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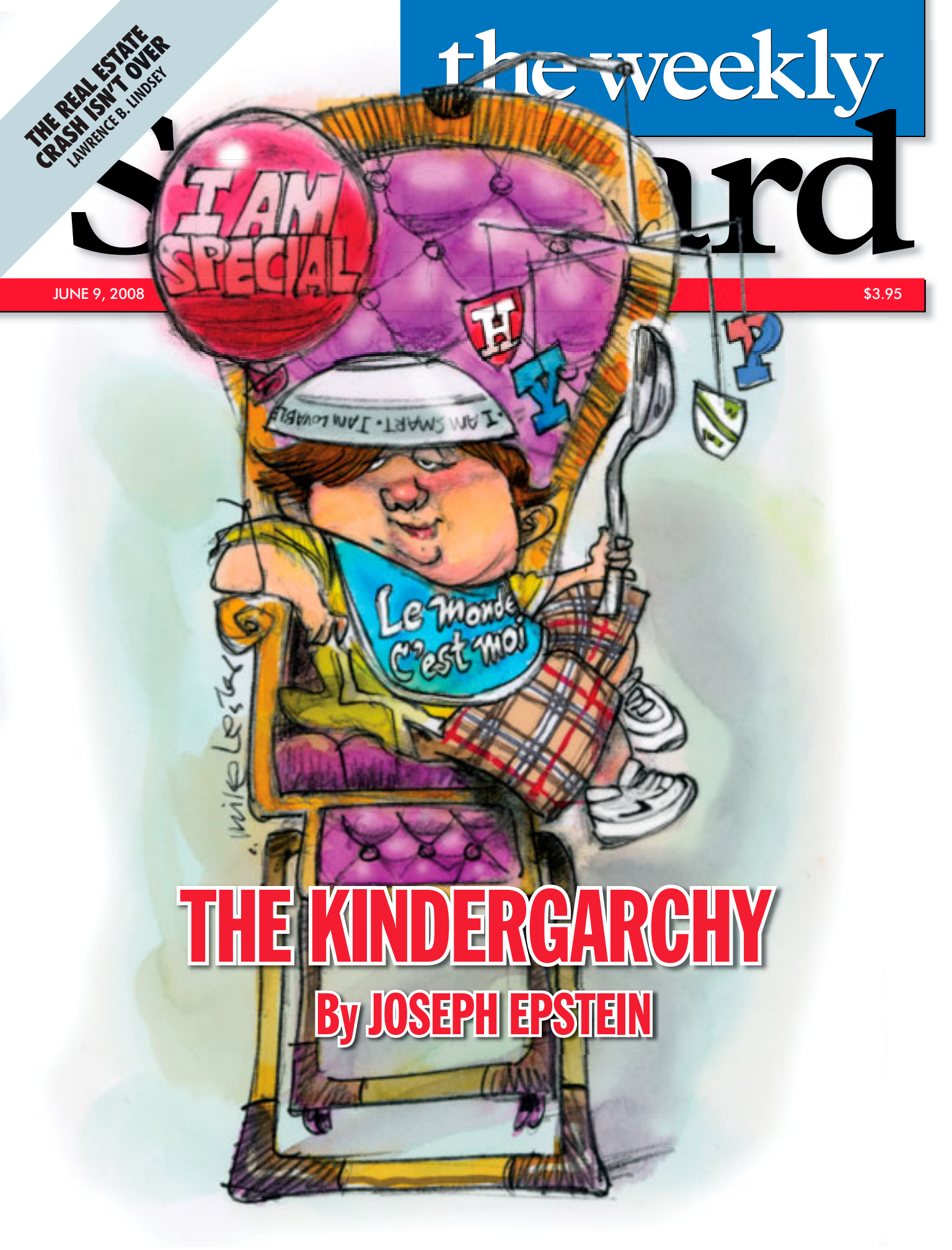
THE REAL ESTATE CRASH ISN'T OVER
LAWRENCE B. LINDSEY



THE KINDERGARCHY

By JOSEPH EPSTEIN

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In the new issue of *Policy Review*

Islam, the Law, and the Sovereignty of God

Accomodating Koranic principles to the civil religion

Where Muslims cannot expect to enforce Shari'a they will, hopefully, work to accommodate Islam to the civil religion we find, for example, in the United States. In this civil religion, moral precepts from many denominations are found, but they are abstracted from the denominational precepts that may be in force for believers, precepts that are not enforced politically. The resources for such an accommodation can be found in Islam, in its concern for equality and social justice. If this accommodation occurs in the United States, perhaps it will have an effect on the larger *umma*, spurring an understanding of Islam that will enable its development so as to facilitate the construction of viable constitutional states in Muslim majority countries.

—Mark Gould

A Better Approach to Foreign Aid

Private development finance is vital

Rather than providing aid according to the wishes of foreign governments, the United States should provide incentives to encourage corporations and individuals to distribute development dollars. In 2006, $380 billion of foreign direct investment flowed to developing countries and $220 billion in remittances was sent home by developing-country migrants. . . . Government policy can act to shape the direction of these dynamic flows of private development capital rather than solely relying on the old model of government-to-government transfers. One simple way to provide incentives for private development finance is to give tax credits to American companies that invest in developing countries.

—Justin Muzinich & Eric Werker

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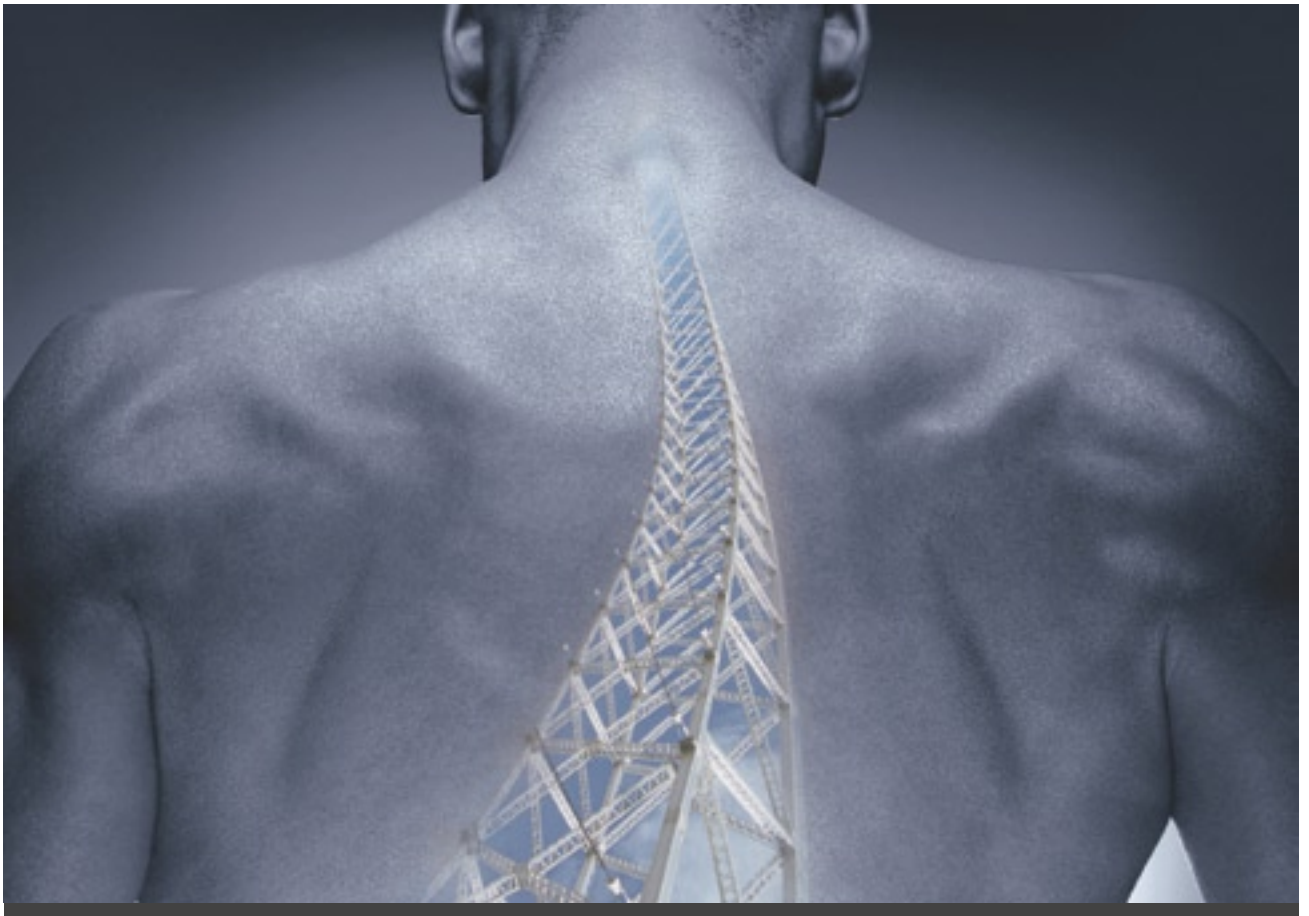

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Contents

June 9, 2008 • Volume 13, Number 37

Articles

Cover: Mike Lester

Features

Books & Arts

the weekly Standard

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The Upside of the Cultural Revolution

As readers may have noticed, The Scrapbook generally refrains from tales of academic horror—not because we're not concerned, but because there are so many of them. Describe the course in Transgendered Semiotics at Ivy U one week, and we'd be tempted to reprint the syllabus for Post-Christian Eco-Hermeneutics at Valley State in the following issue—and there wouldn't be much room for anything else.

But every rule in journalism needs to be broken now and then, and so we offer one morsel that grabbed us by the lapels in last week's *New York Times Book Review*.

It seems that the *NYTBR* had run a review which had some uncomplimentary things to say about the Cultural Revolution in China—you know, that decade-long orgy of revolutionary violence (initiated by Chairman Mao) in which thousands of uniformed Red Guards, waving their pocket-sized editions of the *Thoughts of Chairman Mao*, were unleashed to humiliate, beat, torture, and send into internal exile tens of millions of innocent victims (and kill an estimated 4 million) with the wrong ancestry or links outside China, or who harbored "bourgeois" thoughts about literature or liked the wrong kind of food, music, or haircut. It was during the Cultural Revolution that China's schools and universities were shut for nearly a decade, millions of city dwellers were forced into slave labor in the countryside, and historic art and architecture were destroyed in every province in huge quantities.

All of which prompted Professor Dongping Han, who teaches history and political science at Warren Wilson College in western North Carolina, to write to the *Times* in indignation.

> Today more and more Chinese working-class people look back at the Cultural Revolution years with fond memories. Despite some shortcomings of the Cultural Revolution, China was a socialist society that was overcoming inequality with full employment, free medical care and free education for its citizens. It was a country that had largely eradicated deeply rooted problems of homelessness, prostitution, bandits and drug abuse.
>
> Since China abandoned socialism, it has been faced with the spread of drug abuse and prostitution, worsening environmental degradation, official corruption and other crimes. It is time that we recognize the positive lessons of Chinese revolution, particularly the Cultural Revolution.

To which The Scrapbook can only shake its head in wonderment. To be sure, Warren Wilson is a self-consciously left-wing institution which requires its students to perform community service and indentured labor on campus in order to graduate, and the Sierra Club magazine has hailed it as one of America's "10 Coolest Schools" in the struggle against global warming. But imagine, for a moment, a professor of history and political science who extols the achievements of Stalin's Russia (industrialization, the Moscow subway, acquisition of the eastern half of Poland) or Hitler's Germany (national unity, the Autobahns, acquisition of the western half of Poland) while dismissing the Holocaust or the death by starvation of millions of Russians or the Nuremberg Laws or the Moscow Trials or the Second World War as "shortcomings."

He or she would probably think twice before publishing such opinions in the *New York Times Book Review*. But not Professor Dongping Han of Warren Wilson College—whose unique perspective on the North Korean miracle, or paradise Mugabe-style we can't wait to read. ♦

Ice, Ice, Baby

Of the many benefits to living in a warmer world (a longer planting season, lower heating bills, fewer polar bears), the opportunity to cruise the ice-free Arctic in the summer months may be the most tantalizing. The national parks have become so crowded with bitter gun-clingers, and the Caribbean was too hot and humid in summer even before President Clinton (and Vice President Gore) failed Gaia by refusing to submit the Kyoto treaty for ratification.

So The Scrapbook now looks north, where one day soon we will be able to cruise the deep blue waters of the Bering Sea, enjoy the sunny port of Nunavut on Resolute Bay, and perhaps don our finest cruise wear at the balmy resorts of the Arctic.

That also seems to be what the brave souls aboard the "massive Russian icebreaker" *Kapitan Khlebnikov* were thinking when they set sail last week to see the fruits of global warming for themselves.

Their journey turned out to be more *Endurance* than Love Boat. As one of the passengers reported in Toronto's *Globe and Mail*,

> What irony. I am a passenger on one of the most powerful icebreakers in the world, travelling through the Northwest Passage—which is supposed to become almost ice-free in a time of global warming, the next

(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of September 10, 2001)

shipping route across the top of the world—and here we are, stuck in the ice, engines shut down, bridge deserted. Only time and tide can free us.

And so a three-hour tour became seven days adrift in the pack ice, with no entertainment but booze and happily marauding polar bears. Guess we'll have to suffer through another summer, hoping Al Gore's prophecy will come true and the Arctic will finally assume its rightful place among America's favorite summer playgrounds. ♦

The Whistler

The Scrapbook notes with regret the death last week of 88-year-old Earle Hagen, the title of whose 2000 autobiography (*Memoirs of a Famous Composer—Nobody Ever Heard Of*) summarized his career with economy and precision.

In a long, successful, and rewarding life in music, Mr. Hagen composed innumerable pieces, including the jazz classic "Harlem Nocturne," but his greatest gift to posterity, in The Scrapbook's considered opinion, was the abundance and quality of the television theme songs he wrote and, in one immortal instance, performed. It was Mr. Hagen who composed the diabolically memorable title tunes for *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, *Gomer Pyle USMC*, *That Girl*, *I Spy*, *The Mod Squad*, and his unquestioned masterpiece, *The Andy Griffith Show*. Let it be recorded here that the whistler who carries the melody while Andy and Opie are seen walking down toward the Mayberry fishin' hole is Earle Hagen himself.

Like the unheralded Madison Avenue geniuses who wrote the advertising jingles the whole world sings—"Plop Plop Fizz Fizz / Oh what a relief it is," "By the hour by the day / By the week or any way / Just let Hertz put you / In the driver's seat today," "Winston tastes good / Like a (clap clap) cigarette should"—Mr. Hagen labored in a certain anonymity, enjoying considerable professional success while remaining almost wholly unknown to the public at large. In this respect he bears some resemblance to the great Vic Mizzy, whose theme songs for *Green Acres* and *The Addams Family* will live as long as Americans pay for cable and watch reruns.

In Earle Hagen's case, can there have been any greater reward than furnishing the sound track for Rob Petrie tripping over the ottoman, or Sergeant Carter berating Gomer Pyle? ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'So I prefer, as Barthes once said in a lecture, to entrust myself to the banality within me, and thereby be restored to the sort of reflection that does not await the evening news to . . ."

—Leon Wieseltier, 'New Republic'

Casual

Fly Buy

Allow me to begin with a slightly off-topic public service message: Do not clip your fingernails on airplanes.

It never occurred to me that I would have to make such a public request. Of course, it never occurred to me that the guy sitting next to me on a five-hour flight to Los Angeles would clip his nails for 30 minutes, either. But that very thing happened on a trip I took in April.

Unbelievably, it was the third time since the beginning of the year that I'd been seated within spitting distance of someone who chose a long flight to give himself a manicure. Each time I was tempted to voice my disgust, but I seemed to be the only one who noticed. I'm beginning to worry that nail clipping is becoming one of those things—like drinking ginger ale—that people just do on airplanes.

It was as we were getting settled in for the long trip that the man to my left took out his clippers. I didn't notice until the first loud CLICK, which I heard over the José González song playing on my iPod. It was revolting, but I assumed that it was an emergency, maybe a hangnail. But he kept going. CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

The problem with nail-clipping in public—and in a confined space where movement is restricted—is the random flight of each distal edge after it's liberated from the nail plate. Think of a beginning golfer at a driving range or pinball. I soon became obsessed. With each new CLICK, I looked out of the corner of my eye, praying that the small white crescent moon did not land in my Canada Dry. The clipping went on for hours—or minutes that felt like hours, anyway. In a desperate effort to distract myself I grabbed a copy of the SkyMall catalogue in the seat pocket in front of me.

I'd flipped through the SkyMall catalogue from time to time, but I'd never read it. Does anyone read it? And does anyone actually buy this stuff? By page 17, I was completely engrossed.

That page included a photograph of The Voice Activated R2-D2. The description that accompanies the pictures tells us that the 15-inch replica of the Star Wars droid "responds to

over 40 voice commands and navigates rooms and hallways." Its other features are certain to appeal to the lonely science fiction geeks who might be willing to shell out $115 for the mini-robot. Not only can R2-D2 "follow behind you" if you're looking for a little companionship after a long day, but he also "plays games like tag."

Animals get lonely, too, according to the entry for the Automatic Cat Toy ($79.95). "Most of us work 40 hours a week, leaving our housecats alone in empty, quiet homes leading to separation anxiety, laziness or behavior problems (for the cat)." And, one supposes, for its guilt-ridden owner. The answer is an electronic mouse. "Our new automatic programmable cat toy plays with your cat when you're away! Its programmable timer activates the toy at set intervals, arousing the cat's hunting instincts and encouraging playful activity. . . . Perhaps the best gift your cat will ever receive."

Not if your cat gets the Advanced Large Capacity Feline Drinking Fountain ($69.95). The fancy bowl was "developed by a veterinarian with the help of an animal behaviorist," and by "reducing the risk of urinary tract infection and kidney disease" it might actually extend Felix's life. The Adjustable Pet Feeder ($29.95), essentially a dog bowl with two heights, may not be a lifesaver, but by helping your dog "eat in a healthier position, all life long," it is quite effective at "minimizing gas."

Many of the gadgets in the photo-packed catalogue appeal to the animal-obsessed. There are four different pet ramps/steps to help old/arthritic/lazy pets climb onto a couch or bed ($79.95-$199.95). There is a canine GPS system ($199.95), an "indoor dog restroom" ($149.95), and, to "avoid injury during sudden stops or an accident," a dog seat belt ($69.95).

Such accidents are preventable, especially if you wear Piloti Driving Shoes ($85) with the Roll Control™ heel that helps "with precise pedal application." Since it's summer, you might consider instead the H.S. Trask Driving Sandal ($130), on the opposite page, which doesn't have the Roll Control™ heel, but a "wrap-around heel pad" that prevents scuffs and "specially-designed soles [that] grip your car's pedals."

Writers often work under the illusion that they have some special ability to understand and explain their fellow man. I suppose I'm no different.

But I don't think I will ever quite get someone who plays tag with a mini-droid, buys a seat belt for his dog, or owns a pair of driving sandals.

Not to mention a guy who clips his nails on an airplane.

Stephen F. Hayes

DARREN GYGI

Nixon's A.G. Redux

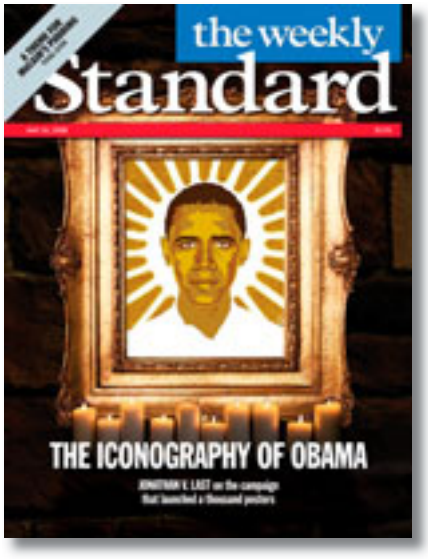
When The Weekly Standard asked Robert Novak to review my book, *The Strong Man: John Mitchell and the Secrets of Watergate* ("Big Bad John," May 26), I doubt they knew that the syndicated columnist, long and rightly a respected figure, has nurtured an animus toward John Mitchell that predates his service as attorney general; that Novak claimed Mitchell "very nearly proved fatal" to Richard Nixon's victorious presidential campaign of 1968, which campaign Mitchell, in fact, managed; that Novak publicly blamed the attorney general for fostering "national disunity"; or that he used his column, as early as 1970, to clamor for Mitchell's head.

Even I, however, was surprised by the confused logic and erroneous assertions of fact that plagued Novak's review. What to make, for example, of Novak's argument that Mitchell, with his 1971 prediction that the country was moving to the right, "was feeding Nixon's worst prejudices"? Was Mitchell's prophecy not correct? Are all those who have welcomed this movement "prejudiced"? And hasn't the enlargement of the right since 1968, been, on the whole, rather good to Bob Novak?

Similarly, Novak argues that the much-maligned Mitchell "deserves his reputation," even while conceding: "Rosen makes a convincing case that perjured testimony . . . formed the basis of the case that made Mitchell 'the highest-ranking government official ever to serve [prison] time.'" Since Mitchell's bad reputation derives chiefly, if not wholly, from his criminal convictions in Watergate, how can that reputation be "deserved" when it was created, as Novak acknowledges, by men bearing false witness? Consider, too, that Novak's last review of a major biography in these pages, in November 2007, bore the headline: "McCarthy = Bad: But the truth is more complicated." Presumably, Novak believes Joseph McCarthy to be a worthier subject of principled revisionism than the attorney general who desegregated the southern school system.

Then Novak accuses me of posing, but never addressing, two questions: about the role the CIA played in Watergate, and the connection between Nixon's foreign policy and ultimate fate. In fact, *The Strong Man* describes in detail (pp. 280-285) how CIA director Richard Helms used at least three different men to neutralize Gordon Liddy and the Plumbers in the Ellsberg and Watergate missions; and chronicles in depth (pp. 168-176) the internal espionage committed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the relationship between that episode and one of its key players, Alexander Haig, to Watergate.

I don't know how Novak missed



these passages, but Sollozzo's lament in *The Godfather*—"The don, rest in peace, was slippin'"—comes to mind.

Finally, there is Novak's unpardonable revelation, at the outset of his review, of the ending to my 609-page book, indeed his reproduction of the closing sentences. This he does for the purpose of harrumphing that the anecdote related therein—attested to by two sources, not just the one Novak mentioned—cannot possibly be true because, he, Novak, never heard about it "in gossipy Washington during the past forty-eight years." It is an exceptional brand of solipsism when someone asserts that an event could not have happened because he, personally, in his travels through "gossipy Washington," didn't witness it; but to give away the surprise ending of a book to a readership, such as The Weekly Standard's, that might actually be disposed to purchase said book is an act of bad manners, or worse still, bad faith. In all, "The Prince of Darkness" has not been this instructive on the subject of morality and ethics—his own, chiefly—since the outing of Valerie Plame.

James Rosen
Washington, D.C.

Robert Novak responds: I am sorry that James Rosen is so upset with a review that praised his "unfailingly honest reportage" in writing "an engrossing account" of the Nixon years. We obviously disagree on the merits of John Mitchell.

I feel I must respond to Rosen's allegation that I "missed" passages in the book that addressed the questions raised in its prologue: whether "the CIA and the intelligence community" played a "role" in Watergate and whether "Nixon and his men" paid a price for détente with the Soviet Union and rapprochement with Communist China. He cites two sections in the 609-page book (one of six pages and the other of nine pages). In fact, they do not address the questions Rosen claims they do. The six-page section details the well-known CIA connections of the Watergate burglars and provides evidence only of the failed White House effort to pin the blame on the CIA. Rosen writes that "the role of CIA in the collapse of the Nixon presidency" was "a mystery that bedeviled Mitchell to his grave." The nine-page section deals with the espionage operation against President Nixon performed by Adm. Thomas Moorer, and never connects it with Watergate, much less retribution for Nixon's Soviet and China policies.

I was disappointed by Rosen's attack on my "morality" and "ethics" for relating the closing anecdote in his book. Unlike a suspense novel, a biography never contains a surprise ending that the reviewer is constrained from revealing.

• • •

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the weekly Standard

Win the War? Yes, We Can!

Don't look now, but evidence of progress in the war on terror is just about everywhere. Last week CIA director Michael Hayden noted some U.S. accomplishments for the *Washington Post*: "Near strategic defeat of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Near strategic defeat for al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. Significant setbacks for al-Qaeda globally." *USA Today*: Attacks in Iraq are "down 70 percent since President Bush ordered a U.S. troop increase, or 'surge,' early last year."

The *New Yorker*'s Lawrence Wright devoted a long essay to Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, onetime mentor to Ayman al Zawahiri, who now criticizes his former protégé and Osama bin Laden and suggests they be put on trial. In the *New Republic*, Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank told the story of Sheikh Salman al-Awdah, author of an open letter attacking bin Laden and violent jihad that has caused shockwaves across the Muslim world. The sheikhs of Anbar Province in Iraq lead a national, transsectarian movement preparing for provincial elections by the end of the year. Polling shows a widespread decline in support among Muslims for suicide bombing and for bin Laden. Fareed Zakaria observed that the number of Islamist attacks worldwide has declined precipitously since 2004.

How did this happen? It is partly due to Muslim outrage at al Qaeda's killing of its coreligionists. It is partly due to Muslim rejection of al Qaeda's malign interpretation of Islam. For these reasons, Bergen and Cruickshank wrote that "encoded in the DNA of apocalyptic jihadist groups like Al Qaeda are the seeds of their own long-term destruction."

True. But such seeds must be sown, watered, and tended. Read the authors mentioned above, and you would think that al Qaeda's troubles sprung up overnight. They did not. Its troubles cannot be separated from U.S. counterterrorism policy. From President Bush's policy.

After 9/11, the president mobilized all forms of American power against bin Laden and his global jihadist movement. The constant pressure—cutting off the movement's funding, bringing down the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, hunting down jihadist affiliates in the Philippines and the Horn of Africa, spying on the terrorists' global communications—put the enemy on the defensive for the first time.

Then the president denied the jihadists an ally by removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. Bin Laden declared Iraq the "central front" of his war against the West, and the Sunni insurgency helped Al Qaeda in Iraq gain a foothold there. Bush changed strategy last year, sending reinforcements to Iraq and ordering General Petraeus to secure the country's population. The results have been dramatic. By the time the first reinforcements arrived in Iraq, the Anbaris were already turning against al Qaeda. The Americans helped to almost completely eliminate the group in Anbar. Al Qaeda in Iraq is on the run. It has been denied its strategic goal of establishing an Islamic State of Iraq. Its black flag flies no more there.

What once seemed a war between jihadists and the West is now a war between jihadists and Muslims who reject terrorism. Bin Laden is close to losing this fight on his central front. Al Qaeda is no longer the attractive "strong horse" of bin Laden's December 2001 metaphor. It is that fact, more than any other, that accounts for his movement's current disarray.

But a global war has many fronts. Progress in one battle is often accompanied by setbacks in another. Al Qaeda may be on the brink of defeat, but its leadership maintains a safe haven along Pakistan's northwest frontier. In Afghanistan, Coalition forces continue to fight al Qaeda, the Taliban, and other agents of state failure. Meanwhile, the Iranian theocracy moves steadily forward in its quest for nuclear weapons. Iran's proxies in Iraq, Gaza, and Lebanon commit murder in the pursuit of illiberal ends. A disturbing number of European Muslims are sympathetic to the jihadists and are a potential source of fresh recruits. And a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq would erase all of the progress that has been made in the last year and a half. A precipitous withdrawal would provide aid and comfort to al Qaeda.

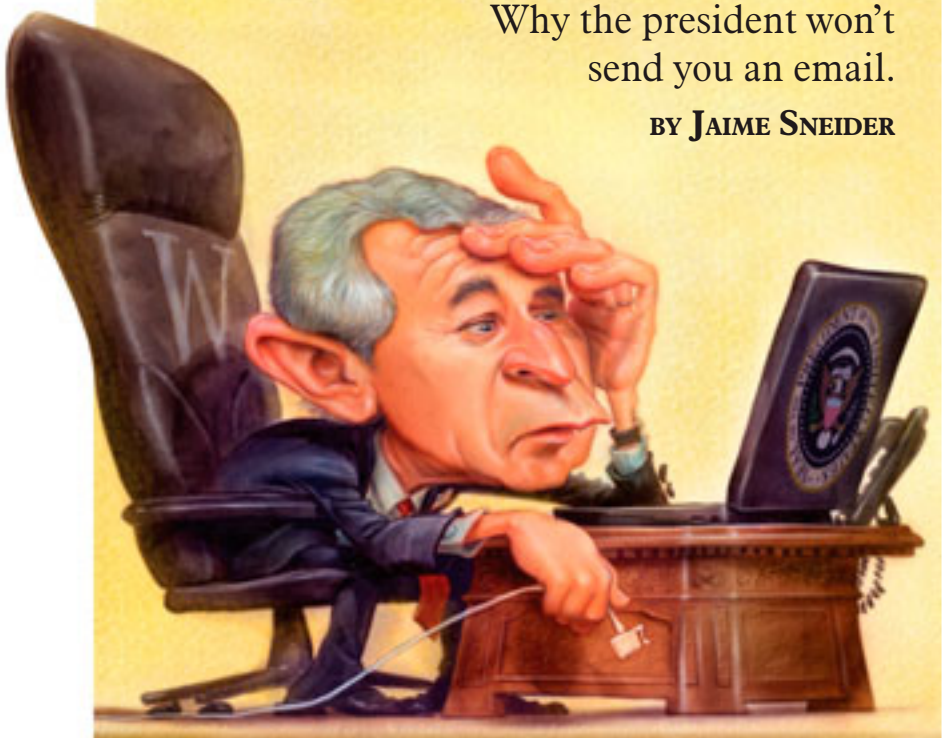
The left's analysis of jihadism has been proved incorrect at every turn. It argued military power would be ineffective against the terrorists. Wrong. It argued that intervention in Iraq would energize bin Laden's movement. That movement is in shambles. The left argued Iraq was a lost cause. It isn't. The left argues that a "war on terrorism" is futile, that defeat is inevitable, because terrorism is a "tactic," not an enemy. Nonsense. President Bush has demonstrated through perseverance and (more often than not) sound policy that the war on terror can be won. And right now we're winning it.

—Matthew Continetti, for the Editors

Blackberry Deprivation

Why the president won't send you an email.

BY JAIME SNEIDER



John McCain and Barack Obama are often seen sending emails between campaign rallies as they barnstorm the country. But whichever man is elected president will face a predicament: unholster his Blackberry or risk political suicide. As George W. Bush told a small group of friends just days before being sworn in, "Since I do not want my private conversations looked at by those out to embarrass, the only course of action is not to correspond in cyberspace." In the last eight years, President Bush has not sent a single message. And future presidents are all but certain to follow in his footsteps.

Although liberal critics often claim that Bush prefers living in a bubble, the president seemed to regret giving up email. He used it as governor of Texas, and he told reporters last week that he eagerly looked forward to signing on again once his second term comes to a close. Recalling the good old days when he had a computer, he remarked, "I stayed in touch with all kinds of people around the country, firing off emails at all times of the day to stay in touch with my pals. . . . [T]here's no better way to communicate."

The potential benefits of using email in executing the duties of commander in chief are as self-evident as the risks. Because the number of people who have physical access to the president is inevitably quite small, email would empower him to seek counsel from a greater number of people both inside the White House and outside Washington.

Yet if the president did use email, there would be no guarantee his minute-to-minute communiqués would remain confidential. And it would be foolish to assume there is no cause for concern so long as the president obeys the law. Just consider the ridicule were the media to get wind of a late-night email to the White House Mess requesting a bag of Cheetos.

There is not a long track record, but President Bush is not the first president to give up email altogether in light of the possibility politically sensitive and embarrassing discussions could be disclosed. Aside from the occasional photo-op, Bill Clinton did not use email. Vice President Cheney used email briefly, but gave it up soon after. And Vice President Gore's use of email was a source of controversy when the House of Representatives subpoenaed his correspondence in investigating campaign finance abuses, and the Office of the Vice President claimed more than a year of his messages had disappeared.

The nub of the problem is this: If the president uses email, it will be subject to the Presidential Records Act, as is all executive-branch email. This law requires electronic records to be copied and saved to a central database. Anyone from the public can access these records 12 years after a president leaves office, and Congress has put forward a variety of legal pretexts for receiving such information much sooner.

Executive branch email is not under lock and key. Emails about secret office romances—and, dare I speculate, evidence of an extramarital affair or two—are just waiting to be uncovered among the gazillions of messages people in the White House exchange on a daily basis. Nobody has much to worry about unless nominated for a more significant position in a future administration, at which time a brigade of opposition researchers and journalists will descend on the applicable presidential library and dig up every last embarrassment, however trivial.

Poorly worded emails sent in the spur of a moment have already derailed careers. Consider the controversy surrounding the firing of several U.S. attorneys. The resignations of Kyle Sampson and Monica Goodling, both top-ranking Department of

GARY LOCKE

Jaime Sneider, a contributor to The Weekly Standard *blog, served as deputy associate director of the White House Communications Office.*

Justice officials, were prompted by the disclosure of their emails under threat of congressional subpoena. In Goodling's case, the focus of criticism was not even her comments about the U.S. attorneys. Rather, the occasional reference to God and a tagline quoting the president ("[W]e know that when the work is hard, the proper response is not retreat; it is courage") were used to brand her a political hack.

Although former FEMA chief Michael Brown is unworthy of much sympathy, he provides still another interesting case study. Apparently conditions at the Superdome in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina were not alone sufficient to demonstrate his incompetence. Reporters and congressmen also harped on the fact that Brownie emailed his press secretary in advance of a television-appearance to ask, "Tie or not for tonight? Button-down blue shirt?" in the midst of the storm. Yet one can only imagine what a survey of congressional email in the hours before a *Meet the Press* appearance would uncover. *No, Senator, I really don't think you can pull off a plaid tie with a plaid shirt and madras blazer.*

Scrutinizing just about anyone's minute-to-minute correspondence can be used to make that person look like an idiot. That is why the most devastating emails are often the least relevant, like Brown wanting to know whether he should roll up his sleeves or an Enron executive discussing how to upholster the company's latest jet. These simply do not bear on whether Brown could effectively manage an emergency or whether Enron was committing fraud.

Perhaps because of this apprehension, the exacting standards Congress imposed on the White House only apply on one end of Pennsylvania Avenue. No effort is made to archive congressional email for investigators or historians. Members of Congress have made plain that they favor their own ability to communicate quickly, freely, and privately. When it comes to the White House, the opposite holds true. So while broadcasts of the State of the Union capture many ill-mannered congressmen thumbing through emails on their Blackberries, President Bush and Vice President Cheney have been effectively denied this staple of modern political communications.

Another way congressional and presidential emails differ is that the White House computer network forces aides to use their official government email addresses by blocking all outside email accounts. That's why Representative Henry A. Waxman has made much of the revelation that a couple of dozen White House staffers, including Karl Rove, regularly used laptops issued by the Republican National Committee to access alternative email addresses. Waxman has gone so far as to remark that such an arrangement may "raise serious questions about violations of the Presidential Records Act." At the same time, he neglects to note that Congress's computer system makes no effort whatsoever to prevent staffers from using nongovernment email accounts.

To be sure, there is a greater potential for abuse by those who execute the laws in a government, and therefore greater oversight of executive activity is constitutionally appropriate. Yet it seems equally clear that Congress has gone overboard on the scrutiny of executive branch communication while treading lightly when it comes to supervising its own ranks. A complete search of Representative William Jefferson's email might reveal much about the $90,000 found in his freezer a couple of years back. And given that disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff's Hill contacts were even more extensive than his connections to the Bush administration, one is left to wonder what evidence a stringent document retention policy might have preserved.

Likewise any system that denies the president of the United States access to a communications technology now used freely by billions of people around the world fails to strike the right balance. There is value in all of our representatives' being able to communicate readily both with their staff and with the public they serve. ♦

Quelle Horreur!

Eurovision and other insults to French culture.

BY ANNE-ELISABETH MOUTET

Paris

It is difficult to overstate the weird, galactic silliness of the 52-year-old Eurovision Song Contest, which wrapped up on May 24 in Belgrade. Every spring, Eurovision fever seizes European countries, culminating in a televised finale that demolishes any tastelessness standards set by, say, *American Idol* or *Dancing with the Stars*. (That installment with Paul McCartney's tangoing one-legged estranged wife comes close.) But this year's Eurovision had all of France up in arms: Our competing entry was sung—*quelle horreur*—in English! Never mind that over half this year's contestants (including the Dane, the Germans, the Latvians, the Pole, the Swede, the Ukrainian, and more) also chose to sing in the language of rock music, *la langue du rock*. Cultural politics being what it is in France, cabinet ministers' heads may roll.

After a three-and-a-half-hour TV marathon in Belgrade (which, by contract, none of the rebroadcasters may cut), the cute half-clad Russian, Dima Bilan, singing in English, won. On the face of it, he had all the makings of a Europop star (including killer hipbones), but his victory really had nothing to do with the judges' assessment of his talent. In recent years, Eurovision has become ridiculously political—it's bloc voting, with every Scandinavian nation voting for all the other Scandinavians; the former Warsaw Pact countries hanging together; and places like Ukraine, Moldova, and Estonia aligning themselves according to the pipeline that brings them oil and gas. (Seriously. Ukraine voted oil-geographically, putting Russia first, Azerbaijan second, and Georgia third.)

You'd think the non-Scandinavian Western Europeans would realize they have no ghost of a chance any longer, but they still ostensibly believe in playing fair. The two French commentators—who included designer to the stars Jean-Paul Gaultier, the man who made a name for himself putting Madonna in a conical bra—mentioned none of this in their saccharine remarks, but veteran BBC commentator Terry Wogan (a kind of shaggy-haired Johnny Carson) made jokes and took potshots at everything, which apparently angered the Eurovision people enough that they complained to Wogan's bosses.

Dreamed up during a 1955 Monte Carlo junket by a bunch of Geneva-based European Broadcasting Union bureaucrats, both as a technical experiment in live broadcasting and a means to cheer up postwar Europe, the Eurovision Contest took off in the sixties and seventies, fostering the music style best known as Europop, which bears only a distant resemblance to the actual national music of the participating countries. In 1967, the year of the Beatles's *Sgt. Pepper* album, for instance, the (winning) British Eurovision entry was Sandie Shaw's "Puppet on a String." France's 1969 winner was Frida Boccara's "*Un Jour, Un Enfant*" in the very year when Serge Gainsbourg produced "*Je t'Aime, Moi Non Plus*" and Georges Moustaki sang "*Le Métèque*." (A cult Eurovision entry is Germany's 1979 disco "*Dschinghis Khan*," which only placed fourth but is one of YouTube's top-rated videos. It has it all—stiff, uncoordinated dance number in gold lamé, luxuriant mullets, relentless mechanical beat.)

Few Eurovision winners have managed to build any kind of career on their victory in the contest, the exception being the Swedish disco group ABBA in 1974. (Celine Dion, who confusingly competed for Switzerland in 1988 with an inoffensive French title, did win, but had to wait half a decade before achieving lasting fame in an entirely different style.) Yet its very dorkiness has given Eurovision a new cool factor in recent years, hence the appearance of Jean-Paul Gaultier on the France 3 broadcast.

No matter: Participation in the contest is highly coveted by any young nation between Iceland and Azerbaijan (a new contestant in 2008). Israel has been a competitor since 1973 and won three times, the last in 1998 with an entry sung by a transsexual calling herself Dana International. For months now the Serbian press, highbrow and tabloid, has been heralding the contest—held in Belgrade because the Serbian entry won last year—as their country's final proof of rehabilitation after the Kosovo crisis.

You'd think more established nations, like, say, France and the United Kingdom (which, with Germany and Spain, are permanent members of Eurovision's own version of the Security Council, guaranteed a place in the finals by virtue of their major European broadcasting networks) would take things with a little more distance. You'd be wrong.

Irony was tried last year, and failed. There was an Israeli entry in French, English, and Hebrew called "Push Da Button" which was addressed to President Ahmadinejad of Iran; and a group of rednecks from northern France called *Les Fatals Picards* who overdid the hicks-from-the-sticks style with a song from an album called *Pamplemousse Mécanique* ("Clockwork Grapefruit"). Neither got anywhere. This year, possibly the best entry—Ireland's Dustin the Turkey, an engaging animatronic glove-puppet DJ-ing an electronic number with a lot more charm than his human competitors—was thrown out in the semi-finals (which prompted calls for sacking at the state-run Irish TV authority in the *Eire Daily Mail*).

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It was the first time Azerbaijan entered the Eurovision competition, and they did not disappoint: Feathers! Wings! Fire!

And so France is abuzz with the *scandale* Sébastien Tellier. A protégé of the chart-topping duo Daft Punk, the hirsute and bearded Tellier, who was educated in one of France's most exclusive Catholic private schools, Saint Martin de Pontoise, sang in forgettable English a forgettable song called "Divine" (see it here, *www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vz58Hw9hldw*). He was picked to compete at Eurovision by entertainment honchos at (state-run) France 3 during a live broadcast, prompting an angry outburst on the floor of the National Assembly by Gaullist member of parliament François Michel-Gonnot ("It's the first time in 52 years that such an outrage against French culture has been committed . . . ").

Culture minister Christine Albanel soon came under fire. Albanel, a former Chirac speechwriter and a novelist, has quite a few enemies in her own party, who covet her plum job. Among them is Alain Joyandet, the junior minister for *Francophonie*, the Alliance of French-Speaking Countries, which France uses as its own little U.N. diplomatic pressure group (it was headed for a while by Boutros Boutros-Ghali). Joyandet read France 3 the riot act, then contacted the Eurovision Contest's executive producer, Svante Stockselius, to have the song altered. (Stockselius refused.) Tellier grudgingly added a couple of French lyrics to his song, but complained that it "didn't sound the same."

It brought back numerous earlier French tantrums, such as the reaction against the EuroDisney amusement park near Paris when it opened in 1992. A group of intellectuals led by the great theater director Ariane Mnouchkine called EuroDisney a "cultural Chernobyl"—as if Notre Dame had been torn down and replaced by Sleeping Beauty's castle, instead of the whole thing being built in the middle of beetroot fields 35 miles from the Louvre. This sensitivity, you understand, springs from the duty of every French citizen to foster the "*rayonnement de la culture fran-*

çaise," an expression that has French culture radiating its beneficent influence like the sun.

All the same, there may be better ways to warm the planet's denizens by the glow of French culture than making French the compulsory language of all future entries in the Eurovision Contest. One came to mind recently as I searched the web.

I was looking for an electronic text of Balzac's great novel *Les Illusions Perdues* (1843) to send to a French-educated American friend. It soon became apparent that, while the most cursory of Google searches will produce three separate English translations (thank you Project Gutenberg and the University of Virginia) as well as versions in Italian and Russian, none was to be found in the original language. Further investigation failed to produce major French classics such as the plays of Molière, Racine, and Corneille (the 17th-century trio who collectively occupy in French letters a place roughly equivalent to Shakespeare's) except for a couple of plays on a provincial teacher's homepage and an archive in Quebec. It began to look as if French culture wasn't so terribly radiant after all.

As it happens, the Bibliothèque Nationale, French equivalent of the Library of Congress, now housed in a tall glass building on the Seine, was tasked by former president Chirac not long ago to provide an answer to Google Books's infernal gall. ("A *commercial, American* company, digitizing all books in existence? Even the French?" Chirac thundered, and promptly assigned a committee to counter this outrage.) Before that, Gallica, the website of the Bibliothèque Nationale, mostly held facsimile copies of books, exactly reproducing the original pages, typeface, and so on, which were hugely unwieldy (10 to 80 megabytes) and unsearchable. But surely, I thought, by now Gallica would have *Les Illusions Perdues*.

After half an hour getting lost on Gallica's new site, I called the library's press office. A polite young man named Jean-Noël Orengo explained to me that digitizing books cannot be done "just like that," "on a massive scale," "helter-skelter" (oh the horrors perpetrated by Project Gutenberg's tens of thousands of cheerful volunteers who have entered over 40,000 titles into its free online collection!); it must be done "correctly." (Thus did the zealots of the Counter Reformation battle those Bible-obsessed militants raring to let just *anyone* read Scripture. It's not for nothing that France was, for a very long time, a Catholic country.) Monsieur Orengo said I should write to the communications director of the Bibliothèque Nationale if I wanted to find out more.

"But surely," I countered, "you can guide me through the website? I'm in front of a screen. You're in front of a screen. Can't we just find one book together?"

"I'm not an Internet specialist," admitted M. Orengo, getting more flustered by the minute. "But surely," I repeated, having fruitlessly waded through lists of electronic works ranked by *date of digitization*, "the point of a website is that it can be used by everybody?"

This was obviously a new and surprising notion to my guide. It turned out that we couldn't find "my" Balzac, however hard we tried. I suggested we open another window to Google, and type the first sentence of the book, in quotation marks. No dice. I tried the opening sentence of one literary work that *does* exist on the Gallica website in electronic form, Molière's sublime *Tartuffe*. ("*Allons, Flipote, allons, que d'eux je me délivre*.") Google doesn't link to it. "Ah," said M. Orengo, in the tone of someone revealing an important and necessary truth, "but all web search engines are *Anglo-Saxon*."

We eventually hung up, he worried that his boss would unfairly think he'd got the library bad press, me vowing that if it took me all night, I would *find that book* on the website of the French National Library.

I couldn't. Typing *Illusions perdues* in the Gallica jungle eventually produced the text of another Balzac novel, *Ursule Mirouët*. I would take that one at least, I decided, and clicked on the "download" link. This brought up a two-page questionnaire, demanding from me in addition to name and address a "customer number," a Value Added Tax affiliation number, a bank account number, and the soul of my first-born. (I made that last one up.) Feeling reckless, I clicked back, selected the entire text on my screen, and pasted it in a new Word document.

I now own the electronic text of a minor Balzac novel published 160 years ago, which I stole from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. That'll give me the odd *frisson* next time I leave the country. As for our Eurovision Song Contest entry, it came in 19th out of 25 finalists, which, while better than the three losers tied for 25th place (the U.K., Poland, and Germany), is nothing to write the Académie Française about. ♦

Have I Got a Proposition For You

California's tax revolt, 30 years on.

BY ARNOLD STEINBERG

Thirty years ago, this week, California voters started a taxpayer revolt that quickly spread to other states, helped set the stage for President Ronald Reagan's income tax cuts, and inspired an entire generation of diehard opponents of big government. While the rest of the country slept through the Carter presidency, hundreds of thousands of Californians participated in a true grassroots petition campaign to place an initiative on the June 1978 ballot. And then they voted for this historic measure, Proposition 13, to amend their state constitution to limit property taxes.

Prop. 13 limited (a) taxes on real property to 1 percent of value, and (b) increases in property taxes to 2 percent annually. In simple terms, a home worth $500,000 could be taxed up to $5,000, and, in the event that the value of the home went up, those taxes could increase by no more than $100 (i.e., 2 percent of $5,000) in year one, then $102 (2 percent of $5,100) in year two, and so forth. For good measure, Prop. 13 went beyond property tax reform—for an increase in local general taxes, it required the approval of local voters, and for an increase in state taxes, it required a two-thirds majority in the state legislature. The logic was compelling. Howard Jarvis, Prop. 13's creator, felt that if you limited property taxes but did not otherwise inhibit government, it would raise other taxes promiscuously.

Early on, I urged my client, Attorney General Evelle Younger, a candidate for governor in the Republican primary that June, to endorse Proposition 13. I argued that even if it lost, it would win handily among Republicans, and he needed them in the primary. And if it won, it would probably do so broadly, and he needed to expand his base for the general. One of Younger's impressive primary opponents, San Diego mayor Pete Wilson, like most mayors, opposed Proposition 13 as fiscally imprudent.

Partly because of his support of Prop. 13, Younger won the June 6 primary. Against my counsel, he then took an immediate vacation to Hawaii. Meanwhile, Governor Jerry Brown, who had campaigned vigorously against Prop. 13, turned on the proverbial dime: He immediately, wholeheartedly embraced its implementation. By Election Day in November, confused voters credited Prop. 13's opponent, the Democrat Brown, with championing lower taxes and, accordingly, reelected Governor Moonbeam.

For most California Republicans, though, 13 turned out to be a lucky number. In November 1978, a host of young Republican candidates ("Prop. 13 babies") won seats in the state legislature and then advanced politically as conservative prospects improved. Republicans George Deukmejian and Pete Wilson (who always supported Prop. 13 after 1978) were elected governor and reelected (1982, 1986, 1990, 1994). Fast forward to the 2003 recall of Democrat Gray Davis. During the campaign, challenger Arnold Schwarzenegger brought Warren Buffett for a staged fiscal summit. The billionaire investor made big news in urging a remake of Prop. 13; fearing implosion of his campaign, Schwarzenegger publicly disowned Buffett, who quickly disappeared from Schwarzenegger's entourage. The Terminator could not hint at terminating Prop. 13.

For all its subsequent popularity, Prop. 13 was never an electoral certainty. Howard Jarvis had tried and failed with similar measures. And Prop. 13 at first seemed headed for defeat. Big business allied with politicians in both parties, along with police, firefighters, teachers, and all the usual suspects in a lavish campaign to kill it. They provided a "moderate" alternative, Proposition 8, that would have trumped 13 if it had received more votes. But just weeks before Election Day, homeowners across the state received their reassessments, which were substantially higher and thus foretold huge property tax hikes. Then a late revelation of a sizable state budget surplus undercut the main rationale for opposing Prop. 13—that the state needed revenue. In the end, voters repudiated the hysterical anti-Prop. 13 ad campaign which suggested that, if not the world, then the state's government would come to an end if deprived of higher property tax receipts.

Jarvis's campaign focused on homeowners, but business has been quite the beneficiary as Prop. 13 treats business and residential property the same. Yet the state's largest corporations led the charge against Proposition 13. They bought into the argument that, if Prop. 13 passed, government would be so starved it would be unable to provide basic services. California, the line went, would become a statewide ghost town, bereft of such public necessities as policing, firefighting, and schooling. Corporations would leave, new enterprises would not start or move here. Employment would fall, so consequently would public revenue, in an endless cycle of decay.

Prop. 13 detractors are still saying these things. Howard Jarvis, who died in 1986, would love that they're still whining about his mischief. He was a sort of precursor to Ross Perot, but of decidedly modest means. In his own way, he told people to look under the hood. Things were not that com-

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plicated, he maintained. Jarvis was the consummate anti-politician who appealed to this populist preoccupation: Government does not need more money, it merely must stop wasting what it has.

Jarvis was crusty and fiercely independent. He felt more comfortable among Republicans but was hardly a party man. In fact, he tilted toward Jerry Brown in the general election. That's because he went with the power, and Brown assured him he would faithfully implement Prop. 13.

Jarvis was involved with an association of apartment owners, many of whom were not wealthy but middle-class, owning a few units the income from which they were counting on in their retirement. But to Jarvis, Prop. 13 was about much more than limiting property taxes on apartment buildings; it was the fiscal embodiment of "a man's home is his castle." Jarvis felt, and rightly so, that longtime homeowners, especially the retired and elderly, were being forced out of their homes because property taxes were rising at a seemingly uncontrollable and unpredictable rate.

Howard Jarvis

PHOTO BY TIM LOGAN / ZUMA PRESS

For government expansionists, Prop. 13 represents all that is wrong with the conservative movement. They have chafed at its restraints for more than a generation. Because of it, they feel, people in the Golden State are denied the public sector resources necessary to provide vital services and to fund public education adequately. But California has done quite well since 1978. If Prop. 13 really has bankrupted state, county, and city government here, then why didn't Silicon Valley move elsewhere?

The truth is, it's hard to imagine California without Prop. 13, or to argue the state would be better off without it. After all, is it so tragic that people who own a home can look into the future and know they will not lose it over runaway property taxes? Gas prices may go up, costly home repairs may be needed, but your property taxes can only increase incrementally each year.

There have been problems for California, to be sure, but these are not the fault of Prop. 13. Lots of people come here. And many, while they contribute to the economy, also claim substantial public services. Immigrants here illegally may benefit consumers or business, but government must fund, for example, the growth in school enrollment.

A study commissioned by the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association reviewing the first quarter-century of experience with Prop. 13 found that school district revenue—*per student and adjusted for inflation*—had increased 30 percent. In that same 1978-2003 period, state government revenue, as a whole, had increased 25 percent; even the revenues of the chronic complainers, city governments, had increased 20 percent—*adjusted for inflation and population*.

In the three decades since Proposition 13 passed, big business has been less than grateful for its property tax breaks, which disproportionately favor large properties like, say, Disneyland and skyscrapers. Ever courting the state's increasingly liberal state legislature, the corporate interests have funded efforts to undermine 13, such as ballot measures to lower the threshold for approving local special taxes for school funding. In trying to change Prop. 13, they should be careful what they wish for, or they could end up with a "split roll"—a higher tax rate for business property than for residential real estate. After all, the Jarvis coalition was centered not on business, but on homeowners.

Perhaps the most controversial manifestation of Prop. 13 is that it treats different homeowners differently—favoring longtime owners over newcomers. When you buy a home, the purchase price is the assessment, and that assessment (and consequent property taxes) can increase only by 2 percent annually, regardless of real estate appreciation. When you eventually sell it, the new owner is assessed his purchase price, and the process starts again. This means that a new homeowner could be paying two or three times the property taxes of his neighbor, who has lived there a long time. But trying to change this formula could open the door to large increases for everyone. So it has retained popular support.

As time goes by, of course, more and more of the original supporters (many were seniors 30 years ago) disappear from the electorate. I just conducted a study for the Jarvis organization of how California voters view Proposition 13. Although they feel (by 3-to-1) that things in California are on the wrong track, they would vote for Proposition 13 again—by a 2-to-1 margin. It does not do as well among the roughly one-third of the electorate that is "not familiar at all" with Prop. 13. But once they are told of its key provisions, voters opt to keep Prop. 13 as is. Here's to 30 more years. ♦

Descent into Appeasement

Pakistan's dangerous deals with terrorists.

BY DAVEED GARTENSTEIN-ROSS AND BILL ROGGIO

The good news is that some politicians apparently do keep their promises. Immediately after being appointed Pakistan's prime minister earlier this year, Yousaf Raza Gilani promised negotiations with the Taliban, saying that his government was "ready to talk to all those who give up arms and adopt the path of peace." Regional officials echoed his sentiment. He has delivered. The bad news is that such negotiations are eroding Pakistan's security and creating an increasingly dangerous situation for Americans.

The trouncing of Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf's PML-Q party in the country's February elections signaled a repudiation of his internal policies and his alliance with the United States. Musharraf's approach to Pakistan's largely lawless tribal regions—havens for the Taliban and al Qaeda—swung clumsily erratically between mobilizing his forces and entering into unenforceable agreements that eroded his military credibility. Neither tactic did much good, but negotiating with terrorists was the more popular of the two failed policies.

It is not surprising then that Pakistan's new government launched a round of negotiations with the country's Islamic extremists. What was unexpected, though, was the scale of the negotiations. Talks have been opened and agreements entered with virtually every militant outfit in the country. But the government has done nothing to answer the problem of the past accords and is again accepting promises that it has no means of enforcing.

The Pakistani government has done nothing to answer the problem of the past accords and is again accepting promises that it has no means of enforcing.

The Taliban violated each of the conditions of the now-infamous September 2006 Waziristan accords. It used the ceasefire as an opportunity to erect a parallel system of government complete with *sharia* courts, taxation, recruiting offices, and its own police force. Al Qaeda in turn benefited from the Taliban's expansion, building what U.S. intelligence estimates as 29 training camps in North and South Waziristan alone. And, while even the Waziristan accords paid lip service to stopping cross-border attacks against Coalition forces in Afghanistan, the new negotiations often leave this consideration aside. As North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) governor Owari Ghani recently told the *New York Times*, "Pakistan will take care of its own problems, you take care of Afghanistan on your side."

The first in this new round of agreements was struck with the NWFP's Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (the TNSM or Movement for the Implementation of Mohammad's Sharia Law) on April 20 in the Malakand Division. The TNSM is led by Maulana Sufi Mohammed, who was imprisoned in 2002 for providing fighters to the Taliban in Afghanistan (as the TNSM continues to do to this day). The Pakistani government and the TNSM entered into a six-point deal in which the TNSM renounced attacks on Pakistan's government in exchange for the promise that *sharia* law would be imposed in Malakand. The government also freed Sufi Mohammed.

A month later, Pakistan inked a deal with the Taliban in the Swat district. Led by Mullah Fazlullah (Sufi Mohammed's son-in-law), they have been waging a brutal insurgency in the once-peaceful vacation spot. (More than 200 Pakistani soldiers and police have been killed since January 2007.) The 15-point agreement between the Pakistani government and the Swat Taliban stipulates that the military will withdraw its forces, and the government will allow the imposition of *sharia* law, permit Fazlullah to broadcast on his radio channel—which was previously banned—and help turn Fazlullah's madrassa into an "Islamic University."

Though the government extracted some concessions from the Taliban, they are so difficult to enforce that Pakistan will likely gain little more than the reintroduction of vaccination programs. (Fazlullah has campaigned against vaccinations in the past, describing them as a Western plot to make Pakistani men impotent.) The promise to close down training camps is certainly suspect.

This week, Pakistan negotiated a peace agreement with a Tehrik-i-Taliban leader in the Mohmand agency. Its terms are similar to the new accords signed with the TNSM and Swat Taliban.

In South Waziristan, the Pakistani government is in the process of negotiating an agreement with Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of the Tehrik-i-Taliban. He is a longtime adherent of the Taliban's ideology, frequently vis-

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iting Afghanistan in the mid-1990s and appointed by Mullah Omar as governor of the Mehsud tribe. Baitullah Mehsud's forces are responsible for killing and kidnapping hundreds of Pakistani soldiers, and he has masterminded a suicide-bombing campaign throughout Pakistan. He established the Tehrik-i-Taliban in December 2007 to unite local Taliban movements throughout the tribal areas and the NWFP and is thought to be responsible for Benazir Bhutto's assassination that month.

While the agreement has yet to be signed, Pakistan's *Daily Times* published a draft copy. The draft states that the Tehrik-i-Taliban must eject foreign terrorists (a concession they have ignored in the past) and prohibits them from attacking government and military personnel or impeding the movement of aid workers. In exchange, Pakistan will free Taliban prisoners and withdraw its army from the region. The deal is to be signed any day.

Pakistan has also started negotiations with the Taliban in the settled district of Kohat. The leaked terms of the proposed agreement are nearly identical to those negotiated with other groups.

This strategy of accelerated appeasement only empowers groups with a history of violence who are devoted to undermining Pakistan's sovereignty. In addition to creating breathing space for extremists (since it is the militants who determine when an agreement is broken), the accords allow a greater flow of recruits to the training camps and further violence. At best, the politicians are shunting the problems down the road—and these problems will be larger by the time Pakistan is forced to confront them.

The new accords are also a threat to the United States. Baitullah Mehsud has told journalists that "jihad in Afghanistan will continue" regardless of negotiations, a sentiment echoed by other Taliban leaders. As U.S. forces in Afghanistan face increased cross-border attacks, Americans at home should be concerned about the increase in the risk of another catastrophic terrorist attack. The *9/11 Commission Report* warned that a terrorist organization requires "time, space, and the ability to perform competent planning and staff work" in order to carry out a 9/11-like attack. Pakistan's new accords provide al Qaeda and its allies with the requisite time and space.

If another major act of terror hits the United States, it will almost certainly be traced back to the al Qaeda network in Pakistan. Far from addressing the situation, Pakistan's government is only increasing the dangers that we face. ♦

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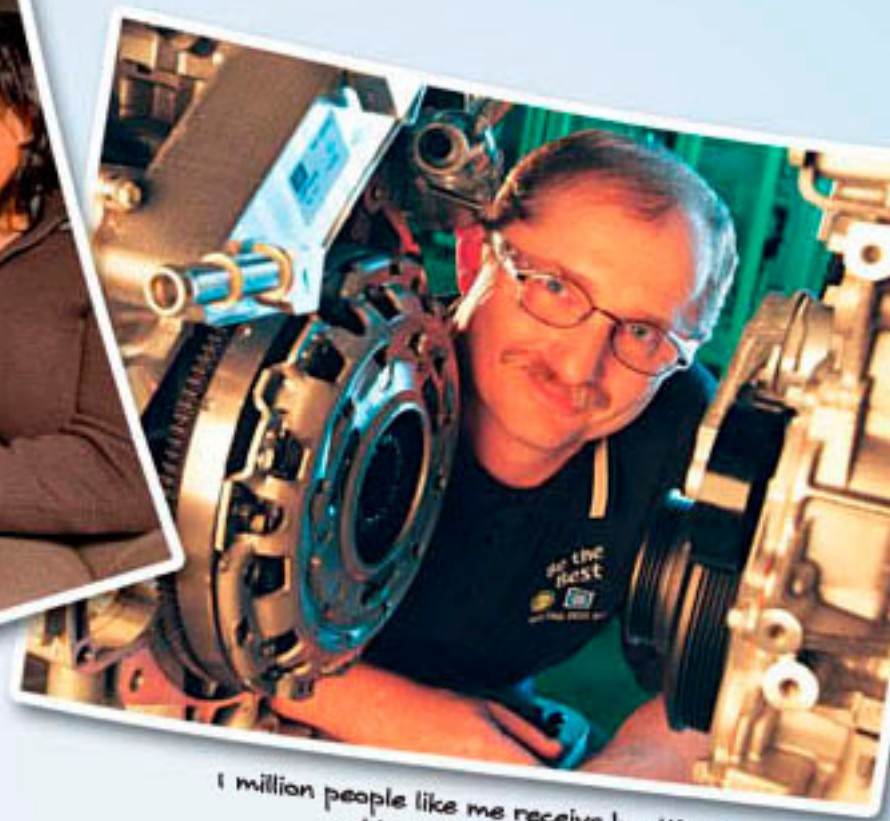

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The Kindergarchy

Every child a dauphin

By Joseph Epstein

In America we are currently living in a Kindergarchy, under rule by children. People who are raising, or have recently raised, or have even been around children a fair amount in recent years will, I think, immediately sense what I have in mind. Children have gone from background to foreground figures in domestic life, with more and more attention centered on them, their upbringing, their small accomplishments, their right relationship with parents and grandparents. For the past 30 years at least, we have been lavishing vast expense and anxiety on our children in ways that are unprecedented in American and in perhaps any other national life. Such has been the weight of all this concern about children that it has exercised a subtle but pervasive tyranny of its own. This is what I call Kindergarchy: dreary, boring, sadly misguided Kindergarchy.

With its full-court-press attention on children, the Kindergarchy is a radical departure from the ways parents and children viewed one another in earlier days. Ten or so years ago I began to notice that a large number of people born around the late 1930s and through the 1940s had, as I do, a brother or sister five or six years younger or older than they. So often was this the case that I began to wonder if there wasn't some pattern here that I had hitherto missed? Then it occurred to me that mothers in those days decided not to have a second child until their first child, at five or six, had gone off to school.

Born into the middle class in the Middle West, growing up I did not know any married woman who worked. So the mothers I am talking about here did not put a five- or six-year separation between the birth of their kids for economic reasons, or because it gave them more time to devote to their first-born children, or any other reason I can think of other than their own damn convenience. They did it because—insensitive, selfish, appalling really to contemplate—it was easier not to have two children under four years old to worry about at once; it made more sense to them not to have to deal with two or more needy greedy little children simultaneously. Let one go off to school, then we shall think of having another—much easier for everyone all around. Or so I believe thinking on the matter went.

Did this arrangement make sense for the children? Five or six years' age difference between siblings is probably not an ideal difference for the development of closeness between brothers and sisters. When my younger brother entered boyhood, at eight or nine, I was already in high school; when he was in high school, I was away at college; and when he was in college, I was a married man with a son of my own. No, a five- or six-year separation is doubtless not the best spacing between two kids growing up in the same household. If you had confronted my mother and father with this psychological datum, they might have said, "Interesting." But I doubt that they would have found it very interesting at all.

Let me quickly insert that I had the excellent luck of having good parents. Neither was in the least neurotic, both were fair to my brother and me, neither of us ever doubted the love of either of them. I can also say with no hesitation that my parents' two sons were never for a moment at the center of their lives. The action in their lives was elsewhere than in childraising.

In my father's case the action was at his business—"the place," as he sometimes called it. A small businessman, he came most alive when at work. Without hobbies or outside interests, he worked a five-and-a-half day week, and didn't in the least mind if he had an excuse to drop in for a few hours on occasional Sundays.

My mother, who was not in any way a trivial person as the following details might make her seem, played cards at least three afternoons a week. She kept up a fairly brisk social round. She was at home to provide us lunch when my brother and I were in grammar school, and she cooked substantial dinners, baked, and

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MIKE LESTER

Joseph Epstein is a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard. *His* Fred Astaire *will be published in September by the Yale University Press.*

was a careful housekeeper. Later she took an interest in charities and paid for and helped organize occasional fundraising luncheons. When her children were grown, she went to work in her husband's business as a secretary-bookkeeper-credit-manager, at all of which she did a first-class job.

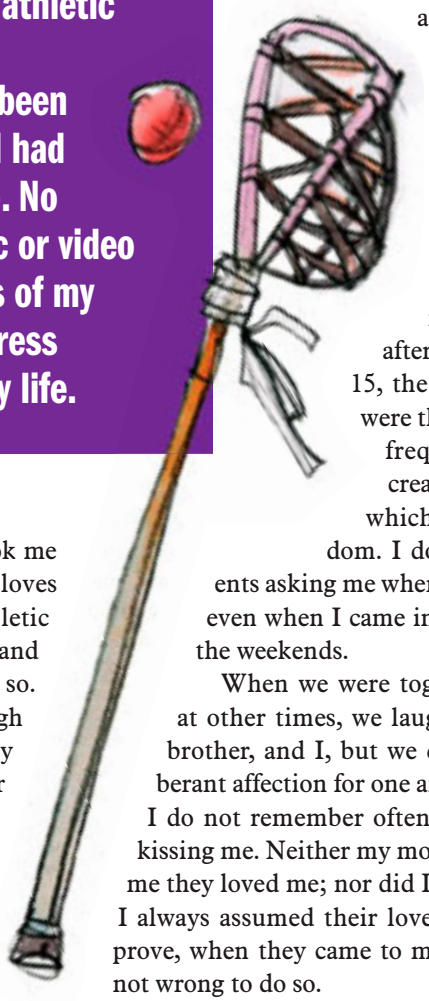
When I was a boy my parents might go off to New York or to Montreal (my father was born in Canada) for a week or so and leave my brother and me in the care of a woman in the neighborhood, a spinster named Charlotte Smucker—Mrs. Smucker to us—who was a professional childsitter. Sometimes an aunt, my mother's sister who had no children, would stay with us. We seldom went on vacation as a family. When I was eight years old, my parents sent me off for an eight-week summer camp session in Eagle River, Wisconsin, where I learned all the dirty words if not their precise meanings. None of these things made me unhappy or in any way dampened my spirits. I cannot recall ever thinking of myself as an unhappy kid.

My mother never read to me, and my father took me to no ballgames. My parents never came to any of my athletic games, and I should have been embarrassed had they done so. No photographic or video record exists of my uneven progress through early life.

My mother never read to me, and my father took me to no ballgames, though we did go to Golden Gloves fights a few times. When I began my modest athletic career, my parents never came to any of my games, and I should have been embarrassed had they done so. My parents never met any of my girlfriends in high school. No photographic or video record exists of my uneven progress through early life. My father never explained about the birds and the bees to me; his entire advice on sex, as I clearly remember, was, "You want to be careful."

I don't recall many stretches of boredom in my boyhood. Life was lived among friends on the block and, later, during games on the playground. Winter afternoons after school were filled up by "Jack Armstrong," "Captain Midnight," and other radio programs for kids. Boredom, really, wasn't an option. I recall only once telling my mother that I was bored. "Oh," she said, a furtive smile on her lips, "why don't you bang your head against the wall. That'll take your mind off your boredom." I never mentioned boredom again.

After the age of ten, I made every decision about my education on my own. The one I didn't make, at ten, was to go to Hebrew school in order to be bar-mitzvahed; this was a decision made for me and was nonnegotiable. But my parents felt no need to advise me on what foreign language to take in high school, where I ought to go to college—though my father paid every penny of my tuition and expenses—or what I ought to study once there. That I was a thoroughly mediocre student seemed not much to bother them. Neither of my parents had gone to college, and my father never finished high school, moving to the United States and going off on his own at 17, and so they did not put great value in doing well at school.



At roughly the age of 11, I had the run of the city of Chicago, taking buses, streetcars, or the El with friends to Wrigley Field, downtown, or to nearby neighborhoods for Saturday afternoon movies. Beginning at 15, the age when driver's licenses were then issued in Chicago, I had frequent use of my mother's cream-and-green Chevy Bel-Air, which greatly expanded my freedom. I don't recall either of my parents asking me where I had been, or with whom, even when I came in at early morning hours on the weekends.

When we were together, at family meals and at other times, we laughed a lot, my parents, my brother, and I, but we did not openly exhibit exuberant affection for one another. We did not hug, and I do not remember often kissing my mother or her kissing me. Neither my mother nor my father ever told me they loved me; nor did I tell them that I loved them. I always assumed their love, and, as later years would prove, when they came to my aid in small crises, I was not wrong to do so.

I did not seek my parents' approval. All I wished was to avoid their—and particularly my father's—disapproval, which would have cut into my freedom. Avoiding disapproval meant staying out of trouble, which for the most part I was able to do. Punishment would have

meant losing the use of my mother's car, or having my allowance reduced, or being made to stay home on school or weekend nights, and I cannot remember any of these things ever happening, a testament less to my adolescent virtue than to the generous slack my parents cut me.

The older I become the more grateful I am to my parents for staying off my case. Yet they were not unusual in this. Most of the parents of my contemporaries acted much the same, which is why very little anger or animus on the part of my friends against their parents was in evidence. Some parents were more generous to their kids than others, a few mothers showed anxiety about their sons and daughters, but no parents that I knew of seemed oppressive enough to give cause for feelings of revolt on the part of their children. Free and almost wildly uncontrolled though it may seem today, my upbringing was quite normal for middle-class boys of my generation.

I don't for a moment mean to suggest that such an upbringing produced a superior generation of adults. What it produced was another group of people who later spent their lives going about the world's business, with no strong grudges against their parents or anger at such abstract enemies as The System. All I would claim is that to be free from so much parental supervision seemed a nice way to grow up, and it surely resulted in a lot less wear and tear on everyone all round.

Parents generally didn't feel under any obligation to put heavy pressure on their children. Nor, except in odd, neurotic cases, did they feel any need to micromanage their lives. My own father once told me that he felt his responsibilities extended to caring for the physical well-being of my brother and me, paying for our education, teaching us right from wrong, and giving us some general idea about how a man ought to live, but that was pretty much it. Most fathers during this time, my guess is, must have felt the same.

A single generation later, I have to confess, I didn't—at least, not quite. I tried to bring up my two sons on the model on which I had been brought up, but I was unable to bring it off very successfully. My own confidence in my doing the right thing as a parent was considerably less than that of my own parents. I was always telling my two sons how much I loved them. I told them this so often that I should imagine they must have begun to doubt that I had any real feeling for them whatsoever.

The time was the 1960s and early 1970s. The culture was beginning to change radically. Lots of marriages were falling apart, my own among them. (After divorce, I had custody of my sons, who were then eight and six.) Drugs seemed to be everywhere. Crime was getting a lot more press. The rise of political hippyism followed by feminism, itself in part a reaction to the male dominance of the political movement of the Sixties, brought on a strong contempt for the middle class, and what was thought its stolid ways and left a wide swath for anyone who wished to make a jolly damn fool of him- or herself, which lots of people did. The business of therapy appeared to be picking up; more and more people seemed to be undergoing it, and its assumptions became more deeply ingrained in middle-class life.

One of the direct results of the 1960s was that the culture put a new premium on youthfulness; adulthood, as it had hitherto been perceived, was on the way out, beginning with clothes and ending with personal conduct. Everyone, even people with children and other adult responsibilities, wanted to continue to think of himself as still young, often well into his 40s and 50s. One of the consequences of this was that one shied away from the old parental role of authority figure, dealing out rewards and punishments and passing on knowledge, somewhat distant, carefully rationing out intimacy, establishing one's solidity and strength. Suddenly parents wanted their children to think of them as, if not exactly contemporaries, then as friends, pals, fun people. Parents of my own parents' generation may have been more or less kind, generous, humorous, warm, but, however attractive, they never thought of themselves as their children's friends. When your son becomes a man (or your daughter a woman), make him (or her) your brother (or sister), an old Arab proverb has it. But it's probably a serious mistake to make a kid of 9 or 14 your brother or sister.

Childrearing became a highly self-conscious activity, in all of its facets. Husbands were now called in not merely to help out with childrearing but in actual childbirth. They went to Lamaze classes with their wives; there they were, not infrequently videocam in hand, in the delivery room cheerleading and rehearsing breathing exercises with their laboring wives. Pregnant women were advised not to smoke, not to drink, not to do a great many other things that generations of expectant mothers had always done, lest their children pay the price in ill-health, if not actual birth defects.

A child being the most dear of all possessions, instructions—maintenance manuals, really—for his or her early upbringing were everywhere. Pacific mobiles swayed gently over cribs, nursery rooms were designed with the kind of care devoted to the direct descendants of the Sun King—and why not, for every child suddenly became his or her own dauphin or dauphine. In the background the music of Mozart—so good, parents were

told, for heightening the intelligence quotient—played on at just the right volume. Impossible to be too careful about these matters, when so much was at stake.

"Children are best seen not heard," was a maxim once in frequent use. "Speak only when spoken to," was another piece of advice regularly issued to children. Now kids are encouraged to come forth, as soon and as frequently as they wish, to demonstrate their brightness, cuteness, creativity. A few years ago, I found it noteworthy (and still memorable) that when on the phone with an editor I was dealing with—he was working at home at the time—he said to his daughter, "Faith, don't disturb Daddy right now. He's working." Most people today would have put one on hold or offered to call back later. Kids, after all, come first.

On visits to the homes of friends with small children, one finds their toys strewn everywhere, their drawings on the refrigerator, television sets turned to their shows. Parents in this context seem less than secondary, little more than indentured servants. Under the Kindergarchy, all arrangements are centered on children: their schooling, their lessons, their predilections, their care and feeding and general high maintenance—children are the name of the game.

No other generations of kids have been so curried and cultivated, so pampered and primed, though primed for what exactly is a bit unclear. Children are given a voice in lots of decisions formerly not up for their consideration. "If it's your child, not you, who gets to choose your weekend brunch spot," writes David Hochman in the magazine *Details*, "or if *he's* the one asking how the branzino is prepared, it's probably time to take a hard look at your own behavior."

Where once childrearing was an activity conducted largely by instinct and common sense, today it takes its lead from self-appointed experts whose thinking is informed by pop psychology. Here, for example, is a blogger calling herself Millennium Mom on the subject of punishment. On spanking, Millennium Mom's view—quoting from an article posted on the iVillage website—is that:

> spanking may give children a clear message about the unacceptability of their behavior and sometimes stops the behavior in the short run. However, in the long run, it teaches children that it is all right to hit, and that it is all right to be hit. Even children are confused by the irony of the statement, "This spanking will teach you not to hit your brother."

On the subject of "time-outs"—those enforced recesses when children are asked to go off to contemplate their bad behavior—Millennium Mom notes:

> the problem with time-outs is that they take a child away from a valuable learning experience. A child who hits another child can begin to learn empathy from watching the other child's response to being hurt, and if he stays around, he may also be able to participate in helping the other child feel better.

Bountiful is your heart, Millennium Mom; it is only your insight into human nature that is troubling.

The relentless cultural enrichment of children under Kindergarchy is not an option; it will be seen to, whatever the toll in time or money. At a minimum, visits must be made to Disneyland, the Epcot Center, national parks, children's museums, youth concerts, every new movie designed for the children's market. Various lessons—ballet, tennis, guitar, more—must be contracted, with mom or dad driving the kids to them and picking them up afterwards. ("Parenting," that dreary neologism, has given the old role of parent the status of a job, and no part-time one, either.) Each child must have a vast arsenal of toys, with emphasis currently on the wireless. The appropriate CDs and DVDs need to be acquired, and books, lots and lots of books. "Mackenzie has read Harry Potter, all seven books, three times." How nice for Mackenzie! "Gideon adores books about mythology, and, did I tell you, he's learning French?" *Merveilleux*! A parent can report nothing more satisfying than that her child is an eager reader, years and years ahead of himself, and, though only nine, already reading at the postdoctoral level of comprehension.

The names Mackenzie and Gideon are a reminder of how important the naming of children has become under the Kindergarchy. No more Edward, Robert, David, when you can have Luc, Guthrie, and Colby; no more Jane, Barbara, Lois, when Lindsay, Courtney, and Kelsey are available. Sometimes, in the naming of children, there is a dip back to the deliberately out-of-date—Jake and Max, Emily and Becky—but such names are tainted by an historical falsity, in the same way that Balanchine said that every beard grown after those worn by men in his father's generation was a fake.

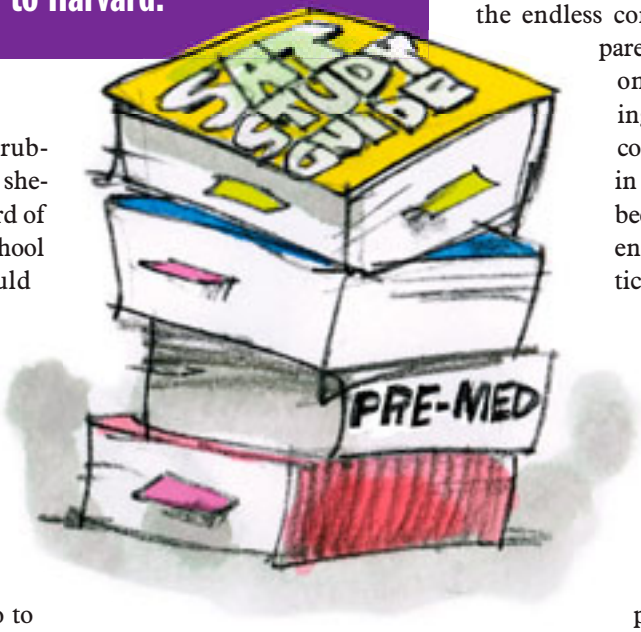
One reads occasional stories about the spoiled children of the rich, those little tyrants of private schools, who wear designer clothes and mock classmates who do not; or about the kids whose parents drop a couple hundred grand on their bar-mitzvahs or sweet 16 parties; or of affluent suburban high-school parking lots filled with their students' BMWs and Porsches. In a rich country, a fair amount of this kind of sad vulgarity figures to go on. But what I have in mind is something more endemic—a phenomenon that affects large stretches of the middle class: the phenomenon, heightened under Kinder-

garchy, of simply paying more attention to the upbringing of children than can possibly be good for them.

The craze of attentiveness hits its most passionate note with schooling, and schooling starts now younger and younger. When Lyndon Johnson began the War on Poverty in 1965, its most popular, perhaps because least controversial, program was Headstart, which provided the children of the poor with preschooling, so that they would catch up with the children of the middle class by the time all began kindergarten at the age of five. But the middle class soon set in motion a headstart program of its own, sending its children to nursery and preschools as early as is physiologically possible. Where one's child goes to school, how well he does in school, which schools give him the best shot at even better schools later on—these are all matters of the most intense concern.

Today's high school students hoke up their sad little résumés to make themselves look like miniature Dr. Albert Schweitzers in search of lepers to whose aid they might come, and generally plow away at what they call Preparation H, shorthand for preparing to apply to Harvard.

Under Kindergarchy, no effort on behalf of one's children's schooling is too extensive, no expense too great, no sacrifice in time and energy on the part of parents too exacting. In a scandal of a few years ago, a New York stock-market analyst named Jack Grubman arranged some complicated stock shenanigans to get to a member of the board of the coveted 92nd Street Y Nursery School in Manhattan, whom he hoped would smooth the way for his twin children to get into this school, which he felt would in turn pave the way into the better New York private elementary schools and high schools, and thence obviously to the very Valhalla of the Ivy League itself. The Grubman story shows how much parents feel is riding on their kids' schooling and how far some are willing to go to get what they think is the best for them.



The pressure on the children upon whom all this attention is lavished is not slight. At New Trier, the upper-middle-class suburban high school on Chicago's North Shore, children load up their backpacks with SAT study guides to get as close to being toll free—present parlance for scoring two 800s on the SATs—as possible, carry lacrosse sticks and tennis racquets wherever they go, hoke up their sad little résumés to make themselves look like miniature Dr. Albert Schweitzers in search of lepers to whose aid they might come, and generally plow away at what they call Preparation H, shorthand for preparing to apply to Harvard.

Every high school now has its battery of counselors: guidance, psychological, college. A larger and larger segment of the student population seems to bring its own psychological tics and jiggeroos to school with them: ADHD, dyslexia and other learning disabilities, various degrees of depression requiring regimens of pills and therapy sessions. Some of these defects and disabilities are the result of parents' having their children at a later age. Might others be that the children are so intensely watched over and tested that more and more defects and disabilities show up, some among them possibly imaginary?

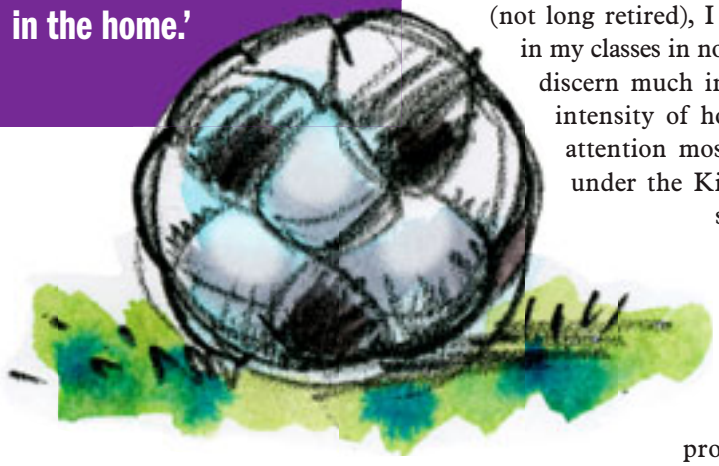
School is the pressure point. More and more teachers in grade and high schools complain not about the children they are asked to teach, but about the endless contact with children's parents. Parents are *in situ*, on the scene, unstintingly on the job. "How come Corey only got a B in physics? He's always been so wonderful in science." "Why isn't Lettice a better speller? Her father won the state spelling bee in Iowa." One wonders how many teachers have been driven out of the profession by parents' bombarding them with emails, phone calls, and requests for meetings?

As my sons were growing up, I began to notice parents taking a great deal of interest in their education, much more so than previous generations of middle-class parents had done. Everyone wanted his or her kids to get into one of the better-regarded colleges, and a lot more than education seemed to be riding on it. A son at Princeton, a

daughter at Yale, such things seemed a validation of one's own virtue as a good parent, and hence, somehow, as a superior human being. Much snobbery was entailed, of course; having a child at Harvard being obviously thought more impressive than one at a nearby community college, but more than snobbery alone was involved. Payback time, getting into a good college is the child's return on his parents' immense psychological investment in him.

These much loved children eventually do, at staggering expense (but who's complaining?), go off to college. First, of course, there are the de rigueur pre-college visits, where parents load up the car during junior year of high school to tour all the colleges that are within the child's range of possibility. ("Thaddeus hated Tufts, loved Reed.") Then, the applications completed, the acceptances garnered, the decision made, one last trip: carting the kid off to the school of choice, with a carload of his clothes and appliances, with stereos, computers, television, DVD-player, PlayStation, cell phone, credit card. There he will learn from teachers raised not so very differently than he that it is precisely people like his parents—that would be you, Mom and Dad—who have made life hell for the wretched people of Africa, Bangladesh, and underdogs everywhere round the world. Which may not be the payback most contemporary parents quite envisioned.

So often in my literature classes students told me what they 'felt' about a novel, or a particular character in a novel. In essay courses, many of these same students turned in papers upon which I wished to—but did not—write: 'D-, Too much love in the home.'



How did earlier generations of parents seem able to manage raising children while putting in so much less time, avoiding so much *Sturm und Drang*? People raising children today will tell you that the world is a more frightening place now than it was 50 years ago. Much more crime out there, drugs are easily obtained, sex offenders are everywhere, lots of children turn up missing, as the back of your milk cartons will inform you. The spirit of therapy having triumphed, we now see more clearly than heretofore how fragile the young human personality is, how easily it can be smashed by mistreatment or mismanagement or want of affection. Add to all this that the options for children are much greater today; a child can go in any number of ways in education and in life, and all these need to be thoroughly investigated.

Failure today seems a much more dismal prospect; 50 or so years ago, if one didn't, for example, get into what was thought a good school, life didn't seem permanently dim, if not effectively over. America seemed to offer more then than now in the way of second chances. Today everything seems so much riskier, so much more appears to be at stake.

Why shouldn't parents do all in their power to make their children's lives less bumpy, more concentrated and carefully planned, thereby increasing their prospects for a happier, more satisfying life? No reason at all, really, except that trying to do so often comes to seem so joyless and the children who emerge from such ultra-careful upbringing so often turn out far from the perfect specimens their parents had imagined.

As a teacher at Northwestern University (not long retired), I found the students in my classes in no serious way I could discern much improved for all the intensity of home and classroom attention most of them received under the Kindergarchy. A very small number, those who had somehow found passion for books and the life of the mind, were remarkable, a number proportionally probably little different than in any generation of students; the rest were like students everywhere and at all times: just wanting to get the damn thing called their education over with and get on with life with the best start possible.

The most impressive students I had over my 30 years of university teaching were those I encountered when I first began, in the early 1970s, who almost all turned out to have been put through Catholic schools, during a time when priests and nuns still taught and Catholic education hadn't become indistinguishable from secular education.

Many of these kids resented what they felt was the excessive constraint, with an element of fear added, of their education. Most failed to realize that it was this very constraint—and maybe a touch of the fear, too—that forced them to learn Latin, to acquire and understand grammar, to pick up the rudiments of arguing well, that had made them as smart as they were.

So often in my literature classes students told me what they "felt" about a novel, or a particular character in a novel. I tried, ever so gently, to tell them that no one cared what they felt; the trick was to discover not one's feelings but what the author had put into the book, its moral weight and its resultant power. In essay courses, many of these same students turned in papers upon which I wished to—but did not—write: "D-, Too much love in the home." I knew where they came by their sense of their own deep significance and that this sense was utterly false to any conceivable reality. Despite what their parents had been telling them from the very outset of their lives, they were not significant. Significance has to be earned, and it is earned only through achievement. Besides, one of the first things that people who really are significant seem to know is that, in the grander scheme, they are themselves really quite insignificant.

Growing up with only minimal attention sharpened this sense of one's insignificance. One's fierce little opinions were all very well, but without the substance of accomplishment behind them, they meant nothing. Not long after I had graduated from the University of Chicago, at a family dinner, an aggressively confident cousin of my father's asked what I planned to do with my life. I mentioned, rather diffidently, that I hoped one day to be a writer. "You ought to try to get something in the *Reader's Digest*," he replied, in a challenging way. The *Reader's Digest* was not what I had in mind; in those days publishing in the *New Yorker*, in my young highbrow's view, would have meant selling out. Naturally, I wanted to tell this man how stupid his notion of literary success was and that he should stick to his own damn business (which was the hardware business), and to bugger off, thank you very much. I knew, though, that I daren't do so; I was untried, untested, still a kid (even though one of 22), without authority. Instead I nodded, as if I thought publishing in the *Reader's Digest* an interesting notion, and returned to my roast beef.

Had that incident occurred today, had I been raised under the Kindergarchy, I no doubt would have lectured him on his ignorance, put him properly in place, my approving parents ("Wonderful how young Joseph always speaks his mind!") looking on. I say this based on the fact that I note today many of the young, in late high-school or college years, suffer no shyness in putting forth their own opinions, observations, and usually less than penetrating insights. So many I have encountered also greatly overestimate their charm. But, then, why shouldn't they; their parents have for years been telling them how tremendously charming they are.

Every generation must have its journalistic label, and the most recent generation to depart school to enter the larger world has begun to be called "the millenniums," after the fact of their coming into their maturity in the 21st century. Newspapers stories are beginning to report that, on the job, these people, raised under the Kindergarchy, don't tolerate criticism well, and need lots of praise to buck them up and get them through the day. A friend of mine, who works for a financial consulting firm, tells me that the brightest of the young men and women going into financial work he meets are almost all interested in hedge funds—they want big scores, 20 or so million before they reach 30. They didn't have to wait long for their toys or attention or anything else as children, so why should they wait for the world's prizes as adults?

The consequences of so many years of endlessly attentive childrearing in young people can also be witnessed in many among them who act as if certain that they are deserving of the interest of the rest of us; they come off as very knowing. Lots of their conversation turns out to be chiefly about themselves, and much of it feels as if it is formulated to impress some dean of admissions with how very extraordinary they are. Despite all the effort that has been put into shaping these kids, things, somehow, don't seem quite to have worked out. Who would have thought that so much love in the home would result in such far from lovable children? But then, come to think of it, apart from their parents, who would have thought otherwise?

Well, in the words of Vladimir Illych Lenin, who had no children, what is to be done? Not very much, I suspect. When such seismic shifts in the culture as that represented by the rise of Kindergarchy take hold, there isn't much anyone can do but wait for things to work themselves out. My own hope is that the absurdity of current arrangements will in time be felt, and people will gradually realize the foolishness of continuing to lavish so much painstaking attention on their children. When that time comes, children will be allowed to relax, no longer under threat of suffocation by love from their parents, and grow up more on their own. Only then will parents once again be able to live their own lives, free to concentrate on their work, life's adult pleasures, and those responsibilities that fall well outside the prison of the permanent kindergarten they have themselves erected and have been forced to live in as hostages. ♦

It's Only Going to Get Worse

Everything you always wanted to know about the housing crash, but were afraid to ask

By Lawrence B. Lindsey

America has not had a nationwide housing crash since the 1930s. At one point during that calamity, an estimated 60 percent of all mortgages were in technical default. The rather primitive housing credit system of the time, which relied on five-year balloon mortgages, certainly exacerbated the problem, but the bulk of the problem was related to the general economic downturn. There have been some regional housing crashes that were short and relatively mild, most notably in California, Texas, and New England in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Most of those were caused by declines in key local industries: oil in Texas, aerospace and defense in Southern California and Massachusetts.

The current downturn, by contrast, is due almost exclusively to a change in the housing credit cycle from excessively easy to modestly restrictive. Housing turned down before the economy, and even now, nearly 18 months into the housing recession, the national unemployment rate is still at what economists consider full employment. That is unlikely to last as credit problems spread into the consumer sector, layoffs spread, and the resulting rise in unemployment makes the consumer credit situation still worse.

It is the uniqueness of the current housing crash that adds to its intractability. Policymakers haven't been here before, so they're not certain of the way out. Many of the institutions that underpin the industry are relatively new—actually created since the last downturn in the early 1990s—and untested. We also know that many of those institutions were far from transparent, and some were fraudulent. As a result, everyone needs to be suitably modest about predicting how the housing crash will end and remain flexible about the policy actions that may be needed to augment the normal functioning of the market. Some basic facts about supply and demand offer a good, if sobering, place to start.

Lawrence B. Lindsey is the author of What a President Should Know . . . but Most Learn Too Late *(Rowman and Littlefield).*

Some Facts About the Housing Market

There are 129 million housing units in the United States, comprising owner-occupied, rented, and vacant units. Of these, 18.5 million are empty. This vacancy rate is 2.5 percentage points higher than it has been at any point in the half century the data have been tracked, translating into at least 3 million too many empty housing units in the country. This number, moreover, is rising. This is the most intractable part of the real estate bubble, for we cannot find a true bottom to home prices until this inventory of empty units starts to clear, and we cannot find a bottom to the mortgage finance market until home prices bottom out.

The worst type of inventory is an empty house, which people in the industry like to say has about the same half-life as a head of cabbage. As the former chairman of the Neighborhood Investment Corporation, I've seen the damage done to neighborhoods by vacant homes. They are never maintained adequately, depress surrounding property values, and can quickly become temporary retail space for drug lords and a playground for juvenile delinquents. They are also the homes whose owner has the least incentive, and usually the least ability, to service the mortgage or pay the property taxes. So whittling down the inventory of empty houses should be the first economic, social, financial, and political objective.

The math of the housing market is fairly clear. Each year roughly half a million homes are destroyed to make better use of the land on which they sit. Population growth also helps whittle down inventory. The household formation years—ages 25 to 34—have 39.5 million

The math is simple: Build a million, tear down half a million, form 850,000 new households, and the country only whittles down its excess inventory by 350,000 units annually. It will still take years to get our housing inventory back to normal.

Vacant homes, which are never maintained adequately, depress surrounding property values.

AP / J. PAT CARTER

people in them forming 19 million households, a group that creates demand for 1.8 to 1.9 million units each year. On the other hand, households pass from the scene later in life, and the homes they used to live in go onto the market. There are 11.6 million households of 65- to 74-year-olds and 9 million households of 75- to 84-year-olds. Their departure increases supply by around 1.1 million units per year. On net, therefore, demographic realities add about 850,000 units to demand on top of the half-million homes that are destroyed and removed from supply.

The home building industry is in a deep recession, with additional yearly new home supply cut in half since 2006. But homebuilders are still adding nearly a million units per year. The math is simple: Build a million, tear down half a million, form 850,000 households, and the country only whittles down its excess inventory by 350,000 units per year. This is one reason to expect a further drop in new home construction, but it will still take years to get our housing inventory back to normal. The economic, social, and financial damage over that time could be staggering.

WASHINGTON TO THE RESCUE?

Faced with this situation, politicians are rushing to do something, anything, about the problem. One of the first efforts was to provide relief—$25 billion over the next two years—to the homebuilding industry in the form of "net loss carryback" tax provisions. (Note that if the real problem is a glut of vacant housing on the market, one of the least helpful things Congress could do would be to keep the homebuilders in business so they could increase supply still further.)

But most legislative activity merely ignores the vacant home problem rather than making it worse. Congressmen don't want to appear to be helping speculators, liars, or cheats. The trouble is, a good part of the problem was caused by people who might be considered speculators, liars, and cheats. Speculators by definition bought vacant properties in the hope of "flipping" them for a higher price. A vacant home is therefore a good sign of speculative activity. Moreover, some studies of foreclosed homes indicate that a majority of the foreclosures involved misrepresentations by the borrower. The most typical misrepresentation was that the borrower intended to live in the property; an

owner-occupied property generally receives a lower interest rate than one that will be rented out.

The case of Democratic congresswoman Laura Richardson from California illustrates a number of these problems. According to reporting by *Capitol Weekly* ("The Newspaper of California Government and Politics"), the *Wall Street Journal Online*, and *DailyBreeze.com*, Richardson was delinquent on three personal home mortgages. Her Sacramento home was recently sold at auction, and as of May 23 foreclosure was pending on a home in San Pedro. A home in Long Beach went into default on March 28—no payment had been made since November—but Richardson "was able to bring her payments up to date." Her lender on the Sacramento mortgage, Washington Mutual, lost some $200,000, and the home's buyer agreed to pay the $9,000 in property taxes she had in arrears on the property. On the San Pedro house, she owed $367,436 on a $359,000 loan made in 2005 and hadn't made a payment since last June. The Long Beach home was the collateral for a $100,000 loan she in turn lent to her campaign for a state assembly seat in 2006, and though she raised enough to pay herself (and presumably the bank) back, she plowed that money into her 2007 race for Congress.

Futures markets are predicting that home prices will fall over 30 percent, with 70 percent of the drop happening by year's end. Just as 2007 was the year that mortgage credit dried up, 2008 will be the year that home prices plummet.

Richardson's situation—while unusual in that she changed jobs and cities three times in a short space of time—highlights a number of the problems Congress must wrestle with. She had three vacant homes, and news reports of neighbor complaints suggest they weren't being kept up or taxes paid. Reportedly, one home loan was used for "consumption"—political campaigns—that involved no improvement in the value of the collateral, a bit like taking out a home equity loan for a trip to Vegas. The home values declined drastically—27 percent over 17 months in the case of the Sacramento home, whose ultimate buyer was a speculator. Until recently, congressional action and most press coverage of the housing market has adopted the premise that innocent home buyers are struggling to meet payments so as to stay in the family home. But on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 represents a person victimized by an unscrupulous lender and 10 is the delinquent owner of three vacant homes, most people defaulting on a mortgage fall in the range of 5 to 8.

The best thought-out bill in Washington is sponsored by Barney Frank, chairman of the House Financial Services Committee. He is intellectually honest and one of the few chairmen who puts his bills out in the light of day for people to evaluate before he jams them through. Under Frank's proposal, participating mortgage holders would have to write down the value of their loans to 10 percent below current market value and pay a 5 percent fee. With home prices already off 20 percent in troubled areas, this would mean writing off a third of the original mortgage assuming the 94 percent loan-to-value ratio typical for first-time home buyers in 2006. In return, the homeowner would receive a government-backed FHA loan—ideally at a low enough rate that they could afford to stay in the home. And, of course, vacant homes would not qualify.

Lenders and borrowers willing to take the Frank option would have to fit in a fairly thin slice of the market where home prices have already stabilized so borrowers do not expect to go underwater again but have not declined so much as to have already wiped out most of the value of the mortgage. Note that the bill would require a reappraisal in the midst of a plummeting housing market. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that this plan would help 500,000 people over four years. But by the time the plan took effect, we would likely have had an additional 2 million foreclosures beyond what would be expected in normal times. The most valid criticism of the Frank plan is that by itself it wouldn't put a bottom in the housing market. Frank admits as much, saying he wants to slow the pace at which home prices are falling, not impede the adjustment.

But politics being what it is, opponents of the Frank bill have cried "bailout." His plan is estimated to cost $1.7 billion, which in Washington is a rounding error as "bailouts" go. Consider for example the Senate's overwhelming support for a $25 billion bailout for homebuilders or the fact that a majority of House Republicans joined with Democrats to override President Bush's veto of the most pork-laden farm bill in history, as did all but 14 Republican senators. That legislation contained such high national priorities as $170 million for accelerated depreciation of race horses, the pro rata equivalent of stopping 50,000 foreclosures under the Frank plan. Frank's bill is narrowly targeted to avoid the political and moral problems involved in bailing out the undeserving. It is hardly a bailout. But that is also what makes it far from a panacea for the housing problem.

A real estate agent waits for buyers in an empty house, Santa Clara, Calif.

AP PHOTO / TONY AVELAR

BACK TO THE MARKET

If Congress is therefore unlikely to "solve" the problem any time soon, that leaves the market, and it must deal with three simultaneous and interrelated excesses: Homebuilders made too many houses, prices rose too high, and credit standards dropped too low. Each is unraveling at its own pace. As noted, homebuilders have cut new construction in half, but that is still probably not enough. The credit markets reacted fastest and with devastating effect. The Federal Reserve had to take a series of extraordinary measures to keep the financial system afloat during the credit tightening. A full 40 percent of the mortgage market has disappeared since August, and most of this will not come back in the new era of higher down-payments and real credit scoring.

Markets correct huge inventory overhangs and declines in demand due to the scarcity of credit by lowering prices. Home prices are correcting, though more slowly than the credit market shrank. Prices are down over 14 percent in aggregate since their peak in 2006—having adjusted in a year and a half as much as liquid markets might in a month. The pace of decline, about a 30 percent annual rate in recent months, is still accelerating. The California Association of Realtors reports that the median price fell that much in just the last year. Futures markets are predicting that home prices will fall over 30 percent in aggregate on a national basis, with 70 percent of the drop happening by year's end. I personally think the decline will be less, but just as 2007 was the year that mortgage credit dried up, 2008 will be the year that home prices plummet.

Just a 20 percent decline in home prices would place a quarter of mortgages under water. A 30 percent decline still more. The great uncertainty is how homeowners will respond: Do they walk away from an asset that is worth less than what they owe on it? The foreclosure prevention activity by Congress and a somewhat different approach proposed by Harvard's Martin Feldstein are designed to keep as many people in their homes as possible, despite the lower prices.

But prices must still decline to clear the excess inventory. Private sector players must be induced to hold more housing than they currently do, and that can only happen at lower prices. This can take the form of more second home purchases or investment in rental property. The latter only makes sense if the price is lower since with more units around, the property is likely to be vacant more

of the time. Finally, price declines can convince speculators—those politically dreaded beings—into buying houses in the expectation that prices will recover in the future. Recall that a 27 percent price decline induced one such speculator to buy Representative Richardson's foreclosed Sacramento home.

The problem with this is that the wealth loss to the household sector and to the financial services industry would be huge. A 30 percent drop in prices would shrink household assets by about $6.5 trillion. Under normal economic rules of thumb that would permanently lower household spending by $200 billion to $300 billion, or between 1.5 and 2 percent of GDP. Not enough for a recession by itself, but the collateral damage to the financial system would likely be sufficient to induce a downturn similar to those in the 1970s and early 1980s.

MORE EXOTIC BUYERS

So, optimists hope that new types of buyers will emerge, with three types leading the pack: foreigners, inflation-hedgers, and the government itself. Some have said that laxer immigration laws are the way to absorb excess houses under the theory that immigrants need homes. In its popular version this view is actually quite naive. It is harder to imagine an easier immigration situation than the one that existed in the past few years, with its negligible enforcement. But what one might call "volume" immigrants aren't the answer. They are here to make money and save it and crowd themselves into housing, making them poor absorbers of excess homes. Moreover, many of them worked in the home construction, remodeling, and maintenance industries and are now unemployed and leaving the country. Opening the borders further to this type of immigrant is not only politically problematic, but also runs counter to current economic reality.

By contrast, "targeted" immigration might just work the trick. Imagine a hypothetical immigration program that gave a provisional green card to anyone who invested at least $10 million in residential property and held it five years. To stop them from buying just their own expensive Upper East Side apartments, one might cap the value in each property toward the quota at $1 million. A mere 100,000 people signing up would not only pump a minimum of $1 trillion into the housing industry, they would also absorb at least one third of the current excess inventory. Trouble is, such high end immigration is just the type that a Democratic Congress finds most objectionable ideologically.

But foreigners might also be part of the solution thanks to the falling dollar. Not only are house prices likely to be down significantly from their peak, but so is the dollar. The cumulative decline in, say, condominiums in Florida or Las Vegas is at least 50 percent to a European, Japanese, or British buyer. So even without legislation to encourage them, foreigners are likely to provide some of the solution to the housing overhang.

Inflation hedgers are another potential source of demand. They are speculators who are willing to bet that borrowing at low fixed long-term interest rates on real property that will in the long run grow with inflation may be a good investment. True, Federal Reserve governors are correctly expressing their concern about gathering signs of inflation. But it is certainly not out of the question that the political, economic, and banking system pressures might induce the Fed to follow a more inflationary path. The Fed's first job is to preserve the banking system, and a 30 percent national home price decline would certainly prompt it to take action. This would cost money, which the Fed can create, albeit with a risk of further inflation. Now is probably not the moment to place that bet, but if home prices continue to decline at their current rate, late this year or early next year might be.

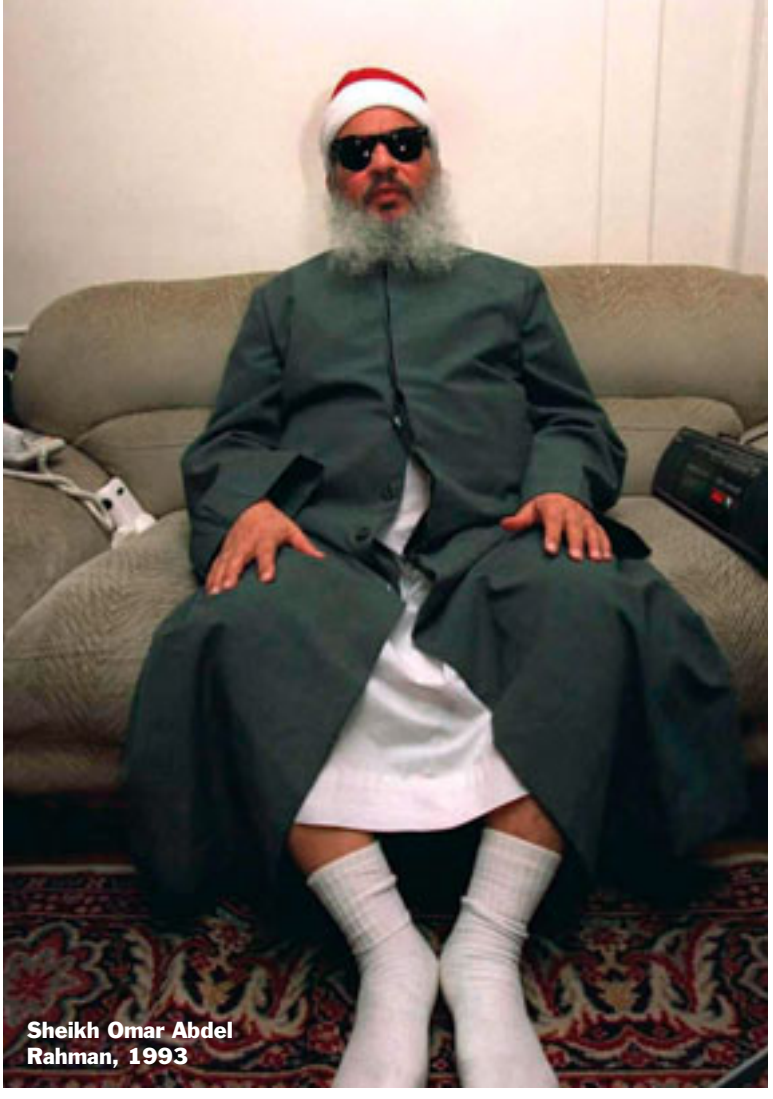
Finally, there is the government itself. During the last real estate collapse in the early 1990s, the government was forced to acquire a large amount of property as it worked to rescue the financial system. The chances are reasonable that at some point late in 2009 a similar approach might be adopted. The last time around it was called the Resolution Trust Corporation. It was, as one would expect from government, far from surgical in its approach. A lot of investors, bankers, and property holders probably lost more than they deserved to in the process. But it got the job done. It is the ultimate last resort, using the balance sheet of Uncle Sam to save the housing market. If nothing else works, a new RTC is in the cards, and those who think Barney Frank's bill is a "bailout" will be shocked by its size.

The housing market crash is far from over, and its ramifications will be with us for some time. The combination of excessively easy credit, a rapid run up in prices, and overbuilding set the stage for the current mess. Prices must fall to correct oversupply, and that, in turn, will further adversely affect both consumer confidence and financial solvency. The unique nature of the problem makes a precise ending hard to predict. But it seems likely that some combination of speculative buying, inflation, and purchases by both foreigners and government entities will correct the situation. Now is not the time for ideology, of either the left-wing variety (soak the rich, punish speculators, and conduct a witch hunt through the financial community) or the right-wing variety (stave off government involvement of any form). Pragmatism is a conservative virtue. It is time for everyone to start practicing it. ♦

Are We Serious?

They're at war, we're catching crooks

BY THOMAS JOSCELYN



Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, 1993

AFP PHOTO FILES

In the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks, America has tried to understand how she could have been so blind. Countless books, articles, documentaries—in addition to the 9/11 Commission's high-profile investigation during a hotly contested presidential election year—have all attempted to answer one central question: How could a small band of al Qaeda terrorists execute the greatest attack on American soil since Pearl Harbor?

For Andrew McCarthy, a former federal prosecutor, the answer begins with a series of fateful events in the early 1990s. And in his exceptional new book, he documents a series of missteps that led America to consistently misjudge both the scale and the nature of the terrorist threat. McCarthy exposes a fundamental flaw in the government's counterterrorism strategy prior to September 11. While our enemies were waging a war, we were prosecuting them as mere criminals. Much of the burden of dealing with an imminent national security threat was, therefore, placed on the criminal justice system. But as McCarthy demonstrates in meticulous fashion, the courts are a poor substitute for the real battlefield, so much so that our terrorist enemies were consistently able to outflank us.

Willful Blindness
A Memoir of the Jihad
by Andrew C. McCarthy
Encounter, 250 pp., $25.95

McCarthy's story is centered on the trial of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman ("The Blind Sheikh") and 11 of his followers. McCarthy led the prosecution of this dirty dozen in 1995. In landmark convictions, Rahman and his cohort were found guilty of participating in a broad conspiracy to attack Americans, including the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and a follow-on plot to destroy landmarks in the New York area just months later.

It is no exaggeration to say that the convictions stand out as a singular achievement in counterterrorism history. At the time, the law was so ill-equipped to handle such a case that McCarthy and his team had to charge the sheikh with violating a Civil War-era statute prohibiting seditious conspiracy! The sheikh slyly avoided discussing precise tactics, preferring instead to lend his voice to theological justifications for violence. His blessing was crucial for the terrorists to move forward, but America's laws were not written with someone like Rahman, or his type of violence, in mind.

In McCarthy's words, "The legal system circa 1993 was woefully unprepared

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for radical Islam." Therefore, pinning these events on Rahman—who clearly, at the very least, inspired them—was no small feat.

McCarthy, however, does not rest on his laurels. In fact, one senses that if it were up to him, the trial of Rahman and his cohort would never have happened. The terror network centered on Rahman should have been years earlier—or, better yet, never allowed to develop on American soil in the first place. And in the aftermath of the events of 1993, the criminal justice system should *not* have been our frontline defense.

As McCarthy writes, "In the eight years between the World Trade Center's bombing and its destruction, the high-profile court cases that constituted the Clinton administration's counter-terrorism strategy resulted in the convictions of exactly twenty-nine terrorists." By way of contrast, consider that the former National Security Council official Richard Clarke has stated that "perhaps over 10,000 terrorists" were trained "at the camps in Afghanistan" alone. Clearly, America was not on a war footing.

From McCarthy's perspective, the missteps began in 1989 when the FBI prematurely abandoned its investigation into a group of jihadists conducting firearm drills in Calverton, Long Island. One of those jihadists, El Sayyid Nosair, went on to murder an extremist Jewish leader named Rabbi Meir Kahane on November 5, 1990. Despite overwhelming evidence of his guilt, Nosair was acquitted of Kahane's murder and convicted of only lesser charges.

This miscarriage of justice, McCarthy explains, was further compounded by an incompetent investigation. Nosair left behind a treasure trove of information, including handwritten notes, connecting him to a broader terror network then operating in New York and New Jersey. But authorities failed to analyze much of it. Instead, Nosair was branded a "lone gunman" and the 40-plus boxes of evidence seized with Nosair were ignored, thereby allowing his fellow conspirators to initially escape scrutiny.

Nosair was no lone wolf, as McCarthy makes clear, but one of Sheikh Rahman's gaggle of followers. And together they had more grandiose designs. For example, in one of his initially overlooked notebooks, Nosair expressed his desire to destroy America's "high world buildings which they are proud of and their statues which they endear and the buildings in which gather their heads [their leaders]."

On February 26, 1993, more than two years after Kahane's murder, a powerful truck bomb was detonated underneath the World Trade Center. Seven people were killed, including an unborn child, but the damage could have been much worse: The terrorists responsible, some of whom had consulted Nosair in prison and attended the firearm drills in Long Island, wanted to kill thousands.

Nor did Rahman's jihadists stop there. They soon began plotting yet another, more devastating, attack. This time they wanted to simultaneously destroy several landmarks in the New York area, including the United Nations building and the Holland and Lincoln tunnels. That plot never got off the ground because of a well-placed FBI informant named Emad Salem. Rahman's followers thought the Egyptian Salem was a committed jihadist who could provide them with invaluable explosives expertise. Instead, Salem led them down a path of misdirection: The plotters mixed the chemicals for a bomb in a Queens warehouse under Salem's (and the FBI's) watchful eye. Once a critical mass of evidence was collected, Rahman and his minions were rounded up, thereby short-circuiting their bomb making, and convicted as a result of McCarthy's relentless prosecution.

But as McCarthy reveals, even this success has a troublesome back story. The FBI first recruited Salem to serve as a mole prior to the World Trade Center bombing. Skittish agents, who mishandled Salem from the first, alternated between fears that they could not corroborate his testimony and that Salem's fellow plotters would be successful despite Salem's meddling. In the latter case, the FBI would have known about a plot that it failed to stop—a surefire recipe for public scorn. The bureau, therefore, decided to end Salem's employment several months before the World Trade Center bomb was detonated.

The failure to properly vet Nosair's documents, or to continue using Salem's services in the months leading up to the World Trade Center bombing, is bad enough. What's worse is that Sheikh Rahman was allowed to freely operate and inspire these terrorist acts from American soil in the early 1990s. At that point, for more than a decade, Rahman had provided the religious justification for numerous terrorist plots in Egypt, including the assassination of Anwar Sadat. He was the spiritual head of Egypt's two main terrorist groups, both of which were instrumental in aiding al Qaeda's rise. And he was a player in the jihad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, where he made numerous allies, including Osama bin Laden himself.

Yet, despite his dark past, Rahman was repeatedly granted U.S. visas. It is ironic, then, that while the sheikh could not safely preach in Cairo, he could preach in mosques in Brooklyn and Jersey City.

Had McCarthy stopped at telling the story of the many tactical failures that allowed Rahman's terrorists to menace America in the early 1990s, *Willful Blindness* would have been an invaluable addition to the literature of 9/11. But he takes his argument a step further, showing how these *tactical* failures were merely symptoms of a larger *strategic* failure to comprehend the nature of our terrorist enemies. In the process, McCarthy has given us one of the most important books on jihadist terrorism.

The strategic failure McCarthy exposes is ongoing, and extends even to something as basic as naming the enemy. Just as *Willful Blindness* was released, the State Department and other agencies published an edict banning the use of the word "jihadist" (as well as similar terms) from the government's lexicon. The thinking is that the terrorists like to call themselves "jihadists," thereby appropriating an Islamic term which can have far more benevolent meanings, such as the struggle for spiritual betterment or simply to do good.

It is true that, in some Islamic traditions, "jihad" has been endowed with

such inoffensive meanings. But as McCarthy rightly argues, "jihad" has far more frequently been used to connote violent campaigns against infidels since the earliest days of Islam. When Sheikh Rahman called on his followers to wage "jihad," they knew that their master did not mean for them to become absorbed in prayer.

Moreover, Washington is apparently too obtuse to notice that Saddam Hussein, al Qaeda's terrorists, Tehran's mullahs, and Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi clerics have called for a militant brand of jihad persistently over the past several decades. All of these parties know how their words will be interpreted by the Muslim masses, and no fiat from the Washington bureaucracy will undo this widely accepted meaning.

Not only does Washington have a hard time properly naming our jihadist enemies, it still fails to understand that terrorist-sponsoring regimes have long backed them. Here, McCarthy has been at the forefront of explaining how jihadist terrorism is frequently, but not exclusively, a tool of hostile regimes: Writing in these pages in 1998 ("The Sudan Connection"), he explored the many ties between the 1993 plotters and the Sudanese regime then led by an Islamic radical named Hassan al-Turabi. Indeed, Turabi and Rahman were longtime friends and allies. McCarthy returns to this aspect of the story in *Willful Blindness* to show how Sudan's U.N. delegation provided material support to Rahman's terrorists as they plotted to blow up New York's landmarks. (The Clinton administration even expelled two Sudanese delegates because of their involvement.)

Sudan's sponsorship went far beyond Rahman's goons. In the early 1990s Turabi forged a broad terrorist coalition that included Osama bin Laden's core group of followers, all of al Qaeda's affiliates, and a number of other organizations. Turabi envisioned bringing all of these parties together in one grand anti-American terrorist coalition. And he received the support of the two leading state sponsors of terrorism: Saddam Hussein's Iraq and the mullahs' Iran. Out of this witch's brew of state and nonstate actors grew the network that we commonly call "al Qaeda."

It is beyond my scope here to summarize all of the evidence that supports this thesis, but suffice it to say that McCarthy is exactly right when he asserts,

> It is not difficult to find some current or former intelligence official ready and willing to opine that Sunnis [such as Rahman and bin Laden] would never cooperate with secularists or Shiites—overlooking abundant evidence of the Ba'athist Saddam Hussein coddling Sunni jihadists and a years-long history of collaboration between al Qaeda and Shiite Hezbollah.

McCarthy argues that, more than a decade after the Blind Sheikh was convicted of inspiring terrorism on American soil, America remains largely blind. Even the September 11 attacks did not fully awaken our nation, or its leaders, from their slumber. An implacable hate drives our enemies to never-ending violence. For them, we are the "other," infidels who deserve to be slaughtered as victims of a religious jihad, and there are many who are willing to support their war on us. ♦

BCA

Crock of Gold

How the Emerald Isle became the Celtic Tiger.

BY EDWARD SHORT

When the Irish abandoned their parliament in 1800 and accepted the Act of Union with Great Britain, in return for bribes that were extravagant even by the generous standards of Georgian venality (each parliamentarian received £7,000, or what today would be £364,197.63), a turning point was reached in Irish history that would profoundly affect the future course of the country.

Luck and the Irish
A Brief History of Change from 1970
by R.F. Foster
Oxford, 227 pp., $30

The Act of Union paved the way for systemic English misrule, famine, Fenianism, the unbridgeable divide between North and South, and the cult of sectarian violence that has only recently begun to recede. In *Luck and the Irish*, Roy Foster looks at another Irish turning point: the economic boom of the last quarter century, which has brought changes to Ireland's religious, political, and cultural life comparable to those wrought by the Union.

Professor of history at Hertford College, Oxford, and the author of *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, *Paddy and Mr. Punch*, and a magisterial two-volume biography of William Butler Yeats, Foster comes to his analysis with impressive credentials. Despite the fact that academic historians do not as a rule shine when tackling contemporary history—consider Linda Colley on Hillary Clinton or Niall Ferguson on what he insists on calling the American empire—Foster treats his vexed subject with judiciousness and panache. Readers interested in Ireland or economic, political, and social history will find *Luck and the Irish* an entertaining, provocative study.

An English equities trader christened the "Celtic Tiger" in 1994 to liken the surging Irish economy to the "East Asian Tigers"—South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan—during their period of rapid growth in the 1980s. The extent of the Irish boom has been impressive. In the decade after 1995, Foster points out, Ireland's output increased by 350 percent, personal disposable income doubled, exports increased fivefold, trade surpluses mounted into the billions, employment skyrocketed, and the number of immigrants soared.

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Margaret Thatcher, Charles Haughey

At the beginning of the 1990s there were fewer than 50 immigrants applying for asylum in Ireland; by 2001 the number had reached 11,000. By 2001, immigrants from Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Philippines, and Romania were pouring into the country and 36,000 work permits were issued. The boom they helped to sustain made many Irishmen rich as Croesus. Terence Brown vividly substantiates this in his recent survey, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2001*: In 1995 Irish consumers spent £23 billion on goods and services, in 1999, £34 billion, and in 2000, £40 billion.

What caused this unprecedented prosperity?

Foster identifies two schools of thought regarding the Tiger's birth: One of "Boosters" and the other of "Begrudgers." The Irish historian Declan Kiberd, an outspoken Booster, claims that the Celtic Tiger sprang to life when the Irish rediscovered the ideals of the Gaelic revival of the late 19th and 20th centuries, and effectively combined "the sense of local pride with the idea of self help." For the Begrudgers, the boom was largely the result of American firms—among them Hewlett-Packard, Dell, and Intel—going into Cathleen Ni Houlihan's backyard and exploiting her talented labor for the gain of American stockholders.

There is more blather than reliable analysis in these readings. Yes, Irish initiative and American firms contributed, but the factors that most drove the boom were low taxation, pro-business regulatory policies, and a young, tech-savvy workforce. For many multinationals the decision to do business in Ireland was made easier still by generous incentives from the Industrial Development Authority. EU membership was also helpful, giving the country lucrative access to markets that it had previously researched only through the United Kingdom, and pumping huge subsidies and investment capital into the Irish economy.

In recent years, as economic growth has slowed, the Celtic Tiger has lost much of its ferocity. Rising wages and inflation, poor infrastructure and the addition of new members to the EU since 2004 have all contributed to a blunting of Ireland's competitive edge. In addition, low fertility rates, which had initially buoyed the economy, may soon sink it as the population (a third of which is now aged 25-44) begins to grey. But this is a still-unfolding story; what Foster concentrates on is how the boom has changed the character of Irish society.

One of his best chapters examines the changes that have recently occurred in Ireland's religious life. Foster attributes the decline of the Irish Catholic Church to three factors: first, Irish feminism, largely imported from America and promulgated by Mary Robinson, the onetime president of Ireland whose liberal stance on contraception, abortion, and divorce helped undermine the Church's teachings on these matters; second, the mishandling of the pedophile scandals within the Irish clergy, which inspired understandable contempt for a hierarchy more intent on protecting criminal priests than vulnerable children; and last, the new materialism now rampant in Ireland, which is rather similar to the old materialism described in Kate O'Brien's *My Ireland* (1962), from which Foster quotes:

> Dublin has picked the simplest rule—and made it absolute. You can be anything you like within her Four Hundred—but you must be a successful person. That is all. Successful in the plainest and commonest sense—that you make, and spend, a very great deal of hard cash in pursuit of whatever you do, and that your name is very often in the papers. That is the simple regulation which keeps the ruling class down to a very manageable, neat proportion in Dublin; it might also seem to threaten that class with monotony, but in practice this is not so—since where every kind of creature is eligible, from duke to disc jockey, variety and comedy are non-stop, and easily observed in any decently expensive public place.

Whether a majority in the Irish Republic will remain at odds with Catholicism remains to be seen. As unbridled materialism continues to coarsen Irish society, some may begin to question the benefits of secularism. Some may even see a certain prescience in the hierarchy's 1979 pastoral letter, *Human Life is Sacred*, in which the faithful were enjoined to repudiate the idolatry of self, in which "money, alcohol, drugs and sex are . . . given a place and status . . . not too different from the place occupied by the gods of money, wine and sex in pagan times."

What is surprising is that, as the appeal of the Church of Rome has dwindled, the Church of Ireland, long considered moribund, has rebounded. The doctrinal elasticity of the Anglo-Irish faith perfectly suits the new liberal Irish middle classes. Daniel O'Connell, the architect of Catholic Emancipation, passed by Robert Peel's government

GETTY IMAGES

in 1829, must be turning in his grave.

Foster is least persuasive about the boom's influence on cultural life. It is true that, in the past, Ireland has produced an inordinate amount of first-rate literary talent. In the 20th century alone, one can cite Elizabeth Bowen, Flann O'Brien, Molly Keane, and Lord Dunsany, among many others. But for Foster to tout the work of such mediocrities as Colm Toibin and John Banville as proof of the boom's cultural dividends shows a lamentable lapse of taste. His gushing over the likes of Bono, Shane MacGowan, Bob Geldof, and the producers of *Riverdance* is similarly telling: These are exemplars of cultural decadence, not vitality. Foster is on surer ground when he sticks to politics.

In those realms of dross, he can be wonderfully entertaining. Here he paints a portrait of the ineffable Charles Haughey (1925-2006), the Fianna Fail politico, who served three times as Taoiseach (prime minister) from 1979 to 1992. "His model of grandeur," Foster writes,

> was an odd combination of Napoleonic enigma, Ascendancy hauteur, Gaelic chieftain and Tammany boss. Like his rival Garrett FitzGerald, Haughey had a certain cult of France; but, while FitzGerald's tastes had been formed by youthful holidays with French families and a keen appetite for philosophical discussions with Catholic intellectuals, Haughey's Francophilia involved lavish visits to Paris, hand-stitched shirts from the legendary Charvet *atelier*, a cellar of chateau-bottled claret and a running bill at Dublin's plutocratic French restaurant Le Coq Hardi.

He was also an embezzler, extortionist, and brazen tax evader, who held extravagant court over the seamier side of the boom. As Foster notes, Haughey entirely took to heart "the exhortation given by Guizot to the subjects of Louis-Philippe: 'Enrichissez-vous!'"

Who gained most from the boom? Members of the Dunne family, owners of the supermarket chain, who "might have stepped straight from Balzac," as Foster nicely describes them, were some of its most corrupt beneficiaries. By the 1990s they sold 48 percent of the food sold in Ireland. They were also grateful patrons of Charles Haughey. In gratitude to his looking away from their fiscal irregularities, they paid him £1.3 million. On the morning of February 19, 1992, however, the free ride ended when Ben Dunne went berserk in a hotel in Orlando, Florida:

Dun Laoghire, near Dublin

LARS HALBAUER / DPA / CORBIS

> After an incident involving a bag of cocaine, call girls and a violent psychotic episode on a seventeenth-floor balcony, he was carried from the hotel hog-tied to a pole. (This is the point where the story of modern Ireland demands its Zola rather than its Balzac.)

(Bono was in the same hotel on that same morning, a coincidence which Foster notes with the avid interest of a teenybopper.)

In his conclusion, Foster recalls the character of James Tyrone from Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, played so memorably by Ralph Richardson in the Sidney Lumet film. Tyrone, based on O'Neill's father, wasted his theatrical talents playing the Count of Monte Cristo night after night until he could play nothing else.

"O'Neill intended this syndrome to be emblematic of the Irish in general," Foster writes. "One of the profound changes of attitude experienced by the Irish in the late twentieth century was the realization that they could play more roles, and that history did not dictate a determinist and stereotypical fate." But is this true? Surely, over the centuries, the Irish have played an immense variety of roles: Think of Burke, Wellington, Parnell, Constance Gore-Booth, Lady Wilde ("Speranza"), William Russell, Shaw, and Yeats—to name only a few of Ireland's more mold-breaking sons and daughters.

These were not people who felt constrained by any "stereotypical fate." No, the Irish have always been a resourceful people. They did not need the Celtic Tiger to bring out their native inventiveness. A more interesting question is how the Irish will respond to the social chaos and overdevelopment that the boom has brought. Can those genies ever be returned to their bottles? And what of the Irish themselves? Will they become walking, talking parodies of Irishness, like those imitation Irish pubs that one sees throughout Europe? Or will they gradually lose their distinctness altogether as they succumb more and more to the one-size-fits-all popular culture that has leveled and degraded so many Western societies?

"The options of Irishness at the end of the twentieth century reflect a great dislocation," Foster notes. "Looking at the new motorway encircling Dublin, the cultural commentator Anne Marie Hourihane caustically pronounced: 'History is finished here. Now we are going to live like everybody else.'" This might be the Celtic Tiger's most lasting legacy. ♦

When Worlds Collide

The American past meets modern museum doctrine.

BY **P.J. O'ROURKE**

The Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago has a new permanent exhibit of savagery and barbarism, "The Ancient Americas." The ancient Americans themselves are not portrayed as savage or barbarous. (How surprising. Knock me over with a *feather*.) The savages and barbarians are the museum's curators. They plunder history, ravage archaeology, do violence to intelligence, and lay waste to wisdom, faith, and common sense.

The Ancient Americas
The Field Museum
Permanent Exhibit

At the Field Museum, the bygone aboriginal inhabitants of our hemisphere are shown to be regular folks, the same as you and me, although usually more naked and always more noble. Ancient Americans have attained the honored, illustrious status of chumps and fall guys. Never mind that they were here for 12,000 or 13,000 years before the rest of us showed up with our pistols and pox, so most of their getting shafted was, perforce, a do-it-yourself thing.

And also never mind that "The Ancient Americas" exhibit tells you nothing that a fourth grader doesn't know. I am the parent of a fourth grader. I live in a house cluttered with twig and Play-Doh models of hogans, longhouses, and wickiups, hung with ill-made "dream-catchers" and strewn with poorly glued miniature birch bark canoes shedding birch bark on the rugs. My daughter's bedroom is heaped with the apparel, equipage, and chattel of Kaya, the Native American American Girl doll. The fourth grade classroom's bookshelves overflow with culturally sensitive and ecologically aware retellings of Potawatomi, Paiute, and Kickapoo legends, colorfully illustrated by women who use birds or mammals for their last names.

When I was in the fourth grade, some 50 years ago, my grandmother would take me to the Field Museum. It was a solemn, quiet, awe-engendering place. All of creation's wonders were on display in orderly ranks. Dim corridors were lined with dioramas featuring important animals, shot, stuffed, and carefully labeled. Further corridors held wonders of a sterner kind: Sinister masks from Africa, demon deities of the heathen Raj, alarming Sung Dynasty figurines depicting the exquisite tortures of Chinese hell. Whatever steadiness of nerve I now possess I owe to steeling myself to walk past the display case containing an unwrapped Egyptian mummy.

The Field Museum was interesting even in its least interesting parts. The section devoted to Useful Varieties of Wood fascinated me in the exactitude of its tediousness. The world was full of things and—if I could summon the patience and concentration—those things could be organized, understood, and made to serve a purpose.

The museum fueled every worthy ambition. The mineralogical collection made me decide to become a man of learning and means sufficient to lead an expedition to find an immense amethyst geode, which I would present to Jennifer Riley, she of the auburn hair in my fourth grade class, one row over and two desks up. And the large, gloomy hall devoted to life in the Arctic was a religious inspiration. I looked at the full-scale cutaway of winter quarters in MacKenzie Bay, where you lived in an underground room the size of a Buick, wore itchy seal skins, ate raw whale and breathed the smoke of a Caribou chip fire.

I would bow my head and intone, "Praise God for not making me an Eskimo."

Then Grandmother and I would go to lunch in the museum's cafeteria, an austere room that served school food of the better kind—much as the White House Mess does to this day. Over this comforting fare I would quiz my own family's ancient American.

"Grandma, what's the difference between Democrats and Republicans?"

"Democrats rent."

"Grandma, what's wrong with the people in the bad neighborhoods that we saw from the 'El'?"

"No one is ever so poor that he can't pick up his yard."

"Grandma, which Roosevelt was worse, Teddy or Franklin?"

"Theodore. He had no business meddling in things the way he did after your great-grandfather's friend Mr. McKinley died, and he divided the Republican party, allowing that scallywag Woodrow Wilson to become the president."

One of the best pleasures of my childhood was to walk hand-in-hand with my grandmother up the broad flights of marble steps to the towering bronze doors of the Field Museum. The doors are closed now. The main entrance to the museum is no longer used. These days that neoclassical portico with its view of Loop, lakefront, and Grant Park grandeur probably makes people feel small. The back door has more room for tour buses and handicapped ramps. Grandeur is out of style anyway. The Field Museum was built for Chicago's Columbian Exposition, celebrating (if you can imagine celebrating such a thing) Columbus's "discovery" of America. It wasn't the happiest 400th anniversary for ancient Americans.

The museum is full of noisy children and their caregivers, blended families, and whatever else we're calling kith and kin these days. A long, mouse-maze, airport security-style line must be endured to get tickets. The sculpture of a Masai spearman facing off against a crouching lioness has been shunted to a lonely cor-

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ner, lest someone somehow take offense. Nowadays offense is taken—snatched and grabbed—as if offense were something valuable to own. And given our umbrage-filled presidential campaign, maybe it is. The brontosaurus has been pushed to the back (that is to say the front) of the main hall and isn't called a brontosaurus anymore. (Doubtless offense was taken by Chicago's Bronto-American community.) Nor is the skeleton of this vast vegan any longer engaged in postmortem mortal combat with the bones of a tyrannosaurus rex. Modern kids are too loving and caring about dinosaurs to be exposed to such scenes of domestic violence.

Most of the minerals and all of the useful woods have been replaced by a gift shop the size of Macy's (appropriately enough, since Macy's is now the name on Marshall Field's, the department store whose founder was the Field Museum's patron). The cafeteria is gone; a McDonald's has been installed. At least people are still dressed the way I was a half-century ago: In jeans or shorts, T-shirts, and gym shoes. Except these are people of 40 or 50. Indeed, some are as old as my grandmother was when she, in hat and gloves, escorted me. And Grandma had visited the Field Museum during the Columbian Exposition.

I couldn't see what the children are wearing; they are misbehaving blurs to my bifocaled eyes. None seems afraid to walk past the mummy case. I didn't have the heart. Unwrapped as he is, the mummy fits in too well, sartorially, with a 21st-century crowd. At the portal of the "Ancient Americas" exhibit is the first of many, many wall inscriptions telling you what you should be thinking, if you happen to do any of that.

> The Ancient Americas is a story of diversity and change—not progress.

Were this a criticism of pre-Columbian societies, you'd be in for an interesting experience. It isn't. You aren't.

Besides the wall inscriptions the exhibit is cluttered with innumerable video screens displaying people yakking in native languages described as nearly extinct. What information is conveyed thereby, and to whom, is an open question. An extensive collection of Inca clay faces appears opposite the "not progress" message. The Inca seem to have been skilled cartoonists in the Wallace and Gromit manner. However, claymation lacks something when it isn't animated. But that's not-progress for you.

"Gallery guides available in Spanish only," reads another wall inscription. This is either overdoing it with the multiculturalism or an implied insult to the effect that Hispanics are too stupid to find their way through an exhibit arranged like a drunkard's version of the museum's ticket line.

Under one such painting the inscription reads:

> "Look at that mammoth," your aunt cries out as you hike downhill towards a vast plain. The men [sic!] did well . . ." Your family and other group members pause to give thanks and honor the mammoth whose life was taken . . .

The Americas were peopled, presciently, by future Californians.

"After the Ice Age," reads another wall, "human creativity made the Americas more culturally diverse." Barack Obama was elected, I guess. Nearby is a large mural titled "Eastern Woodlands 2500 B.C.-500 B.C." I'm a resident of the Eastern Woodlands and, except for fewer naked people, they haven't changed much. Perhaps the title should be amended to "Eastern Woodlands 2500 B.C.-500 B.C. and A.D. 1969 when Janis Joplin and Santana Were Performing at Woodstock."

Teo mask, Mexico, circa A.D. 500

JOHN WEINSTEIN / FIELD MUSEUM

A very wordy inscription details the theories of when and how humans arrived in the New World. Translated from the academese: "We dunno." An encomium to the Ice Age hunter-gatherers follows. "People like us," it concludes, "prospered in ancient times." We did indeed—if your idea of prosperity is fastening a "Clovis people" spearpoint to a stick and stabbing long-horned bison, giant grand sloths, wooly mammoths, mastodons, and New World horses until they were all extinct. The economic boom didn't extend to casual wear and sports clothes. Ice Age or no, everyone in the talentlessly painted murals is naked. Nipples seem to have been vague and smudgy in ancient times, and a mastodon or giant ground sloth was always getting in between mural viewers and your genitals.

The naked people in the Eastern Woodlands "faced growing population and environmental stresses. This led to periods of conflict with their neighbors."

Fortunately, Chief Obama was willing, without diplomatic preconditions, to meet and negotiate with any ancient American leader. Therefore, the "periods of conflict" didn't result in anything like, oh, members of the Iroquois Confederation capturing,

The Field Museum, Chicago

torturing, enslaving, and occasionally eating everyone they could get their hands on.

An office cubicle's space is allotted to the Moundbuilders. Who were they? Why did they build the mounds? How did they do it? Was there free parking? Translating, again, from the Academese: "Got me, pal."

Then comes a prolix wall headed "Powerful Leaders."

> Why did people give up power to make some of their own decisions? Central decision-makers were often more effective than groups at organizing large amounts of labor, managing resources, and directing wars.

So maybe it was Hillary, not Obama, who got elected.

This brings us to the Maya and their abominable customs, nicely glossed.

> . . . sacrifice has played a role in the religious beliefs of many people throughout history and in all parts of the world. . . . Even today almost all world religions include sacrifice of some kind in their spiritual practices.

Now wait a damn minute, you infidel apes of social science. Shut your brie holes and listen up. God, *the* God, the God who didn't make me an Eskimo, does not require human sacrifice, he *suffers* it: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

That is the difference—perhaps the only difference—between civilization and savagery. And it's not just us Christians who say so. From the time of Abraham no monotheist has practiced human sacrifice; no Buddhist ever has, and no Hindu since the days of suttee and the Thugs. No Taoist, no Confucian, no Zoroastrian, Baha'ist, or Sikh includes murder in his "spiritual practices."

The text on the Maya continues:

> Some societies in the ancient Americas, like the Maya, practiced bloodletting or human sacrifice as part of their ceremonies or spiritual beliefs. Why? Anthropologists don't fully know.

Let's finish that sentence. "Anthropologists don't fully know *the difference between right and wrong*."

In a nook around the corner from Mayan Spirituality a computer-animated movie runs on a continuous loop. "Living in a State Society" offers a different definition of civilization. State Societies are, it seems, all societies in which sticks and grass aren't the principal constituents of housing, wardrobe, and diet. The movie explains that, in a State Society, the "Ruling Classes" are supported by the "State Power Triad" consisting of the Economy, the Military, and Religion. "For the first time," the narration drones, "the ruling class had a different standard of living than others. Why would people want to give up their freedom? For most there was no choice."

The message of the movie is, I think, to build a wigwam, wear a hula skirt, and boil some sticks for dinner. Or maybe the message is to pack the car and move to North Korea. Or, possibly, the message is to get over it, accept Big Chief Hillary, and learn to love her tax hikes, Iraq retreat, and pseudo-Methodist spiritual beliefs (including health care bloodletting) because "there was no choice."

After a twist and a turn in the exhibit's vagrant route you are among the Aztec and Inca. The loathsome Aztec devoted most of their energy to human sacrifices, horrifying in extent and gruesome in technique. The Ancient Americas treats this in a moving-right-along manner.

> From mild bloodletting to violent death, sacrifice offered thanks to the gods while maintaining the natural order of the world.

The original New World Order, as it were. Inscriptions also give a nod to media hype.

> The Spanish often emphasized accounts of bloodthirsty sacrifice to justify conquering the Aztec people.

You're hustled past the Inca's no doubt better-justified conquerings. You enter a hushed and funereal room with tombstone lettering on black walls.

> WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE
>
> In 1492, the first European explorers arrived in the Americas, triggering a devastating loss of life almost inconceivable to us today.

Mao Zedong, please go to the white courtesy phone.

The wall inscription proceeds:

> Here, we reflect on the magnitude of loss inflicted on America's Indigenous peoples by European invasion.

The European inflictions are grimly illustrated. The first one upon which we are expected to reflect is the only decent thing (not counting the wheel, iron, cigarette papers, etc.) that Europeans brought to America's Indigenous peoples, "Religious Conversion." Second is "Disease," which should stir our sympathy but hardly

JOHN WEINSTEIN / FIELD MUSEUM

our guilt. The exhibit points out that disease was the chief cause of suffering after European contact. Therefore, the horrors that beset The Ancient Americas following 1492 would have happened if the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa María* had been manned by Jimmy Carter, the Dalai Lama, and Bono.

You escape the pity parlor of When Worlds Collide and traverse a space of video screen talking heads and interactive displays with all their buttons being pounded by toddlers. This is "Living Descendants." The ancient Americans' modern relations are regular folks, as well as their ancestors were, and with clothes on, too, the same as you and me. Of course, if they're the same as you and me, why do they need a room in a museum any more than we do? Well, "despite centuries of injustice and oppression, today's "Indigenous peoples strive to sustain their cultural traditions."

You could say the same of the Irish. Being one, I looked for the exit to go find a drink. I wandered into a solemn, quiet, awe-engendering place. Looking around the large, gloomy hall I saw the full-scale cutaway of winter quarters in MacKenzie Bay. Its labels are curled and yellowing but unchanged: respectful, factual, precise.

The ancient Americans weren't regular folks. They lived strange, spectacular lives on strange, spectacular continents untrod by man and more remote for them than Mars—or the world of museum curation—is for us. The ancient Americans were tough as hell. They did their share of nasty stuff. But even the Aztec don't deserve to be patronized, demeaned, and insulted by what is—or is supposed to be, or once was—one of the white man's great institutions of learning.

Give the "Ancient Americas" exhibit back to the ancient Americans, and the Field Museum along with it. If any of the heirs and assigns of the Aztec, Inca, or Maya feel inclined to practice a little human sacrifice on anthropologists, sociologists, moral relativists, neo-Marxists, and other conquistadors of modern academia, call it "maintaining the natural order of the world." ♦

BCA

Veritas and Stuff

The lowdown on the higher learning in America.

BY ROBERT WHITCOMB

The satirical novel about college life has a lively postwar history, including celebrated contributions from the likes of Kingsley Amis, Mary McCarthy, and David Lodge. Roger Rosenblatt has taken to picking this low-hanging fruit in *Beet*, about a fantastical college of the same name a bit north of Boston. Life even in real colleges seems fantastical to many in the workaday world. Just that a large number of employees (tenured faculty) can't be fired puts it on a somewhat extraterrestrial basis.

Beet
A Novel
by Roger Rosenblatt
Ecco, 240 pp. $23.95

History Lesson
A Race Odyssey
by Mary Lefkowitz
Yale, 208 pp., $25

This satire—really, almost a comic book without the pictures, rather like Rosenblatt's funny, over-the-top first novel, *Lapham Rising*—is a manic send-up of contemporary college life. It might have been better if the author had curbed his love of hyperbole and verbal pirouettes a tad, but what he has produced may stir the creative juices of the Disney animators. His Buckleysque proclivity for exotic words, even when more common ones might work better, and scenes preposterous in the extreme, may sometimes leave the reader feeling that he's trying too hard.

The hero is the Candide-like Beet English professor Peace (named by Sixties parents) Porterfield, who is the occasionally hapless chairman of a panel charged (in what is the Beet leadership's window dressing; its real plan is to close the college and make a killing off its real estate and cultural treasures) with trying to save the institution ("Will the Beet Go On?" ask headlines as the story goes national) whose $250 million endowment has mysteriously evaporated. That last item is one of *Beet*'s all-too-incredible elements.

As he innocently tries to reinvent Beet's curriculum to make it more alluring to students willing to pay the sky-high tuition even while actually strengthening intellectual standards, the implausibly uncynical Porterfield must contend with a profoundly corrupt chairman of the board of trustees (he's eyeing the bucolic campus for real-estate development) and his lackey, the sniveling Beet president who is also intent on looting the institution, as well as rich leftist (or anarchist?) student-agitators, and a sweet-natured "Islamic" terrorist from Scarsdale who wants to blow up the place.

The faculty oversee such courses as "Nippocano Studies: Where Tokyo Meets Tijuana" and "Little People of Color," such departments as Women's and Fashion Studies, and such organs as the Sensitivity and Diversity Council. While Beet is a bastard to get into (think Williams or Bowdoin), and most of the students are very smart, clearly large parts of the college are worthless to those students seeking rewards in the Life of the Mind. Named after an 18th-century worthy who was New England's largest pig farmer, Beet College has all the pathologies of the politically correct to the nth power. (The book is also replete with pig jokes, including a Trojan pig on a hydraulic lift that would have looked handsome in *Animal House*.) Along the way, Rosenblatt evokes with eloquence the numerous depressing aspects of New England, including its darkness and cold, saddening earth colors, claus-

Robert Whitcomb is editor of the editorial pages at the Providence Journal.

trophobia, and residents' tendency to hypocritical sanctimony.

He also details the sort of events you'd expect: building takeovers, town-and-gown socio-economic relations, silly sex, and other colorful undergraduate undertakings. And he takes to it with a Waugh-like love of weird names: The chairman of the board of trustees is Joel Bollovate, the lead female is named after Martha Stewart but has changed her name to Matha because she thinks it sounds more revolutionary, and the young terrorist has changed his name to Akim Ben Laden from Arthur Horowitz. Then there's the college chaplain, Bucky Lookatme.

The Simpsons comes to mind; virtually all the characters are stock comic figures. The droll physician wife of Professor Porterfield and his best friend are the only two major players who would seem very plausible in Nature (as opposed to Art). But it doesn't matter all that much. This short tale has more than an adequate number of hilarious scenes while it raises important points about some of the absurdity and vacuity of American higher education.

Of course, it bears remembering that while there are many worthless courses at elite American colleges, their students are so ambitious that most will take at least *some* serious ones to obtain postgraduation jobs and graduate-school admissions. (And after all, their tormented parents don't want their children, at $50,000 a year, to waste four years at a private college on drivel.) But Rosenblatt has a field day with one of the worst ills of American academia: the increasing commercialization of college and university life—with bloated administrations and overpaid administrators seeking the next hot college-marketing tool at the expense of the verities of tried and true academic disciplines.

This all suggests that we may have too many colleges, and would do well to have fewer, but better, ones. Why should everyone go to college, anyway? And why would Professor Porterfield even bother to try to save Beet? That's the biggest unanswered question in *Beet*, but it doesn't matter: It's a joke.

Meanwhile, Mary Lefkowitz's *History Lesson: A Race Odyssey* is, on the face of it, a very different creation from Roger Rosenblatt's. Yet this memoir of a Wellesley classics professor emerita contains a trenchant analysis of some of the same themes, including political correctness at the expense of intellectual rigor and truth, timid administrators, and angry, trendy, cowardly professors.

Wellesley College Chapel

Like Rosenblatt, Lefkowitz deals with academic fantasies, except that hers came out of all-too-real controversies over the propositions that ancient Greece "stole" many of its ideas from Africans, and that the Jews ran the slave trade. These notions have been heavily promoted by such dubious scholars as Lefkowitz's sometime Wellesley colleague Anthony Martin, an incoherent anti-Semite (and author of *The Jewish Onslaught*) who seeks to promote black pride by way of wishful thinking.

The propositions here are unsupported by anything like rigorous scholarship into the origins of the golden age of Greece, but as Lefkowitz (author of *Not Out of Africa*) notes, that something is preposterous doesn't get in the way of its being widely promoted and accepted—especially in the academy, the very place where fact-based scholarship should be permitted to shoot it down. These ideas are also allowed currency, in part, because of the desire of their proponents to obtain the benefits (hefty speaking and publishing fees, TV appearances, etc.) of professional victimhood.

When Lefkowitz sought to deconstruct these opinions, she was bound to run into a buzzsaw, which included a lawsuit aimed at silencing her. She describes her battle in deadpan prose, detailing the sort of racial tensions and unpleasant incidents (one involving a screaming match between Martin and a student in a dorm) that sometimes soil American campuses. However tranquil it appears, Wellesley College is rife with the conflicts and anxieties of American society.

As does Roger Rosenblatt, Mary Lefkowitz shows how common administrative and faculty evasion can be when it comes to defending intellectual rigor and integrity. (In the end, Wellesley does pretty much the right thing and backs her up.) Unlike *Beet*, however, none of her account is intentionally funny. Still, Lefkowitz's painful struggle and ultimate victory are edifying—and, perhaps, a hopeful sign for higher education. Things might not be as bad as we think, or as bad as they were. Too bad *History Lesson* isn't destined for Hollywood, as *Beet* might well be. ♦

WELLESLEY COLLEGE

New York Dolls

Four gals in Manhattan, plus men, shoes, and important lessons. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

The movie version of *Sex and the City* has almost every failing, and hardly a single virtue, of the long-running HBO television series about four female friends on the loose in Manhattan. Where most of the show's episodes hurtled through their 27-minute running times with four separate plotlines—so that if one of those stories was boring or annoying you merely had to wait a minute until you got to a more pleasing one—the movie drags itself across two hours and 25 minutes with all the energy and enthusiasm America once beheld during a Scott McClellan press briefing. The series had a bright, fizzy quality equivalent to a sip of a Cosmopolitan, the sweet cocktail it introduced to the world. The movie is rueful and anxious; it's more gin and bitters than Cosmo.

Sex and the City
Directed by Michael Patrick King

When last we saw the Four Horsewomen of the Metropolis, they were basking in the domestic contentment that had continually eluded them during the six seasons of the show's run. *Über*-WASP Charlotte found marital bliss, adoptive motherhood, and the ancient faith of the Hebrews with the bald Jewish divorce lawyer who liberated her from impotent Trey and his overbearing mother. Hard-shelled lawyer Miranda fell in mutual love with the sweet and schleppy bartender she had thought was not good enough for her. Promiscuous public-relations executive Samantha settled down with the decades-younger boy toy who took care of her during a bout of breast cancer. And Carrie, our narrator-heroine, was at last reunited with the love of her life, the sly tycoon Mr. Big.

For six years, they had made mistakes, were betrayed and betrayed others, had their hearts broken and broke the hearts of others. And yet, at the end of every episode, they picked themselves up, brushed themselves off, and went to brunch all over again. The fantasy at the heart of *Sex and the City* was that, no matter how bitter a turn life might take, there will always be a friend or three there to offer moral support when you need to buy a very expensive pair of shoes. *Sex and the City* didn't capture the hearts of American women because of its depiction of Manhattan glitz; it was the notion, rather, that while romance may be fleeting, female friendship will ever endure.

This sweet, naive notion is the guiding principle behind the movie, and writer-director Michael Patrick King stretches it beyond the breaking point. To demonstrate its importance, he takes a hatchet to all but one of the successful romantic relationships to which he guided the *Sex and the City* women when he was producing the show in its final years. But those happy endings were crucial to creating a satisfying arc for the characters that would finally reward them (and the audience) for the pain and suffering through which they had put themselves over the years.

Their pain and suffering were as fluffy as everything else on display. The women of *Sex and the City* lived in a universe in which people never worry about money, or employment, or fear for a child's health; in which love objects, of both the human or accessorizing variety, instantly materialized whenever needed and were procured without difficulty. It was, in other words, the world of romantic fantasy, and the movie retains that quality. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent without a thought. People procure first-class plane tickets and sign up for long stays at five-star resorts. Apartments are bought and sold and repurchased, and no one breaks a sweat.

That's fine; who wants to spend $11.75 at the box office visiting a world of unromantic reality? It appears that Michael Patrick King wants us to. His message is that there are no happily-ever-afters. A valuable lesson, to be sure—except that this is *Sex and the City* we're talking about, not *Anna Karenina*. And in any case, we've been through all of this before with them, and I think most viewers were happy and relieved to have it all wrapped up.

Kim Cattrall

CRAIG BLANKENHORN / NEW LINE CINEMA

Was anybody clamoring to see Carrie Bradshaw and Mr. Big go through yet another breakup when we had seen it twice already? For Miranda and Steve to hit rocky shoals when most of their relationship during the series consisted of them *not* having a relationship? Worse still is the spectacle of Samantha craving her former promiscuity and then refusing to act on her craving out of principle. When Samantha Jones turns from Id to Superego, it's time to head for the exits. Where's the fun in that?

There isn't much fun in that, and there's almost no fun to be had in *Sex and the City: The Movie*. ♦

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

"Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton quickly apologized Friday after citing the June 1968 assassination of Robert F. Kennedy in defending her decision to keep running for the Democratic presidential nomination despite increasingly long odds." **—Associated Press, *May 23, 2008***

Parody

DAY, JUNE 4, 2008

Clinton Apologizes Again, Says 'Destroy Him' Misinterpreted

By SHAILAGH MURRAY
Washington Post Staff Writer

One week after issuing an apology for making references to the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton found herself saying she regretted making additional remarks that some might find offensive. "I recently tried to compare my dear friend Senator Obama to the Great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln," said Mrs. Clinton in a statement. "Some in the media have misconstrued these remarks to mean I wish him ill. I do not." The senator from New York earlier told supporters that "I hope Barack enjoys the theater. I hear it's a great play. We all know what happened to Abe Lincoln when he went to the theater."

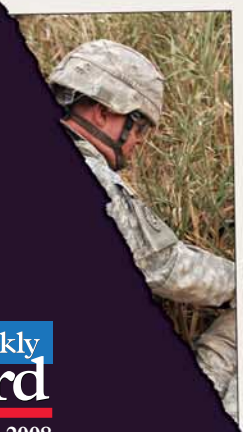
Senator Clinton then held a press conference over the weekend to explain comments she made at a bar in Orlando: "My choice of words, I admit, was poor. They were obviously the product of no sleep and my tireless efforts working for the American people—more of whom have voted for me than for Senator Obama, I might add." At the bar, Mrs. Clinton said, "If I ever cross paths with Barack Obama, I'll be sure to wear brass knuckles and hit him where it hurts. I will tear him limb from limb. I must destroy him." (She made the statement in between shots of SoCo and lime.) Later, addressing reporters, Mrs. Clinton explained how "again, I've been working nonstop for the little girls and the great-grandmothers who want me to win and know I can win. I've won in every key battleground state—electorally speaking, I have already destroyed him. That's what I meant."

UPI PHOTO / MARK COWAN

"My opponents predict my campaign will hurt the party," Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton told a Detroit rally yesterday. "But I predict this will make our party stronger. My prediction for Senator Obama? Pain."

Although the primaries have officially ended, it is unclear whether Mrs. Clinton will drop out of the race now or take her fight to the convention. "Let me say in advance that whatever happens, Senator Obama and I will remain close friends," said the senator from New York before adding, "Just remember: Keep your friends close but your enemies closer. And when Barack and I hash out the nomination, probably in a public place, a bar or restaurant, I'll finish him off." Mrs. Clinton then added, "what I mean is, we'll have a lovely sit down. Try the veal."

See NOT PERSONAL, *A10, Col.1*



New Poll Finds Majority View Obama As Deity

46 Percent Confuse McCain with Brimley

By PERRY BACON JR.
Washington Post Staff Writer

A recent *Newsweek* poll finds 54 percent of Americans believing Senator Barack Obama to be a deity while 42 percent consider him a mere demi-god. Many of the respondents pointed to a glowing picture of Obama in *Newsweek* (which rarely puts him on the cover) as proof of his divinity. Meanwhile, that 46 percent of those polled confused Senator John McCain with aging actor Wilford Brimley.

"I just loved him in *Cocoon*," said one woman, "but even with a free meter from Liberty Medical, I'm concerned about his

See DIABEETIS, *A5, Col.1*

POLL: Obama Human or Divine?

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