echoed by McCain's Senate buddy, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina. He urged Obama to "step up to the plate" and say Rockefeller's comment was "out of bounds."

What the McCain gang wanted, in effect, was an apology from Obama for what someone else had said. They didn't get one. Instead, Rockefeller said he was sorry for using "an inaccurate and wrong analogy," which scarcely qualified as a sincere apology.

Meanwhile, an obscure Obama press aide was trotted out to say Rockefeller had gone too far. That only prompted the McCain team to demand, once again, that the candidate himself, Obama, repudiate Rockefeller. There was no telling when the flap would end.

Of course the whole thing was largely playacting—in other words, political theater. Sure, Rockefeller's attack was nasty, unfair, and over the top. So what? McCain has heard much worse. He certainly did during his 2000 presidential bid. He did when he championed immigration reform. He's no stranger to the nasty, unfair, and over-the-top side of politics.

One of McCain's strengths has been his ability to stand up to political abuse without flinching or whining. This is surely a presidential trait: the ability to shut out insults and cheap attacks and hostile buzz and concentrate on what's important. Ronald Reagan was particularly good at this. Constant offense-taking wasn't a feature of his campaigns or his presidency.

But 2008 is different and not just for McCain. Peter Baker of the *Washington Post* has aptly dubbed it the "Year of Taking Offense." It's mostly fake. Candidates and their minions pretend to be offended by some sharp attack by an opponent. And the opponent or a campaign flunky pretends to be sorry.

Baker took note of a 48-hour period last month in which the following happened:

> Barack Obama's campaign is outraged that Hillary Rodham Clinton's husband supposedly questioned the Illinois senator's patriotism. Clinton's campaign is insulted that an Obama surrogate would compare the supposed attack to McCarthyism. The Obama campaign is shocked that a top Clinton supporter would compare an Obama supporter to

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Congratulations to Michael Ramirez, winner of the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning

Judas Iscariot. The Clinton campaign is beside itself that an Obama state worker would mention Monica Lewinsky's infamous blue dress.

That episode, in which numerous apologies were sought, wasn't the half of it. When Brit Hume of Fox News decided to list the recent cases of offense-taking and apology-demanding, it took five "fullscreens"—that is, five separate pages on a television screen. His list included Clinton strategist James Carville's labeling New Mexico governor Bill Richardson "Judas" for endorsing Obama and Obama's denunciation of his foreign policy adviser Samantha Power for calling Hillary Clinton a "monster." Carville, by the way, refused to apologize.

A number of things are going on here. One is that candidates are taking offense to discredit criticism or to draw attention on an especially outrageous attack. The media routinely play along, turning on the attacker and asking when the apology is coming.

Another aspect is the imposition of political correctness on the political dialogue. It's proper to banish racist or anti-Semitic statements, and any politician who relies on sexist or religious references in a political attack is asking for trouble. But driving tough, harsh, stupid, inappropriate, and even extreme language out of politics is something else entirely. Doing so takes the life and vividness and wonderfully exaggerated oratory out of political dialogue. All of politics begins to sound like the arid campaign debates that we now see week after week on television.

One wonders how America got along so well for two centuries with election campaigns brimming with unreasonable attacks and insensitivity and cheap insults. In 1976, President Ford asserted that Governor Reagan couldn't start a war but President Reagan could. How unfair was that? Very. Ford didn't apologize, yet Reagan survived and won the presidency four years later.

Presidential campaigns are supposed to be rough. They test the candidates in many ways, including how well they deal with the pressure of vicious and sometimes ludicrous attacks and how they respond. Reflexive offense-taking won't suffice. Acting huffy and hurt isn't a presidential trait.

McCain should recognize this. But last week, he was also expressing umbrage over being called a "warmonger" by an introducer at an Obama rally (the candidate wasn't on stage at the time). "If Senator Obama is going to wage the kind of campaign that he says he is, I hope that he will, he personally, will repudiate that kind of language," McCain said.

I hope he won't. ♦

MICHAEL RAMIREZ

Sex, Nazis, and Videotape

The inestimable entertainment of the Max Mosley scandal

BY ANNE-ELISABETH MOUTET

London

It's the cup of tea that lifts the Max Mosley sex scandal from the tawdry to the Roald Dahl-esque.

"F1 boss Max Mosley has sick Nazi orgy with 5 hookers—Son of fascist Hitler lover in sex shame" blared the cover of the London *News of the World* tabloid, complete with a seven-page spread and a 90-second video—shot by a camera concealed in one of the girls' bra—on its website, the salient parts tactfully covered with a checkered racing flag. Unlike Eliot Spitzer's pedestrian misdeeds, where the most shocking part was the girl's inflated price tag, this one has everything. Whips, chains, Nazi uniforms, role-playing, five hookers in a Chelsea basement "dungeon" (at bargain basement prices, too; the total tab was a little under $5,000), and YouTube footage of the hanky-panky. And, in unique British style, after the floggings, spankings, German-language play-acting, and various activities, Mosley, who'd acted out both victim and guard, concluded his fantasy afternoon with the girls by sharing a cup of tea before shrugging himself back into his business suit—both the whipping bench and the restorative cuppa belong to the specific repertoire of the English sexual psyche.

What gave the whole story its unique, er, twist, is Mosley's background. He is the son of Britain's most notorious Fascist couple: Sir Oswald Mosley and his second wife, Diana. Mosley founded the British Union of Fascists in 1932 after an inspirational visit chez Mussolini, and became famous as a rabble-rousing orator and troublemaker, marching into the working-class East End Jewish neighborhoods with black-shirted, goose-stepping troops equipped with knuckledusters and truncheons.

A serial womanizer, the married Mosley had seduced the 22-year-old society beauty Diana Guinness, who left her brewery heir husband and two young sons to live openly as Mosley's mistress. Diana belonged to the glittering brood of aristocratic Bright Young Things, the six Mitford sisters, who together would span the entire spectrum of ideologies of the 20th century, from the Communist Jessica (who ran away from home to the Spanish Civil War) to the Nazi Unity (who was befriended by Hitler while in finishing-school at Munich and shot herself when war was declared). Diana sided with Unity and attended with her several Nazi party days at Nuremberg, making friends with assorted Third Reich luminaries, including Hitler, who took her to the Bayreuth festival. Mosley's first wife died of peritonitis, and, in 1936, he married Diana in the Goebbels' drawing room, with Hitler as best man.

> Mosley, who only denies the Nazi angle of the whole episode (the rest, he says, is his private life), was swift to hit back. 'Given the history of BMW and Mercedes Benz, particularly before and during the Second World War, I fully understand why they would wish to strongly distance themselves from what they rightly describe as the disgraceful content of these publications.'

The Mosleys were interned during World War II—by order of Diana's distant cousin, Winston Churchill. Max, the Mosleys' second son, born 11 weeks prior to his parents' arrest, spent the first three and a half years of his life with nannies and relations. After the war, his parents sent him to school in Ireland, France, and Germany to shield him from the opprobrium his name evoked. It's no wonder that Max, who after Oxford trained to become a lawyer, found the world of car racing liberating when he discovered it in the mid-1960s. "He encountered a world where his name meant nothing. Indeed, fellow entrants in club races assumed he was the son of coach builder Alf Mosley from Leicester," explains the motor racing correspondent Kevin Garside.

Mosley was neither a terribly successful driver, not even a first-rank team owner, but he came into his own working with his friend Bernie Ecclestone, the tycoon who now owns the Formula One commercial rights, particularly after he ousted the aging Jean-Marie Balestre from the leadership of the sport's regulatory body in 1991. (Balestre himself had a colorful past: a former automotive journalist, he made much of his supposed wartime record with the French Resistance until pictures of him in Waffen SS uniform emerged. Somehow he still managed to get himself decorated with the Legion of Honor in 1979.)

Mosley and Ecclestone—who is Jewish and a major financial contributor to Tony Blair's New Labour, as is Mosley on a smaller scale—transformed Formula One into the global, multibillion-dollar business it has become today, imposing better safety rules and capping research spending to provide a level playing field. Mosley's abrupt style and limited tolerance for fools served him well in that

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world of larger-than-life performers, who live (and die) fast. "If Max was in bed with two hookers, they'd say 'good for you' or something like that," Ecclestone said when he learned of the latest affair. "Assuming it's all true, what people do privately is up to them. I don't honestly believe [it] affects the sport in any way. Knowing Max it might be all a bit of a joke. You know, it's one of those things where he's sort of taking the piss, rather than anything against Jewish people."

Ecclestone owes to Mosley what may be the most rewarding contract in the history of professional sports: a 100-year Formula One commercial rights exclusive, slated to run from 2010 to 2110, sanctioned by an unprecedented European Commission ruling after Mosley managed to persuade competition commissioner Mario Monti that it wasn't a monopoly. There was no tender, and Ecclestone was the lone bidder for the rights, for which he paid about $300 million. His companies are now valued 20 times that amount. Mosley feels there is no area of the sport he shouldn't concern himself with. Thus, last summer, was the Ferrari/McLaren industrial espionage criminal case, in which 800 pages of Ferrari's designs were stolen and used by McLaren-Mercedes's engineers. A criminal investigation being under way, he had no cause to intervene. Mosley nevertheless decided that the FIA—the International Automobile Association, which Mosley heads—should fine McLaren a record $100 million for "bringing the sport into disrepute." When a similar case arose with Renault (who had hired a design engineer from the McLaren stable who provided numerous engine and chassis diagrams), Mosley declined to fine them at all, contrasting Renault's "immediate contrition" with McLaren's "lies." To no one's great surprise, Mercedes was among the first to call for his resignation when the sex story broke in the *News of the World*, followed by BMW, then by Toyota and Honda.

Mosley, who only denies the Nazi angle of the whole episode (the rest, he says, is his private life), was swift to hit back. "Given the history of BMW and Mercedes Benz, particularly before and during the Second World War, I fully understand why they would wish to strongly distance themselves from what they rightly describe as the disgraceful content of these publications." He was certainly touching on a sensitive point—the Mosley scandal, while virtually ignored by the French press, has been playing in large spreads in German newspapers—but he was also indulging in German-baiting of the "Don't Mention the War" variety. Press coverage in England has been enormous—often driven by humorous headlines and wordplay. "How about a whip-round for Max's retirement?" asked a *Daily Telegraph* columnist.

So far, the Canadian, German, U.S., Dutch, and New Zealand motorists associations have called on him to go. (To date, only the United Arab Emirates motoring association have announced they support him.) Mosley has decided to stick it out to the end of his mandate in 2009 ("Triumph of the Wheel?" suggested the *Times*), but called an extraordinary FIA general assembly on June 3, at which the full membership—222 national motoring organizations from 130 countries—will take a secret-ballot vote of confidence. But is his position tenable until then?

His mother, who lived to the age of 93 in Paris, told interviewers to the end that she had been "terribly, terribly fond" of Hitler, and saw no point in dissembling. She might not have admired her son's tastes, according to her biographer Anne de Courcy, but she would certainly have admired his stubbornness. ♦

GARY LOCKE

Carrying a Torch for China

Skip the opening ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics, Mr. President

By Ethan Gutmann

London

It was my four-year-old son's first demonstration. But he was getting cold, the police were manhandling the Tibetans to the point that there might be a stampede, and I wasn't sure if the bus that had just rushed by at such an unseemly speed actually carried the stupid torch, so we headed for the tube and home. My son wanted to know why people kept saying "China, stop the kitty."

"It's 'stop the killing,'" I corrected.

I tried to explain for the nth time: "Suppose you have a neighbor who has a dog. And he beats the dog. You can hear the dog crying all day. Then the neighbor comes by and invites you to bring your dog . . ."

"Daddy, we don't have a dog."

"I know. We will sometime soon. I promise. But pretend. The neighbor wants to invite your dog—and every other dog in the neighborhood—to a dog party. A big dog party. Black dogs, white dogs, yellow dogs, red dogs . . ."

"Or a mouse, it could be a mouse party, Daddy. Or a cat party . . ."

Okay, I thought, he gets it.

REUTERS / GONZALO FUENTES

A protester at Paris's city hall on April 2, 2008

It wasn't until I got home and saw the paramilitary blue and white tracksuits flanking each torchbearer, and the wolfish Chinese army profiles so familiar to anyone who has lived in Beijing that I got it. I regretted not dropping off my son with some kindly Tibetan woman and trying to stand in front of the bus myself.

I have been agnostic on the utility of boycotting the Beijing Olympics. I prefer to consider the Olympics nothing more than a sporting event. Host cities should do their job: spend their $30 billion and get out of the way. But the Chinese government, in its insecure and bullying fashion, keeps pushing its luck with acts like the army-saturated torch welcoming ceremony in Beijing and the endless torch relay with its unprecedented scale of 85,000 miles and 20,000 torchbearers, scheduled to hit not just every Chinese province, but major capitals on every inhabited continent, as if we were all part of a new Chinese world order. Most of all, by adding their goon squad of "flame attendants" with no apparent diplomatic status into the scene—hovering retentively, manhandling Londoners, and barking orders at the torchbearers—Beijing has made it abundantly clear that this is not about the Olympic spirit, but about power, Chinese power.

The torch relay is an unforced error by the Chinese government, and it deserves every bit of mayhem and farce that London, Paris, San Francisco, and all the cities to come can provide. At a minimum, a boycott of the political opening ceremony looks like the inevitable, if imper-

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British tennis player Tim Henman runs with the Olympic torch and its guardians on April 6, 2008.

POOL / IAN WALTON / EPA / CORBIS

fect, compromise. But we should do it eyes open, aware not only of Chinese culpability for the current mess, but also of our own.

Back in 2001, pretty much every U.S. newspaper editor tacked the headline "Who's Hu?" on the obligatory backgrounder introducing the incoming Chinese president, Hu Jintao. The pun was usually more interesting than the article; the singular accomplishment in Hu's otherwise colorless party career was his suppression of the Tibetan revolt of 1989—100 people were massacred. With Hu now firmly in control, it's not surprising that the current Tibet crackdown appears cleaner than the first: well rehearsed, coldly efficient, with most of the blood splendidly isolated from the prying Western media. Hu could have provided window-dressing for the West: an agreement to sit down with the Dalai Lama (at some unspecified point in the future, once the shape of the table has been determined and so on). In fact, under pressure from the International Olympics Committee (IOC), he still might provide some similar bunkum, but it will not change the nature of the Chinese Communist party. Much like the true church of the Middle Ages, the party has the prime directive of bringing errant provinces into the fold and destroying any opposing systems of thought. The problem is that, as a world leader, Hu has the prime directive of bringing off a successful Beijing Olympics—an event, by the way, that the Chinese people have put a lot of sweat into. And that's a problem for us too.

As the Tibetan and Falun Gong protests surrounding the global trail of the Olympic torch pick up intensity, Europe has already begun to pick sides. Haunted by the Berlin Olympics of 1936, universally regarded as Europe's dress rehearsal for the disastrous policy of appeasement, it is no coincidence that the two populations that bore the immediate brunt of the Nazi war machine, Poland and the Czech Republic, were the first to pull out of Beijing's political opening ceremony. Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, recently announced that she will not attend either. Nicolas Sarkozy has pub-

By adding their goon squad of 'flame attendants'—hovering retentively, manhandling Londoners, and barking orders—Beijing has made it abundantly clear that this is not about the Olympic spirit, but about power, Chinese power.

licly threatened to do the same and possibly to carry the European Union along with him. You'd have thought that Britain might be inhibited by London's role as Olympics host city in 2012, but Prime Minister Gordon Brown went back late last week on his previously stated intention to attend the opening ceremony (while still clinging to a fig-leaf appearance at the closer).

The answer to the question of how comprehensive a boycott we are looking at probably lies in the United States, the global superpower. Given China's status as America's second largest trading partner, Washington cannot easily embrace the unbearable lightness of boycotting, but it is hard to imagine that President Bush, who has accepted a Chinese invitation to attend the Olympics, can easily stomach the Chinese rationalizations for the Tibet crackdown either.

Once you get past the usual Chinese admonitions about interference in internal affairs, the first Chinese argument is that Tibetan monks and activists are essentially terrorists, with the Dalai Lama standing in for bin Laden. Thus Chinese suppression of Tibetan Buddhism and the strategic resettlement of Han Chinese in Tibet are downplayed in favor of a serial loop of badly shot "atrocities of the Tibetan independence forces." (The Chinese government recently warned of "Tibetan suicide squads," indicating that they may consider staging an event with better lighting in the near future.) This argument doesn't really fly. Too many Washington leaders, Bush among them, have met the Dalai Lama, and it won't work with U.S. journalists either—the Chinese have shut down press access to Tibet all too frequently.

The second defense, favored by angry young Chinese males in reader comment sections throughout the Internet, parrots the Chinese government's depiction of Tibetans as picturesque but feckless (like our caricature of American Indians back when we still called them that), who desperately need Chinese modernization for their own good. The problem with the "Han Chinese burden" rationale is that we stopped slaughtering our natives some time ago.

The third Chinese argument is rarely stated openly. To do so would negate not only the two previous arguments, but also China's commitment to improve the human rights situation in advance of the Olympics. It goes like this: *You are hypocrites. You knew the human rights situation in China when we made our bid. Your journalists only give human rights sporadic, selective coverage anyway. So why are you complaining at this late date?* And here, as the context of the original bid and the tragic history of Falun Gong fully demonstrate, the Chinese are dead right.

Beijing's was always a blackmail bid. The IOC likes to profess a studied disinterest in politics, but that pose was only possible because of the equally studied neutrality by the United States and other Western countries towards Beijing's ambitions. I was a business consultant in Beijing during the bidding process, and it was common knowledge that the West would receive some much-needed political restraint from the Chinese in return for our support. It was whispered that the Beijing Olympics would buy peace in the Taiwan Strait for eight years, ensure continued economic liberalization, mollify runaway Chinese nationalism (by bolstering Chinese self-esteem), permit journalists to operate in a slightly more plausible working environment, and inhibit the Chinese leadership from overtly slaughtering its citizens.

When it comes to Taiwan and economic liberalization, China has technically lived up to its promises, pulling Taiwan into the Chinese orbit through business interests rather than by naval blockade or missile attack. In terms of nationalism, journalistic freedom, and human rights—well, best not to dwell on how that turned out—but in all fairness, the only one of these issues that the IOC appeared to be mildly serious about was human rights. Even there, it was always a same-bed-different-dreams deal. For Western business in China, "human rights" translates as: Please don't embarrass us publicly. For the Chinese government "human rights" was always translated within the prism of "social stability": How else can you ensure a smooth Olympics? And the way to ensure social stability was to neutralize the "five poisons"—Tibetan separatists, democracy activ-

A protester clashes with a British policeman near Downing Street in London on April 6, 2008.

ANDY RAIN / EPA / CORBIS

ists, Taiwan independence supporters, Xinjiang freedom fighters, and Falun Gong practitioners. And here, again, the angry young Chinese men have a point concerning the hypocrisy of Western journalists.

It was all a charade. The blackmail bid took place in clear sight of the mindbending persecution of Falun Gong, an operation that had already mobilized China's state security forces on a scale that dwarfs the current Tibet crackdown. The West had three clear openings to bring the issue to a head: when the Beijing bid was nearing fruition in 2000, when an energized Falun Gong movement in the West emerged four years later with documentation that thousands had been murdered and over 100,000 had been thrown into labor camps, and finally in 2006 when credible reports of systematic organ harvesting of Falun Gong practitioners seeped out, pushing the potential death toll well into the tens of thousands.

I have interviewed some of the survivors. Roughly half of the Falun Gong practitioners who have emerged from the camps describe physical exams aimed at determining the health of their internal organs, along with close examination of corneas. Ears, genitals, and the other parts of the body usually scrutinized in medical exams—all of which have no value in the organ market—were routinely ignored. Yet it is a curious fact that American newspapers barely mentioned the targeted organ harvesting. Indeed, studies within the Falun Gong community demonstrate that the higher the Falun Gong death toll, the less the reporting. A former Beijing bureau chief of one of America's top networks accurately represented the average China journalist's view of Falun Gong in a candid conversation with me: The crackdown was indeed absurdly harsh, even by Chinese standards, but it was a drag to cover the story because "I hate both sides."

The reality of China is actually quite fascist in nature. Like its forerunners, it alternates between demonizing Western democracy and lusting for the tokens of Western legitimacy to help it maintain power over its citizens—the same citizens it so fears.

For American journalists, Falun Gong has three strikes against it. First, Falun Gong's emergence in 1999 took them by surprise, and journalists don't like feeling out of the loop. Second, reporters depend on the party's minimal cooperation for access and accreditation. Falun Gong is the party's enemy number one, as a Chinese spiritual movement from the heartland is more difficult to contain than a separatist movement like the Tibetans'. This meant the hot zone was not just in Lhasa, but everywhere, and that news stories had to be suppressed directly rather than just by limiting geographic access. Stories about persecution and torture could bring retaliation—blocked websites, detention, and, worst of all, loss of the journalist's ability to actually work. Stories that stuck the cult label on Falun Gong or, better still, avoided the issue altogether, ensured access.

The third strike against Falun Gong is that many Beijing-based journalists have gone slightly native. They see themselves as the arbiters of Chinese social progress. Falun Gong, with its insistence on traditional values—marriage and morality—looked like an enemy of the New China that journalists actually like: the hip, urban, ironic, way-cool place where cynical artists dish out scorn for crass Western commerciality. Falun Gong, simply put, is a Buddhist revival movement with all that entails: passion, talk of miracles, are-you-running-with-me-Master-Li individualism, and a reflexive mistrust of establishments and outside agendas. By contrast, the Tibetans had the far safer veneer of an ancient, well-established religion, and Hollywood's Richard Gere (and even some dimly remembered associations with tantric sex). Here, journalists intersected with their U.S.-based editors who not only tend to be suspicious of religion—particularly revivalist versions—but who also had no idea of how to incorporate the mass murder of Falun Gong's followers into the preferred storyline of China's amazing progress.

Thus, in public, foreign businessmen casually inserted anti-Falun Gong rhetoric into speeches to please their Chinese hosts. In private, when Chinese security needed targeted Internet surveillance technology to catch Falun Gong practitioners, Cisco provided it to their specifications. Oversight in Washington of this sort of activity lagged because politicians absorbed the distorted perception pumped out of China by many journalists and succumbed to the lobbying pressures of businessmen eager to cut deals with Chinese officials. And human rights groups appeared curiously unwilling to protest despite the scale of the Falun Gong persecution and the vehemence of the Chinese government's resolve to continue it. The record suggests an informal pact with the Chinese government to trade away mention of Falun Gong in exchange for minor concessions, such as scripted labor camp visits and legal exchanges.

Falun Gong is only one in a long historical line of atrocities the West has chosen to ignore while they were happening. But hating both sides is no longer a valid strategy for the Beijing Olympics. We are assisting in the construction of a simulacrum of an independent, modern society, while the reality is actually quite fascist in nature. Like its forerunners, it alternates between demonizing Western democracy and lusting for the tokens of Western legitimacy to help it maintain power over its citizens—the same citizens it so fears.

U.S. coverage of China has been weak and our policies inconsistent. Terribly so. But it doesn't render us incapable of doing the right thing. Falun Gong has been getting little press in the torch relay fracas. That's not surprising. As an indigenous Chinese movement, rather than a separatist one, Falun Gong has taken a neutral position on boycotting the Chinese Olympics, sensing correctly that it has become a matter of Chinese "face" that the Olympics continue. But we in the West have our own version of face, a genocide line that cannot be crossed without our identity beginning to crack. No matter how much we ignored the crying, the persecution of Falun Gong demonstrably crossed that line, and even if the Chinese leadership calls off the torch relay or makes an effort to resolve the Tibet situation, it is too late for this Olympics.

Boycotts don't work, but the political opening ceremony, for better or worse, is Beijing's big show—its dog party. Let's admit that we screwed up, quietly declare a no-fault boycott of any ceremonies, and move on. President Bush, please stay home. ♦

Embrace Your Inner Teddy Roosevelt

An economic agenda for John McCain

By Irwin M. Stelzer

John McCain is for low taxes, rapid economic growth, and free trade. Those are the underpinnings of everything else he deems important:

• Low taxes mean individuals keep more of their own money and therefore are freer to make choices and less dependent on government;

• Rapid economic growth, one of the results of low taxes, produces the strong economy needed to fund an adequate defense and permit America to play its destined role in world affairs; economic growth also provides opportunities for self-advancement and finances programs that help the deserving poor;

• Free trade fosters efficiency at home and strengthens America's prestige and position abroad.

The senator from Arizona is presenting himself as the inheritor of Teddy Roosevelt's view that America is "a great nation, forced by the fact of its greatness into relations with the other nations of the earth, and we must behave as beseems a people with such responsibilities." For him, domestic policy is inextricably bound up with foreign policy—only a nation with a strong, growing economy is sufficiently self-confident to bear what TR called "the heavy responsibility" of projecting "the cause of free self-government throughout the world," and has the wherewithal to discharge that responsibility.

Add to that his admiration of Ronald Reagan's efforts to define the role of government as an institution that will "stand by our side, not ride on our back." That means a government not as wildly expansionist, expensive, and intrusive as George W. Bush's, nor one insensitive to the problems of hardworking or disadvantaged Americans who might fall on hard times. Surely, that will prove to be an appealing alternative to what is on offer by the Obama and Clinton camps: higher taxes, unnecessarily intrusive regulation, more government involvement in health care, education, child care, financial markets, infrastructure construction, and just about every aspect of life.

McCain has two basic problems. The first is organizational: how to free himself from the influence of former Texas Senator Phil Gramm.

The candidate and his mentor in Phoenix, March 3, 2008

TIMOTHY A. CLARY / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

But if McCain is to persuade the American people that his vision of a great nation is superior to the Democrats' vision of a nation retreating from involvement with the world, inhabited by people increasingly dependent on an expanding state, he will have to give vent to his populist, reforming instincts, and to the basic decency that prompted him to ignore the so-called Republican base, oppose the Bush tax cuts as excessively favorable to the already-comfortable, and support regularizing the status of immigrants.

The decency is instinctive. I once heard him reply, off the cuff, when challenged on the subject of his refusal to deport all illegals: "First, we don't have 12 million pairs

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of handcuffs in America. Second, what are we about as a nation if we don't welcome people who come here to improve their situations by working hard?" No cost-benefit analysis. Instead, a human reaction combined with personal observation of the work ethic of the new arrivals. And, again, a modern echo of TR, who used his first State of the Union address to declare: "We need every honest and efficient immigrant . . . who brings here a strong body, a stout heart, a good head, and a resolute purpose to do his duty well in every way and to bring up his children as law-abiding and God-fearing members of the community."

It is just this combination of instinct, humanity, and personal experience on which McCain must rely in forging a domestic program that might be called populist conservatism, repositioning the Republican party as "the party of Sam's Club, not just the country club," to borrow from Minnesota governor and vice presidential possibility Tim Pawlenty. Persuading voters to sign on to such an agenda will not be easy. It is not unreasonable for Americans in danger of losing their homes, or who fear that they might be next in line for some blow to their standard of living, to be a bit frightened by McCain's correct but scary statement that "it is not the duty of government to bail out and reward those who act irresponsibly, whether they are big banks or small borrowers." Or to wonder why sauce for the Bear Stearns goose is not sauce for the beleaguered homeowners' gander.

McCain has two basic problems. The first is organizational: how to free himself from the influence of former Texas senator Phil Gramm. I am told that McCain is grateful to Gramm for taking him under his wing in his early days in Congress, which is admirable, and intimidated by Gramm's superior knowledge of economics, which is not. Gramm, it will be recalled, sponsored the legislation that freed investment banks from much of the regulatory oversight imposed on them by the Glass-Steagall Act. The rest, as they say is history: excessive leveraging and inadequate capital ($32 of debt piled onto every dollar of capital in the case of Bear Stearns), sloppy lending practices, and eventual recourse to the Fed's discount window—another way of saying that the investment banks can now offload their dicey loans onto the U.S. taxpayer. Then there is the unfortunate fact that, fairly or not, Gramm's reputation as an economic seer has not been enhanced by his role as vice chairman of UBS Warburg, which sensationally wrote off $38 billion of bad loans a few weeks ago. Gramm is the McCain campaign filter through which economic policy suggestions must pass, and his "government is not the answer" ideology means that any policy proposals that reflect the candidate's populist humanity, or a nuanced economic calculus (see below), are unlikely to survive the filtration process.

McCain's second problem—and the more important one—is that he has to reconcile his free-market instincts with his capacity for indignation at the excesses that free markets seem to produce. The operative word is 'seem.'

The second problem—and the more important one—is that McCain has to reconcile his free-market instincts with his capacity for indignation at the excesses that free markets seem to produce. The operative word is "seem." For it is not properly functioning markets that account for excessive executive pay, or some of the housing mess, or the plight of workers displaced by free trade. It is market failure—imperfections in the market—that are the culprits. Which means that McCain can quite comfortably propose solutions to several current economic problems, and plans for longer-term programs, without lurching into the mindless, big-government activism of a Clinton or Obama.

A protestor outside Bear Stearns headquarters in New York

CHRIS HONDROS / GETTY IMAGES

Start with executive compensation, a subset of the issue of rising inequality of income distribution. Democrats find executive pay too high—which is why Obama supports an increase in the top marginal income tax rate to 39 percent from 35 percent, and a rise in the capital gains tax from 15 percent to somewhere between 20 percent and 25 percent, with exemption from that latter increase for "people with certain incomes." His target is "those of us in the upper brackets [who] have benefited disproportionately from a globalized economy."

McCain can allow himself his "anger" at executive compensation without descending to the politics of envy, and while remaining true to his free market principles. Rather than condemning high earnings, he can quite properly condemn the flawed process that produces some of those earnings. Free markets that reward performance are one thing; rigged compensation markets that allow the CEO's pals on the board to approve large golden goodbyes for departing executives who have wrecked their companies, or compensate executives at levels proposed by consultants currying favor as they seek additional contracts, or backdate options so that incentives to good performance are magically converted into *de facto* guaranteed compensation, or conceal compensation levels in the legalistic jargon of reports to the SEC and shareholders—these might be how much corporate pay is set, but the process has about as much relation to free markets as Hillary Clinton's tales have to reality, or Obama's pastor's sermons to racial conciliation. So the senator would be quite within traditional free-market bounds were he to aim what he calls his "capacity for anger" at such inequities and the income inequalities to which they contribute, and to call for government action to assist shareholders in bringing these boards and managers under their control.

He would be right, too, to defend the rewards that such high-flying—although recently grounded—risk-takers as private equity deal-makers earn at their trade. After all, market capitalism is all about rewarding adventurers who turn bloated companies into lean, mean, efficient machines. But McCain would be in no danger of sacrificing his free-market credentials were he to call for a reform of the system that taxes the incomes of private-equity entrepreneurs at rates below those imposed on the workers who clean their offices. And if that is a tax increase—the thing that for some reason rouses the ire of the legendary conservative "base"—he can propose equivalent reductions in other taxes, including the regressive payroll tax.

Then there is the problem created for McCain by the Bear Stearns deal, which allowed the company's shareholders to receive $10 per share for stock that would have been worthless in the absence of the taxpayer bailout engineered by the Fed's Ben Bernanke and JPMorgan's Jamie Dimon, with the blessing of Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson. McCain agrees that the failure of Bear Stearns might have been contagious, and created chaos in the market: After all, other firms had trillions of dollars in trading relations with Bear Stearns and would have been battered by its collapse. But he told the audience of *Fox News Sunday*, "When I see greedy people like a guy cashing in millions of dollars on the backs of this Bear Stearns takeover, I get angry." And he added in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, "I think it's outrageous that someone who is the head of Bear Stearns cashes in millions and millions of dollars in stocks."

Inconsistency? Wobbling on his free-market principles? Hardly. McCain can argue that the pain inflicted by a Bear Stearns bankruptcy would extend to innocent third parties—counterparties to Bear's trades, workers employed by firms dependent on smoothly functioning credit markets, "the average citizen" to use McCain's formulation. The senator can take comfort—and courage when confronting Gramm—from the fact that economists who support free markets agree that "externalities," to use the technical term, must be factored into the calculus underlying policy decisions, and minimized. As McCain intuited, it was appropriate to risk taxpayer money to avoid a possible collapse of Bear Stearns—not because of any sympathy for its executives and shareholders, but to avoid damage to innocent bystanders. But it was not a good idea to allow Dimon to raise his original $2-per-share offer. McCain can quite properly say that *his* Treasury secretary would not have approved paying Bear Stearns $10-per-share, even if the stock had once sold for $170, especially since the company's boss was playing bridge, with his cell phone turned off, when the deal was done. Save the financial system and innocent bystanders, certainly; reward the shareholders of a firm that had taken imprudent risks, certainly not.

McCain can also comfortably support increased regulation of investment banks—a return to the pre-Gramm era. The free market principle on which he can rely is that by insuring the banks against obliteration due to foolish risk-taking, the Fed has increased the likelihood that they will engage in just that behavior. Fear of just such a phenomenon is the reason insurance companies require their homeowner-clients to install smoke alarms, lest they become careless on the grounds that "we are insured." The Fed has created what economists call "moral hazard." Investment banks now know that they can take dicey paper to the Fed and trade it in for cash. And they have seen Bear Stearns do just that, in the process getting paid $10 per share for stock that would otherwise be worthless. This opens the door to a sit-

uation McCain can properly label intolerable: Losses are nationalized, while profits from risky investments remain privatized. Make a bad deal, and the taxpayer gets the bill; make a good one, and the banker keeps the profit. So why not take more and more risks in the hope of ever-higher profits?

The only reason would be that regulators will not allow it. So long as the investment bankers can successfully rattle their beggars' bowls at the Fed's door, the Fed will have to make sure that they have sufficient capital, that they are not excessively leveraged, that their internal risk-management controls are adequate—there's more, but you get the idea: Accept taxpayer cash and the regulator will be knocking on your door. As Fed auditors have already done. They are now ensconced at JPMorgan, Merrill Lynch, Morgan Stanley, and Lehman Brothers, all of whom with the possible exception of Merrill have traded some of their paper for Fed cash (Merrill won't say).

None of these steps would have upset McCain hero Teddy Roosevelt, who understood that with government privilege comes government regulation. TR recognized that "a fortune accumulated in legitimate business . . . confer[s] immense incidental benefits on others. . . . The captains of industry . . . have on the whole done great good to our people. . . . The mechanism of modern business is so delicate that extreme care must be taken not to interfere with it in a spirit of rashness or ignorance." Roosevelt nevertheless contended that business entities that are granted the privilege and protection of corporate status must be regulated—"subject to proper governmental supervision" lest these businesses commit "real and grave evils."

The danger of creating moral hazard in the business community, then, can be reduced by regulation. But the danger of creating similar incentives to bad behavior—in this case a repeat of improvident lending by banks and borrowing by homeowners—poses a more difficult problem. McCain does not want to reward what he calls "people who speculated or people who engaged in unsavory practices" and "those who acted irresponsibly." After all, there is something offensive about bailouts that "reward people who were irresponsible at the expense of those who weren't." Would that life were so simple.

Are people who bought houses in the hope of renting them at a profit evil speculators or investors adding to the supply of available homes? Are people who bought second homes imprudent, or preparing a retirement nest? Are people who lied to lenders on their mortgage applications to be penalized even though the lenders had access to the borrower's tax returns and chose not to check the information, instead writing NINJA mortgages (No Income, No Job or Assets)?

These questions would be irrelevant if the housing and mortgage markets functioned as well as believers in free markets would hope. Were that the case, McCain's preference for a policy that relies on lenders and borrowers to renegotiate payment terms to their mutual satisfaction, and the improvident to go broke or homeless, would be well founded. But these real-world real estate markets are so riddled with imperfections that McCain should have no difficulty supporting interventions that would be unacceptable in markets unafflicted by such massive problems.

First, incentives are improperly aligned. Government interference in markets can be minimized only if we get

It doesn't take long for entire neighborhoods populated by upstanding citizens to be reduced to virtual slums. Which is why it is so odd that McCain's housing plan excludes doing anything about foreclosed properties.

Foreclosed home for auction in Woodstock, Georgia

ROBIN NELSON

the incentives right. Here, we are dealing with a market in which brokers earn their livings from commissions for originating mortgages, but bear none of the risks of failure of the borrower to pay. So it should come as no surprise that many borrowers were encouraged to take out loans they had little chance of repaying.

These borrowers were beset by another type of market failure: information asymmetry. The mortgage broker or lender possessed significantly more information than the person on the other side of the transaction, the borrower, and had an incentive to misrepresent that information to the borrower, who had every incentive to believe what he or she was told. Misguided, perhaps, but not in all cases venal. Imagine what it is like for a poor person, encouraged by a bank branch opened in their neighborhood at the insistence of the U.S. government, never before confronted with a legal document, with no basis for guessing the future course of interest rates, being offered an opportunity to realize the American dream. There are some scoundrels out there, and it would be wonderful if we could separate those mangy goats from the white-as-the-driven-snow sheep. But we can't, at least not completely.

The third complication is that even if we could identify the bad guys, and do what McCain would dearly love to do—confine help to "deserving homeowners," as he calls them—we would have made a grave error. The housing market is a classic case of one characterized by externalities. Acts by any one homeowner impose uncompensated costs (or unrewarded benefits) on another. Keep your house neatly painted and your lawn tidily mowed, and the value of your neighbors' houses goes up. Get evicted or walk away from a house because you can't afford to keep up the mortgage payments, and it will soon fall into disrepair, either because banks are notoriously inept at maintaining properties, or because the evicted family will engage in spiteful vandalism, or because thieves strip out and sell such stuff as copper plumbing and wires. Neighbors, all responsible, all up-to-date on their mortgage payments, will see the value of their properties take a dive. It doesn't take long before entire neighborhoods, although populated by upstanding citizens, are reduced to virtual slums. Which is why it is so odd that McCain's housing plan, sketched in Memphis on Friday, specifically excludes doing anything about foreclosed properties.

When markets malfunction because incentives are misaligned, information asymmetry exists, *and* there are large externalities imposing costs on innocent bystanders, government intervention is called for: not to replace the invisible hand with the long arm of government, but to replace an atrophied hand with one capable of functioning. Mortgage brokers who misinformed borrowers can be prosecuted; lenders can be made to retain some of the risk associated with any loan they make rather than securitize the entire loan and pass the risk off as part of a bundle; rating agencies can be barred from accepting fees from lenders, eager for an AAA rating for the securitized bundle of loans that they plan to peddle, or rating agencies can be required to assume some of the risk of nonpayment.

When markets malfunction because incentives are misaligned, government intervention is called for: not to replace the invisible hand with the long arm of government, but to replace an atrophied hand with one capable of functioning. Mortgage brokers who misled borrowers can be prosecuted; lenders can be made to retain some of the risk associated with any loan they make; rating agencies can be barred from accepting fees from lenders.

Yes, these are regulations. But of a special kind. They are aimed at making markets work better, so that further government intrusion is not necessary to protect consumers. Yes, there is a risk of creating moral hazard, or of creating government agencies that don't die a natural death when they are no longer needed. But policy-making always involves balancing competing priorities and concerns. And in the cases laid out above the greater risk is harming the innocent if we focus exclusively on punishing the guilty.

The goal in each instance is not to abandon markets but to improve them, a goal that can also be applied to assist workers displaced by trade carried on in a market in which one of our major trading partners undervalues its currency, or to tackle global warming with taxes or other programs that force users of fossil fuels to pay the cost of the externalities they produce. John McCain was either typically candid or equally typically in a humorous, self-deprecatory mood when he said he knows little about economics. No matter. His instincts, informed by his understanding of how markets work and what to do when they malfunction, and his understanding of the benefits sound domestic policies confer on America's ability to pursue a vigorous foreign policy, allow us to hope that his advisers will let McCain be McCain, a candidate who will worry less about country club and "base" Republicans, and a bit more about the mass of Sam's Club Republicans. ♦

Mennonites and Mammonites . . .

in Paraguay

By Graeme Wood

Asunción

Something's strange about Sunday-morning service at Raíces, the biggest Mennonite church in Paraguay's capital city. The pastor leads worship in Spanish, not the traditional German. A girl in the congregation wears spaghetti straps and has a dragon tattoo on her shoulder. Those electric guitars don't seem very traditional, either. Why are two guys in the back pew packing heat?

This progressive Mennonite congregation has departed in more ways than these from the customs of their forebears. Mennonites have lived in Paraguay since the 1920s, mostly in the miserably hot Chaco, a region that was barely inhabited before they arrived, and indeed barely inhabited today. For the first 70 years, they kept to themselves and preserved the pacifist and isolationist ways that characterize the sect everywhere. But now they're at the center of one of the strangest phenomena in South American politics, a saga of corruption and faith that has left these world-renouncing Anabaptists in control, for a time, of the highest worldly offices in Paraguay—and wondering whether their newfound power is a blessing or curse.

President Nicanor Duarte Frutos and his wife, Gloria, in 2003

REUTERS / JORGE ADORNO

Raíces ("Roots") is the center of this transformation. It is just like any other Mennonite church, explains Horst Bergen, 41, the affable pastor who chatted with me after the service: It emphasizes peace, family values, and a righteous life. It is not traditionalist, and the members don't dress in antiquated garb. But its congregation that morning consisted mostly of converts, rather than German-speaking descendants of the Mennonites who came to Paraguay, like Bergen's own grandparents, in the first half of the 20th century. Today's Raíces community has a few converts from other Protestant sects, as well as many ex-Catholics (some bearing tattoos, and a more liberal attitude to church music) drawn by the message of peace and love on which the church is built. The spirit of peace and love, Bergen says, is why the men in the back are so discreet about their sidearms, and why they've been asked not to brandish machine-guns in the church's quiet suburban neighborhood.

The armed men are there to protect Nicanor Duarte Frutos, president of the Republic of Paraguay and a Raíces churchgoer for over a decade. Nicanor isn't a Mennonite—like 99 percent of Paraguayans, he is nominally Catholic—but his wife Gloria converted to Mennonitism in the mid-1990s. The details of her conversion remain obscure: What's known is that she sought treatment for an unspecified but serious condition at a Mennonite hospital in the Chaco, and when she left, she had become convinced that her problems related less to her body than to her soul. Adult baptism, the only kind Mennonites recognize, soon followed, and she began dragging her husband to church, even after he won the presidency in 2003. Sycophants and opportunists eased into the pews to get near him. In what some see as an effort to win the ear of the woman who has the ear of the president, a few may have taken the Mennonite plunge themselves.

Graeme Wood is an editor at the Atlantic Monthly.

Street signs are in both German and Spanish in the Paraguayan Mennonite town of Filadelfia.

The very presence of a Mennonite church in Asunción—much less one that counts Paraguay's elite as its patrons—is improbable. The Mennonites' isolation in the Chaco was deliberate. In the 1920s, the Paraguayan state invited them into the Chaco with the understanding that they would stay there, living what promised to be a difficult and hard-scrabble life in one of South America's least inviting regions. The Chaco comprises 60 percent of Paraguay's land, but close to zero percent of its population. It has little water, and even Indians had more or less given it up as too parched to inhabit. The Paraguayan leaders, though, saw an upside to its colonization: Their settlers bolstered Paraguay's claim to the region in any future dispute with Bolivia.

Both countries, the only landlocked states in South America, were feeling uneasy about their economic prospects and considered the Chaco their own—in the fervent (and, as it turns out, misguided) hope that it had oil. The Mennonites were totally unaware of their being enlisted as pawns in this rivalry. When it finally erupted into the Chaco War of 1932-35, Paraguay prevailed, in part because its supply lines were shorter with Mennonite agriculture already in place. After the war, however, even with their agricultural skills, which would have been better suited to Canada or the Ukraine, the Mennonites barely managed to rise above subsistence in the poor region.

Over the next few decades, a few clever innovations improved their fortunes. The introduction of buffalo grass allowed them to soak up and retain water more effectively, and brought a change in focus from farming to ranching. In the 1960s, a road connected the Chaco to Asunción; previously, it had taken up to a month to get from farm to market and back. By the 1980s, the Mennonites were the beef and dairy kings of Paraguay, and their massive, modern cooperatives in the Chaco inspired awe in the many Paraguayans who had assumed survival was barely possible there, and then only in austere, Essene primitivism.

Now the Mennonites were rich, and they started sending their sons to Asunción to be educated and fashioned into the doctors and lawyers of the Chaco. Schools and churches popped up in the capital to accommodate them. When Gloria, Nicanor's wife, sought medical treatment, the hospital in Filadelfia, the Mennonites' largest town, was an obvious choice; the region's prosperity and isolation guaranteed a high standard of care and privacy. Paraguayans have pointed out that the hospital is the country's best for psychiatric conditions, in part because the Mennonites' inbreeding had given its doctors extra experience with deranged and mentally challenged patients.

REUTERS

Paraguayan presidential candidate Blanca Ovelar campaigned in the city of Neuland in northwestern Chaco on April 2, 2008.

REUTERS / PARTIDO COLORADO

By all accounts, Gloria's embrace of Mennonitism began the wave of political involvement that has turned the Mennonites into the consiglieri of Paraguay's elite. They began embarking on political forays, first locally and then nationally. Orlando Penner, one of the country's best-known Mennonites, took a Senate seat after a career as a race-car driver ("the Mennonite Michael Schumacher"). When Nicanor took office in 2003, the affiliation of the seemingly incorruptible Mennonite businessmen with the first lady made them natural picks for high appointments. Carlos Wiens, a Mennonite doctor, became the director of public health. Carlos Walde became minister for modernization and liaison to the IMF and World Bank, and Ferdinand Bergen (brother of Pastor Horst, and husband of Gloria's best friend Lucy) became minister of industry and commerce. Bergen and Walde are among Paraguay's richest citizens.

Nicanor was not the Mennonites' ideal candidate. He had no particular reputation for probity, either in public or private life, and certainly did not meet the standards of a people who, in some of their communities, consider cell phones a gateway to Hell. But Paraguayan politics was still emerging from its 35-year captivity under the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner, who permitted no politics whatsoever. After Stroessner was deposed in 1989, the presidency had consisted of an endless string of coup attempts, impeachment proceedings, and political murder. Paraguayan politics had been a dirty bath for years, and the Mennonites thought they could be the bar of soap in its tub.

"There was suspicion," admits Gerard Ratzliff, a Mennonite historian in Asunción. "It is not part of the Mennonite tradition to enter politics. Some said it would bring the Mennonites down." For centuries, the Mennonite movement had prized its separation from the world. Had they spent decades bringing water to the dry dirt of the Chaco, only to return to the center of earthly power when the buffalo grass finally sprouted?

Horst Bergen says the church began looking outward because it saw an evangelical opportunity. The Mennonites could win souls for Christ as well as anyone. "The Mennonite principle always was that we live in the world, but we try to maintain a difference from the world," he says. "And now the more modern groups, they think, we have to make a difference in the world."

Ratzliff acknowledges that Mennonites have long differed about what part of "the world" they need to shun—all of it, or just the sinful part. But in the end he is more pragmatic. The politicians, he says, won because the Menno-

nites had no choice. "What I heard quite often at the beginning is that if we don't take part in the administration of the Chaco, then others will. And it will be worse."

Orlando Penner took his senate seat, and Heinrich Ratzliff, the historian's brother, won a spot in parliament. Non-Mennonite observers sneered at their power, and some suspected them of plots. "Who is that gringo?" Paraguayans asked. One Paraguayan politician told me the Mennonites were the target of anti-Semitic-style conspiracy theories: "Here we have another small sect that will come and take over the country, just like the Jews dominated the world." Paraguay had become the place where the Mennonite meets the Mammonite.

But where some saw a sinister cabal of Anabaptists, others saw a sinister cabal of Anabaptists that might have them as members. At this height of Mennonite glory, Catholics joined the church in droves. "The converts went there and they were baptized, in an immersion baptism," says Diego Abente Brun, a Paraguayan politician now in Washington. "Some say they were converted, but many were trying to be close to where the politics is." Horst Bergen recalls a few incidents in which ambitious churchgoers tried to slip a curriculum vitae to Nicanor or Gloria. He says the First Couple rebuffed them, and that the church has been steadfast in its efforts to treat its high-profile attendees like any other congregants.

Where some saw a sinister cabal of Anabaptists, others saw a sinister cabal of Anabaptists that might have them as members. At the height of Mennonite glory, Catholics joined the church in droves; a Paraguayan politician says 'some say they were converted, but many were trying to be close to where the politics is.'

In time, the Mennonites proved morally fallible, too—and not only by the standards of their own church. Orlando Penner, the race-car driver, drank and womanized; eventually he exiled himself to a Mennonite community in Manitoba for moral purification. (There's a motto the Manitoba Tourism Council won't be promoting soon: "Mennonites Come Here to Clean Up Their Act.")

Others behaved badly, too—"worse than a liberated Russian," said one Paraguayan who consults for Mennonite industries. Peter Siemens, a Chaco bigwig, departed from power amid accusations of embezzlement. A Mennonite vice minister for taxation resigned in disgrace, amid accusations of having falsified a credential he hadn't needed for his job anyway. Carlos Walde, the modernization minister, had taken office flaunting his character, and ostentatiously vowing he would take no salary. Within a year, *Ultima Hora*, Paraguay's leading newspaper, broke news of his company's having received a lucrative contract to supply powdered milk to the education ministry. Some viewed the contract with suspicion, since the primary business of the company, Chacomer, was importing and exporting auto parts. "You wanted to be like a nun," said one opposition senator, "but you are like a whore." Walde resigned two months ago.

Ferdinand Bergen left power, too, ostensibly because the dirty politics of an election year, in which Nicanor faced heated criticism for using his presidential office to campaign for his favored successor Blanca Ovelar, clashed with his pious sensibilities. But opponents of Nicanor said the taint of the president's increasingly dubious government had touched Bergen too, and the attention was unwelcome. Bergen has, in any case, endorsed Ovelar.

Nicanor's presence at Raíces no longer seems wholly welcome, if it ever was. As his presidency enters its final weeks—elections later this month will choose a successor—officials at Raíces seem reluctant to claim him as one of their own, and more than slightly embarrassed that a member of the congregation stands accused of flagrant abuse of power.

"The church was very much disappointed," Gerard Ratzliff says. "He just attacks so vilely. He put himself forward as candidate for party chief. That is not allowed by the constitution, not as the president. He should be impeached, *realmente*."

None of the candidates for the next presidency has close ties to Raíces, and nearly everyone seems to regard retirement from direct political activity as a good thing for the Mennonites. "The moment they [get into politics], they start getting involved in things that end up being very bad," Diego Abente says. "They think, 'We should stay here, take care of our own affairs, and have our own one deputy. Don't go there, it is too dirty, too noisy, and if you go there you end up like Penner.'" Temporarily, at least, they'll be forced into the retreat from politics that their predecessors had urged to begin with.

But the economic entanglements remain, and to retreat from politics might require them to curtail the astonishing economic boom that financed the Mennonite ascent to power in Asunción less than a decade ago. Their commercial habits are too ingrained, and the Paraguayan appetite for their milk and yogurt too powerful, for easy reversal now. The seal is broken. "They are family men," Abente says, perhaps channeling the early Mennonite fathers. "But the more they have to deal with a corrupt place, the more they corrupt themselves." ♦

Grand Ambition

From the Greeks to the Founders

BY SUSAN D. COLLINS

'Commemoration of Washington' (ca. 1800) by John James Baralet

It belongs to me more than others to rule. And I suppose that I am worthy of it.

So declares the young Alcibiades of Thucydides' history as he proposes to lead the greatest expedition of the Peloponnesian War. As Robert Faulkner's searching case for greatness brings to light, at the heart of political ambition abides not just the desire for honor but also a virtue that knows its own worth. We rightly view with ambivalence an Alcibiades whose ambition swept all else aside. But to understand political life, we have to comprehend ambition in all its forms, measuring each from the peak of the most honorable kind. Faulkner's book is an indispensable guide.

Prompted by the paucity of the contemporary perspective, and "the contrast between our experience and our theories," Faulkner reaches back to the classical thinkers—Aristotle, Plato, Thucydides, and Xenophon—for insight. Their sympathetic diagnoses of great ambition "illuminate our experiences . . . far better than the critical and doctrinal theorizing that is more familiar and has been in the works for three or four centuries."

The Case for Greatness
Honorable Ambition and Its Critics
by Robert Faulkner
Yale, 288 pp., $30

Ambition is all around us, and its honorable form is a perennial possibility. Yet modern thought, which reduces human action to narrow self-interest, and contemporary social science, which emphasizes "rational maximizing, power seeking, self-interest, and popular voice," have narrowed the lens through which we observe the restless and elevated ambition of men such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, and Franklin Roosevelt. In his graceful and incisive analysis of this ambition, Faulkner places us in the company of great thinkers and great leaders, the better to understand them and ourselves.

He begins with the classical portrait of magnanimity or "greatness of soul," a peak of moral virtue in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. This portrait is the template by which we can com-

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prehend every form of ambition, from the ordinary to the grand. Its delicate moral distinctions also make it possible to judge the overreaching of an Alcibiades against the restraint of a Washington. Aristotle's study of the virtue that pertains to great honor rescues ambition from the suspicion that, even in the best case, it is mere love of fame, desire for domination, or overweening pride.

In reviving an outlook that may be "foreign to our ears" but not our eyes, Faulkner traces the fine lines of the great soul: its devotion to nobility and justice; its self-knowledge, especially its awareness of its own virtue; its rightful claim to honor and disdain for all goods save virtue; its goodness as well as greatness.

"Aristotle does not mince words on this topic," Faulkner observes, "and neither should we. No greatness without goodness, yes, but also no true goodness without greatness." The great-souled are superior in virtue, and this superiority "claims for human excellence the prominence and tasks it deserves." No poor players strutting and fretting their hour upon the stage, these ambitious types are worthy of the highest honors and most demanding roles—worthy because they are both good and great.

Yet the great soul is complex; it harbors also deep tensions and dangers. While Aristotle's account of magnanimity is educative, trimming grand ambition with devotion to justice and philosophic equanimity, even the best education cannot always tame the love of honor and restless longing to act that move the great soul. Hence, in the next three chapters, Faulkner considers the Alcibiades of Thucydides' history and Plato's dialogues and the Cyrus of Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*. These "souls of grand ambition" contain promise and perils worthy of careful study and reflection. Their grand ambition exhibits political virtue and rationality at its peak and its limit, and like the classical thinkers, Faulkner remains alive to the virtues of the great soul while also diagnosing its ills.

Taking these thinkers as his guide, Faulkner illuminates the complex psychology of ambitious men who long to rule over all. Political judgment about the capacities of such souls, as well as their ills and ignorance, requires a philosophic, and Socratic, education. Before the young Alcibiades, Socrates places a "radical mirror . . . the mirror of the knower." The reflection does not flatter the young man's hubris. He comes to see, for example, his contradictory dependence on the love of those over whom he would rule, his incoherent view of justice, and his fundamental lack of self-understanding. At the same time, he feels the depth of his concern for nobility and even his need for divine protection.

Aristotle

He is shaken by his discoveries. His virtue, as great as it may be, still needs a teacher. But the Socratic education ultimately fails to tame the ambitious Alcibiades. How and why it fails are central questions for Faulkner and must be for anyone who seeks to understand grand ambition in its brilliance and its shadows.

Such a picture emerges in Faulkner's nuanced discussion of Xenophon's Cyrus, the founder of the Persian empire, who is a mix of light and dark, gentlemanly wit and ruthless action. In Xenophon's hands, the legendary Cyrus, whom Plato's Alcibiades takes as his model, becomes the most rational of imperialists. The only ancient work Machiavelli mentions in his *Prince*, "the *Education of Cyrus* considers the political way of life at its most extreme and rational." But unlike Machiavelli, Xenophon does not "reduce truth to effective truth" or goodness to its appearance. As Faulkner argues, Xenophon's reader "can see and feel the cost as well as the benefit . . . the tragedy and the evil as well as the triumph" of imperial rule, even at its best or most rational.

Turning in his final chapters to the "sweeping modern skepticism" about the classical view, Faulkner pits Douglass Adair's "Fame and the Founding Fathers" against John Marshall's *Life of Washington*, and then examines the influence of the egalitarianism of John Rawls and Hannah Arendt. These chapters show the consequence of a more superficial view of ambition. They also lead to key examples of the thought that has shaped this view: the critique of virtue in Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant's defense of equal dignity, and "the explosive Nietzschean reaction against both Hobbesian bourgeois security and Kantian idealistic equality." In a deft series of moves, Faulkner thus descends from the peak of Aristotle's great-souled man to Hobbes's vainglorious sons of pride and Friedrich Nietzsche's blond beast.

His last chapter is a cautionary tale. With Nietzsche, Faulkner observes, greatness of soul "comes storming back," but now it is all passion and will to power, absent reason and moderation. The challenge now is to look anew for true greatness and honorable ambition, "whether in examples such as a Washington or in the historians and philosophers who took seriously what is good and true as well as what is strong and great."

Ambition is all around us, but are goodness and greatness? Faulkner awakens his readers to what is at stake in this question, and our answer will take the political wit and philosophic insight so much on display in his compelling work. ♦

DELLA PORTA COLLECTION

Revealed Truth

In Tobias Wolff's world, wisdom comes with experience.

BY DIANE SCHARPER

"The best stories seem to me to be perhaps closer in spirit to poetry than to novels," Tobias Wolff observed in a recent interview. "They don't tell you everything." Wolff's latest offers some good examples. Like poems, the stories show rather than tell; and although they have a narrative structure, they have open endings, which leave readers wondering what happens next.

Our Story Begins
New and Selected Stories
by Tobias Wolff
Knopf, 400 pp., $26.95

A highly regarded short story writer, novelist, memoirist, editor, journalist, and professor of English, Wolff has won numerous prizes—including a PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction and several O'Henry Awards—and these 31 stories (21 selected, 10 new) were written over 30 years. Nearly all showcase his lucid style, his profound sense of irony, his preference for understatement, his eye for the telling detail, and his ear for the sound of language.

One of the stories ends as the protagonist is "roused, elated," by the "pure unexpected music" of this grammatical mistake: "'Shortstop,' the boy says. 'Short's the best position they is.'" In another story a dog is shot: "[H]is legs splayed out on each side, his yellow eyes open and staring. Except for the blood, he looked like a small bearskin rug."

Overall, the stories here don't study emotions so much as they study subtle emotional effects. They look at shadows appearing and vanishing instead of looking at the objects casting the shadows. In one, a man daydreams about a beautiful woman in order to cope with an impending death. Then the heroine of his fantasies dies and he feels a double loss. In another, the protagonist joins the Army to spite his mother, whom he's very close to; in an odd but poetic twist, he winds up spiting himself.

As with much of Wolff's work, these stories are autobiographical. A few echo back to Wolff's service in Vietnam—featured in his memoir *In Pharaoh's Army* (1994)—but most seem like adaptations of Wolff's 1989 memoir *This Boy's Life*, which was made into a 1993 film, and features his difficult relationship with an abusive stepfather.

In a sense, the stories seem like close-ups of chapters in his memoir: Wolff was born in Birmingham in 1945; his biological parents divorced when he was 10; afterward he lived with his mother while his older brother (the writer Geoffrey Wolff) lived with their father. Mother and son forged a deep bond, which influenced Wolff's fictional emphasis on the relationship between mothers and sons.

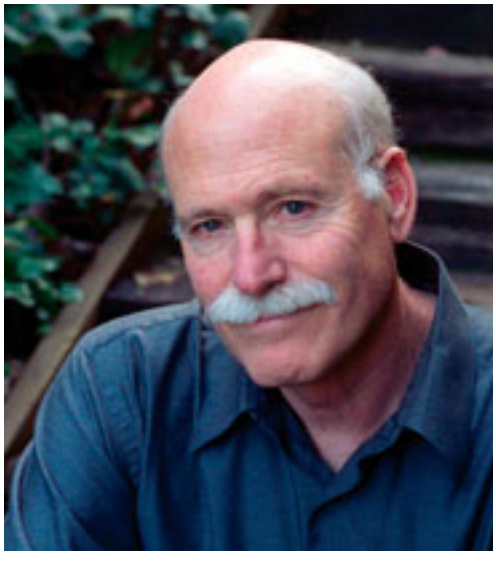
Wolff's separation from his father and his brother led to rifts in the family. One was caused by Wolff's conversion to Roman Catholicism, a decision protested by his Episcopalian stepfather. Devoutly Catholic, Wolff considered studying for the priesthood, and though he later changed his mind, never lost a spiritual sense. This profoundly reverberates through his work.

The plots tend to be about the brotherhood of mankind and how that plays out in everyday life. In less talented hands, the concept could feel preachy, but Wolff manages to inspire even when he sermonizes, as in "The Night in Question," arguably the best story in this book.

It focuses on Frances, an older sister who will fight anyone, even God, to protect her younger brother Frank. The victim of an abusive father, Frank is an alcoholic and lifelong loser; Frances is the successful sibling. As the story opens, Frank's found religion and wants to discuss a sermon that centers on a conflict between saving the life of one's son or the lives of a trainload of people. But the point of the sermon isn't the rightness or wrongness of the action; the point is that God is always present, and His presence can be especially felt in difficult moments.

Frank says that faced with a wrenching choice of whether to save one who is dearly loved or many strangers, people must remember that "the Father of All gave his own Son, his beloved, that others might be saved." But rather than accept the implication of her brother's words, Frances insists that this is a "terrible story." She has protected her brother from "neighborhood punks, snotty teachers and unappreciative coaches, loan sharks, landlords, bouncers," even their own father, "and if push came to shove she'd take on the Father of all, that incomprehensible bully."

Ultimately, all of Wolff's characters



Tobias Wolff

ANTONIO OLMOS / EYEVINE

Diane Scharper teaches at Towson University and is coeditor of Reading Lips, *a collection of memoirs.*

seek authenticity, or come upon it accidentally. "In the Garden of the North American Martyrs" features Mary, a college teacher who pretends to be like everyone else. Gradually, she becomes "part of the college's idea of itself," and when the college closes, she is forced to find another job. She's interviewed for a position but soon learns that she has been duped: A statute requires the department to interview one woman for each opening, and she'd been brought in merely to satisfy the rule. Furious at the hiring committee, she launches into a tirade:

> Mend your lives. You have deceived yourselves in the pride of your hearts and the strength of your arms. Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, thence I will bring you down, says the Lord. Turn from power to love. Be kind. Do justice. Walk humbly.

Her words come from Obadiah, the Old Testament prophet who foretold the downfall of the desert nation of Edom. These words also suggest the notion of self-deception, which permeates *Our Story Begins*. But in Wolff's world, that notion takes an unexpected turn.

In "The Benefit of the Doubt," Mallon learns the meaning of life from his 11-year-old daughter's bout with a brain tumor. Her course of radiation therapy renders Mallon "intensely conscious of life as something good in itself," and on a business trip to Rome, he has an opportunity to act on his heightened sensitivity to others. Yet when he tries to be sympathetic, his action backfires, and he learns that people (including himself) are both better and worse than they seem.

From the first story in the book, "In the Garden of North American Martyrs," to the last, "Deep Kiss," these narratives are in some way preoccupied with what is eternal in a throwaway world. The conflicts involve moral choices with characters blinded by misperceptions. They don't understand what's happening to them, or they choose not to understand. Either way, they eventually experience a moment of revelation when they're able to distinguish what's right from what isn't. ♦

BCA

The Magic Shrum

When he touches a Democratic presidential candidate, they lose. **BY NOEMIE EMERY**

Any conservative down in the mouth for this or that reason could do a lot worse than to pick up Robert Shrum's memoir of his long life in politics, published last year, and settle in for several hours of bliss. And there it all is: thirty-plus years of liberal nose-dives, from George McGovern's epic loss to the unloved Richard Nixon, through Ted Kennedy's 1980 defeat by the unloved Jimmy Carter, to the martyrdom of Al Gore at the hands of the chads and Antonin Scalia, to the fragging of John Kerry at the hands of the Swifties, to the unjust ascension of the Bushes and Reagan, as fresh as the days they occurred.

No Excuses
Concessions of a Serial Campaigner
by Robert Shrum
Simon & Schuster, 544 pp., $28

Legendary scenes are relived in all of their poignancy: Kennedy's meltdown with Roger Mudd before primary season, Gore rehearsing his victory speech on the day of the 2000 election, Shrum calling Kerry "Mr. President" on Election Day 2004. The tone through it all is one of sweet sorrow: In his long career, Shrum managed to become rich and famous, and elected a lot of senators, but he somehow contrived to lose all of the big ones, and became legendary in political circles for his zero-for-eight record in electing a president. The back cover of the dust jacket shows Shrum with five major Democrats—McGovern, Kennedy, Bill Clinton, Gore and Kerry—but only one of the five actually got to be president.

He was the one who did not hire Shrum.

Poor Shrum seems to exist in a state of denial, regarding his clients and cause. He claims that if Gerald Ford had not freed Poland from Soviet control in the presidential debate in 1976, Jimmy Carter would have not been elected, the Republicans would have borne the burden of the "economic and geopolitical woes of the late 1970's," and Ted Kennedy, not Ronald Reagan, would have become the next president.

It never seems to occur to him that these woes were created by liberal governance, were greatly expanded by Carter's misjudgments, and were cured in the end by conservative nostrums, not only by Reagan here in this country but by his friend Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain and his protégé Rudy Giuliani in the sewer that once was New York.

He seems to believe that Kerry and Gore "belonged in the White House"—as opposed to George W. Bush, who didn't, except perhaps as a waiter—on the basis of qualities he never identifies. Instead, as his accounts of their endless and flailing quests for a "message" make evident, they had no reason for running beyond their own sense of entitlement, and were passionate about nothing so much as their own self-regard. Shrum tells us that both Kerry and his client John Edwards cast votes in favor of going to war in Iraq wholly in hopes it would advance their ambitions, and then tried to withdraw them for much the same reason.

A key exchange in regard to their tunnel vision about themselves takes place on the day in December 2003 when Kerry, who had endorsed Gore at his lowest point in 2000, discovers that Gore, without a word or a warning to anyone, is about to endorse Howard Dean for president. Astounded and

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angry, Kerry asks to speak to the former vice president. Shrum and an aide give him the number.

"Kerry dialed it," Shrum writes, "and a few seconds later, said 'Al, it's John Kerry.' The line went dead. When Kerry redialed the number, Gore's phone was turned off."

In terms of his sensitivity, his manners, and his respect for and consideration of others, this tells you all you need to know about Albert Gore Jr.

Aside from the joy of reliving the Kerry-Gore losses, there are two other reasons for loving this book. One is a piece that ran a year ago in *Rolling Stone*, that well-known house organ of the right-wing hate machine, called "The Enemy Within," an exposé of consultants, and of Democratic ones in particular, that paints Shrum as a shakedown artist who wrings enormous sums out of his credulous clients while giving them dreadful advice.

According to this, while Republicans work for a flat fee in presidential elections, Democrats work on commission, a system the piece says amounts to a license to steal: "Over the past two presidential elections," *Rolling Stone* estimates, "that racket has cost the Democrats at least $10 million more in consultant fees than it did the Republicans. Even top GOP advisers, who usually counsel that greed is good, are amazed by exorbitant fees."

Mark McKinnon, the top Bush strategist in both his elections, thinks the cash that flowed into Shrum's coffers could have been spent better in Florida in 2000 or in Ohio in 2004. Even then, the ads that Shrum did make were terrible: "We paid our consultants millions and got retread Mondale ads," complained Tony Coelho, a 2000 Gore aide.

In the 2004 contest, it was the same, only worse:

> The Kerry team, once again headed by Shrum, advised the candidate to focus on prescription-drug benefits rather than national security, and counseled Kerry not to respond to the Swift Boat attack ads. . . . Shrum's team spent an estimated $130 million for advertising—roughly triple Gore's ad budget—receiving a commission of 4.5 percent on top of a payment of $2.5 million. Once again, the ads were a disaster: While Bush's team used data-mining to microtarget voters with cable TV and Internet appeals, Shrum relied on network television. "The Bush campaign did everything a sophisticated Fortune 100 company would do," says [Clinton-Gore coworker Chris] Lehane. "The ads Kerry ran were so unfocused that they not only didn't help him, they actually helped Bush."

John Kerry, Robert Shrum (right), 2004

DAVID HUME KENNERLY / GETTY IMAGES

At least this puts Shrum in the same box as some of his clients, such as Kerry and Edwards (and now Gore, a multimillionaire from lavish corporate handouts), who profess great concern for the low and impoverished while living lives of sybaritic indulgence themselves. But there is a second reason for loving this book. By the time they linked forces, Shrum and Gore had both made reputations as established race demagogues, adept at trying to link all opponents to the Confederacy, if not directly to the Ku Klux Klan.

Gore, who could not conduct a debate on affirmative action without suggesting his opponents wanted to resurrect slavery, and who almost reflexively called Bill Bradley a racist, had already delivered a ranting oration in which he compared people who used the term "color blind" to hunters hiding in duck blinds, the better to ambush their quarry (in this case, blacks). Shrum, meanwhile, had run ads suggesting that Republicans loved burning black churches, and launched a hit on a Republican running against his client in Maryland as being a racist that involved false accusations and outright lies. Certainly, neither objected to an ad run by the NAACP accusing George W. Bush—who would give the country its first black secretaries of state in succession—of being sympathetic to an appalling race murder that had happened in Texas a few years before.

In this spirit, Shrum recounts an incident from the campaign in 2000, when then-aide Donna Brazile launched "a media squall of her own. . . . In an interview, she'd said that African-American Republicans like Colin Powell were just tokens: Republicans would 'rather take pictures with black children than feed them.'"

Shrum regarded this as a pain, as it made Powell angry, but otherwise nothing to bother with: "I regarded what she said as true," he reports. "So did Gore."

What a charming and lovely collection of people! And none more deserving of what befell them in Florida that year. Call it retribution, call it a payback, call it God's justice. Read it, and grin. ♦

Ralph Fiennes in The English Patient *(1996)*

The Conductor

Anthony Minghella (1954-2008) made music in film.

BY KELLY JANE TORRANCE

Anthony Minghella died of a hemorrhage last month at London's Charing Cross Hospital, and the news took the creative world by surprise. The filmmaker was just 54 years old and few knew that he had been operated on the week before for cancer. With the astonishing critical and commercial success of *The English Patient* (1996), Minghella became one of the world's leading writer-directors after just his third film. He left only eight, however. (His last was the made-for-television *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*.) One of those seven he didn't write, and four were adaptations of novels. In the book of interviews, *Minghella on Minghella*, he says he did this to make as many films as possible while learning the craft: "The reason I've been tempted not to write my own work, but to adapt existing material, is because I've only made a few films and I want to make forty," he said. "It's a job you can't practice; you have to do it."

He never got the chance to make those forty. Some might think that Minghella will be remembered as a capable but not particularly creative interpreter of other people's work. That's like calling Alfred Hitchcock or David Lean mere translators rather than the genre-changing geniuses they were. Of course, Minghella hasn't left a legacy as rich as theirs, but his body of work is stunning, and includes one film every bit as masterful as their best.

Minghella's films—besides the instant classic *The English Patient*, his best known are *Cold Mountain* (2003) and *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999)—are a varied lot, but just about every one features the music of Bach.

"I listen to Bach every day," he told me when I interviewed him at the Toronto International Film Festival a year and a half ago, noting that he keeps two photographs on his desk: one of Samuel Beckett and the other of the pianist and Bach interpreter Glenn Gould. (Minghella was a very learned man, but wore his learning lightly.) Like many English actors and directors, he began his career in theater and television; he actually got his start as a student at the University of Hull writing incidental music for the theater. He wanted to become a pianist or a composer but didn't feel he had the talent. Instead, more than any other contemporary filmmaker, he brought a distinctly musical sensibility to the cinema.

All the films Minghella wrote are small dramas writ large. "I love scale in movies, I love the cinema of cinema," he told me. "But I have very small handwriting and I think my interests are very small. So there's an interesting tension between what I want to write about and what I want to look at."

The English Patient, a sweeping epic that swept the Oscars with nine wins, is about a burn victim remembering his failed love affair against the backdrop of World War II. *Cold Mountain* is *The Odyssey* retold, simply the story of a man trying to make his way back to a home that's changing faster than he can get there. *Breaking and Entering* (2006), his final feature film, was, like *The English Patient*, just the age-old story of an adulterer, but one whose affair takes place in a changing London facing the clash of multiculturalism. Minghella never had a life's theme, like Hitchcock, but there are common threads amongst his work: His films are about people who can never be together because of the larger, complicated world in which they live.

Another common thread is the composer. Gabriel Yared scored five of Minghella's eight films, alongside the classical, jazz, and folk composers he sprinkled throughout his work. Music was important in tying together those big themes and small stories Minghella felt himself torn between. Music, of course, expresses the most personal of emotions and the grandest of ideas: Think of Bach's beautifully felt, individual music written for the glory of God. Minghella's films are filled with Wagnerian motifs, and in all of them music is the key to the larger world.

CORBIS SYGMA

Kelly Jane Torrance is arts and entertainment writer at the Washington Times *and fiction editor of* Doublethink.

In *The English Patient*, a Hungarian folk song that Katharine thinks is Arabic encapsulates the film's themes of the frustratingly inadequate borders on our maps and in our hearts. The nurse, played by Juliette Binoche, is sternly told by a soldier that the Germans may have hidden a bomb inside the piano she's just been playing at an Italian monastery; she laughs that she must be okay because she's been playing Bach. In *The Talented Mr. Ripley* Minghella exhumed the Italian 1950s hit "Tu Vuo Fa L'Americano" which, in a jazz club scene, serves at least three purposes: It allows Tom Ripley and his eventual prey Dickie Greenleaf to bond; it introduces the classical music-loving Tom to a new genre of music and, with it, a new way of life; and it slyly comments on the events of the thriller.

Minghella's work contains something of the abstraction and multiplicity of meaning in music. He doesn't feel the need to explain everything in his intelligent films. In the devastating finale of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, the process of careful calculation that leads Ripley to kill the only person who loves him is left for the viewer to unravel. That ending wasn't in the Patricia Highsmith novel, by the way; he turned her sociopath into a human being. Minghella made his adaptations his own.

In fact, Michael Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient* was widely considered unfilmable before Minghella turned it into one of the greatest films of all time. It did nothing less than change the way we think of the epic.

"The rules of filmmaking have often been about narrowing down the population and having heroic heroes and bad, bad guys and a clear narrative," he pointed out to me. "But actually, our experience of life is nothing like that." Some critics were incensed by a romantic hero who sold useful maps to the Axis powers. But *The English Patient* wasn't a morality play. Minghella's films are politically informed, but he never allows politics to trump people.

Nowhere is that approach more apparent than in his foray into opera. His brilliant, stark production of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* opened the 2006-07 Metropolitan Opera season. The Met is known for its showy sets, but Minghella's stage was almost bare. His focus was on the people, not the background. He told me his production was inspired by Glenn Gould and his "forensic . . . compositional" method.

"One of the problems with repeated productions with opera . . . is that directors feel forced to put something over the opera," he said. "'They're Americans in Vietnam and we're going to have machine guns. . . .' I tried to do exactly the reverse."

Minghella's production was so revelatory because it swept away such allegorical readings. He didn't want a political drama to overwhelm the human drama. Indeed, in his films, the human drama often manages to overwhelm the wider events. In the epics he's likely to be best known for, *The English Patient* and *Cold Mountain*, Minghella's vision might have been just as majestic as David Lean's. But though he made big films about big things, he made his debut with a small film about a cello player and a pianist—criminally, *Truly Madly Deeply* (1990) is out of print on DVD in the United States—and never lost his interest either in a scale suitable for humans or the music that can express both. ♦

The Right Stuff

Michael Oakeshott and the 'disposition' to conservatism.

BY BARTON SWAIM

"To be conservative," wrote Michael Oakeshott in 1956, "is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss."

These words first appeared in "On Being Conservative," later collected in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (1962). Thus did Oakeshott reject the notion that conservatism could be defined by reference to a coherent set of ideas or precepts; conservatism was, for him, a "disposition" to prefer and enjoy what one has rather than risk it for the possibility of something better.

Oakeshott's conservatism stands against what he took to be the principal fallacy of modern political thinking, Rationalism. What defines the Rationalist is his unshakeable belief that social and political ills require only the application of human reason for their elimination. The Rationalist believes political governance must be based entirely on theoretical or technical knowledge—arguments, facts and figures, ideas—and he has no regard for practical knowledge, the kind of knowledge one acquires over time by being constantly engaged in an activity.

Practical knowledge can't be taught or written down, and so the Rationalist disregards it. If he applied his view

Lectures in the History of Political Thought
Selected Writings of Michael Oakeshott, Vol. II
Edited by Terry Nardin and Luke O'Sullivan
Imprint Academic, 516 pp., $58

Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics
by Elizabeth Campbell Corey
Missouri, 253 pp., $39.95

Barton Swaim is author of the forthcoming Scottish Men of Letters and the New Public Sphere.

of politics to cookery, says Oakeshott, the Rationalist would have to believe that great cooks are those who know and understand cookbooks. But trenchant though Oakeshott's analysis is, it leaves sympathetic readers wondering uncomfortably whether it's pointless after all to resist the encroachments of modern ideologies. Modern liberalism can't be fought with appeals to practical knowledge.

is right to criticize the Rationalists for subverting all habits, the good together with the bad. But so long as he provides us with no means for distinguishing between good and bad, let alone for cultivating a disposition to do good rather than bad, we are obliged to look elsewhere for guidance—to invoke mind, principle, belief, religion, or whatever else may be required to sustain civilization.

Michael Oakeshott at Cambridge, circa 1933

Thus, in 1975, Gertrude Himmelfarb published a mostly admiring essay on Oakeshott in which she objected to his conviction that conservatism has little to do with ideas and principles: However appealing his notion of a "conservative disposition" may be, a "disposition" is no match for the radical creeds seeking to remake society from top to bottom. What is disturbing about Oakeshott's critique of Rationalism, said Himmelfarb, "is his tendency to equate ideology with ideas, to be equally suspicious of both, to be impatient with the rigorous exercise of the mind." Oakeshott, she concluded,

It's hard to disagree with that criticism. Yet somehow I feel it fails to do justice to Oakeshott's enduringly relevant appraisal of modern politics.

So in a reprinted version of the essay in Gertrude Himmelfarb's recent collection *The Moral Imagination* (2006), the final, critical section has been completely rewritten. "Oakeshott's conservatism," she says after 30 years, "still speaks to us today not as a practical philosophy . . . but as a disposition that reminds us of more tranquil times, and which may still serve as a corrective to the more rigorous and strenuous modes of thought and conduct called for in a world that is anything but tranquil."

This revision comes nearer the truth, I think. Oakeshott was under no illusion that Rationalism could be resisted by means of a disposition to conserve; he was always amused when people wanted to know what could be "done" about Rationalism. Its roots stretch far too deeply into the history of Western civilization to "do" anything about it. His writings shouldn't be thought of primarily as a set of arguments and ideas, though they contain plenty of both. What Oakeshott offers is the dissection of a mindset—ours.

Michael Oakeshott (1901-90) began his career at Cambridge. Though his field was history, his first book, *Experience and Its Modes* (1933), was a dense work of philosophy in which he distinguished between different forms of human experience. Though it fetched high praise from R.G. Collingwood, then a well-regarded Cambridge philosopher, the book took 30 years to sell out. His next work sold far better: an analysis of horse-racing with the wonderful title *A Guide to the Classics; or, How to Pick the Derby Winner*. Oakeshott was never a man to take himself too seriously.

After World War II—he had been a captain in a reconnaissance unit—Oakeshott quickly established his scholarly reputation with an introduction to Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, and in 1947 became editor of the *Cambridge Journal*, where the essays reprinted in *Rationalism in Politics* first appeared. By the time of his appointment as professor of political science at the London School of Economics in 1951, he was widely known in Britain as one of the few intellectuals willing to defy the postwar consensus on statist intervention.

Retiring from LSE in 1969, he moved into a small cottage in Dorset with his third wife. He was a gentle and unpretentious man; when he died the

BLPES OAKESHOTT ARCHIVES

local townsfolk were surprised to learn that he was a famous writer.

He still is. Over the last 20 years Oakeshott has been the subject of scores of articles and monographic studies. Several books have appeared by the man himself during this period. Yale has published two collections of essays, *The Voice of Liberal Learning* (1989) and *Religion, Politics, and the Moral Life* (1993), as well as one previously unpublished monograph, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Skepticism* (1996). And Liberty Fund in Indianapolis keeps in print its beautiful 1991 edition of *Rationalism in Politics* containing a few additional essays from the *Cambridge Journal* which the author (according to his friend Kenneth Minogue) simply "forgot" to include in the original.

Now the British publisher Imprint Academic has put out the second volume of a projected four-volume set of *Selected Writings*. The first—*What Is History? and Other Essays*—came out in 2004 and contains 30 essays almost all of which were previously unpublished. I was prepared to acknowledge that Oakeshott had left these writings in some drawer because he knew they were not so good, but in fact they are uniformly superb. One of them, a sprightly and intelligent discussion of different ways of writing history—Oakeshott imagines Edward Gibbon and Lord Macaulay in conversation—compares favorably with Charles Lamb or Walter Bagehot. It was handwritten in 1928 on the back of a pile of student exam papers.

Oakeshott wrote a great deal on the nature and meaning of history, and it has always been an oddity of his career that he never published a work of history. Now he has. Volume II of the *Selected Writings* consists of his lectures on the history of political thought at the London School of Economics.

The book takes its place among the author's major works. Oakeshott's method in describing political "thought" is to examine each political utterance he treats, from the *Republic* to the *Wealth of Nations*, as a response to specific historical situations. His approach resembles that of the "contextualist" school of political history exemplified by the historian J.G.A. Pocock, whose major works began appearing when these lectures were already written.

BLPES OAKESHOTT ARCHIVES

At the London School of Economics, 1964

The lectures are worth reading in their own right, but Oakeshott's admirers will appreciate them primarily for the elaboration they afford to some of the points he made in his anti-Rationalist essays. In two of those, he distinguished between the word "ruler," the medieval term for a sovereign or head of state, and the word "leader," which we now use to describe political officials of whose strength or charisma we approve.

The former, says Oakeshott, carries the idea of adjudicating disputes and otherwise maintaining order; the latter suggests the teleological impositions of the modern state. "Rulers" want enough money to fight wars and as few internal disputes as possible; "leaders" want to take the state in a certain direction and must persuade majorities to let them. The transformation began, says Oakeshott, when, in the early modern era, the medieval distinction between adjudication and policymaking began to fall away.

For medieval rulers, policymaking had been confined almost exclusively to foreign policy: the making of treaties, declarations of war, and so on—powers, by their nature, unlimited. But in time, governments began to pursue policy with respect to their own population.

> A modern state is a 'policy' state; and this, in its extreme, is a 'police' state. For what constitutes a 'police' state is not the 'knock at the door' (that is a minor detail), but the pursuit of policy by a government in relation to its own subjects.

Oakeshott has been blessed by sympathetic and capable interpreters; he must be one of the only major thinkers consistently to be the subject of readable and enlightening academic monographs. Elizabeth Campbell Corey's *Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics* is among these. She argues that Oakeshott's thought, including his thought on politics, is animated as much by aesthetic and religious interests as by any purely philosophical ideas.

That Oakeshott's thought is, in any way, religious will surprise some, since he was not himself notably religious and since, in his writings on politics, he was deeply averse to any grand claims about the providential origin and development of the nation. (He thought of Edmund Burke, whom he admired in later years, as a "cosmic Tory.") But Oakeshott's skepticism toward religion had to do with religious and metaphysical claims *in politics*, not with Christianity in its own right. And in any case, Oakeshott himself was profoundly influenced by

Augustine—a fact made abundantly clear by the LSE lectures.

Indeed his suspicion of the "politics of faith," as he referred to political thinking based on metaphysical certainties, is rooted in the Augustinian belief that the pursuit of human perfection is both futile and dangerous. Oakeshott's distrust of any scheme proposing to achieve (as he often put it) "perfection as the crow flies" derives more or less directly from Augustine's campaign against the Pelagians.

The "poetic" aspect of Oakeshott's writings is more apparent but, as Corey acknowledges, more difficult to pin down. In "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," one of his most original and gracefully written essays, he likens the interaction among three different "idioms" of human activity (science, practical affairs, and poetry) to the interaction among friends in a conversation.

> In a conversation the participants are not engaged in an inquiry or a debate; there is no 'truth' to be discovered, no proposition to be proved, no conclusion sought. . . . Of course, a conversation may have passages of argument and a speaker is not forbidden to be demonstrative; but reasoning is neither sovereign nor alone, and the conversation itself does not compose an argument.

Oakeshott's concern here is to restore one of those idioms—poetry, or the enjoyment of beauty for its own sake—to its proper status of equality with other idioms.

The poetic is, for Oakeshott, the mode of activity most essential to being human: The governing principle of all his writings is that human life, if it's to be enjoyed, must be taken on its own terms and enjoyed for what it is. The most objectionable thing about modern liberalism was, for Oakeshott, that it cannot accept human affairs as they are but must always be striving to make them into something else. The long and beautiful passage from "On Being Conservative" in which he explains why young people are so disinclined to be conservative is a good instance of this:

> To rein in one's own beliefs and desires, to acknowledge the current shape of things, to feel the balance of things in one's hand, to tolerate what is abominable, to distinguish between crime and sin, to respect formality even when it appears to be leading to error, these are difficult achievements; and they are achievements not to be looked for in the young.

Though sharply critical of certain trends and tendencies in modern society, he was not outraged at the world because it had taken a course other than the one he would have chosen. He did not make the mistake—frequently made by conservatives—of supposing that some period in the past had been a great mistake after which everything had gone awry.

Oakeshott was not what Americans would call a libertarian. His conservatism had nothing to do with the use of abstract principles in determining what to do in specific circumstances. It's true that his political philosophy was preeminently concerned with the value of personal freedom: His masterpiece *On Human Conduct* is an attempt to find the ideal state in which political and individual freedom could exist. But what lies at the heart of Oakeshott's worldview isn't so much the idea of freedom as the individual who stands to enjoy it.

The starting place of his philosophy wasn't "in the empyrean," he said—that is, in the world of abstractions—"but with ourselves as we have come to be."

After his death it was said that Oakeshott had been the intellectual force behind Thatcherism: a preposterous claim, whatever one thinks about Margaret Thatcher. He said he voted for the Tories because he thought they were likely to do the least harm. Oakeshott's analysis of Rationalism and its attendant ideologies couldn't give rise to a political movement, especially one so momentous as Thatcherism.

At his best, however, he reminds us that folly and frustration await those who put their faith in the human intellect, and who equate "reason" with their own opinions. And that's hardly useless. ♦

BCA

Cute as a Button

A 1930s-style screwball comedy set in the 1930s. Sounds like fun. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

Movie critics participate in two conversations, endlessly. One begins with the assertion by an interlocutor that it must be *so much fun* to be a critic because what could be more wonderful than seeing movies and writing about them for a living? When I was a young whippersnapper movie critic, I replied acidly there could be few things in life less wonderful than having to spend even three seconds watching anything with Robby Benson in it.

Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day
Directed by Bharat Nalluri

Now that I am a decrepit middle-aged critic, I can no longer use the Robby Benson example, as no one knows who Robby Benson is anymore. Now, in Robby's place, I mention Scarlett Johanssen, an oddly acclaimed actress who speaks every line as though she is a foghorn in human form, albeit one suffering from laryngitis.

The second conversation is all about how they just don't make movies the way they used to. Once upon a time, I

John Podhoretz, editorial director of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

hear again and again, Hollywood made great films, and now Hollywood makes nothing but trash. To which I reply: It is true that Hollywood makes trash; it is *not* true that Hollywood used to make great films as a rule. Great or even good films have always been the exception.

During the so-called Golden Age (1930-48) somewhere between 450 and 600 movies were produced by Hollywood studios every year. In total, there were about 5,000 films made in Hollywood before 1950, and probably another 4,000 or so in the 25 years following the advent of television. Of these 9,000 movies, it is impossible to come up with a list of 100 great ones, never mind 500 good ones, never mind a thousand watchable ones.

The point is that most movies are terrible. Most movies have always been terrible.

Which means they *do* make them like they used to. The problem is, when they make them now, they spend a lot more money and try much harder than they did back then, and the excessive labor shows, to painful effect.

Such is the case with a trifle entitled *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*, adapted from a little-known British novel about an unemployed governess in 1939 London who cons her way into a job as the social secretary of a ditzy would-be stage actress juggling three men. One is the young producer who has the star part she covets. One is the sleazy nightclub manager whose apartment she lives in. And the third is a penniless piano player who owns her heart. In the course of a single day, Miss Pettigrew will somehow manage to help the ditzy actress get everything she wants and needs—and find her own happiness in the bargain.

In the thirties and forties, there were dozens of movies made of this sort, screwball piffles in which a featherhead shows unexpected depth when she is given a choice between money and love. One of them—*one* of them—is great. That would be *It Happened One Night* (1934). Some of its progenitors are good, but most are dully formulaic at best, like any product made by an assembly line (in this case, the Hollywood studio system). Today's Hollywood assembly line makes television shows, not motion pictures. Motion pictures are now made by hand, one by one. There is an enormously long time period from the moment they are conceived to the moment they are finally shown to the public, and along the way each project starts and stops, dies and is reborn, is cast and recast. (To take one example, the recent George Clooney flop *Leatherheads* has been kicking around Hollywood for *16 years*.)

Frances McDormand (left), Amy Adams

If you told me that, off-camera, Adams and McDormand actually went at each other with machetes it would come as no surprise, given how uncomfortable they seem to be when they're in a shot together.

Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day is intended to be fizzy and frolicsome, a glass of champagne on celluloid, with a dash of melancholy to heighten the bubbliness. But it's been sitting out too long, and what might once have been fizzy comes across as flat. *Miss Pettigrew* will find an enthusiastic audience with people who are desperate to see an old-fashioned movie that has cars with running boards, bad women with long cigarette holders, and a Bertie Wooster type who says things like, "It's a jolly old show, what?" Good costumes and terrific set decoration can make a difference—for about 20 minutes. Then the story and the characters have to take center stage. And here the story is so sketchy and the characters so broad that you begin longing for a glimpse of another perfectly preserved vintage Rolls Royce to stem the tide of boredom.

Playing the ditzy actress, Amy Adams, wonderful as both a working-class Southern girl in *Junebug* and a cartoon princess come to life in *Enchanted*, works far too hard trying to come across as cute as a button. Frances McDormand, an American actress playing an Englishwoman, seems far more focused on maintaining her accent at all times than she is at constructing a character. These two people supposedly love each other, but if you told me that, off-camera, Adams and McDormand actually went at each other with machetes it would come as no surprise, given how uncomfortable they seem to be when they're in a shot together.

Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day does have one inestimable virtue, however. Scarlett Johanssen isn't in it. ♦

FOCUS FEATURES

"The presidents and prime ministers and their spouses had gathered at the Athenee Palace Hilton hotel for a gala dinner on the final night of the NATO summit when suddenly an unexpected visitor crashed the party—Russian President Vladimir Putin. Although Russia does not belong to the alliance, and Putin had not been invited to the dinner, he showed up anyway, to everyone's surprise." **—Washington Post, *April 5, 2008***

Parody

…, May 5, 2008

Putin Party Crashing Disrupts Awards, Birthdays, 2008 Derby

By Peter Baker
Washington Post Staff Writer

LOUISVILLE, May 4 — Cleanup crews continued collecting debris in and around Churchill Downs a day after the Kentucky Derby and the surprise appearance of Vladimir Putin. The Russian president and his entourage walked directly onto the tracks, thirty yards from the starting gate, just as the race commenced. According to a Russian spokesman, Putin simply intended to join the festivities at the infield, "where the proletariat like to make merry."

Instead, chaos ensued. Though most of the jockeys were able to rein in their horses, a few failed to regain control until FSB agents intervened. Three horses were critically injured. Shortly afterward, Putin and his men were pelted with cups and cans of beer. "This is how they welcome me?" asked an incensed president before ordering his security detail to suppress the crowd until local authorities broke up the brawl.

It was exactly one month ago that Vladimir Putin showed up at a NATO dinner in Bucharest uninvited. The other heads of state politely made room—fortunately there was an open seat due to Afghan president Hamid Karzai's early departure. The Russian president was displeased, however, to be served Karzai's meal, which was vegetarian.

Emboldened by his welcome, Putin made even more unannounced appearances: At Rancho Mirage, California, for the birthday of former first lady Betty Ford, then on to the Playboy Mansion for Hugh Hefner's birthday the following day. "How much for the women?" Putin wanted to jokingly ask Mr. Hefner. (He accidentally used the line with Mrs. Ford.) The following week Putin was seen at the CMT Music Awards in Nashville. During a performance by the band Rascal Flatts, he joined them on stage and launched into a series of Russian dance kicks and yelled, "I am invincible!" to a stunned audience.

But the Derby fiasco may be the last straw. Asked by reporters if he cared that one of the thoroughbreds might be put down, Putin replied, "If he dies,

See DNC KEYNOTE, *A7, Col.4*

REUTERS / Kevin Lamarque; George Bridges / MCT

Russian president Vladimir Putin walked onto the track at the Kentucky Derby Saturday at the start of the race. Three horses were critically injured, and Putin was pelted.

NATO Rejects Ukraine, Invites Liechtenstein

By Peter Finn
Washington Post Staff Writer

…UZ, Liechtenstein, May 4 — …nth after NATO turned down …rship plans for the former …republics of Ukraine and Georgia, U.S., European, and Russian …terparts agreed on compromise …date, Liechtenstein. show a majority of Liechtensteiners expressing support for joining NATO, but the neighboring governments of Switzerland and Austria called the decision "a diplomatic disaster" and "an act of war." Over the weekend, Swiss mercenaries marched along Liechtenstein's western border the Rhine, whe… left… raising pikes and halberds. In the east, Austrian troops briefly penetrated the principality's border but a Viennese official later explained the soldiers were merely looking for a singing group from Salzburg

See LONELY GOATHERD, *A7, Col.1*