the weekly
Standard

COMMANDER IN CHIEF OBAMA?
FREDERICK W. KAGAN
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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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The rise in fuel prices has been largely due to demand growth outstripping supply growth. That has produced a dramatic increase in global crude oil prices, the most important factor (by far) in determining what we all pay for gasoline and diesel fuel. Congress needs to address the challenge of providing tomorrow's consumers with the growing supplies of energy they will need – and, specifically, options to encourage additional supplies of domestic oil and natural gas.

We must expand supplies of all reliable, competitive forms of energy while moderating demand and improving efficiency

Some Congressional prescriptions, however, seem driven more by political whim than sound policy choices, and do little to address this supply-demand imbalance. In some instances, they could dramatically worsen it.

In fact, several proposals would discourage the very investments in new oil and natural gas supplies – and increased efficiency – so critical to meeting growing demand. So-called "price gouging" measures, for example, constitute de facto price controls. Such government intervention led to the curtailment of supplies that resulted in gas lines and shortages in the 1970s.

Some want to increase taxes on oil and natural gas companies. However, U.S. Department of Energy data show they already pay nearly double the effective income tax rate of all manufacturing industries. Even more importantly, increasing taxes means fewer dollars for investment in new supplies, increased efficiency and emerging energy technologies. That would compound the challenges that America's businesses and consumers are already facing.

Critically, America must produce more of its own energy, much of which remains off-limits to production, before demanding that other countries increase theirs. Proposed legislation, for example, that would subject OPEC nations to litigation in American courts could also result in severe retaliatory steps by these countries – not increased supplies of oil. We have enough domestic oil and natural gas to power 60 million cars and heat 160 million households for 60 years.

America's long-term energy security is best served by policies that actually expand supplies of all reliable, competitive forms of energy – oil and natural gas, petroleum products and alternatives – while moderating energy demand and improving efficiency. Our economic strength – now and in the future – absolutely depends on it. Let's work together to ensure a secure energy future. Learn more at EnergyTomorrow.org.

THE *people* OF AMERICA'S OIL AND NATURAL GAS INDUSTRY

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the weekly Standard

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We're Frosted

The Scrapbook notes with dismay some innovative justice meted out in Vermont.

Readers will recall the incident last January when dozens of young nighttime revelers broke into the onetime home of Robert Frost in Ripton, Vermont, drinking, smoking pot, and generally having a grand old time. They broke up wicker furniture and dressers and burned them in the fireplace, emptied two fire extinguishers, destroyed dishes and pictures and light fixtures and chairs, tossed empty beer cans and plastic cups on the floor, even vomited in the living room.

As part of their punishment, prosecutor John Quinn has thrown the book at them—literally. Some two-dozen merrymakers will be required to study Robert Frost's writing under the tutelage of poet/critic Jay Parini, who teaches at nearby Middlebury College, which owns the Frost house.

As Prosecutor Quinn told the Associated Press: "I guess I was thinking that if these teens had a better understanding of who Robert Frost was . . . they would be more respectful of other peoples' property in the future and would also learn something from the experience."

They would learn something, all right. Needless to say, The Scrapbook's reaction to this is not favorable. To begin with, where would it end? If juvenile delinquents ransack the childhood home of, say, Allen Ginsberg, will they be "dragged . . . through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix"? What if a group of literary vandals deliberately destroy some Sylvia Plath manuscripts? We wouldn't necessarily require them to stick their heads in the oven.

No, you don't have to be a partisan of T.S. Eliot to believe that studying the poetry of Robert Frost should not be part of any criminal's penalty. Reading poetry should be pleasure, not punishment. Talk about sending the wrong signal! Any young Vermonter who thinks it's a hoot to break into a private residence—of the famous or obscure—and ransack the place for laughs is not likely to benefit from a textual analysis of "The Death of the Hired Man." In the spirit of Frost himself, The Scrapbook would recommend a night or two in one of those quaint Vermont hoosegows, or maybe some particularly onerous chores on the old homestead, such as "bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top in each hand" for two or three days, and walking "out in rain—or back in rain" for a couple of hours. ♦

No Republicans Need Apply

On his website, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*'s Dick Polman modestly reprints a quotation from someone or another lauding him as "one of the finest political journalists of his generation." Polman, like the *Inquirer* itself, is part of the media throng working furiously to elect Barack Obama president. Which is fine. We would expect no less from the newspaper that ran 21 consecutive days of editorials endorsing John Kerry over George W. Bush in the three weeks leading up to the 2004 election.

But in his gushing over Obama's clinching the nomination on June 3, Polman wrote, "let us pause instead and simply acknowledge this historic American moment before it inevitably becomes subsumed by the day's political minutiae: An African-American has been chosen to lead a major party in a presidential election. In the space of four decades, the unimaginable has become reality."

Unimaginable? Did Polman miss the 1996 election, when a number of Republicans were desperate for Colin Powell to accept their nomination? Maybe that just slipped Polman's mind. Or maybe not. Polman then mentions the paucity of black politicians holding statewide office, saying: "Obama, joined in 2007 by Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick, are the only black Democrats currently holding statewide elective office (Harold Ford came close to winning the Tennessee Senate race in 2006)." Why not mention a black Republican like Michael Steele, who was elected lieutenant governor of Maryland before running a serious campaign for the Senate in 2006? Readers can draw their own conclusions. ♦

Not a Joke

An actual correction from the June 5 *Washington Post*: "A May 31 Metro article about the Scripps National Spelling Bee misspelled last year's winning word. The correct spelling is serrefine." ♦

Not a Parody


STUDY: MEDIA NOT FAVORING OBAMA

The headline above, from the May 30, 2008, *Daily Variety* refers to a Pew Research Center poll conducted between January and March indicating that "the dominant personal narratives in the media about Obama and Clinton were almost identical in tone, and were both twice as positive as negative," 69 percent and 67 percent of the time, respectively. The percentage of stories

(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of December 3, 2001)

about John McCain that were positive? forty-three percent. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

"I tell this tale, of course, not merely to remind us that the better world of which Robert Kennedy so movingly spoke died aborning 40 years ago in Los Angeles. I also tell it because I see a dynamic similar to that between the Kennedy and McCarthy campaigns in the relationship between Barack Obama's and Hillary Clinton's equally historic campaigns, and because today's Democrats have . . ."

—Harold Meyerson,
Washington Post, *June 4, 2008*

Congratulations

The tenth annual Eric Breindel Award for Excellence in Journalism has been awarded to *Wall Street Journal* columnist Bret Stephens. The judges singled out for particular praise his February 13, 2007, column, "Russian for Chutzpah," which began: "The nearest equivalent the Russian language has for the word chutzpah is *naglost*. In you, Vladimir Putin, the Russian nation has found the embodiment of *naglost*."

Sponsored by the Eric Breindel Memorial Foundation, and generously supported by News Corporation, Breindel's longtime employer and this magazine's corporate parent, the award carries a prize of $20,000 and is presented each year to the columnist or editorialist whose work best reflects the spirit that animated Breindel's own writing: love of country, commitment to democratic institutions, and determination to bear witness to the evils of totalitarianism. ♦

The Profound Humility of St. Barack

"The journey will be difficult. The road will be long. I face this challenge—I face this challenge with profound humility and knowledge of my own limitations . . .

"I am absolutely certain that, generations from now, we will be able to look back and tell our children that this was the moment when we began to provide care for the sick and good jobs to the jobless. . . . This was the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal."

—Barack Obama, June 3, 2008

Help Wanted

Contributing editor Charles Krauthammer seeks a research assistant for a one- or two-year term. Send résumé to job@charleskrauthammer.com. ♦

Casual

Tea for Two

Barack Obama's elitism runs even deeper than previously thought. Not only does the man from Hawaii, Morningside Heights, Cambridge, and Hyde Park look down on the grubby rubes in Altoona who go hunting after church. Not only does he bowl like a (10-year-old) girl. But it turns out that even his choice in beverages is an exercise in namby-pamby privilege. Recently it was revealed that on the campaign trail, Obama's drink of choice is Honest Tea.

Yet in the matter of designer beverages, I come not to bury Obama, but to praise him. Honest Tea is a delightful concoction, and his embrace of it is a mark of high character. Based in Bethesda, Maryland, Honest Tea is a bobo Horatio Alger story: The company's founder, Seth Goldman, started the business by brewing five thermoses of tea in 1998. He took them to Fresh Fields, the forerunner of Whole Foods, where a buyer ordered 15,000 bottles.

I don't mean to brag, but I adopted Honest Tea back in 2001 and have been enjoying it in contented solitude ever since. But the company has grown. Today Honest Tea produces all sorts of teas and juices. Senator Obama prefers the Black Forest Berry tea. Of course.

But my penchant for frou-frou beverages goes somewhat beyond simple gourmet organic small-batch independently brewed iced teas. In recent years I've gone to increasing lengths to find interesting and obscure soft drinks. I eschew the everyday brands of bottled water and go straight for the $4 bottles of Voss—the artesian water from Norway notable for being (1) maliciously priced and (2) packaged in large, sleek, cylindrical glass jars. I was drinking Snapple in the late '80s, before it had ubiquitous, annoying TV ads and scores of nonsensical flavors. In the early '90s, I was part of the outré movement that embraced mass-designer cola products—Crystal Pepsi and Pepsi Kona were two of my favorites. But when it comes to soda these days I've moved on to the brand Boylan's, which substitutes cane sugar for high-fructose corn syrup. You can only get them at high-end grocers, such as Balducci's, and they run $1.50 a pop, so to speak. When I'm feeling really selective, I'll reach past the Boylan's in my refrigerator for a Cricket Cola—which is made with both cane sugar and green tea. Try finding one of those in Altoona.

HAL MAYFORTH

The problem is that all good soft drinks eventually come to an end. There is precious little stability in the market because a drink either catches on and becomes an object of mass consumption or fails to find an audience and dies out. From the perspective of the beverage snob, it's hard to say which is more tragic.

And, while I hesitate to break the news to Senator Obama—he has enough to worry about, what with saving our country, restoring hope, and altering the fabric of American political life—I worry that trouble is brewing even for our beloved Honest Tea. One of their classic flavors is Lori's Lemon, a delicate blend of black tea, lemon, and a hint of cane sugar. It was just sweet enough to entice people like the senator and me. And just bitter enough to offend lesser palates. Consequently, it was my favorite.

But on a recent trip to the grocery store, I was met with a sign announcing that Lori's Lemon had been discontinued. It was being replaced, it seemed, by a flavor called Organic Lemon Black Tea—which is like Lori's Lemon, only sweeter and less bitter. In other words, more appealing to vulgar tastes. I was concerned that the people at Honest Tea were selling out—trying to broaden their market. Unlike Lori's Lemon, the new flavor might become a mass sensation, tippled in ballparks and office buildings across America.

As a hedge against that unhappy possibility, I bought every remaining bottle of Lori's Lemon on the shelf. As you might imagine, I was quite pleased with myself—a familiar sensation for people like Barack and me—because I now had the ultimate drink: an extinct designer iced tea.

Yet even this comfort grew cold after a few days, as I watched my supply of Lori's Lemon, hidden in my office filing cabinet, dwindle. Once he's President Obama, the commander in chief will be able to ensure the continued supply of Black Forest Berry. Lacking such clout, I called the people at Honest Tea headquarters, prepared to simply beg. Happily, they informed me that Lori's Lemon remains in production, it's just no longer available in plastic bottles. Which is fine by me. Glass is more exclusive.

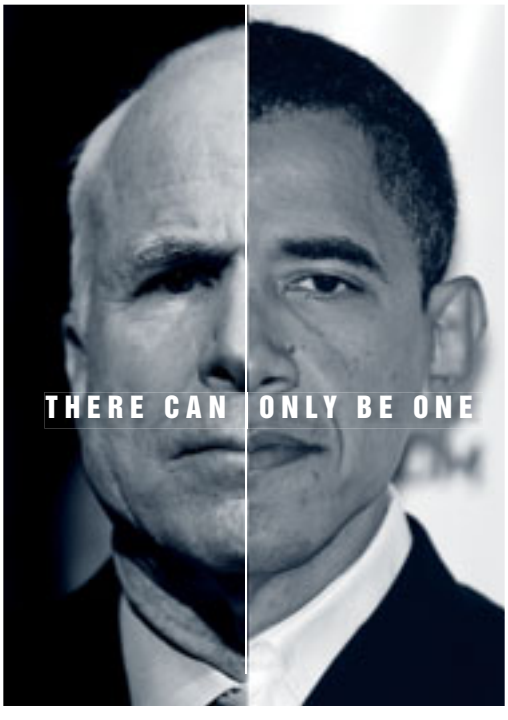
In the course of conversation with Honest Tea's Dale Crowell, I learned that Karl Rove is also a devotee. The bonds of beverage elitism, it seems, transcend even the widest political divides. Which is all well and good, so long as only the right people do the transcending.

Jonathan V. Last

the weekly Standard

Voting for Commander in Chief

It would be hard to design a better test for the job of commander in chief than the real-life test senators John McCain and Barack Obama have undergone in the last two years. As the situation in Iraq deteriorated during 2006 and the war reached its most critical moment, both senators served on national security committees: McCain on Armed Services, Obama on Foreign Relations. From those positions, with access to classified situation reports as well as the public testimony and private advice of those who knew the situation in Iraq best, each man reached an understanding of the facts on the ground and the interests at stake. And each proposed a strategy. It was as close as a presidential candidate could get to showing how he would respond to a national security crisis without already being in the White House.



MCCAIN, JENNIFER MITCHELL / SPLASH NEWS; OBAMA, SPORTSPHOTO LTD. / ALLSTAR

Both men's proposals are a matter of public record, available on the Internet. McCain set forth his in a speech at the American Enterprise Institute on January 5, 2007 (at an event marking the release of AEI's "Choosing Victory," which I wrote, outlining a strategy like the one Bush later ordered). Obama presented his in the "Iraq War De-Escalation Act of 2007" (S. 433), which he introduced in the Senate on January 30. We also know the strategy the president chose—the surge of forces he announced on January 10, very similar to what McCain described—and the outcome it has brought.

McCain's recommendations drew on his conversations with commanders on the ground in Iraq, where he traveled in late December 2006. McCain called for a minimum of three to five additional brigades in Baghdad and at least one in Anbar province. Their mission, he said, would be to implement the thus far elusive 'hold' element of the military's clear-hold-build strategy, to maintain security in cleared areas, to protect the population and critical infrastructure, and to impose the government's authority—essential elements of a traditional counterinsurgency strategy.

McCain cited the "excellent" track record of U.S. troops in stopping sectarian violence. He noted that, "where American soldiers have deployed to areas in turmoil, including Baghdad neighborhoods, the violence has ceased almost immediately." And he was specific about the tasks troops would perform: "establish local outposts; forge relationships with local leaders, which by the way is proceeding in Anbar province; build intelligence networks; engage in economic reconstruction activities; oversee other employment-generating projects; and wean the populace off their reliance on militias for safety." All this the Americans would do "in cooperation with the Iraqi forces until such time as the Iraqis can do it on their own."

In his speech, McCain predicted what the surge would achieve. First, it would cause "more casualties and extra hardships for our brave fighting men and women." But then it would bring violence under control. This would "pave the way for a political settlement." McCain went on, "Once the government wields greater authority, however, Iraqi leaders must take significant steps on their own. These include a commitment to go after the militias, a reconciliation process for insurgents and Baathists, a more equitable distribution of government resources, provincial elections that will bring Sunnis into the government, and a large

increase in employment-generating economic projects."

McCain acknowledged "many, many mistakes since 2003" and the difficulty of reversing them. Still, the consequences of defeat would be "catastrophic." His bottom line: "By surging troops and bringing security to Baghdad and other areas, we will give the Iraqis and their partners the best possible chances to succeed."

Barack Obama's approach differed from McCain's in its basis as well as its goals and methods. Not having traveled to Iraq since January 2006—before the Samarra Mosque bombing, the explosion of sectarian violence, and the two failed U.S. attempts to quell that violence—Obama relied on others' testimony in assessing the situation on the ground. His bill quoted a skeptical Colin Powell and an even more skeptical CENTCOM commander, General John Abizaid. Abizaid said he had discussed the usefulness of a surge of U.S. troops with "every divisional commander, General Casey, the corps commander, General Dempsey," and all had agreed that a surge of troops would not "add considerably to our ability to achieve success in Iraq." Worse, it would "prevent the Iraqis from doing more, from taking more responsibility for their own future."

Given this analysis, Obama's legislation forbade the surge and ordered most U.S. troops out of Iraq by the spring of 2008. It said,

> The redeployment of the Armed Forces under this section shall be substantial, shall occur in a gradual manner, and shall be executed at a pace to achieve the goal of the complete redeployment of all United States combat brigades from Iraq by March 31, 2008, consistent with the expectation of the Iraq Study Group, if all the matters set forth in subsection (b)(1)(B) are not met by such date, subject to the exceptions for retention of forces for force protection, counter-terrorism operations, training of Iraqi forces, and other purposes as contemplated by subsection (g).

In the media, Obama repeatedly predicted that the surge would fail. The day the president announced the new policy, Obama told Larry King he "did not see anything" in the president's surge that would "make a significant dent in the sectarian violence." The same day, he said on MSNBC,

> I am not persuaded that 20,000 additional troops in Iraq is going to solve the sectarian violence there. In fact, I think it will do the reverse. I think it takes pressure off the Iraqis to arrive at the sort of political accommodation that every observer believes is the ultimate solution to the problems we face there. So I am going to actively oppose the president's proposal.... I think he is wrong, and I think the American people believe he's wrong.

Four days later, Obama told *Face the Nation*, "We cannot impose a military solution on what has effectively become a civil war. And until we acknowledge that reality—we can send 15,000 more troops, 20,000 more troops, 30,000 more troops, I don't know any expert on the region or any military officer that I've spoken to privately that believes that that is going to make a substantial difference on the situation on the ground."

So what happened? President Bush ordered the surge. He committed an additional five Army brigades and two Marine battalions to Iraq with the mission of protecting the Iraqi population. In accomplishing this, U.S. forces partnered with Iraqi troops precisely as McCain had suggested, helping them "hold" areas that they had jointly "cleared." Meanwhile, American troops established bonds with local leaders, as McCain had said they would, which led to the expansion of the "Anbar Awakening" movement throughout central Iraq. And U.S. troops developed numerous economic and infrastructure projects that provided jobs.

Sectarian violence stopped almost completely. Al Qaeda in Iraq was dealt what CIA director Michael Hayden now assesses as "a near strategic defeat." This allowed Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to commit Iraqi Security Forces directly against the last remaining illegal militias in Iraq, clearing them out of Basra and Sadr City—weaning "the populace off their reliance on militias for safety," as McCain had put it. American casualties initially rose, as McCain had warned they would, but then fell dramatically: Last month was the lowest-casualty month of the entire war.

Once violence was under control, the Iraqis began to make serious political progress, as McCain had predicted. They passed almost all of the "benchmark" legislation that Obama's bill would have required.

What would have happened if Obama's bill had passed? There is no way to know for sure, but it seems likely that, facing less resistance, Al Qaeda in Iraq would have continued to gain strength, the fragile Iraqi Security Forces would have collapsed, as would the fragile Iraqi government, militias would have flourished—and the United States would have departed under fire, accepting a humiliating defeat in the war against al Qaeda that would have reverberated globally.

For any voter trying to choose between the two candidates for commander in chief, there is no better test than this: When American strategy in a critical theater was up for grabs, John McCain proposed a highly unpopular and risky path, which he accurately predicted could lead to success. Barack Obama proposed a popular and politically safe route that would have led to an unnecessary and debilitating American defeat at the hands of al Qaeda.

The two men brought different backgrounds to the test, of course. In January 2007, McCain had been a senator for 10 years and had served in the military for 23 years. Obama had been a senator for 2 years and before that was a state legislator, lawyer, and community organizer. But neither presidential candidates nor the commander in chief gets to choose the tests that history brings. Once in office, the one elected must perform.

—Frederick W. Kagan, for the Editors

The Iran Challenge

The Iranian regime supports violent extremists and challenges us across the region. It pursues a nuclear capability that could spark a dangerous arms race, and raise the prospect of a transfer of nuclear know-how to terrorists. Its president denies the Holocaust and threatens to wipe Israel off the map. The danger from Iran is grave, it is real, and my goal will be to eliminate this threat.

—Barack Obama, June 4, 2008

So begins the great transformation, whereby a dovish primary candidate mutates into a (moderately) hawkish nominee.

It's a tall order in Obama's case. He must prove that a 46-year-old senator, a talented Chicago pol with a thin résumé and without national security or executive experience, is a plausible commander in chief. He must downplay the kumbaya rhetoric and irresponsible national security votes, and talk tough while inventing shifty rationalizations for prior weakness.

Exhibit A: Obama's June 4 address, quoted above, to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Read it alongside John McCain's speech to AIPAC, and you'll be struck by the similarities. Both candidates pledged to prevent a second Holocaust. Both said Iran is a major strategic threat. And both promised to deal with this threat through U.N. and non-U.N. sanctions, divestment, and—if necessary—force. But don't be fooled. There are major differences.

McCain told AIPAC, correctly, that for decades negotiations with Iran have failed to win concessions from the regime. This failure has been bipartisan and transatlantic. President Clinton pledged major inducements for Iran to liberalize. He got nothing. President Bush has offered more bounty to Iran in exchange for a suspension of uranium enrichment. Still nothing. The Europeans have been talking to the Iranians for years. They have zilch to show for it. McCain wants to increase pressure until the Iranians understand that their interest lies in reaching a diplomatic solution.

Obama, though, wants his approach to begin with "aggressive, principled diplomacy without self-defeating preconditions."

> We will open up lines of communication, build an agenda, coordinate closely with our allies, and evaluate the potential for progress.

Sounds nice. Obama, moreover, is

> willing to lead tough and principled diplomacy with the appropriate Iranian leader at a time and place of my choosing, if—and only if—it can advance the interests of the United States.

That's a pretty big "if," coming from the guy who has said he would meet without preconditions in the first year of his administration with the leaders of Iran, Syria, Venezuela, Cuba, and North Korea.

If his non-precondition-conditions are met, what will Obama say to the "appropriate Iranian leader"? This:

> If you abandon your dangerous nuclear program, support for terror, and threats to Israel, there will be meaningful incentives—including the lifting of sanctions, and political and economic integration with the international community.

Thus Obama would make an offer that the Iranians have repeatedly rejected, except he would do it in person—at a historic summit, a propaganda coup for the mullahs. Only after they refused the offer—again—would Obama "ratchet up the pressure." We would be back where we started, except the Iranian regime would have denied the leader of the Great Satan's demands in person. This would not only be embarrassing. It would mean more leverage for Tehran.

Obama's "responsible, phased redeployment of our troops from Iraq" would also redound to Iran's strategic benefit. The policy would erase the security and political gains the United States and its Iraqi allies have made in the last year and a half. It would lead to more violence, not less, and to a weaker Iraqi government, not a stronger one. It would breathe new life into the radicals—many sponsored by the Iranian regime—who seek a failed state in Iraq. And Tehran would quickly move to fill any power vacuum that the Americans left behind in Iraq.

Why on earth, then, would the supreme leader of Iran, seeing the U.S. president knocking on his door—a supplicant—and U.S. troops retreating from Iraq, be moved to negotiate with the United States? By what strategic calculus would he determine that that would be the time to give up his chips?

Ah, but we have entered the Obama zone, where conditions are not conditions, where Ahmadinejad is and is not really the leader of Iran, where the Iranian Revolutionary Guards isn't a terrorist group one year but is the next, where Iran is simultaneously a "tiny" and a "grave" threat, and where the absence of American combat troops in Iraq actually increases U.S. influence in the Middle East.

Here, doves are reborn as hawks, and liberals are turned into "pragmatists." And somehow the security of America and her allies will be enhanced by inadvertently promoting the interests of her enemies.

—Matthew Continetti, for the Editors

Obama supporter, Nissan Pavilion, June 5

Their Intended

Obama and his fans.

BY JOHN MCCORMACK

Bristow, Va.

Barack Obama's rally at Nissan Pavilion on June 5 has all the makings of a rock concert. Outside the venue, merchants at tables near the gravel parking lot are hawking Obama kitsch—T-shirts, pins, caps. I can't resist buying a pack of "Hope For The Future" Obama playing cards from Kelly, a native San Franciscan with blonde dreadlocks, a pierced lip, and numerous tattoos including a pentagram at the top of her sternum. She says she's been following the Obama campaign for the last ten weeks on the road, selling her wares and clocking 25,000 miles on her odometer.

Inside the gates, vendors are busy working concession stands, and I'm not the only one disappointed on this 85 degree day that the 24 oz. cans of beer normally on sale here have been prohibited. It's a little after 4:30 p.m, about 90 minutes prior to Obama's scheduled arrival, and a southern rock band, Jody Lee Petty, is on stage finishing its act. When one of the band members shouts out between songs, "Let's give it up for change in America!" the crowd, now filling about two-thirds of the pavilion's 10,000 seats, applauds wildly.

But the band's uninspired renditions of Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama" and Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues" leave the crowd cold. Not that there seem to be many southern rock junkies among the attendees, who are mostly in their 20s to 40s, roughly half African American, half white, and predominantly middle class—judging by their attire and the cars in the parking lot, where there are plenty of Fords and Chevys, but not a Prius to be seen. The Obama campaign has tried in vain to appeal to white working-class voters. They're not here.

The 10,000 people who do show up, however, are bubbling with eagerness to see Obama in person. Why have so many people, many of whom had to take off work, come to see Obama?

The first person I ask is a 51-year-old Obama volunteer, Fred Van Doren of Woodbridge, Va. He says he has never voted before, but was inspired by Obama's "spiritual values and integrity." So, earlier in the day, he shut down his jewelry store in order to serve as an usher at the rally. Van Doren's support predates the Iowa caucuses, when he began "intending" Obama's victory with others on an online forum. "Intending," he says, is the spiritual practice of deliberately intending for something to happen. Van Doren is adamant that "intending," based on the bestselling book *The Secret*, is a "spiritual, not religious" practice. "We didn't pray or do any weird Kool-Aid drinking stuff like that."

Van Doren seems to have a lot in common with the average fan at this rally. Ask one why he or she is here, and the answer isn't Obama's pledge to end the war or fix the economy. These fans have come because of Obama himself. Denise (her middle name) "just happened to feel sick" about noon so she could leave her job at an IT consulting firm and see Obama, whose most appealing characteristic is the "inner strength that he exudes." Irene, a 55-year-old who works for the military, tells me that she's "sick and tired of being sick and tired" and finds Obama's "humble spirit" and "charisma" invig-

OLIVIER DOULIERY / ABACAUSA

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orating. "If God is for you, who can be against you?"

There is a commensurate disdain for Hillary Clinton. "I would have punched you in the nose if you told me you were with *Politico*," Van Doren says jokingly (I think), before informing me that the Washington, D.C., newspaper has a pro-Hillary bias. "I don't trust her," he says, uttering verbatim the response I also get from three others when I ask if they would like to see Clinton as Obama's running mate. Rendee Turano, a single mother from Falls Church, took her daughter out of school to attend the rally. Hillary Clinton "made me embarrassed how she ran as a woman," Turano says, adding that she was disgusted by the "race-baiting she's done and her husband's done."

They all expect to put that nightmare behind them quickly. Now, before we know it, Obama is taking the stage with Virginia governor Tim Kaine and Senator Jim Webb.

Senators Webb and Obama seem like a natural fit on stage together, heightening speculation that Obama will choose Webb as his running mate in order to shore up his weakness on national security and with white working class voters. Webb, who saw combat in Vietnam as a Marine, vouches for Obama's courage, saying that during the primary the senator from Illinois "stood up to sometimes withering attacks with measured responses" and displayed the "confidence and steadiness we want to see in our commander in chief."

When Obama rises to speak, he returns Webb's effusive praise, saying: "If you're in a fight—and we're going to be in a fight—you want Jim Webb to have your back."

Obama's speech hits all of the usual notes: He will work to end global warming, fix the economy, lower gas prices, improve education, and end the war in Iraq. With Webb beside him, Obama appears at ease saying the American people "don't want all this for free. They want to be called to serve. They want to serve in the military as Jim Webb and his son have served in the military. They want to serve in the Peace Corps."

"We're involved in two wars," Obama says, "one war that we must win against those who killed in cold blood 3,000 Americans—al Qaeda in Afghanistan, the northwest provinces of Pakistan. That is a war that we must win, and we must incapacitate those who would do America harm. But we're also involved in a war that I believe should have never been fought and should have never been authorized, should have never been waged in Iraq, and that war has to come to an end."

The crowd goes just as nuts for obliterating al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan as it does for withdrawing from Iraq.

Of course, the crowd goes nuts for pretty much anything Obama says.

At one point, Obama says: "This election is not about me, it's not about Hillary Clinton, it's not about John McCain, it's not about any of the candidates. It's about you."

Don't tell that to his fans, however. One, finding Obama much too humble, yells: "You're our solution, Obama!" ♦

Left to right: U.S. Air Force Second Lieutenants Roberto A. Guerra and Michael J. Arth, U.S. Navy Ensign John D. Reed, and U.S. Army Second Lieutenants J. Danielle Williams and Jason M. Scherer

The Few, the Proud

Harvard ROTC's five new officers.

BY DEAN BARNETT

Cambridge, Mass.

A sense of history suffuses formal events at Harvard, probably inevitable when an institution is 372 years old. Such was the case at a commissioning ceremony this past Wednesday where five Harvard students who had completed the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program and who would receive their degrees the next day were sworn in as officers in the U.S. military.

Five students may not sound like much, and for a university of Harvard's size it isn't. Harvard's graduating class this year will number somewhere around 1,600. The smallness of the ROTC cohort makes the students literally exceptional. As several of the speakers and attendees at the commissioning ceremony noted, these five determined their path not only after 9/11 but after the Iraq war began. While other high school students won admission to Harvard and began dreaming about the big bucks they might make on Wall Street, the kids who chose ROTC charted a different course.

The commissioning took place on Class Day, the day before Harvard's elaborate commencement ceremonies. A crowd of over a hundred well-wishers packed the Tercentenary theater; family members' pride was evident as they buzzed about with cameras. The number of fellow graduates who showed up to offer support and their congratulations in spite of an unseasonably cold rain was impressive.

Also present in impressive numbers were members of Harvard's Class of 1958. (The 50th reunion class plays a prominent role in Harvard's commencement week each year.) There's little wonder that they were drawn to the scene. The featured speaker, Lt. General Tad Oelstrom (USAF, Ret.), noted that in 1958, 150 members of Harvard's graduating class participated in the ROTC program and joined the armed forces upon graduation. One member of the class of '58 happily recalled his years in the Army, telling stories about the time he got to train a young soldier named Neil Rudenstine at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Rudenstine would go on to become president of Harvard in 1991, but by that time the ROTC program had long since become *persona non grata* on campus. In 1969, with the Vietnam war raging, the arts and sciences faculty banished ROTC in order to register its "disapproval of the military." This was the era in which George Wallace ran for president denouncing "pointy-headed professors who can't park their bicycles straight"—all of which might sound like ancient history except that Harvard's anti-ROTC edict remains in force, 39 years later. The Harvard students who sign up for ROTC are folded into MIT's nearby program and must train off-campus.

If this sounds like a shabby way for a university to treat students who want to serve their country, one can perhaps take consolation in the fact that the university is less hostile to ROTC than in the recent past. After 9/11, Larry Summers, then president, began agitating for Harvard to fully accept an ROTC program as a matter of simple patriotism. While Harvard still refuses to host an ROTC program, the ROTC cohort's presence is often felt and appreciated. Lt. Col. Leo McGonagle heads the MIT/Harvard ROTC program (which includes five other local colleges). He noted at the commissioning ceremony that Harvard now often allows a color guard at sporting events and that an official ROTC presence was welcomed when Drew Gilpin Faust ascended to Harvard's presidency in 2007.

Faust triggered a bit of controversy herself when she accepted an invitation to attend this year's commissioning ceremony and say a few words. The *casus belli* was the "Don't Ask/Don't

JUSTIN IDE / HARVARD UNIVERSITY NEWS OFFICE

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Tell" policy on gays in the military, implemented by the Clinton administration. After hearing of Faust's plans to attend the commissioning ceremony, the *Crimson*, the student paper, angrily editorialized that "Don't Ask/Don't Tell" is "so inconsistent with our institution's humanitarian principles ... that many members of the Harvard community correctly cite the discriminatory policy as the most compelling reason to continue prohibiting ROTC on Harvard's campus."

In response to this criticism, Faust promised to express her disapproval of "Don't Ask/Don't Tell" at the commissioning ceremony. This pledge in turn irked various allies of the ROTC program, unhappy that the university president would use the occasion to disparage the institution the grads were pledging to serve.

Faust's speech did engage "Don't Ask/Don't Tell," but in an artful manner. Never mentioning the policy by name, she lamented that there weren't more Harvard graduates being commissioned that day and then delicately pivoted, commenting, "I believe that every Harvard student should have the opportunity to serve in the military, as you do, and as those honored in the past have done."

Her comments were subtler and more respectful than many had expected. But taking her words at face value, one wonders whether she truly anticipates that the removal of the "Don't Ask/Don't Tell" policy would trigger greater participation. Given the percentage of heterosexual students who join ROTC, one would mathematically project the number of homosexual participants to be zero unless Harvard's gay population has a greater eagerness for ROTC participation than the straight population.

The reason so few members of the Harvard community opt for ROTC is that military service has been *declassé* in Ivy League circles for more than a generation. While Harvard's ROTC contingent has the almost unanimous respect of their classmates, a career in the military or even a period of military service isn't something most Ivy League students even consider.

Perhaps leadership would make a difference. While it was nice that Faust attended the commissioning ceremony, she has declined to champion ROTC. Should she decide to, she could point to Harvard's noble military tradition, much of which was recounted at the ceremony. The first Harvard man to sign up for battle fought in King Philip's War in 1675. George Washington not only slept in Harvard Yard, but much of his Continental Army was barracked there in the early days of the American Revolution. Nine Harvard alumni have earned the Medal of Honor.

The handful of men and women who sign up for Harvard's ROTC program represent the best of their generation. Their country will honor them proudly and unequivocally, even if their university won't. ♦

Fuelish Democrats

How high gas prices might work for Republicans.

BY FRED BARNES

Republicans finally have a winning argument on a big issue, and they'd better make the most of it. It starts with high gasoline prices—the single most infuriating issue to voters these days—but doesn't end there.

Democrats are not being blamed for causing the price of gasoline to reach $4 a gallon, at least by the public and at least for now. Where Democrats have stumbled embarrassingly is in their campaign to persuade the public that the American oil industry is the chief culprit. A Gallup national poll in May found only 20 percent blame the oil companies for gouging, down from 34 percent a year ago.

Where Republicans have succeeded is in selling their solution to soaring gas prices: drilling for oil offshore and on federal lands, areas now off limits. In the Gallup survey, support for drilling in precisely these areas jumped from 41 percent in 2007 to 57 percent in May.

So Republicans have an issue to exploit. And it's one on which Democrats are especially vulnerable because they promised in the 2006 campaign to offer a "common sense" plan to curb gas prices. They have yet to produce one, and the price per gallon of gas has risen by more than $1.60 since Democrats took control of Congress in January 2007.

Democrats have also insisted—unwisely, it turns out—on pushing to enact a global warming bill that would further boost the price of gas and rake in trillions of dollars in new revenue. This might have made sense a few years ago, but not in the days of public anger over $4 a gallon gasoline.

As a result, an amazing role reversal occurred on Capitol Hill last week. Republicans, once fearful of the climate change issue, suddenly demanded more debate in Congress on global warming legislation. Democrats, who had earlier promoted the legislation as a top priority, turned squeamish and quickly dropped the issue before it could do serious political harm.

Both House speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate majority leader Harry Reid have cast global warming as the greatest threat facing America today. In fact, Pelosi was so concerned about this grave threat that, shortly after taking charge of the House, she vowed to bring a global warming bill to the floor by July 4, 2007. Now, though a bill is ready, she's unlikely to schedule it for debate and a vote in 2008.

Spotting an opening, House Republican leader John Boehner has made Pelosi his chief target on gas prices. He needles her relentlessly. Week after week since last winter, he's dwelled on what he calls the "Pelosi premium." This is the portion of the price increase which he attributes to her inaction.

Last week, he asked her to bring the global warming bill up for full House consideration, knowing full well Pelosi has no intention of doing so. He wants the measure to get "the time and attention it deserves during these truly unprecedented times for families and small businesses," Boehner said sarcastically.

Meanwhile, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell jumped on the gasoline issue. "Why on earth are we considering a bill that would raise gas prices even higher than they already are?" he said. Reid's response was to halt consideration of the bill. Earlier, Democrats had blocked a vote on a McConnell amendment to sus-

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pend global warming legislation, once enacted, should it begin to drive up gasoline prices.

It wasn't only Democrats who were on the defensive. So was the environmental lobby, which had eagerly anticipated a debate on global warming and possible passage of legislation this year. Instead, environmentalists took a rare beating in Washington and, for the moment anyway, emerged as a liability to Democrats. Their opposition to any effort to slash gas prices make environmentalists an unattractive ally.

On top of that, the key element of the bill, the so-called cap and trade, took a political and intellectual thrashing. Long touted by environmentalists, cap and trade would sharply limit carbon emissions and allow companies to swap allowances on emissions, letting those with heavy levels of emissions acquire them from companies with low levels. Republicans drew attention to the downside of cap and trade, including slower economic growth, industries moving overseas to countries without curbs on carbon omissions, and a "hidden tax" in the form of revenues collected by Washington.

On gas prices, Republicans have been the beneficiary of a political windfall. The question is whether they can make the most of it. The answer: Maybe, but it's not a slam dunk.

It's sensible for House Republicans to continue holding press conferences at gas stations. But, John McCain is a problem. He opposes drilling for oil in the Alaska National Wildlife Reserve (ANWR), though he has come around on increased domestic production in other areas (except off the coast of Florida). Flipping on ANWR may be too much for McCain, though doing so would be consistent with his national security argument against spending billions for Middle East oil.

There's a broader issue than gas prices and oil production. What's the public's main complaint, identified in poll after poll, about the Democratic Congress? Inaction. Congress has done nothing that matters. Energy is but one of the huge issues facing the country on which Democrats have failed to act. There's also immigration, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and health care, to name a few.

This is indeed a do-nothing Congress. The stance by Republicans on gas prices gives them the credibility to make that point. But they must enlarge it by taking on every big issue they can: Offer solutions and dare Democrats to act. McCain can help by embracing a sweeping reform agenda. What have he and Republicans got to lose? ♦

Aftershocks

A new China could be glimpsed after the earthquake.

BY ROSS TERRILL

Chongqing

In a Beijing publisher's board room on the afternoon of May 12, an editor interrupted our meeting to announce a text message from a friend in Chongqing, southwest China's largest city, saying an earthquake measuring 7.9 had just rocked the area. Eyes darted this way and that, then we resumed our negotiations. Would I write a new preface for a fancy boxed edition of my biography of Mao with gold calligraphy and a gold price tag of $100? And so on.

Next morning, the horrible truth about the Sichuan earthquake began to sink in. The following two weeks were fraught. Massive death induced Chinese TV for the first time ever to report a national event live for days on end. A child's hand, severed, still clutching a pen. A youth, wedged between concrete slabs, only his head poking out, being fed through a tube. Body parts swept into waiting bags.

The Chinese nation was focused as I had previously seen it only during Tiananmen Square, which I spent in Beijing. As at Tiananmen in 1989, a rare collective emotion gripped a country where money-making, family life, and other private pursuits usually dominate. But, unlike during Tiananmen, rulers and people seemed joined in a spirit of unity.

At Tiananmen the mood was idealistic as students asked for "dialogue" with the government, then became angry when soldiers crushed the democracy movement. The Sichuan earthquake brought an eerie but powerful collective grief. Government propaganda contributed an urgent refrain: "The Communist Party is Caring for You." Premier Wen Jiabao flew to isolated Sichuan towns to tell bleeding children, "Grandpa has arrived." This self-interested condescension impressed some but not all. Still, since the government did a reasonable job of reporting, rescue, and reassurance—far better than during previous tragedies—the refrain helped shape the national mood.

At 2:28 p.m on May 19, just a week after the earthquake, my vehicle leaving Chongqing for the Buddhist haven of Dazu, less than 100 miles from the quake's epicenter, came to a halt. Cars around us stopped one by one. Some honked as if to remind others of the nationwide three minutes of silence. Men and women, dressed lightly in the heat, stood by their vehicles, some clasping their hands at their waists or behind their backs. A few infants' cries broke the calm. No blaring signal announced the event. None ended it. Raggedly, quietly, people climbed back into their cars. The rush and roar of traffic resumed.

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What was new was mutuality between people and government in a public observance. For a week since the terrible news came on May 12 there had been repressed feelings. I expressed sympathy to Chinese colleagues I dealt with; I felt better for that, but I doubt they did. Something was missing. A public acknowledgment of loss had occurred for most living Chinese only when Mao died in 1976, as the government put on a solemn, imperial-style funeral. Tears were compulsory. With the Sichuan quake, sadness was felt across the nation, but the people, used to taking orders and hiding their thoughts and feelings, had no public outlet.

A column in *China Daily* put it well:

> Since childhood, we have been through numerous rituals and ceremonies where we did what we were told to do. This was one exception. The great majority of people participated in something because they truly wanted to. All the government did was designate the time.

The three awkward minutes at Chongqing and all over China were unspectacular but deeply moving. No one was compelled to participate. People in their millions did so in individual ways, putting one foot in front of the other, looking down, raising a bare hand to wipe their eyes. After we resumed our trip to Dazu, my driver said nothing for an hour.

During Tiananmen, there was an outpouring of emotion from the grassroots. The government, calculating, hid behind walls and said little. Tanks rolling into Tiananmen Square and thousands of troops shooting at crowds on the night of June 3-4 were the first signal in weeks from Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues. The Sichuan quake was different. People and government were joined in an unrehearsed agony. In Chinese folklore, the seventh day after a death is the time of the first big remembrance. It has no significance in Chinese Communist party history or the international Communist movement.

Whether the effect of this moment will endure is far from certain. Within ten days the party-state was boasting in semi-Maoist style of its military rescue efforts; last week it hampered media in the quake zone. In the United States, the political unity that followed 9/11 lasted only months. Furthermore, the postmortem on a frightful natural disaster is usually fractious. The PRC in its complexity was exposed in the weeks after May 12, but probably not changed.

And yet. A twist in China's future was foreshadowed in the response to the Sichuan earthquake. During Tiananmen, urban citizens shocked the government by sympathizing with the pro-democracy students. Students and citizens met their match in the government's bullets and tanks. State beat back society. Nineteen years later, after the earthquake, untold millions of Chinese stepped in of their own volition in bold and generous solidarity with the victims. Chinese TV became vaguely normal for a crucial moment.

Day and night we watched the search for survivors, trapped and mangled in the rubble. It is not that society beat back the state, simply that society proved a powerful force independent of the state. A fine *New York Times* article quoted a Shanghai TV executive explaining why his station could not follow the order from the Propaganda Department in Beijing not to send reporters to the quake area. "This is about China," he blurted out to Howard French. The tragedy simply had to be shared with fellow Chinese.

A former student of mine from China, now a businessman in Shenzhen in the south, had recently opened a branch office of his successful IT import business in Mianyang, a city hit by the quake. By a miracle, none of his 24 Mianyang employees was killed, though the office was wrecked.

"We flew them all to Shenzhen," the businessman told me. "My workers in Shenzhen raised $21,000 for quake victims. For the company, I added $15,000." Some of his staff wanted to channel the money through the Chinese Red Cross, which is virtually a finger on the hand of the party-state. My former student said no. "We want to stand on our own feet. I don't want to just depend on the government. If the folk from Mianyang need more, we'll go back and raise it."

The Sichuan earthquake not only energized him, but led to a step that, after our two decades of friendship, came as a surprise. Never before one to talk about religion, he told me he organized a private Christian service, over dinner, with eight relatives and staff members at a restaurant in Shenzhen. "We sang hymns, took turns reading from the Scriptures, and prayed for the lost people. No beer or wine on this occasion. We felt better afterwards."

"It's been 30 years of chasing after money in China," he said, striking another new note. "And people haven't paid enough attention to spiritual life. Now we Chinese have money; we must also have care and trust in each other. Because China has improved, there's a real private realm where action may be taken—we took it."

This businessman in his 40s, briefly a civil servant in Beijing before coming to Harvard, links his self-reliance to a wariness of the Beijing government, frustration at its lack of transparency, and disgust at its corruption. "If the Sichuan earthquake happened in Japan or USA, there would have been many more survivors," he said with agitation. "Our rescue rate of less than 1 in 10 was very low."

In China some matters are strictly for the government. Politics is for the Communist party-state. Ordinary folk may pursue private goals. Beijing trusts the people with their money, but not with their minds. But the Sichuan earthquake, throwing everyone naked into the air, momentarily bridged the divide.

The government lost buildings and wealth. The people lost 70,000 of their own. Yet in its shocking arbitrariness, the earthquake imposed a common loss, and China, for a while, seemed one family. In the midst of grief, the balance between state and society may have tipped a few degrees further toward society. ♦

Mr. Obama's Neighborhood

The Democratic candidate has made his home in Chicago's Hyde Park, a place that's not like any other in America.

By Andrew Ferguson

Hyde Park, Chicago

When Barack Obama was briefly embarrassed earlier this year by his association with the onetime bomb-builder and wannabe bomb-exploder William Ayers, he blamed his neighborhood, sort of. "He's a guy who lives in my neighborhood," Obama said with a shrug, as if to say, "Don't we all have to put up with these cranky old domestic terrorists wandering through the yard?" But of course not every neighborhood has a former Weatherman and his wife, former Weathermoll Bernardine Dohrn, living in it, especially not as twin pillars of the community. Obama's casual dismissal led people all across America, people who live in all kinds of communities without bombers, to look at each other and say: "Wow, what kind of neighborhood does Barack live in?"

It's not a trifling question. Like a gabby relative or a crooked business associate, a membership in a restrictive golf club or a long-forgotten bisexual fling, a neighborhood can be a problem for a candidate. Voters often feel that incidentals like these reveal something essential about a potential president. Just as important, political consultants often go to great lengths to make voters feel that way. Recall poor Michael Dukakis, the hapless Democratic presidential nominee in 1988. He lived in the Boston suburb of Brookline—a "progressive" village where the townsfolk congratulate themselves for riding mass transit, eating fibrous bread, holding Winter Festivals in place of Christmas parties, joining committees, attending meetings that last many hours and result in the appointment of more committees, growing organic Chinese vegetables in sideyards, and hanging potted plants in macramé hammocks on the front porch. Brookline was an eddy of American life, a pocket of preciosity set apart from the world that most Americans struggle through, and Republican operatives made it a symbol of Dukakis's disconnection from the common man. Maybe this was a low blow, but the Republicans had a point. Anyone who knew Brookline would not have been surprised to learn that Dukakis, as one of its favorite sons, liked to take books about Swedish land-use planning with him to the beach, thus disqualifying himself from the presidency.

As Republicans felt about Brookline, so Obama supporters feel about Obama's neighborhood: It's a measure of the man. "What better way to define what you're all about than where you choose to live and bring up your family?" said Obama's friend, neighbor, and campaign adviser John Rogers in *USA Today*. Obama's neighborhood, Hyde Park, is on the South Side of Chicago, about seven miles from the Loop. Not counting time spent in college and law school, plus part of a year working for a consulting firm in Manhattan, Hyde Park is the only place Barack Obama has lived as an adult. He first moved there in 1984, when he came to Chicago as a community organizer, and he returned after graduating from Harvard Law School. Here he courted his future wife, who grew up in the nearby neighborhood of South Shore, and here his children were born and now attend (private) school. Here, too, is the mansion he bought in 2005, with the proceeds from his two bestselling books in which he speaks fondly of the life he has built here.

The affection is mutual. The *Hyde Park Herald* printed a gala issue when Obama announced his candidacy, in February 2007. "Despite national fame, Barack Obama remains a Hyde Parker to the core," read the banner headline. Inside were display ads from local businesses, full of good wishes and exclamation points: "Good luck, neighbor!"; "Wish Hyde Park's very own Barack Obama and family all the best!"; "Congratulations to Barack, our hometown hero!" There were pages of testimonials from neighbors, shopkeepers, political activists, and his barber, too. All agreed he's "down to earth." One local mother recalled standing next to him at a Halloween parade. "He greeted me with a friendly 'hello,'" she testified. A waitress at his favorite restaurant:

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The neighborhood is famous for its racial harmony. The comedian (and later movie director) Mike Nichols, who got his start in a club on the old 55th Street, defined Hyde Park liberalism for all time: "Black and white, marching arm in arm, shoulder to shoulder against the poor."

"No matter what might be on his mind, he always asks how I'm doing." "He was always one of my quietest customers," said the owner of the local video store. "But when he did have something to say it was always soothing and stimulating at the same time. When he walked away he would leave that thought in your mind. It made you wonder." America has been having the same reaction, but Hyde Parkers experienced it first.

If you think this sounds improbably quaint and Norman Rockwellish, like Anytown, USA, Hyde Parkers think so too. They often refer to their neighborhood as a "small town." Hyde Park isn't a town but, with a population of roughly 35,000, depending on who's counting and how, it is pretty small: 15 city blocks from north to south, another 15 or so from Washington Park on the west to its eastern boundary at the shore of Lake Michigan. Its sense of urban intimacy is reinforced by its isolation. It is the most racially integrated neighborhood in the nation's most racially segregated city. On three sides it is closed in by some of the most hellish slums in the country, miles of littered streets, acres of abandoned lots, block after block of shuttered storefronts and empty apartment buildings left over from the 19th century. These terminate abruptly at the edge of Hyde Park and give way to shade trees and lawns and stately brick mansions and huge, tidied-up apartment houses. Surrounded, Hyde Park is different from any neighborhood in Chicago—different from anywhere in America, for that matter.

Some people call it a college town, since its largest inhabitant, the institution that defines the neighborhood's character, is the University of Chicago, one of the world's most prestigious universities. A friend once described Hyde Park as "Berkeley with snow," and it does indeed have the same graduate-student flavor, the same political activism and boho intellectualism, the same alarmingly high number of men wandering about looking like NPR announcers—the wispy beards and wire rims, the pressed jeans and unscuffed sneakers, the backpacks and the bikes. (This is a pretty good description of William Ayers, by the way.) But the similarities can be overdone. "Not 'Berkeley with snow,' " a U. of C. professor said, when I mentioned my friend's comment to him. "It's the snow that keeps us from being Berkeley. The snow and the cold keep the street people away. It drives everyone inside. You don't have all the students who dropped out of school or graduated and refused to leave. If they stay, they do something. If not, they get out of town. It's too cold just to hang around."

This contributes to the neighborhood's relatively low crime rate and, in part, to the university's reputation as a home for squares and nerds, a buttoned-down "bastion of conservatism," in the phrase of one magazine writer. And the conservatism, by popular account, infects the neighborhood at large, tempers its politics, and adds to its diversity. But the reputation for right-wingery is based on a simple if imprecise bit of data that shocks the delicate sensibilities of college professors: Of the tens of thousands of faculty who have taught at the University of Chicago over the past half-century, perhaps as many as 65 have, at some point in their lives, voted for a Republican. Many of these insurgents were either disciples of the university's most famous faculty member, the free-market economist Milton Friedman, or were drawn to the school because of him; others came under the influence of Allan Bloom, the Straussian philosopher, who ran the university's Olin Center for Inquiry into the Theory and Practice of Democracy, along with a few classically minded scholars. Bloom is dead. So is Friedman. The Olin Center closed its doors in 2005. Their disciples and colleagues who remain at the university aren't getting any younger. It's unlikely that the school's wobbly reputation for conservatism, and the neighborhood's, will survive them.

The reputation for diversity, though, probably will survive. It's not often noted that the neighborhood's diversity has its limits. "In Hyde Park," a resident told me, "'integration' means white people and black people." The nation's fastest growing ethnic group, Hispanics, is scarcely represented at all; same for Asians. The neighborhood is better known as a haven for the black upper class, especially those who don't want to move to an all-white suburb but also don't want the crime risks and miserable schools associated with the neighborhoods to the immediate south, west, and north. Some of these people are famous—Harold Washington, Chicago's first black mayor, lived in an apartment by the lake, and Muhammad Ali lived down the block from Louis Farrakhan, who lives in Elijah Muhammad's old digs,

around the corner from the house of Joe Louis's widow. Most are lawyers and business executives from the Loop, doctors and technicians from the university hospital center, administrators and professors from the university—united to the white upper class through shared politics and aspirations, and delighting in, congratulating one another on, their unique neighborhood.

Hyde Park has always been relatively affluent, but the neighborhood's character was changed forever beginning in the mid-1950s, when university officials orchestrated an ambitious scheme of urban renewal, paid for by the city and federal governments. The project was the first of its kind in Chicago, and one of the first in the country, and it served for a generation as a model for other cities, for better or worse—usually worse. But in Hyde Park urban renewal worked like a Swiss watch.

"You have to understand the mindset," a neighborhood preservationist, Jack Spicer, told me. "In the middle of the 1950s, the university thought they were in the middle of an emergency. Alarms were going off everywhere." All around Hyde Park, white flight was transforming Chicago, goosed by racial panic and the sleazy importunities of "blockbusters"—real estate speculators who bought the houses of fleeing whites at fire-sale prices, then flipped them at a high profit to incoming blacks. "The university figured Hyde Park was next," Spicer said. The school was having trouble attracting students and faculty. Administrators considered moving the campus to Arizona or New Mexico—anywhere pleasant—but balked at the expense. At last they decided that if they couldn't move to a nice neighborhood, they would make their neighborhood nice.

The aim of urban renewal in Hyde Park, according to the university's president, was "to buy, control, and rebuild our neighborhood" until it was a "community of similar tastes and interests." The program lasted a decade. By the end of it the neighborhood had been reconfigured physically and redefined socially. Vast stretches of the old Hyde Park were bulldozed, including the main shopping and entertainment (that is, honky-tonk) district along 55th Street. Planners clear-cut an entire subneighborhood of wooden bungalows that housed workers from the nearby slaughterhouses and the Indiana steel mills, scattering the residents to parts unknown. From these razed blocks sprung parking garages, dormitories, classroom buildings, parks, and rows of townhouses suitable for students and faculty.

What survived the wrecking ball was equally desirable: the mansions built during the neighborhood's day as the

The Obama home (center) in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood

"Bill Ayers—I know Bill Ayers very well. Bill Ayers is an aging, toothless radical. A pussycat. And his wife, too. I sat on a commission with his wife a few years ago. My god, she was more critical of the left than I was! The two of them, they're utterly conventional people. They had a violent streak at one time. But now—they're thoroughly conventional."

city's Gold Coast, in the 1890s, when it drew Armours, Swifts, and other monied families looking for a lakeside home. Just to the south, turn-of-the-century apartment houses were saved, refurbished, and offered as housing for the administrators and faculty at U. of C. Having uprooted most neighborhood businesses, the plan concentrated all commercial activity into three small shopping centers, from which most of the old shop owners were excluded. A single saloon survived. Notably absent from the scheme was any public housing for the poor. After ten years of urban renewal, the neighborhood's population had dropped by 40 percent.

Hyde Park's isolation was by design. At its boundaries, the university bought and leveled city blocks that could serve as a buffer, or moat, from the surrounding South Side as it filled with impoverished blacks. The isolation brings a whiff of unreality to the neighborhood. The place seems unrooted. It's neither one thing nor the other. Hyde Park lacks the freewheeling energy of a college town, and it lacks the surprises and variety of a healthy city neighborhood. Strolling the quiet streets on a morning in May you'll admire the lilacs spilling over the low stone fences, the mansions with the squares of lawn marching to the edge of the boulevards, the funky, vine-covered apartment buildings shaded by overarching oak and poplar. Only after a day or so do you notice what's not here. There are no movie theaters, for example, and not much commerce generally. There's nowhere to buy a pair of pants or shoes. There aren't many restaurants, and only a single overpriced restaurant catering to the culinary affectations of the yuppie trade—strange for a neighborhood with so many wealthy residents. Only in the last few months did the neighborhood get a reliable, clean, and well-stocked grocery store.

And both of these, the fancy restaurant and the new grocery store, are creatures of the university's paternalism. The university has long been aware that the neighborhood it created lacks the amenities that urban dwellers demand as compensation for the discomforts of city living. So when the neighborhood's only large grocery store failed recently—it was a customer-owned cooperative, whose empty shelves and accumulated gunk attested to its Soviet-like disdain for market forces—the university subsidized a new outlet from a "gourmet" grocery chain. Now everybody's happy. The fancy restaurant, too, was encouraged by the university as something its cultured faculty would like, and as a place where parents might take their student children on campus visits; the university keeps the restaurant owners afloat by providing business for their catering service. And, having obliterated the neighborhood's entertainment district 50 years ago, it is now trying to draw bars and clubs back to Hyde Park, either through subsidy or outright purchase. U. of C. recently bought and moved the South Side landmark Checkerboard Lounge close to campus, to restore the nightlife that the 1950s urban planners hoped to kill (and did).

Hyde Parkers sometimes seem strangely unaware of how completely their neighborhood's uniqueness is a product of the university's noblesse oblige. An outsider sees it most clearly in the university police cars that patrol Hyde Park around the clock, and in the emergency call boxes spaced throughout the entire neighborhood, far beyond the campus proper, that anyone can use at any time to summon campus cops. (The university police force is the second largest police force in Illinois.) The paternalism is less obvious because it has never been racial. Urban renewal drove out as many poor whites as poor blacks; for university officials in the 1950s, enlightened liberals all, the panic was over a decline in social and economic class. "They wanted a comfortable place for the upper class to live," said Spicer, the preservationist. "They didn't want only black families, or all black families, but black families of the right sort were welcomed." The neighborhood's famous racial harmony is the result. The comedian (and later movie director) Mike Nichols, who got his start in a club on the old 55th Street, defined Hyde Park liberalism for all time: "Black and white, marching arm in arm, shoulder to shoulder against the poor."

Right out of college, Barack Obama placed himself in the middle of this curious legacy. Culturally he's never been a "South Sider," because no one on the south side thinks of Hyde Park as a South Side neighborhood. It's an anomaly that the writer and cultural critic Andrew Patner, a native Hyde Parker, tried to explain to me as we drove around the neighborhood one day.

"There's a certain wariness toward Hyde Park among

The University of Chicago

South Side blacks, most of whom are poor," he said. "If you're from another neighborhood, you might go to Hyde Park on the weekends. But there's a word, *sadiddy*. It means you think maybe you're better than you are. Pretentious. That's sort of the view of Hyde Park. It's too weird, too far outside what most of Chicago knows."

This had consequences for Obama's political future. Most successful African-American politicians in Chicago come up through the Democratic big-city political machine—either the old machine of Richard J. Daley or the gentler version overseen by his son, the current mayor, Richard M. Daley. Even Harold Washington, now canonized as the greatest of Chicago reformers, was machine-made. By contrast, politicians from Hyde Park, white or black, actively opposed the machine and the headlock it had on the city's politics. "Politically," wrote the Chicago political analyst David Fremon, "Hyde Park has never joined the city." Obama is a politician of Hyde Park pedigree, outside the normal bloodlines of Chicago's black politics.

"When Barack announced for president," Patner told me, "it was a total ho-hum in the black community"—beyond Hyde Park, that is. "It just wasn't that big a deal."

A political rival, State Senator Donne Trotter, put it this way in an interview with the *Chicago Reader*: "Barack is viewed in part to be the white man in blackface in our community. You just have to look at his supporters. Who pushed him to get where he is so fast? It's these individuals in Hyde Park, who don't always have the best interests of the community in mind."

"That's one of the downsides to his background, coming up outside normal channels," Patner went on. "He's always had to prove himself with the black community. He never had that seal of approval. But there are upsides, too."

One upside is that Obama, the Hyde Parker, was automatically more appealing—less threatening—to white liberals, in Hyde Park and beyond. The other upside, said Patner, is that "because he came up through Hyde Park instead of the machine, he stayed clear of all the corruption that's involved with that."

By Chicago standards, Obama's sweetheart real estate deal with the convicted fixer Tony Rezko—who purchasd the lot next to the house Obama was buying, effectively giving him a bigger yard for free—is almost beneath comment: a cost of doing business or a small professional benefit, typical of machine-backed pols and reformers alike. None of the progressive politicos I spoke with in Hyde Park considered it dismaying—"disappointing," as one oldtimer said, but hardly disqualifying. Most found in Obama instead a mint-perfect expression of their particular brand of politics.

"Barack is perfect for the neighborhood!" Rabbi Arnold Wolf told me, when I stopped by his Hyde Park house one afternoon for a talk. He's as round and white-bearded as

RALF-FINN HESTOFT / CORBIS

Santa, with the same twinkle. He came to Hyde Park before urban renewal and saw its effects firsthand. For 25 years he led the congregation at KAM Isaiah Israel, a synagogue across the street from Obama's mansion. (Recently, the Secret Service contingent has been using its bathrooms.)

"You can't say Barack's a product of Hyde Park. He's not really from here. But everybody saw the potential early on. We had a party for him at our house when he was just starting, back in the Nineties. I said right away: 'Here's a guy who could sell our product, and sell it with splendor!'"

I asked him what the Hyde Park product was.

"People think we're radicals here, wild-eyed!" he said. "Bill Ayers—I know Bill Ayers very well. Bill Ayers is an aging, toothless radical. A pussycat. And his wife, too. I sat on a commission with his wife a few years ago. My god, she was more critical of the left than I was! The two of them, they're utterly conventional people. They had a violent streak at one time. But now—they're thoroughly conventional, just very nice, well-educated people from the neighborhood."

As it happened, I'd spent the evening before reading Ayers's blog, and lingered over a manifesto he posted in early April, after his friendship with Obama became national news. "I've never advocated terrorism," Ayers wrote, "never participated in it, never defended it. The U.S. government, by contrast, does it routinely and defends the use of it in its own cause consistently." Capitalism, he went on, "is exhausted as a force for progress: built on exploitation, theft, conquest, war, and racism, capitalism and imperialism must be defeated and a world revolution—a revolution against war and racism and materialism, a revolution based on human solidarity and love" and so on.

Just another guy in the neighborhood.

But back to the product Obama could sell?

"The thing is, it's not what you might think," Rabbi Wolf said. "It's not radical. It's not extreme. It's a rational, progressive philosophy based on experience. You see it here. This neighborhood is genuinely integrated. We did it here, we really did it! Not just talk about it. Look around. And Barack and his family fit right in. This is their neighborhood."

As he walked me to the door he mused about the urban renewal that created the new Hyde Park. He said he'd always been ambivalent about it.

"Even at the time, you could see the university was saving us, and it was destroying us," he said. "It was keeping us afloat, but it was also taking away the old characteristics, the old buildings, the old trees, the old roots. But it made the neighborhood different, unique. You notice there's no class conflict here."

He twinkled.

"That's because there's only one class—upper!"

The irony would be funny if it weren't so jarring: Black America, after 400 years of enforced second-class status, offers the country a plausible presidential candidate, and what's the charge made against him? *He's an elitist*.

Hyde Park may be partly responsible. Obama does show signs of having imbibed its view of the America beyond the moat. David Mendell, in his indispensable biography *Obama: From Promise to Power*, quotes a coworker of Obama: "[Obama] always talked about the New Rochelle train, the trains that took commuters to and from New York City, and he didn't want to be on one of those trains every day. The image of a life, not a dynamic life, of going through the motions. . . . That was scary to him." In his own memoir, Obama depicts his mother fleeing the "smugness and hypocrisy" of her small Midwestern town—a town that Obama visited for the first time this year, campaigning. Only a lack of familiarity with the benign flow of middle-class American life could inspire clichés like these.

"I never had roots growing up," Obama has often said. It's the theme of his life, as he himself tells the story. He even wrote a book, a small masterpiece, about his tortured attempts to locate himself in the larger world. From Hawaii to Indonesia and back to Hawaii, then to Los Angeles and Manhattan and Cambridge, Mass., and finally to Hyde Park: He's never lived in a part of the country that's like 90 percent of the rest of the country. This struck me one afternoon when I drove from Obama's house to Trinity United Church of Christ, the now-controversial church where he worshipped for nearly 20 years. It's a long drive, 30 minutes or more. Whether you take the freeway or the surface streets, the route jolts you from the manicured quiet of Hyde Park through one bombed-out neighborhood after another. Then you arrive at Trinity, hard against the roaring freeway, at the edge of a district of blond-brick bungalows, some tidy and trim, others obscured by weeds, the shutters off their hinges. After services, Obama would get the family in the car and go home.

Hyde Park's the neighborhood he returned to, the place he'd chosen to live, and its roots were torn out 50 years ago. A college town, it has all the churning and transience the phrase implies. Everyone seems from somewhere else. The Armours, Swifts, and the other first families of Chicago left long ago. The working men and their families, who replaced them, were driven out by the university. The poor were secured at a safe distance. Inside, harmony reigned between white and black residents, but the whites drawn by the university were often here only temporarily, and the blacks who moved here have the same sense of displacement, even if they arrived from another neighborhood nearby.

This is the perfect place for a man without an identity to make one of his own choosing. ♦

Mr. Sununu Goes to Washington

The political philosophy of an actual politician

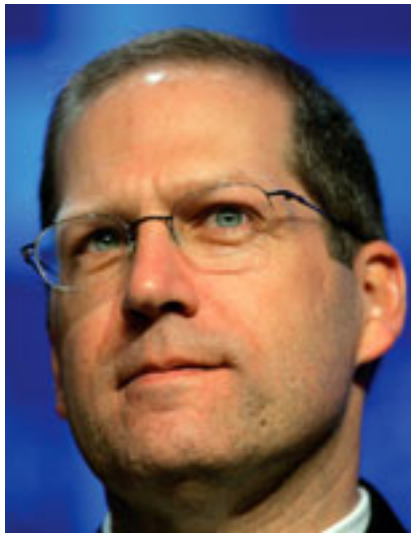
By P.J. O'Rourke

American political methodology is an ontological construct. No, I don't know what I'm talking about, but it's true anyway. Political "science"—like that puppy from the same litter, the dismal science of economics—is not science; it's a branch of moral philosophy. Yet try talking moral philosophy with a politician. Politicians will talk strategy and tactics and policies and programs until they're blue in the face, or you strangle them and they turn blue.

The problem on the left is, now that Karl Marx has forsaken them, they have no philosophy. Thank goodness. Think what evil creeps liberals would be if their plans to enfeeble the individual, exhaust the economy, impede the rule of law, and cripple national defense were guided by a coherent ideology instead of smug ignorance. As for our side, conservatism is a gut reaction for most of us, and a done deal for the rest. The moral philosophy of American politics can be explained briefly and clearly, and, the Constitution being written, it has been.

Where is there a philosopher in Washington?

Actually, I was pretty sure I knew where, and never mind that like any intelligent person he didn't major in philosophy. Senator John Sununu (Republican of New Hampshire) earned a BS and an MA in mechanical engineering from MIT, an MBA from Harvard, and a living as a design engineer and manufacturing consultant. His reputation is . . . well, as one of his fellow senators said to me, "Don't let anything happen to this boy in the New Hampshire election, otherwise we'll have to argue about who's the smartest person in the Senate." I was willing to bet that Senator Sununu knows that if a tree falls in the forest and there's no one there to hear it, the government will tax the timber industry and subsidize the purchase of Miracle Ears.



AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Senator John Sununu

I went to see Senator Sununu at his office in the Russell Building and said that I assumed he had a political philosophy. "I like to think so," he replied. "But it's not something I have written down on an index card."

As a gut reaction conservative myself, I take the senator's point. In fact, however, Senator Sununu could write his political philosophy on a small piece of paper: "I have a deep-seated belief that America is unique, strong, great because of a commitment to personal freedom—in our economic system and our politics. *We are a free people who consented to be governed. Not vice-versa.*" (Italics added for the sake of the multitudes in our government's executive, legislative, and judicial branches who need to fill out that index card and keep it with them at all times. And if the multitudes are confused by "Not vice-versa" they may substitute, *We aren't a government that consents to people being free*.)

"It's important for politicians to understand," Senator Sununu said, "that the Founders' writings reflect that point of view. From Jefferson to Hamilton, freedom was the special ingredient in human prospects, moral prospects, political prospects. The argument was over what government mechanism would ensure common good and guarantee freedom. There was no argument about whether we were free people. In most parts of the world there never has been an appreciation for that perspective. Governments have evolved to provide greater freedom, to reduce the power of monarchies, to reduce absolute power."

When, indeed, governments have evolved at all. Darwin, if he'd studied Russia instead of Galapagos finches, would have come up with the theory of "survival of the filthiest."

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Senator Sununu wants a government mechanism without the innumerable moving parts that collect goo and sludge: "Just because something is a good idea doesn't mean it should be a law—let alone a federal law. That's where I begin," he said, "with a firm belief that people in the United States are best served by limited and effective government."

He gave the example of low taxes, but from a philosophical angle—low taxes respect the prerogatives of free people. "Taxes," Senator Sununu said, "are a confiscation of economic power."

Another of the senator's examples was "local governance to the greatest extent possible." The importance of local governance may not be obvious to an America accustomed to treating city and state downfalls with doses of federal comeuppance. Sometimes there's a reason for that—the Civil War. More often, all reasoning seems absent—No Child Left Behind.

But Senator Sununu was arguing mechanical engineering not ratiocination. I knew what he meant because, some months before, I'd discussed the same subject with his father, a former governor of New Hampshire and Bush 41's White House chief of staff, John Sununu. The governor is himself an engineer and no mean political philosopher. Governor Sununu explained the importance of the "short control loop." Your shower faucets are a short control loop. You turn on the cold faucet, the shower is cold. You turn on the hot faucet, the shower is hot. You fiddle with both faucets, and you take a shower. Now imagine your second-story bathroom has its shower faucets in the basement. That's a long control loop. You turn the water on, climb the steps and get in the shower. It's too cold. You wrap yourself in a towel, go down two flights of stairs dripping water all over the house, go back upstairs. It's too hot. You go back downstairs, etc. "If your federal taxes go up," the governor said, "doing something about it is a protracted process. If your local property taxes go up, you walk over to the town tax collector's house and give him a piece of your mind. So who's more likely to raise your taxes? People in Washington? Or people next door?"

Senator Sununu's political philosophy is consensual government of the short control loop kind. Not only does this make government more responsive to us consenters but it also minimizes government's assumptions about the amount of stuff we've consented to.

I asked the senator, "What does this philosophy require from citizens?" He looked stumped.

There are so many easy answers to that question. Enlightened self-interest. Love of country. Tolerance. Inclusiveness. Blah. Blah. Blah. I felt stupid for asking and heartened by the senator's pause. (We were talking about the limitations of government not the limitations of humans, which is another branch of moral philosophy entirely.) It was as if I'd asked a policeman, "Given the responsibilities and restraints of your position as a law officer, what do you believe that criminals should do?" Actually, I apologize again. That's a lousy analogy considering how Senator Sununu's philosophy is based on the idea that Americans are anything but antisocial. But you see what I'm getting at. Given the consent of the governed, political philosophy is all about the consent. What the governed do is their own business, except in the specific areas of life where the governed have agreed to have government. There are no thought crimes, no philosophical felonies, among a free people. Citizens shouldn't break the law if they can help it, but that hardly merits saying.

What Senator Sununu said instead was, "A responsibility that citizens share is to educate themselves before they cast a vote." But he added, "A responsibility does not mean it's a prerequisite."

I asked Senator Sununu if there were many politicians in Washington with a political philosophy. "There are many," he said, "that would make the argument that they have a core set of values. But these values don't reflect a philosophy. Rather, they reflect a personal goal. 'I believe government should be fair and just.' 'I believe government should represent both the strong and the weak in America.' They're describing characteristics of what they'd like the government to be. They aren't describing principles of organizing a government."

Does Senator Sununu find his principles compromised by the *American Idol* stagecraft of practical politics and its Paula Abdul logic? "Too many politicians," the senator said, "fail to realize that voters are intelligent enough to understand that they can't agree with you about everything. What people want is someone who's thoughtful, direct, and able to explain. Reagan *reveled* in explaining. Was he 'too simplistic'? He was as deep and thoughtful as any of his contemporaries."

He disparaged the idea that there's anything politically hazardous about moral clarity. "I don't think it's tough to make a principled choice. I don't thing it's tough to explain a principled choice. It's more passionate, more engaged. It resonates with people. A principled choice sounds . . ." He hesitated, seeking the right comparison, then sensibly gave up, "more principled."

"Applying the philosophy isn't difficult," he said. "Applying the principles isn't difficult. The Patriot Act, for instance. It was a tool to find and prosecute criminals. Some of the laws we had were outdated. The biggest trouble with the Patriot Act was that the earliest version contained provisions for unlimited detention of suspects.

"Under no circumstances should we be allowed to detain people indefinitely. The provision was dropped, and we put a sunset on the whole Patriot Act. It had to be reauthorized in '05. You make sure, if you're giving powers to law enforcement, they're balanced with powers for civil liberties.

"Guantánamo, on the other hand—even if everything you're doing is legally approved, something can still be implemented in a way that's counterproductive to our moral perspective. We must be right *and* seem to be right. Guantánamo is a political, diplomatic, and moral liability. Give the Guantánamo detainees access to federal courts to appeal the determination."

The senator said that where government goes astray is with the "institutional momentum that often drives things in a wrong direction. It comes from the natural tendency of public officials to show that they've *done* something. The easy way to do this is new spending, set-asides, new rules, new regulations. Reform is difficult. Alternatives have to be carefully examined. Legislators have to think hard about unintended consequences. Most of the members of Congress can't even be bothered to go through the process. There's a lack of self-awareness. Too often members of Congress lose sight of how they're viewed by the public."

Senator Sununu gave, as an example, Congressman Don Young (Republican of Alaska) and his 2005 transportation bill set-aside for a $200 million bridge linking Ketchikan (population 7,845) with its airport (six flights a day).

"Also," he said, "it takes a certain humility to realize that all the committee appointments and bill mark-ups and leadership posts that we get so excited about here in Washington don't matter to the public."

Concerning the humbler aspects of politics, I asked the senator about coping with its six-Rotary-lunches-in-one-day routines. How does anyone—who's not a Clinton or a creature from the Clinton Lagoon—endure the business of running for office? For an answer the senator returned to the authors of our system. "I'm intrigued by the notion that most of our country's founders were suspicious of anyone who wanted to hold public office, e.g., Aaron Burr. The Founders retained that suspicion even after they themselves held office. They regarded it as an obligation, not an aspiration."

Was he suspicious of himself? Or did he feel obligated?

"When the New Hampshire House seat came open [in 1996], I looked at the other people who'd announced. I came to the conclusion that if I didn't run, New Hampshire would be represented by another trial lawyer." Good enough for this reporter. (Incidentally Senator Sununu's opponent in this fall's race, former governor Jean Shaheen, is not a trial lawyer—her husband is. Shaheen herself is a veteran of the only institution capable of making our lives more miserable than the law courts. She was a school teacher.)

Then Senator Sununu let me in on a secret known only to a few select Washington insiders. You can get inside the Capitol dome and go all the way to the top. We took the little train that runs from the basement of Russell to the basement of the Capitol building. There we began a climb of 288 feet, first up spiral steps to the base of the dome where we stared down into the rotunda 180 feet below and up at Constantino Brumidi's *Apotheosis of Washington*. (I wonder if the tourists know just how hot the mythological babes are who surround the Father of Our Country and hover over our commitment to personal freedom—4,664 square feet of rosy bosom and curvaceous hip.)

Inside the Capitol dome: 4,664 square feet of rosy bosom and curvaceous hip

We went through a little door and along a catwalk to a zigzagging iron staircase. There are really two Capitol domes, one inside and one outside. We were between them, scampering through the hemispherical iron trusses that were bolted together nearly a century and a half ago. The senator could, of course, explain the structure's design, its stresses, its load-bearing capacity. And he did so without the huffing and puffing that beset his guest. (He's a very fit senator.) We ascended to the dome's apex and stood outside, under the feet of the heroic scale allegorical figure *Freedom*—an apt place to contemplate consent of the governed.

The view seems to command the world. And sometimes the United States government seems to try to do the same. These are weighty items—the dome, the government, political philosophy. Solid foundations are obviously a must. The dome isn't shaky. But all I can say for the soundness of the other two things is, "Senator John Sununu." ♦

The Train Wreck Ahead

Medicare is rolling toward disaster, and there is no easy way to fix it.

By James C. Capretta

Social Security reform plans are a dime a dozen, but credible Medicare reform proposals are scarce. Why? Because Medicare's financial problems are so immense as to seem beyond resolution, and the policy environment is complex. Would-be entitlement reformers decry the lack of courageous leadership from politicians, but, truth be told, even the so-called experts are at a loss over how to begin closing Medicare's yawning financing gap.

The most recent report from the program's board of trustees, issued in late March, only adds to the sense of hopelessness. Medicare's liabilities are expected to exceed revenue dedicated to paying for the program by $36 trillion over the next 75 years, and the trust fund that pays for hospital services is expected to go bankrupt in 2019. Total Medicare spending is projected to more than triple as a share of the national economy, rising from 3.2 percent of GDP in 2007 to 6.3 percent in 2030, 8.4 percent in 2050, and 10.7 percent in 2080. Federal individual income tax collections amount to only about 8.5 percent of GDP. Covering just the increase in Medicare spending expected by 2030 would require a 36 percent across-the-board individual income tax hike.

It is often said that Social Security will be easier to fix than Medicare because Social Security's problems are "just math." What is meant by this is that Social Security's financial problems stem entirely from shifts in easily measured demographic variables. In a pay-as-you-go pension program, the implicit rate of return that can be paid out in benefits is determined by productivity growth in the economy and changes in the ratio of pensioners to potential workers—the so-called "aged dependency ratio"—over time. Longer life spans and falling fertility are projected to drive up this ratio in the United States from .21 today to .34 in 2030. Consequently, previous Social Security benefit commitments, based on overly optimistic assumptions, are no longer affordable and must be changed to head off insolvency. But relatively modest changes could accomplish this.

Medicare is a pay-as-you-go program too, and the aging of the population is an important reason program costs will soar in coming years, especially as the baby boomers retire. But, unlike Social Security's problems, Medicare's go well beyond shifting demographics. The Medicare entitlement is not defined by a mathematical formula tied to payroll taxes. Rather, those enrolled get government-sponsored insurance coverage, the cost of which is mainly a function of ever-changing standards and technologies of medical practice. Today, Medicare pays for many services, diagnostic tests, operating procedures, and products that did not exist when the program was created by Congress in 1965. And there is no limit on the quantity of services Medicare beneficiaries can use each year, so both the volume and intensity of care provided can go up over time without Congress acting to expand benefits.

Still, it is possible to see Medicare's financial problem as fairly simple math too. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that, between 1975 and 2005, Medicare's cost per enrollee went up, on average, 2.4 percentage points faster than per capita GDP did each year. Medicare's trustees make the reasonable assumption that, absent new information, this long-standing trend of costs outpacing the source of program income (i.e., the U.S. economy) will continue into the indefinite future (though the trustees do expect cost growth to moderate somewhat from its recent trajectory). Compounding is indeed a powerful force; even a small differential in cost and revenue growth rates will, if assumed to continue over many years, produce a massive projected deficit, especially when such a differential is applied to sums as large as those involved in the Medicare program.

Medicare, of course, was never expected to be fully funded with dedicated taxes and premiums. Federal taxpayers have always subsidized coverage for physician services,

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and Congress extended this subsidy, much to the chagrin of many fiscal conservatives, to prescription drug coverage in 2003. Enrollees are required to pay their own premiums if they elect to enroll in these parts of Medicare, but the premiums now cover only about 25 percent of costs, with the balance financed automatically from the U.S. Treasury. This annual subsidy is set to rise dramatically in coming years, from 1.5 percent of GDP in 2007 to 4.7 percent of GDP in 2050. (The entire budget for the Department of Defense now stands at about 4 percent of GDP.)

TIME & LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

The federal government has been trying to slow Medicare spending with tighter payment regulations for nearly three decades, with almost no success. It is hard to see how the government could make further headway on Medicare spending using price controls given their already extensive, and ineffective, use.

Boiling Medicare's financial predicament down to its mathematical essence—per capita spending rising faster, perpetually, than the program's revenue base—may add to the despair of some. Is it even reasonable to think such a long-standing trend can be reversed? But there really is no other choice. It should be self-evident that the country cannot afford a Medicare entitlement that outpaces the economy forever. Shouldn't Congress get on with fixing the problem?

In the past, opponents of Medicare reform have argued, effectively, that it would be unfair to penalize Medicare enrollees with a reform of Medicare alone. To these critics, Medicare is just one of many railcars hooked onto a runaway cost train. The solution is therefore not Medicare reform but a concerted effort, led by the government, to implement reforms that will improve efficiency and eliminate low value services for everyone buying insurance and services, including employers.

This is the kind of thinking behind the health care plan of the Democratic presidential candidate. Senator Barack Obama has not offered any substantive reform for Medicare beyond perfunctory calls to cut payments to private insurers and impose price controls on prescription drugs. Rather, he supports a laundry list of measures that he asserts will solve the cost problem for employers and public programs alike: more and better health information technology, new efforts to coordinate care for those with chronic illnesses, and better prevention.

These efforts, which most Republicans also support, may, in fact, modestly ease cost pressures, but they do not come close to solving the problem of costs rising faster than income. And there is certainly no expectation that they would narrow Medicare's financing gap in any significant way. With plans for massive new spending on insurance subsidies, the Democratic candidate, if he won, would have little choice but to turn to the kinds of cost controls his party favors (but does not advertise) anyway: caps on premium increases each year, enforced with price controls governing private and public payments for services. The end result is predictable: deterioration in the quality of care, fewer suppliers of services, and waiting lists.

The irony is that the federal government has been trying to slow Medicare spending with tighter payment regulations for nearly three decades, with almost no success. So even if one were to assume that price controls in the private sector might cut costs, it is hard to see how the government could make further headway on Medicare spending using price controls given their already extensive, and ineffective, use by program administrators.

A heavily governmental approach to cost control can and should be rejected simply for the damage it would do to the quality of health care services provided to patients. But it should also be rejected because it is based on a flawed understanding of what lies beneath today's cost pressures. Most notably, it fails to account for the role of Medicare's current design in the rapid escalation of costs in American health care.

In an important 2006 study, Amy Finkelstein, an economics professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, demonstrated that the creation of Medicare in the mid-1960s triggered an explosion in the health care infrastructure in regions with previously low levels of insur-

ance enrollment among seniors. Hospitals were built, and physicians and others opened up offices to provide newly enrolled Medicare beneficiaries with a much improved level of service. This was, of course, all to the good, as the primary purpose of Medicare was to improve the quantity and quality of health care services provided to seniors. But, four decades later, with cost escalation now the cause of so much financial distress for families and governments, policymakers must also understand that expansive insurance is the fuel for expensive care and rising costs.

Medicare is not solely to blame. Employer-provided insurance also expanded rapidly in the postwar era. And demand for more and better health care naturally grows with increasing wealth and higher incomes. But Medicare is a large part of the cost problem. In her paper, Finkelstein offered the rough estimate that about half of the real cost increase in health care spending in the United States from 1950 to 1990 can be attributed to the spread of Medicare and other expansive third-party insurance.

Medicare's important influence on how health care services are delivered is often overlooked or understated. Medicare is the largest purchaser of services in most markets today. Four out of five enrollees are in the traditional program, which is fee-for-service insurance. That means Medicare pays a preset rate to any provider for any service rendered to a program enrollee, with essentially no questions asked. Nearly all Medicare beneficiaries also have supplemental insurance, from their former employers or purchased in the Medigap market. With this additional coverage, they pay no charges at the point of service because the combined insurance pays 100 percent of the cost. This kind of first-dollar coverage provides a powerful incentive for beneficiaries to use as many services as their physicians suggest might help improve their health. Whole segments of the U.S. medical industry have been built around the incentives embedded in these arrangements. To be sure, Medicare's payment rates are low, but political pressure ensures they are just high enough to protect the status quo and allow doctors, hospitals, labs, and outpatient clinics to continue operating autonomously, each with its own paperwork and billing arrangements, thus underwriting continued fragmentation.

No one is suggesting turning the clock back to pre-Medicare America in order to control costs. Rather, what is needed is a sensible reform for the program that retains security for seniors even as it fundamentally alters the financial incentives in the marketplace to improve the efficiency of health care service provision.

The outline of such a reform has been clear for some time (indeed it was proposed by a largely forgotten Medicare Commission in the late 1990s, chaired by former senator John Breaux and former congressman Bill Thomas). The Medicare entitlement would be converted into a limited government contribution toward insurance, offered by private plans or the government. The government contribution would be set at a predetermined percentage of the average cost of an insurance plan in the area. Enrollees would be free to select whatever plan they found most attractive, including a public option, but if they selected a plan that was more expensive than the average, they would have to pay the additional premium themselves. This type of reform could be phased in, applied to new Medicare entrants so as to avoid disruption for those settled in their current arrangements.

This redesigned Medicare would look a lot like the new drug benefit, now in its third year. By any measure, the drug program's competitive features are working well to keep costs down for enrollees as well as the government, and the vast majority of beneficiaries like the program and the choices it has made available.

Would such a reform bring Medicare spending growth quickly into line with the economy? Official estimates during consideration of the reform or even during the first years of implementation are unlikely to reflect significant improvement from today's gloomy outlook. The dynamic possibilities of the marketplace are real, but quantifying the benefits beforehand is more a matter of judgment than data analysis. Policymakers should not give more weight to such estimates than they deserve. In a market with strong price competition, insurers who found ways to work with more efficient and higher quality provider networks could gain market share with lower premiums. Beneficiaries would also likely enroll in more managed-care settings if they saw lower premiums as a result. In time, these incentives would force real changes in the way services are delivered to patients. And when that happened, the power of compounding would begin to work in the direction of improved solvency instead of looming financial disaster.

No one should be under the illusion that reducing the size of Medicare's financial imbalance could be done without controversy or financial sacrifice, which is why it is not high on the political agenda. But sooner or later Congress will have to tackle the problem anyway. A reform that promotes consumer choice and strong price competition, much like today's drug benefit, has the potential to significantly improve the program's financial outlook and limit the scope of other changes that might be needed (like means testing or a delayed eligibility age). But if Congress is unwilling to rely on the marketplace to weed out inefficiency, for political or other reasons, bringing Medicare spending into line with what is affordable over the long-run will be unpleasant work indeed. ♦

GETTY IMAGES

The 'Mesopotamia Commission' at the Cairo Conference, which drew the map of the Middle East, 1921

Was Churchill a Zionist?

Yes, most of the time BY STEVEN F. HAYWARD

It's inevitable that scholars and authors will plumb every facet of our larger historical figures, a trait made evident by the fact that a book exists with the title *Lincoln and the Coming of the Caterpillar Tractor*. The subject of Winston Churchill and the Jews is not a trivial or peripheral subject, but it is difficult to treat this delicate matter in isolation, as the virtues and defects of these two books demonstrate.

Sir Martin Gilbert, fresh off *Churchill and America*, brings his familiar strict chronological treatment of Churchill's interactions with leading Jews and Zionist issues throughout his long career, and as useful and thorough as Gilbert always is, this approach leaves some important interpretive gaps.

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Churchill and the Jews
A Lifelong Friendship
by Martin Gilbert
Henry Holt, 384 pp., $30

Churchill's Promised Land
Zionism and Statecraft
by Michael Makovsky
Yale, 368 pp., $35

It's amusing to know that Churchill received oranges from Israel on his 83rd birthday, but it would be more useful to understand better the factors behind Churchill's frequent distraction and hesitation over Jewish issues.

Michael Makovsky's more analytical volume attempts to fill these gaps by placing what he calls Churchill's "nonlinear" or "erratic" Zionism into the larger context of Churchill's grand statecraft, but his judgment of Churchill shifts as often as Churchill's did, leaving some questions unresolved.

What is undeniable from both books, however, is Churchill's extraordinary philo-Semitism, which represented an important departure from the comfortable anti-Semitism of his political and class peers, and is yet another piece of evidence that Churchill cannot be explained simply as a product of the Victorian age.

Churchill was the ardent friend of leading Jews in Britain and a supporter of Zionism, expressing as early as 1908 his sympathy for a "restoration" of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and successfully opposing an Aliens Bill brought to the House of Commons in 1904 that would have sharply restricted Jewish immigration into Britain. Later, as colonial secretary in the 1920s, Churchill took steps that enabled 300,000 Jews to emigrate to Palestine over the next decade, providing the nucleus for the

future nation of Israel. As prime minister, in 1941, he proclaimed that "I was one of the authors" of Zionist policy. Indeed, among the lengthy catalogue of criticisms of Churchill was that "He was too fond of Jews."

Churchill's interest and sympathy for Jews had philosophical and cultural roots. Both Gilbert and Makovsky highlight Churchill's comment, offered in the fifth volume of his World War II memoirs, that "No two cities have counted more with mankind than Athens and Jerusalem. Their messages in religion, philosophy, and art have been the main guiding lights of modern faith and culture." This was not merely a casual one-off but a highly unusual reflection coming from an otherwise unreligious man. The essential harmony of reason and revelation implied in this comment was usually found only among Roman Catholics in the mid-20th century.

Churchill understood that Christians owed this tradition to Judaism; as early as 1921, while visiting Jerusalem, he commented, "We owe to the Jews in the Christian revelation a system of ethics which, even if it were entirely separated from the supernatural, would be incomparably the most precious possession of mankind, worth in fact the fruits of all other wisdom and learning put together. On that system and by that faith there has been built out of the wreck of the Roman Empire the whole of our existing civilization."

The story of Moses, including the exodus across the parted Red Sea, Churchill wrote in a remarkable essay in 1931, should be taken literally. Moses was "one of the greatest human beings" who is to be associated with "the most decisive leap forward ever discernible in the human story." The Mosaic establishment of monotheism was "an idea of which all the genius of Greece and the power of Rome were incapable." Like all of Churchill's other historical speculations, this was not mere antiquarianism. He liked to repeat the phrase attributed to Disraeli that "the Lord deals with the nations as the nations dealt with the Jews."

This philosophical dimension, more than his romantic imagination, or views of how Zionism was compatible with his imperialism (as Makovsky sometimes suggests), explains Churchill's fundamental regard for Jews. But as is the case with so many other prominent aspects of Churchill's career, there are a number of inconsistencies and contradictions in his expressed attitudes and policies toward Jews and Zionism to be observed and, if possible, reconciled.

As Makovsky puts it, Churchill was "a Zionist who often abandoned Zionism." Now and then Churchill wobbled. Gilbert devotes several pages to recounting a controversial newspaper article Churchill published in 1920 commenting on the "struggle for the soul of the Jewish people" represented by the clash between Zionism and Bolshevism—the latter being understood as a "conspiratorial" Jewish movement. Both Gilbert and Makovsky note that Churchill was apparently taken in by *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, a copy of which Churchill had recently encountered.

David Ben-Gurion greets departing British troops, 1948

HULTON-DEUTSCH COLLECTION / CORBIS

Makovsky's account captures in copious detail how Churchill's views of Zionism "were seemingly all over the place. At times he ignored and even scorned Zionism, and at times he vehemently endorsed it." On the surface, Churchill seems susceptible to the criticism that he picked up and set aside his Zionist sympathies to suit his convenience. Churchill strongly opposed the Peel Commission's White Paper of 1939 advocating Palestinian partition, but did nothing subsequently as prime minister to undo the White Paper. He was publicly indifferent to Zionist causes at various points in his career, but often lurched to the other extreme, sometimes making support for Zionism a "litmus test" of political rectitude.

Makovsky's narrative of Churchill's course often feels whipsawed by Churchill's constant course corrections, culminating in perplexing summaries such as this: "He felt the need to distance himself from Zionism partly, and ironically, because it was never more integral to his being." Had Churchill the amateur painter rendered his Zionism on canvas, Makovsky writes, "the final product would resemble the scattered and splattered swirls of Jackson Pollock."

The better artistic analogy for Churchill would be the neo-impressionist Georges Seurat, whose pointillist images only become clear when one steps far enough away from the canvas to take in the whole. Makovsky explains Churchill's inconsistencies chiefly as a function of the clash between his

capacious romanticism and his British nationalism: His Zionism frequently had to take a back seat to Britain's national interest (not to mention his own political self-interest). But the clash between sentimentalism and national interest will explain anyone's course, while Churchill's case in this, as in so many areas, remains exceptional.

Missing is a serious treatment of the statesman's prudence, which is the crucial ingredient for evaluating Churchill's many otherwise troubling changes and inconsistencies across all aspects of his career. Churchill understood (though seldom articulated directly) that the cause of Zionism depended upon the health of Western democracy itself, the precariousness of which was the dominant focus of his statecraft from the outset of World War I. He understood that the Balfour Declaration of 1917 was inspired by wartime calculations, not unlike Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, and that it would be awkward to fulfill in the short term after the war, which explains his limited public engagement with it.

Gilbert's steady narrative captures this better, noting that Churchill saw the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine to be one of his prime postwar tasks, but which had to wait until the war against Hitler was won, to the great frustration of David Ben-Gurion and other Zionists. That Churchill could have, or might have, done more on behalf of Jews during the war is not necessarily clear, even in hindsight; and in any event requires placing the issue within the larger context of Churchill's whole statecraft, which is never easy to do. Just as Lincoln often disappointed the Abolitionists (to whom 20th-century Zionists can be compared in some ways) by his measured course toward emancipation, Churchill's essential sympathy and support for Zionist ends can only be understood justly from the standpoint of the prudent statesman, of whom we rightly honor Churchill as the highest modern example.

When this is done, it becomes easier to share the sentiment of a Jewish prisoner in a Soviet labor camp during the war, recounted by Gilbert: "We have no bread, but we have Churchill." ♦

BCA

Words and Music

What can happen when Art serves Power.

BY SHAWN MACOMBER

The outside world's impression of a given artistic endeavor will nearly always pale in comparison with the epic potency its creator's mind attributes to it. And who can blame creators for believing so? After all, no less than Vincent Van Gogh, the two Franzes (Schubert and Kafka), and John Kennedy Toole, to name a few, have shuffled off this mortal coil with little fanfare, only to find posthumous praise and immortality.

The Savior
A Novel
by Eugene Drucker
Simon & Schuster, 224 pp., $14

Goldberg: Variations
by Gabriel Josipovici
Harper Perennial, 208 pp., $13.95

All the more reason why these two recent novels—*The Savior*, by the renowned violinist Eugene Drucker, and *Goldberg: Variations*, by the acclaimed British novelist Gabriel Josipovici—are so fascinating: Both tales center on artists who somehow *fail*, with profound implications, to fully recognize their own brilliance until under duress.

The story told by Drucker in his debut novel could not be darker: During the waning hours of World War II, young German violinist Gottfried Keller is compelled to perform at a concentration camp as part of a Nazi experiment to rejuvenate a select group of shell-shocked Jewish prisoners.

Keller is a sad-sack, go-along-to-get-along type. He spends his days serving the Wehrmacht, performing for ungrateful wounded soldiers. At night he carefully places SS-praising red herring entries into his diary to appease any snooping authorities. He lives perhaps a bit too easily with the guilt of having failed to defend his best friend and the love of his life, both Jews, from prewar prejudice. The closest he comes to rebellion is practicing Bartok and Berg compositions: "There was . . . a kind of titillation, a furtive thrill as he closed all the windows and doors in his apartment, put on a heavy practice mute and tackled 'degenerate' music that had been banned from the concert stage."

The violinist's biggest gripe against the Nazis seems to be the party's penchant for coarseness as enculturation and, thus, he is susceptible to the relative highbrow charms of the commandant running the camp. Here is a Nazi authority figure who not only gives Keller permission to perform "degenerate" music, but conspiratorially derides Keller's Wehrmacht audiences as men who "couldn't possibly understand Bach."

When the commandant demands that the violinist "be an Orpheus" to the prisoners and "thaw their frozen souls," he is flattering him as an artist, and Keller chooses to believe the experiment must have some inexplicably positive end.

It works. Soon enough, the co-opted violinist is passionately thundering through Paganini caprices before prisoners to "grab their attention, banish their listlessness with dazzling effects." The challenge opens up reservoirs of virtuosity in Keller, enabling him to slowly draw his captive audience, weeping, back from the land of the living dead. Drucker dazzles, too, following the rote, ubiquitous write-what-you-know advice while never alienating with his expertise.

Shawn Macomber is currently at work on a book about global class warfare.

Unpacking Bach's Partita in D Minor, for example, the neophyte novelist paints a portrait of note flurries shifting "from urgency to repose and back again, never straying from its key, reworking the same harmonies in ever-shifting guises" slowly building into a piece "full of the joys and sorrows of this life, and a yearning for something beyond."

Drucker enables Keller's music to shade the mood and atmosphere of the narrative. When a prisoner surreptitiously tells Keller he's rekindled "the language of the heart" in prisoners' souls, the violinist briefly attains a transcendental sense of purpose and destiny, only to watch in horror as the commandant shortly thereafter orders a mass execution.

"You get satiated, bored—especially when they don't resist, when they no longer seem to *feel* what you're doing to them," the commandant muses when Keller begs for the collective life of his audience, adding, "If you can find a way to raise their hopes, they'll be at your mercy again."

Some prisoners jeer the violinist *en route* to their death, and he's left with the commandant's parting shot ("You really present no threat to the Third Reich. In your heart . . . you're an accomplice") and the knowledge that his ultimate artistic achievement—his finally uncovered genius, really—provided essential accompaniment to a symphony of torture and murder.

The stakes are not nearly as high in Gabriel Josipovici's *Goldberg: Variations*, yet the core theme of unrecognized artistic power and the novel's title and structure—in homage to Bach's 30 harpsichord pieces of the same title—make it almost a sister tome to *The Savior*.

Goldberg: Variations opens with a poverty-stricken novelist's first encounter with Tobias Westfield, a belligerent, wealthy insomniac who has paid the author to read him to sleep nightly. The catch is that Westfield, implausibly insisting he has read every worthwhile published story, demands the reading be a story composed *that day*, and he is not interested in any gripes about creativity on demand: "You are a writer, not a thinker," Westfield tells Samuel Goldberg, the earnest author. "I, alas, am a thinker. That is why you can sleep but I cannot."

On the fly and under pressure, Goldberg composes a series of interrelated stories—each, to borrow a snippet of Eugene Drucker's beautiful prose, "reworking the same harmonies in ever-shifting guises." Goldberg alternately casts himself impressing a Victorian royal court with his interpretation of John Donne's "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day," and then failing to hold the interest of a wife who adores the great artist she is sure resides within him, but is disenchanted by the self-absorbed brooding accompanying it.

Both The Savior *and* Goldberg: Variations *seem to suggest unheralded artistic heights may lead to the plummeting depths of civilization. 'He paid me well, but what I did for him was beyond all payment,' Goldberg writes to his wife in a farewell note.*

Elsewhere in this series of difficult-to-follow stories, Goldberg's poet-friend descends into a creatively impotent insanity when his muse departs: "You see, your Lordship, a comma, a tiny little comma," the poet exclaims when he reads another's verse. "But without it the whole world would fall over. It would simply keel right over."

By placing the words in the mouth of a madman, Goldberg maintains plausible deniability concerning the sentiment expressed. But as the novel progresses, and Goldberg's stories become more assured and philosophical, it becomes clear he is beginning to accept the power of imagination. And it is not long before Goldberg turns on his employer.

During the carriage ride to Westfield's house—which may be a recounting or simply another tale composed on the fly—Goldberg and the driver discuss a recently discovered "wild boy"—which is to say, a boy of the traditional trees-and-wolves wild, not a child star with a cocaine-dusted nose outside a Hollywood club:

It does not take much, Goldberg says, to reduce us to his level.

> Then you do not hold with the theories of M. Rousseau, Hammond says, that it is to his exalted level that we should all aspire? M. Rousseau and his opponents all speak the same language, Goldberg says. For the one our present civilization shows us the depths to which man can fall, for the other the heights to which he can rise. What is there to choose between them?

Both *The Savior* and *Goldberg: Variations* seem to suggest unheralded artistic heights may lead to the plummeting depths of civilization. "He paid me well, but what I did for him was beyond all payment," Goldberg writes to his wife in a farewell note as the once-dedicated husband and father prepares to unencumber himself of family and civilization, a wild boy with inkwell embarking on the path of the true artist. "Not one world but a multitude of worlds have come into being and then passed away since I kissed you goodbye and got into Hammond's carriage," he adds, heralding his emergence as a great artist, above common concerns and responsibilities. What can a wife, child, and gainful employment mean to a creator of worlds?

Drucker and Josipovici both offer well-crafted worlds, full of affecting situations and characters. As with Drucker's Keller, Goldberg has realized his power—and, if not in such a dramatic, visceral fashion, it has likewise ruined his life. Yet it's hard to shake the conclusion that only an extraordinarily accomplished musician and novelist, respectively, would be so bold as to portray their proven skills as powerful forces akin to a shotgun with the safety off. ♦

To See Ourselves

'The willful, or sovereign, self is . . . the cause of our troubles.' **BY MARK BLITZ**

Scholars—"we scholars," as Nietzsche mockingly calls us and himself—often trace today's personal and political excesses to the triumph of the self over the soul.

While we once thought our humanity to be distinguished by souls with common powers of reason, love, and spiritedness, we now claim instead to be defined by unique selves. The masterful expression of each special one replaces the soul's love of common intellectual and ethical perfection. Politically, Nazi and Stalinist willfulness and tyranny attempt to destroy communities guided by justice and the common good.

Sovereignty
God, State, and Self
by Jean Bethke Elshtain
Basic Books, 480 pp., $35

We often trace the intellectual beginning of this personal and political willfulness to Rousseau near the end of the 18th century, and its first culmination to Nietzsche at the end of the 19th. The effect is to tie together views which claim that will, not reason, does (or should) dominate us; that goods we naively believe to be natural are, in fact, values relative to time, place, and person; and that politics is primarily a matter of history's stages and direction, and the clash of ethnicities and identities.

Jean Bethke Elshtain's view in her fine new book is that the willful, or sovereign, self is indeed the cause of our troubles, but that we must follow its origin to an earlier beginning. That beginning is not opinions about political or personal domination, but Christian views about God.

Medieval controversies about divine sovereignty are the chief source of later arguments and positions: "As sovereign state is to sovereign God, so sovereign selves are to sovereign states." Political sovereignty names "self determination for a territorial, collective entity," and "it is altogether unsurprising that the logic of sovereignty came unbound and migrated, becoming attached more and more to notions of the self."

Professor Elshtain follows her theme from St. Augustine through medieval nominalists such as Ockham, and from thence to, among others, Luther, Calvin, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill, Hawthorne, Hegel, Nietzsche, Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir. She concludes with contemporary themes. Indeed, she advises those "more concerned with contemporary cultural criticism" than with the "history of political and theological thought" to begin with her final chapters.

She is not telling us literally to read backwards from the last word to the first, of course, for probing medieval mysticism or coyly announcing a breakthrough in esoteric reading is not her intention or style. (Were she to announce a mystical breakthrough, she would do so, I fear, by referring to the hidden message in some Beatles record played counterclockwise. She too often employs today's irritating device of interrupting serious discussions with unilluminating references to popular culture. We scholars should not pretend that our need to awaken somnolent students with a bracing jolt of their own vulgarity is a virtue to be displayed publicly.)

Although I would not advise THE WEEKLY STANDARD's harried cultural critics to read the last chapters first, it is useful for those unfamiliar with the author to know how her book comes out politically in the end. As Elshtain has throughout her career, she defends sensible, moderate practices. Here, she seeks to buttress her views by reestablishing political thought in a theological framework so that the better elements of that framework can modify, and to a degree guide, our liberal polity. She is no friend of radical feminism, genetic manipulation, and easy abortion. She traces these problems to the victory of hard and soft versions of the sovereign self. She would like to recapture or revivify selves who are enmeshed in the virtues of our everyday dependencies, but still aware of their own dignity.

Jean Bethke Elshtain

> What we find in Augustine is certain universal claims about human dignity and value—we are all God's children—but this recognition can only be specified and realized concretely, in and through speech and fellowship and loving and serving one another.

"Above all," she writes, "we are created to love and be loved."

Intellectually, the best parts of *Sovereignty* are Elshtain's accounts of figures she has studied carefully and also admires. Her discussions of Augustine and Luther are sympathetic and thoughtful, free of condescension or unwarranted veneration. Her remarks on Hawthorne, Bonhoeffer, and Camus are illuminating. She also has interesting things to say about Nietzsche and

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UNIV. OF CHICAGO

Hobbes, whom she considers with an open mind, if not with pleasure.

Elshtain understands her book to be intellectual history. She is following the journey of an idea—sovereignty or will—not examining it analytically. Consequently, she believes she more carefully embeds her discussions historically than do many other writers. Chronologies and authors, nonetheless, sometimes seem jumbled as she moves back and forth among different medieval thinkers. There is a bit too much talk of migrating thoughts and currents of ideas. One would like sequences to be discussed more precisely or, failing that, a clear analysis of why such precision is unavailable and why Hegel, the grandfather of the intellectual history she is practicing, is wrong.

One most of all misses in Elshtain's historical account a clear view of the meaning of Christianity for thinkers such as Machiavelli and Bacon. Her discussions of papal and kingly rule, pretensions to rule, and theories of rule are enlightening, but they give little sense of Christianity's overall effect on human spirit, freedom, and earthly satisfaction. She bypasses the inevitable tension between faith and the unbridled attempt to know, or between theology grounded in revelation and reason grounded in nature alone. She does not bring out the first modern thinkers' attempts to overcome what they understood to be Christianity's dehumanizing and stultifying impact. She discusses Machiavelli narrowly and Bacon not at all.

Elshtain's historical approach leads her to downplay conceptual issues. Although her theme is sovereignty, she does not say in detail just what sovereignty is. She never works out explicitly her subjects' many forms, causes, and connections. A clear analysis of the basic elements or possibilities of "will"—choice, desire, spirited pride—would have been useful conceptually. It also might have controlled her tendency to identify will with mere willfulness, and to make too great a split between will and reason. After all, both Aristotle and Kant, the two great secular teachers of ethics, understood virtue or morality through the connection, or even identity, of practical reason and choice—Aristotle's deliberate desire or Kant's rational will.

Elshtain's decision to begin with Augustine is refreshing, but it does leave one asking about the Greeks, whom she mostly ignores. One wonders just how the willful selves she examines differ from Plato's tyrants, medieval law from the classical discussion of law, and the nihilism she connects to notions of divine willfulness from Plato's discussion of sophistic negation.

Moreover, Elshtain concentrates so much on sovereignty's roots in notions of nihilistic willfulness that she forgets to say enough about the fear of punishment that gives the ruler's arbitrariness or his laws, even his rational laws, their teeth. The power of punishment is one effectual truth of sovereignty, and is especially central politically.

Sometimes she dissolves in the acidic sameness of self-sovereignty important intellectual and practical differences in the ways modern thinkers understand individuality. She overlooks, for example, important differences among Kant's moral will, Hegel's rational will, and Nietzsche's self-overcoming will.

These conceptual and historical issues lead to the book's most significant theoretical problem. Elshtain does not sufficiently plainly distinguish teachings of willful sovereignty from teachings of individual rights or, indeed, give a clear account of the origin and justification of individual rights. At times she praises what sovereignty has accomplished, but on no clear grounds.

Individual natural rights and dominant individual wills are not the same. Liberalism is not nihilism, and the man who holds rights equal to others is not the willful Nietzschean or existential self, let alone a would-be god. John Locke, for example, connects individual rights to will and reason, but also to preservation, comfort, property, and satisfaction. Exercising rights requires effort, responsibility, and industry. Without these characteristics one will be overwhelmed by nature and by others, however sovereign one believes one's self to be. Securing equal rights and their conditions both directs and limits government, so that government neither altogether forms souls nor ignores them.

To advance freedom, of course, is not fully to guide its proper use. For this one needs to understand moral, intellectual, artistic, and political excellence. Liberal regimes require a liberal education which, from the standpoint of mere equality, is inherently illiberal. So, although it certainly is true that liberalism can favor or degenerate to the sovereign selves Elshtain fears, it need not. Its principle of equal rights is less excessive, and is suited to natural ends.

Just as the equality and reason that shape and limit individual rights show liberal freedom's difference from tyrannical, willful, self-assertion, so, too, does unalloyed political mastery differ from the liberal state's sovereignty, for this seeks to regulate its own scope and methods. Liberal democracy carries within it an inherent tension between individuals and majorities, neither of which is altogether powerful.

Elshtain indicates some of this, of course, but does not make enough of it.

She is generally friendly to the merits of sensible liberal democracy. Yet her invariably thoughtful and sometimes courageous arguments do not always support her friendship. If we do not convincingly distinguish equal rights from individual willfulness, we risk contributing to the very license that rightly concerns her. If we do not see that countries based on equal rights require and promote certain virtues, and are thus not as morally neutral as they sometimes seem, we risk diminishing these countries, and our appreciation of their merits. If we do not account properly for human strength, self-assertion, competition, and our ability to shape nature's material, we risk a quietism that Elshtain might decry but against which her arguments (in my judgment) provide insufficient defense.

Our human goal is not just to love and be loved, but also to educate and be educated, and to stand up for ourselves. These goals sometimes conflict because we and what is ours differ from the perfections for which we strive. Perhaps these limits show us most clearly that, as Elshtain reminds us in this intelligent book, we are "less than sovereign." ♦

The National Archives

Washington by Design

What the look of the nation's capital tells us.

BY RICHARD STRINER

The architecture of our nation's capital will never stop fascinating people, as two recent books about the city attest. The *AIA Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C.* is the latest in a series of highly selective guidebooks produced since the 1960s by the Washington chapter of the American Institute of Architects. *Washington from the Ground Up* is part of a series of books about cities of the world by a scholar who writes about urban history.

James McGregor's *Washington from the Ground Up* is a fine undertaking, a concise account of the city that integrates geography, history, and design. "From the ground up," the author discusses Washington's terrain and topography as they relate to its urban development.

McGregor is principally concerned with the *evolution* of the city (both planned and haphazard) and the growth of its federal component, its "monumental core." Two chapters on the U.S. Capitol building alone—admittedly a very interesting story—consume a quarter of the book. McGregor's strategy is to start with iconic federal buildings, then write about the precincts surrounding them. In this way the book expands its geographical coverage: from the U.S. Capitol to Capitol Hill, from the White House to Lafayette Square, then Federal Triangle, Foggy Bottom, the Mall. At last, the book reaches outlying precincts and neighborhoods.

The architectural history, as such, is often technical; readers at ease with architectural terminology will follow the descriptions of buildings more easily than others. But even casual readers will be captivated by McGregor's commentary on the European precedents that guided so many of the architects, artists, and planners who shaped the city. This commentary is interwoven with summaries of historical trends and events that illuminate the cultural landscape of Washington.

In covering architecture, McGregor handles the issues of aesthetic judgment and subjective taste fairly well. Writing of the J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building, he cites the influence of modernist "brutalism," a style that, he notes, "has been widely praised and widely criticized." Taste polemics can be perilous business, and McGregor has a light touch when it comes to these matters.

The historical treatment throughout the book is good, but McGregor—a professor of comparative literature at the University of Georgia—would have managed to avoid some mistakes if he had circulated his manuscript to a wider network of scholars, especially historians.

Some of the errors appear to be typos: He writes, for example, when discussing the colonial history of the mid-Atlantic region, that "Virginia colonists shipped some twenty pounds of tobacco to England" in 1620. (In fact, they sent in the neighborhood of 20 *tons* in 1620, according to historian Alden T. Vaughan.) Other errors appear to be Freudian slips: He refers to a Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington that "duplicates one that has hung in the White House since the beginning of the eighteenth century." (He means the 19th century, of course.)

A number of the errors seem to flow from unexamined premises. Referring to the British Proclamation of 1763, which halted colonial settlement at the Appalachian mountain line, McGregor writes that "everything west of this line would remain Indian land in perpetuity." No, the proclamation's language forbade any further settlement beyond the line "for the present," according to the

Washington from the Ground Up
by James H.S. McGregor
Harvard, 352 pp., $29.95

AIA Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C.
by G. Martin Moeller Jr.
Johns Hopkins, 400 pp., $19.95

Richard Striner, professor of history at Washington College, is the author, most recently, of Father Abraham: Lincoln's Relentless Struggle to End Slavery.

NEWSCOM

British historian Ian R. Christie. A few of the errors appear to have been caused by simple haste: The first capital of the Confederacy was not "Mobile, Alabama" but Montgomery. Other errors are scattered through the volume, and it's a pity. Perhaps the mistakes can be corrected in a second (or the paperback) edition.

McGregor also lapses into unsustainable generalizations. Toward the end of the book, he states that "with the exception of a few days during the Civil War when the capital threatened to become a battleground, and a long weekend in the 1960s when riots tore through its central neighborhoods, the city has scarcely felt the exhilaration of great national movements or the cold breath of disaster." The mind reels: How hasty can analysis become? Surely the march of the Bonus Army in 1932, and Franklin Roosevelt's inauguration in 1933, brought the force of great historical events to the nation's capital. And many more examples could be given, including the examples from the War of 1812 that McGregor himself includes in the early chapters.

Such problems are a shame, since McGregor has produced a fine volume. Many parts of this book make excellent reading; the chapter on Pierre L'Enfant and early Washington is especially good, and the chapter on the local and social history of Washington is outstanding. This is a book by a man who truly knows and loves Washington.

The book's physical character, however, is another matter. Granted, this is a compact production and not a coffee table showpiece. The typography, though, is rather hard on the eyes and the stingy dimensions of the well-chosen illustrations (with the exception of some full-page maps, architectural plans, and urban prospects that form an appendix at the back) make the color photography less successful than it should have been. Perhaps the problem is mostly with the quality (digital or otherwise) of the images themselves. In any case, perusal is a squinty experience.

Such is not the case with Martin Moeller's *AIA Guide*: The typography scans very easily and the high resolution of the black-and-white photographs enables the images to hold their own within dimensions that are almost as small as (or smaller than) the ones in McGregor's book. The overall comparison here should be an object lesson to book designers.

Moeller is the senior vice president and curator of the National Building Museum. His new iteration (the fourth edition) of the *AIA Guide* uses walking-tour coverage of city precincts to handle the issues of geography. Where McGregor's book features chapter-length essays, Moeller has followed the guidebook formula with separate individual descriptions of buildings below each numbered photograph. The numbers correspond to locations in the walking-tour maps. The descriptions of the buildings, consisting of one or more paragraphs, are short essays that synthesize architectural analysis, historical commentary, and design criticism.

Moeller writes in a captivating manner that makes his work entertaining. His judgments on matters of aesthetics are debatable—endlessly debatable—as is usually the case with the pronouncements of architecture critics. By turns, he is both judicious—deferential to the "judgment of the ages"—and assertive in rating the "success" or "failure" of buildings.

His historical sense can embrace the ironic; writing of the building that sits just west of the White House—known successively as the State, War, and Navy Building, the Old Executive Office Building, and the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building—he notes that while the building was "widely reviled as a symbol of Gilded Age excess" for years, it is "now, at long last, widely beloved as a welcome exception to the sedate architecture more typical of the nation's capital." In other words, the building can be said to have "attitude," which the taste of the moment tends to favor.

Compare this treatment to Moeller's dismissive account of the Jefferson Memorial. After noting the "bitter debate" about John Russell Pope's design—which drew the ire of militant modernists—Moeller seems to side with the detractors. Let him speak for himself:

> Frank Lloyd Wright and other prominent architects were scandalized by the retrograde design, and argued that the famously erudite and progressive Jefferson would have preferred a memorial that reflected the technology and ethos of the era in which it was to be built. President Franklin D. Roosevelt pushed the scheme through, however, and the result is a neo-Pantheon that is stranded on the far shore of the Tidal Basin, cut off from the life of the Mall itself. The best aspect of the reactionary structure is the glimpse of Jefferson's statue through one of the side openings.

Every one of these pronouncements could be challenged or turned on its head. For example: Would Jefferson have scorned Pope's classical design, his reuse of the Pantheon form? Who knows? But as everyone knows who has the slightest familiarity with Thomas Jefferson, the third president, together with most of the Founders, embraced the world of classical design, which he found to be compatible with (if not deeply expressive of) Enlightenment "progressivism," and he used the Pantheon form both at Monticello and the University of Virginia—hence Pope's design, which saluted the taste of Thomas Jefferson.

Is the Jefferson Memorial "stranded," somehow, or cut off from the life of the Mall? Tell that to the visitors who flock to the Tidal Basin at cherry blossom time and rent paddle boats from which to gaze upon the Jefferson Memorial.

The definitive book about Washington will never be written, and this is exactly as it should be. Definitive judgments on the buildings of the city will never be delivered by critics. The city as a work-in-progress will change, and then go on changing. It is up to preservationists to see that the changes are guided in a way that is enlightened. These two books are new grist for the mill. ♦

Shall We Dance?

We shall—even if we cannot and should not.

BY NATALIE BOSTICK

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kym Johnson and Jerry Springer on 'Dancing with the Stars.'

Every 20 years or so dance appears on television in a big way. In the 1980s we had *Solid Gold*, *Dance Fever*, and *Soul Train*. In the 1960s there were *Shindig* and *Hullabaloo*. When I was a kid my mother let me watch some of these shows after she brought me home from ballet. The *Solid Gold* dancers in their trademark gold lame leotards were cultural icons even a serious baby ballerina like me could adore. Besides, they were the only dancers on TV.

This year may mark the peak of the latest television dance craze. There are four major dance shows on networks and major cable this year, two new and two returning. Like dance shows past, they're all contests. And whereas dance shows past did little more than animate the week's Top 10, today's shows aspire to serious dance. But the rules have changed.

Take *Dancing with the Stars*. Open a tabloid and you'll see that Americans love to catch celebrities in awkward moments. Learning a new ballroom dance weekly is an impossible task for a nondancer and a surefire way to make actors and models and talk show hosts look like idiots. The contestants' partners pick up the slack and come out looking like heroes in all the spandex and beading. But it *is* nice to see the "stars" enjoying the process and learning to respect the dance. You can tell they try to get the moves right. Like all reality TV, *Dancing with the Stars* is a postmodern experience. We're watching beautiful people try to be beautiful.

The show is a test of its contestants' work ethic, and as Martha Graham once said, "Movement never lies."

Welcome to dance reality TV. With names like *So You Think You Can Dance* and *Step It Up and Dance*, the shows aim to instruct audiences in what professional dancing is and what it takes to get the rare dance job. Of course, along the way there will be lots of good trash television: Dancers, young, attractive, self-involved, and long-suffering performers usually hopped up on cigarettes and coffee, will do physically whatever producers ask of them. The job market is extremely competitive and (cue the vindictive celebrity judge) brutally honest. Plenty of opportunity for conflict and wounded egos. But with all this inherent drama, what about the dancing?

The best show is *Randy Jackson Presents America's Best Dance Crew* on MTV. Jackson's first independent production, it is smart, entertaining, and the dancing is phenomenal. The contestants are dance "crews," hip-hop for dance teams. By limiting itself to hip-hop the show teaches viewers to recognize hip-hop dance vocabulary and choreographic styles. (Viewers picked Jabbawockeez, a technically impressive crew with a distinct aesthetic, as this season's winner.)

One of the nice things about *ABDC* is that it is the first to feature dancers as creative artists. In addition to the choreography, the crews are responsible for their costumes and, in some cases, the

Natalie Bostick is a writer in New York.

musical arrangement. The challenges this season included creating dances that narrate the history of street dancing, remixing a Michael Jackson music video, animating a popular club dance, and adapting a Broadway musical style. The crews' responses were, at times, extremely sophisticated.

Showing creative people at work has proven successful for Bravo with shows like *Top Chef* and *Project Runway*, but Bravo's new dance show, *Step It Up and Dance*, is a disappointment. It follows 12 dancers of various abilities through the audition from hell. The weekly challenges are taken from commercial gigs (think Las Vegas) and tend to favor the contestants with Broadway experience. Performed to an empty house, you get the feeling the dancing doesn't really matter. The gay men are frequently on the chopping block, being told their dancing should be more masculine. One hip hop dancer finds herself winning and losing the challenges on alternate weeks: In week two the judges tell her that she's sloppy, but from what viewers see she doesn't look any worse than the other dancers. Contestants and viewers are left confused. When the dancers become frustrated, the judges' perky reply is, "You gotta step it up"—as if attitude trumps ability at an audition.

Step It Up and Dance is really about psychological terrorism. Consider the case of Tovah, a classical ballet dancer. In the first episode she tells the judges she is uncomfortable performing hip hop because she has never studied it. One judge's response: "But, you're black." Later they tell her that although she is not a great dancer she is very pretty. (Perhaps she should try a modeling competition?) In her last challenge Tovah and the other contestants learn a sequence from the Broadway show *Stomp*. The judges cast her off because they just aren't convinced of her passion, as one judge puts it, her need to "dance or die." Hmm. Maybe that's because she wasn't dancing but walking around the stage banging a broom.

Comparing dancers across disciplines is a tough business, especially when they're young and inexperienced. Fox's *So You Think You Can Dance*, another apples-and-oranges contest in its fourth season, is a train wreck from beginning to end. Producer Nigel Lythgoe seems to have created it so he could enjoy something like Simon Cowell's reputation as a straight-talking British critic. But he has no knowledge of dance, and the other judges are hardly better. Sometimes sullen, sometimes shrill, they never make much sense. The dancers are mostly young students from competition dance studios, with the occasional breakdancer or junior ballroom champ thrown in for good measure. The dancing is amateurish—of the hold-your-leg-over-your-head-and-smile-real-big variety—and there's no room for subtlety. It's a cheerleading show with everyone rooting for himself.

But last year something strange happened. Danny Tidwell, former *corps de ballet* dancer with the American Ballet Theatre, showed up at one of the *SYTYCD* auditions and, no surprise, was put through to the final rounds in Hollywood. Tidwell's appearance caused a minor commotion within the ballet world: Was the show becoming a viable job opportunity for professional dancers? Would Tidwell go on to a major commercial gig? There was the indignity of watching him perform Mia Michaels's wretched choreography, but he handled himself well. Maybe he proved the model was working.

Too bad he lost in the final. ♦

BCA

Pushtak to Shove

Adam Sandler attacks the Middle East.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Adam Sandler's lunatic new comedy, *You Don't Mess with the Zohan*, is a landmark of sorts: Aside from Steven Spielberg's *Munich*, it is the first major Hollywood studio release in nearly half-a-century featuring an Israeli protagonist. You have to go back all the way to 1960 to find Sandler's predecessor—a glowing Paul Newman laboring heroically to help bring the Jewish state into being in Otto Preminger's epic *Exodus* (a movie so excruciatingly long that, during a screening, Mort Sahl stood up three hours in and called out, "Otto, let my people go!").

You Don't Mess with the Zohan
Directed by Dennis Dugan

There have been on-screen Israelis, but interestingly for an industry supposedly controlled by Jews, they've mostly been villains. In *Last Embrace*, a little-known early movie by the Oscar-winning Jonathan Demme, Roy Scheider runs afoul of hit men from the Jewish state. In 1990's *Internal Affairs*, the lascivious Israeli wife of an American arms dealer (her name is Tova, no less) is thrilled to be violated under the table in a restaurant by a corrupt L.A. cop played by Richard Gere. 1980's *Eyewitness* and 1991's *Homicide* feature naifs (William Macy and Joe Mantegna respectively) running afoul of murderous Zionist conspiracies. (*Homicide* was written and directed by David Mamet, who has become a scourge of anti-Semites the world over, which is nice, but he seems not to have noticed his own movie is based on a classic anti-Semitic plot point.)

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

What makes *You Don't Mess with the Zohan* a breakthrough, therefore, is that Sandler's character is nothing less than a superhero. Since this is a Sandler movie, Zohan's talents—he's a counterterrorism secret agent—are mostly played for laughs. He can literally twist people into pretzels, and at one point he wills a hand lopped off by a terrorist interrogator to rise from the floor, grab his enemy's dagger, and stab the guy in the back. But in an odd sort of way, the humor only reinforces the idea.

The joke here is that Zohan is not only Israel's finest terror combatant; he's also what Israelis call a *pushtak*, a greaser, a bridge-and-tunnel guy from the land of milk and honey, a Jewish Guido. The classic *pushtak* saunters down a Tel Aviv street with a pack of cigarettes rolled up inside his T-shirt sleeve. He believes he is God's gift to the world, especially to the ladies, and he takes himself with the utmost seriousness even as others laugh at him. Inside Israel, the *pushtak* is a dated stereotype, a figure of sport from the 1970s and '80s.

Sandler and his collaborators, the brilliant comic writers Robert Smigel and Judd Apatow, seem completely aware of this, since their Zohan is obsessed with "going disco disco" and sports a hairdo copied from a 1983 Paul Mitchell styling catalogue. Zohan worships at the altar of Paul Mitchell because, even though he can scamper through a Beirut neighborhood like Spider-Man, he wants to chuck it all and become a hairdresser. (There were a lot of Israeli hairstylists in New York in the early 1980s; maybe one of them coiffed Sandler or Smigel and this film was born.)

Dated the type may be, but since the *pushtak* is unknown to all but a few million people on earth, Sandler's use of it to craft a new comic character is inspired. (Would that his Israeli accent were similarly inspired; half the time he sounds French.) In fact, everything in this movie that has to do with Israel and Israelis is hilarious, if wildly over the top. The dazzling opening scene, set to a catchy number by an Israeli hip-hop band, shows Zohan walking the length of the beach in Tel Aviv playing hacky sack, dancing, fighting, and hosting a barbecue until an army helicopter comes to fetch him for yet another dangerous mission.

His parents won't hear of him taking up another line of work. "You're Rembrandt with a grenade!" his mother declares. His father, played by the great old stand-up Shelley Berman, delivers a gasp-inducingly funny monologue about his son's homosexual leanings when he hears about the hair ambitions.

There is a running gag involving hummus that should grow old quickly but only gets funnier as the movie goes along—and another, more obscure running gag about an orange soda called

Adam Sandler

"Fizzy Bubblech" that may be even funnier to anyone who has ever tried to imbibe a soft drink in the Middle East. (This may be the only time in history that the Tribe brand of kosher chick pea-based foodstuffs has found itself in a position to secure product placement in a major motion picture.)

Zohan finds himself seeking employment at an Israeli-run electronics store in New York with a sign out front that says "Going Out of Business"—only to learn that the actual name of the store is "Going Out of Business." Cowriter Smigel, who is the brains and voice of the genius foul-mouthed puppet called Triumph the Comic Insult Dog, plays the irascible manager of the store, and with a perfect Israeli accent.

"He wanted to be a hand model," a colleague says sadly, "but then the electronics business got a hold of him, and he was never the same. Don't give up on your dream, Zohan."

The movie is a terrible mess, with about six different plotlines going at once that seem to have been stitched together out of a hodgepodge of drafts of a screenplay that's been in the works for a decade. For no reason whatsoever, and with no laughs garnered whatsoever, the villain of the piece is a Trump-like real-estate developer played by Michael Buffer, the man who shouts "Let's get ready to rumble." He is threatening a small strip of downtown Manhattan where there are Arab businesses on one side of the street and Israeli businesses on the other side of the street. Out of nowhere, in the last 10 minutes, the bad guy summons a redneck (played by, of all people, the rock singer Dave Matthews) to take out the block. The Arabs and Jews must work together to defeat the evil White Man.

Zohan keeps saying he wants an end to the bloodshed. He keeps capturing the foremost Palestinian terrorist, the Phantom (John Turturro), only to hear that the Phantom has been traded back to the Palestinians for an Israeli captive to be named later. This is one of several good and unexpectedly sophisticated jokes about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that pop up every now and then. As Zohan and a bad guy fight, they have an argument about whose people were there first, with the bad guy screaming "It's not so cut-and-dried!" as Zohan hurls him off a ledge.

Later, a would-be terrorist calls the Hezbollah help line; he is informed by a recorded voice that no help can be offered because there are negotiations going on, but to call back as soon as negotiations break down. (Perhaps the best joke on the subject is the most inside joke of all: The woman playing Zohan's Palestinian love interest is Emmanuelle Chriqui, who was born and raised an Orthodox Jew.)

There is, as usual for Sandler, plenty of dumb humor of the sort that gives dumb humor a bad name, but that delights his 14-year-old-boy fan base. *You Don't Mess with the Zohan* is unusual because there are all sorts of tantalizing comic ideas floating around in that shallow pool. And every 10 minutes or so, it makes you explode with laughter. ♦

COLUMBIA PICTURES

"Susan Sarandon . . . says if John McCain gets elected, she will move to Italy or Canada." ***—Liz Smith,* New York Post, *May 29***

Parody

the weekly Standard

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