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—Peter Meyer

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

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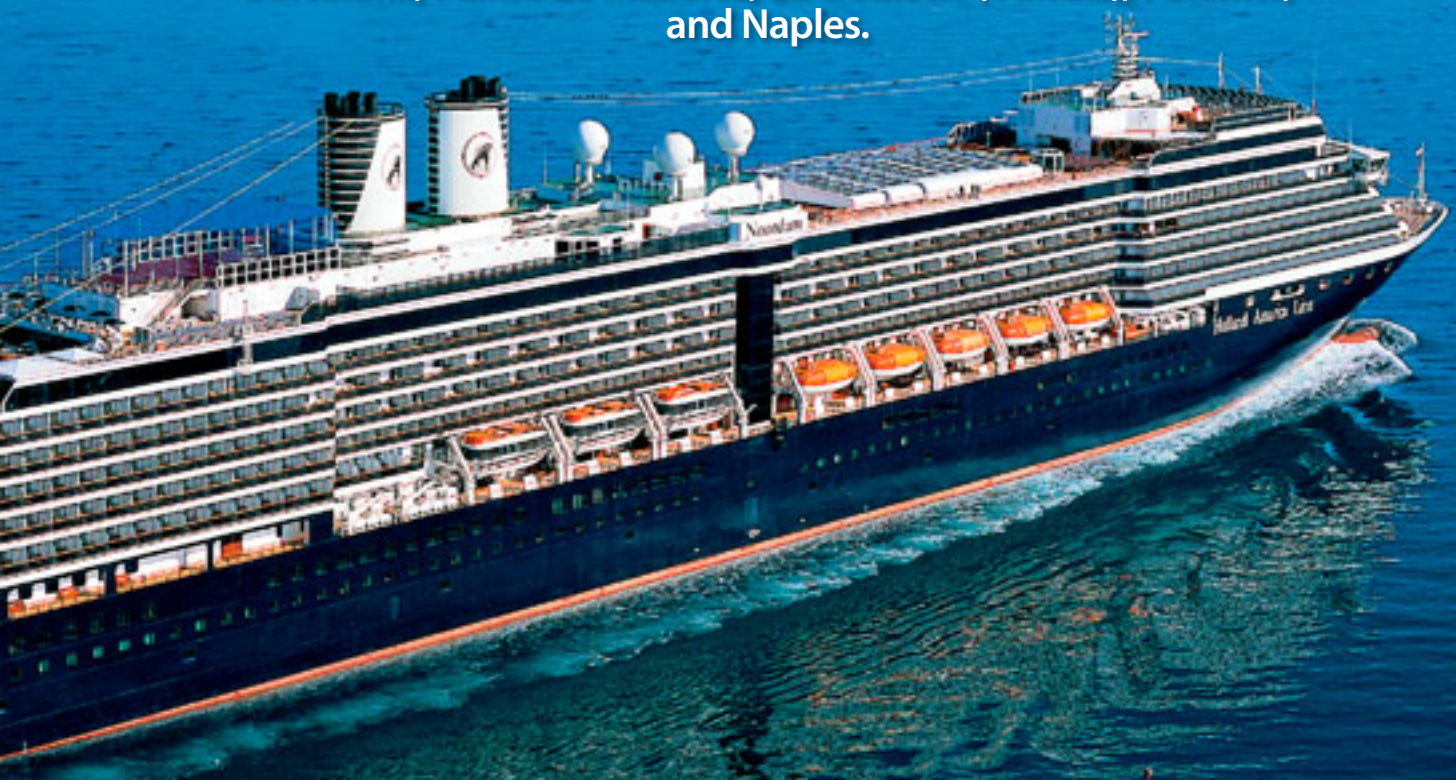

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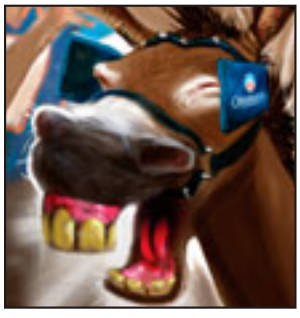

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Books & Arts

the weekly Standard

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History by Herbert

Truth to tell, The Scrapbook's favorite *New York Times* op-ed page columnist is neither of the two obvious choices (sorry boss), but the legendary Bob Herbert. An import from TV and the *New York Daily News*, Herbert is reliably angry and incoherent on any number of topics; but The Scrapbook is happiest when he catches his breath and offers readers a lesson in history. Like Doctor Johnson's observation comparing a woman preaching with a dog walking on his hind legs, "it is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all."

Consider last week's Bob Herbert essay complaining about John McCain's admiration for Theodore Roosevelt. Heresy! The bird-watching, trust-busting TR, says Herbert, would have nothing in common with the oil-drilling, business-friendly McCain and his modern Republican party. And to clinch his argument, Herbert invokes our favorite TV historian and authorized biographer of John Kerry, Douglas Brinkley: "The truth of the matter," Professor Brinkley declares, "is that Roosevelt today would be on the left."

Oh, really? This is a classic specimen of what The Scrapbook calls the party-of-Lincoln argument; e.g., How can the party of Lincoln possibly oppose (take your choice) the Reverend Jesse Jackson, affirmative action, or Al Sharpton's National Action Network? That is to say, take a historical figure a century-and-a-half removed from the present day, and drop him by parachute into contemporary America. This is about as useful as asking how the party of (Andrew) Jackson could favor Indian casinos or, to take a more up-to-date example, how the party of (George) Wallace could possibly support racial quotas.

This is not a means of connecting current politics with the past, but a device to discredit a designated villain by dishonest means.

Theodore Roosevelt was born years before the Civil War, graduated from Harvard in 1880, and left the White House 99 years ago. When he was president, Arizona was not yet a state, women didn't have the vote, New England was solidly Republican, and there was no income tax. He is, in other words, a figure so remote from our own time—living in a social and political climate so different from today's—that drawing strict analogies is a fool's errand.

Of course, Roosevelt was a critic of Big Business and an avid conservationist in his time, but after a century of regulatory reform and environmental legislation, would he have the same perspective as he did in 1901? Of course not. John McCain is as distant from Theodore Roosevelt—exactly as distant—as TR was from John Adams.

On the other hand, as neither Herbert nor Brinkley mentions, there are other possible vectors of comparison. Would the man who "seized the isthmus" and built the Panama Canal be so horrified by drilling for offshore oil? Would the commander in chief who counseled to "speak softly and carry a big stick" oppose the liberation of Iraq?

The "truth of the matter," The Scrapbook tends to think, is that Theodore Roosevelt—naturalist, naval historian, hero of the Spanish-American War—would find more to admire about John McCain than about, say, Bob Herbert or Professor Douglas Brinkley. ♦

Bashing the America-bashers

The Scrapbook's friend Tim Montgomerie got a taste of arrogant America-bashing a year ago when he dined with an American friend at a London restaurant. They were discussing politics when the people at the next table began loudly denouncing America, obviously to annoy Montgomerie, an influential member of the Conservative party, and his friend. "Excuse me," Montgomerie said. "You're being incredibly rude." The snap response: "It was rude for America to invade another country." The exchange went downhill from there.

That incident spurred Montgomerie, who operates a widely read political website called ConservativeHome.com, to begin a campaign to combat anti-Americanism in Britain and Europe. "Anti-Americanism has become an acceptable prejudice," he says. "I've got to do something about it."

Now he has. Montgomerie, 37, last week launched a new website, Americaintheworld.com. Its first feature was a poll showing Brits are anti-American in the abstract, but not in a pinch. Asked who they'd want to come to the rescue of a Britain under attack, 53 percent

(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of May 12, 2003)

said the United States. Germany, at 12 percent, was second. And asked which country they'd like to spend a year working in, 50 percent said the United States, with France a distant second at 17 percent.

Other questions found that Barack Obama's popularity would fade if, as president, he either approved an attack on Iran or failed to stop Iran from going nuclear. The poll also found considerable ignorance about America. More than half the respondents thought polygamy is legal in parts of the country.

The website asks visitors to sign a declaration saying "ours is a better world because of America." Nearly 11,000 signed up immediately. And a two-minute video imagines "A World without the American Soldier"—a grim world indeed. Next month, Tory leader David Cameron is scheduled to endorse the effort to combat anti-Americanism. ♦

He's Grrreat!

If you are the greatest Olympian medal winner of all time, you can pretty much do whatever you want—or at least eat whatever you want. Swimmer Michael Phelps, winner of a record eight gold medals in Beijing, recently revealed he eats three fried egg sandwiches (with cheese and mayonnaise), three pancakes, a five-egg omelet, three slices of French toast, and a bowl of grits. For breakfast. At lunch he will scarf down a pound of pasta and two ham and cheese sandwiches. For dinner, it's another pound of pasta and a large pizza. While training, Phelps consumes some 12,000 calories per day—not that it shows.

So we shouldn't be at all surprised when we see Phelps appearing on cereal boxes next month—even if the cereal happens to be Kellogg's Frosted Flakes. Health scolds, naturally, are up in arms because the winningest Olympian in history is endorsing a product that doesn't feature flax seed, cement powder, and magically nutritious bark and twigs. Nutritionist Rebecca Solomon told the *New York Daily News*, "I would rather see him promoting Fiber One. I would rather see him promoting oatmeal. I would even rather see him promoting Cheerios."

It seems that Phelps's endorsement of Frosted Flakes will encourage children to eat Frosted Flakes, which is apparently lethal. But The Scrapbook grew up just fine idolizing Tony the Tiger and wouldn't have a problem if Michael Phelps appeared on a box of Ho-Ho's. Just remember to exercise eight hours a day, kids. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

"There's a moral problem with all the pro-Georgia cheerleading, which has gotten lost in the op-ed blasts against Putin's neo-imperialism. A recurring phenomenon of the early Cold War was that America encouraged oppressed peoples . . . " (David Ignatius, *Washington Post*, August 20). ♦

Casual

A Summer Car

The car was parked across the street from the ice-cream parlor: a little, old convertible we'd gotten cheap to tool around the Black Hills. Or, at least, it was cheap to purchase. Actually owning the thing turns out to be a more expensive proposition. Your typical British motorcar from the 1980s needs roughly one hour of mechanical work for every hour on the road, and the 1987 Jaguar XJS we found seems determined to uphold all the fine old British traditions: a 12-cylinder motor! jet-black paint! leather seats! an electrical system apparently modeled after a London street map! an oil leak determined to keep Saudi Arabia in business for generations to come!

Anyway, the car was there on the main drag of Hot Springs, one of five or six angled into the diagonal parking spaces overlooking the river. Fall River, it's called, though *river* is maybe a little much. It's really more of an overachieving creek, formed by the dozens of hot springs in the area. For that matter, *hot* is a little much. Water bubbling from the ground at a constant 60 degrees may keep the river from freezing in the winter, but we come to South Dakota for the summer, and along about July, those springs feel a long way south of hot. Or even warm.

Still, the town is a pretty place, nestled in the last mountain canyon before the evergreens of the Black Hills give over to the treeless prairies in the south. Through much of America, it's the soft woods that reveal the presence of water: cottonwoods, maybe an elm or two, some poplars, the occasional oak. You know the look if you've ever driven across the West: Each little town, with its streets square to the compass, its deliberately deciduous trees, and its quadruped water-tower, set apparently at random on the dry and open plains.

Hot Springs has something of that prairie-town feeling, but backed by the mountains of Ponderosa Pine and Black Hills Spruce—all in all, a perfect place to spend our summers, we thought. The best of both worlds, really: a small-town, semirural escape from the pressures of New York, with Internet access and a Jaguar convertible in which to cruise around, at least when it decides to run. Which is why it was parked across from the ice-cream parlor when the flatbed truck, loaded with a gigantic piece of farm machinery, came slowly around the curve.

HAL MAYFORTH

The ice-cream cones were pretty good. My daughter picked the maple nut, I think. My wife chose the huckleberry. And the mower arm on the harvester decided to scoop up the whole row of cars parked across the street. It was a slow-motion catastrophe, the whole thing happening at a leisurely 20 miles an hour. Bam! And the back of the Ford pick-up was smashed. Then the mower arm calmly recoiled back to its home, bounced against the tractor, and swung out again—just in time to smash the back of the old station wagon parked in the second spot. Bam, swing back, swing out again, and bam, hit the next car. And the next. And the next was our little black Jaguar, with the top closed, waiting its turn.

Bad wiring may be the most famous feature of those British sports cars. (As the old joke runs: Why do the English drink warm beer? Because the same company that makes their automobiles' electrical systems also makes their refrigerators.) But those cars are notable, as well, for how low they are to the ground. These aren't automobiles you step out of. They're automobiles you climb up from, and when the mower arm reached the Jaguar, it almost passed right over it.

Almost. Just the lowest tine of the mower caught the car, slicing as delicately as a surgeon's scalpel through the soft roof, making a sort of convertible of the convertible—or a roll-your-own sunroof added to the retractable top.

The smash-up made the front page of the newspaper the following week. This is a small town, after all. And the man from the insurance company spent a good deal of time helpfully hunting down an upholstery shop to sew a new roof for the poor, scalped car.

But it was the policeman, come to write up the accident report, who brought the matter home. "Summer folks, eh?" he asked. "Well, things like this happen from time to time out here. And out on the highway, it would have been worse. You might think about getting a different car. Something a little more solid, a little more South Dakota, if you know what I mean."

Summer folks? *Summer folks?* I was born in this state, I wanted to say, and I've worked on its ranches, and hauled its hay, and ridden its horses. But I looked down at the pretty little black Jaguar, shining there in the sun, and I had to admit that I did know, pretty much, what he meant. Next year, I'm going to get a pick-up.

Joseph Bottum

the weekly Standard

The Thin Man

This week, the least qualified man to receive a major party nomination for the presidency of the United States in modern times will be anointed by his party. He could well win the general election.

Republicans have held the presidency for the last eight years. On five occasions since the FDR-Truman administration, voters have had a chance to change parties after a two-term presidency. Four of those times (1960, 1968, 1976, 2000), they have done so. The fifth occasion was 1988, when Republicans held the White House after Reagan's two terms. But Reagan's approval rating was then close to 60 percent; George W. Bush's is around 30 percent.

What's more, the Democrats now lead the GOP by about 10 points on the generic ballot. Economic growth this election year will be minimal. And a majority of the public are more focused on the economy than foreign policy. In any case, a majority of the public still think the Iraq war was a mistake.

These are the underlying political conditions. As for the candidates, Barack Obama is the beau ideal of a modern contender—and John McCain is not. As for the campaigns, Obama's will outspend and out-organize McCain's. And all the powers of the old media, the old academy, and old Hollywood—all the forces of political correctness and establishment progressivism—have entered into an alliance to try to ensure an Obama victory.

Only two things stand in the way: John McCain and Barack Obama. John McCain is a man of wide experience, demonstrated courage, and strong character. Can one say the same of Barack Obama?

Here is Obama's résumé: an Ivy League law degree, a few years of community organizing, seven years in the Illinois senate, three and a half years as a U.S. senator. Kind of modest. What has he accomplished in any of those jobs? Not much, not much at all.

Has he shown great courage in his political career? Has he shunned the easy path or broken with the conventional liberal pieties of those around him? Has he taken on his own party on a major issue? Nope.

Has he shown exemplary character? He has undoubted skills and abilities. He has always had great potential. But has he followed through on it? Is there a moment in his public life that one looks to and says: Agree or disagree, that was impressive?

His defining moment so far was his keynote speech at the 2004 Democratic convention. If one rereads that speech today, one sees more clearly the emptiness beneath the eloquence, the lack of substance behind the sizzle. But one paragraph does stand out:

> Our party has chosen a man to lead us who embodies the best this country has to offer. That man is John Kerry. John Kerry understands the ideals of community, faith, and sacrifice, because they've defined his life. From his heroic service in Vietnam to his years as prosecutor and lieutenant governor, through two decades in the United States Senate, he has devoted himself to this country. Again and again, we've seen him make tough choices when easier ones were available. His values and his record affirm what is best in us.

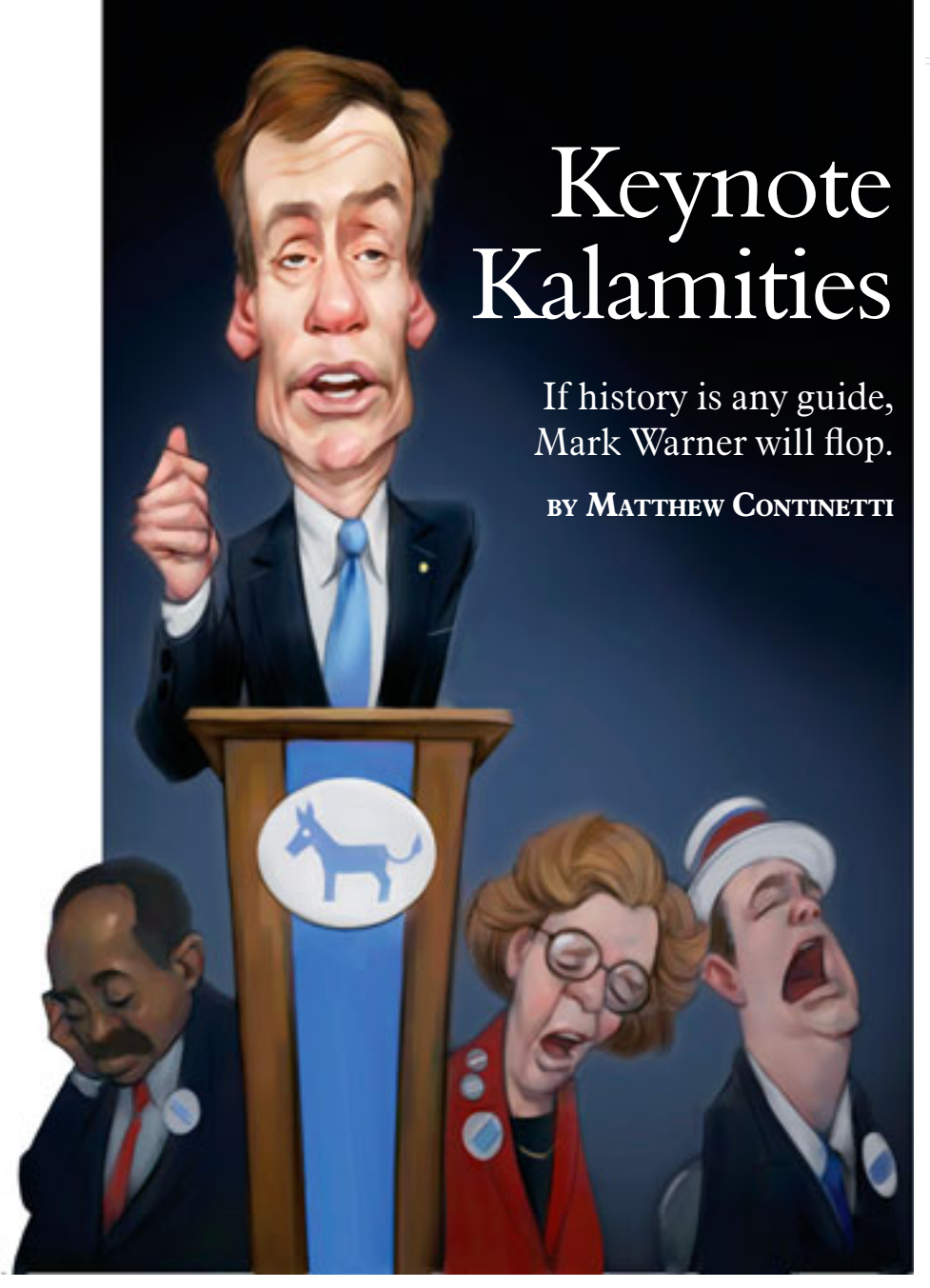
Leave aside whether John Kerry deserved Obama's encomia. Doesn't Obama's praise of Kerry highlight how thin Obama's own claim to leadership is? After all, Obama has done none of the things for which he praises Kerry. Is he ready to be president of the United States? I think a majority of American voters will conclude not.

What's more, they'll realize that the Democratic party will control Congress for the next two years. There's no chance (unfortunately) that a conservative domestic agenda will be much advanced, no matter who's president. So moderates and independents wary of Republican governance or conservative enthusiasms will have little to fear from a McCain presidency. They may conclude they have quite a bit to fear from the team of Obama-Pelosi-Reid governing unchecked.

And we're at war. We're electing a commander in chief. It's not so much that Obama would, like the Democrats of his youth, blame America first. It's that he would wish away the dangers to America—and react too little and too late to threats to ourselves and our allies.

Obama said in 2004, "We coach Little League in the blue states and, yes, we've got some gay friends in the red states." I suspect Barack Obama would be a great Little League coach—sensible but also inspiring, balanced and empathetic, able to deal with both crazed parents and immature kids. And I suspect that, on November 4, the American people will decide to allow Barack Obama plenty of time to coach Little League in the next four years by keeping him in the Senate, and entrusting the presidency to a major leaguer, John McCain.

—William Kristol



Keynote Kalamities

If history is any guide, Mark Warner will flop.

BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

Mark Warner, the former Virginia governor who is currently running to represent that state in the Senate, delivers the keynote address at the Democratic convention on August 26. The bar is high. Four years ago, when the Democrats gathered in Boston, a little-known Senate candidate from Illinois delivered the keynote to great acclaim. The speech launched Barack Obama upward to the stratosphere of global celebrity. Suffice it to say: Warner is unlikely to repeat Obama's experience.

Matthew Continetti is an associate editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

It won't be entirely Warner's fault. Obama is one of the most charismatic Democrats to take the national stage in a long while. Warner, a popular governor and nice enough guy, is the dictionary definition of an empty suit. In 2004, Obama was new and many times more interesting than the dour senator who was the party's nominee. Warner has been around since 1994, when he challenged John Warner (no relation) for the Senate and lost, and he has the unenviable task of paving the ground for a nominee who presides over a cult of personality that would make Che green with envy.

These aren't Warner's only problems. He is a centrist who will address a party that took a sharp left turn in 2006. Warner supports gun rights, wants offshore drilling along Virginia's coast, and sponsors NASCAR races. He is also wealthy, with a fortune estimated in the hundreds of millions and a perhaps understandable distaste for class-warfare rhetoric. His nonideological politics and businessman's approach to governance plays well with both Virginia's suburban liberals and southern good ol' boys. But it is unlikely to stoke the passions of the union members, academics, antiwar activists, netroots bloggers, grievance groupies, and feminists in the national party.

The unpleasant truth for Warner is that centrists do not give the best Democratic keynote addresses. It may not take a village to raise a child, but it takes a liberal to give a good keynote. A review of the last eight such speeches makes this clear. On the centrist side, you have the likes of Evan Bayh and Harold Ford. On the liberal side you have Barbara Jordan, Morris Udall, Mario Cuomo, Ann Richards, Barbara Jordan (again), and Barack Obama. There's no contest. The liberal's address always packs more punch. Consider, also, Bill Clinton's nominating speech at the 1988 Democratic convention, which is often mistaken for that year's keynote. Clinton is a centrist, of course. He bombed big time.

Why do the moderates suffer so? In part it must be because they have so little to say. Their ascendance took place during the Clinton era, when Democrats tried hard to muddy the ideological and programmatic differences between the two parties. It is difficult to get liberals excited about an agenda that "balances the budget to keep interest rates down," as Evan Bayh tried to do in 1996. Or try filling the heads of community organizers and labor bosses with visions of "young people . . . using their entrepreneurial spirit to build companies, start nonprofits, and drive our new economy," as Harold Ford attempted in 2000.

Unwilling to launch partisan broadsides against Republican plutocrats, the centrists inevitably fall back on self-indulgent biographical reminiscences.

DAVE MALAN

In his keynote, Bayh regaled the audience with the history of his family in order to illustrate the banal lesson that, while "the challenges we face are new . . . the values that must guide us are the same." Ford's rhetorical achievement was to combine superfluous memoir with sentimental treacle. He spoke of how he attended a "kindergarten graduation" during his first campaign, and indeed "I continue to attend kindergarten graduations to this day." And it is "with those five year olds in mind," he went on, that "our first step in encouraging their dreams and unleashing their imaginations is"—what else—"electing Al Gore our next president. For their sake, we can't go back." *For the children*.

The liberal keynoters, by contrast, train their cannon squarely on the Republican nominee and never let up. "The keynote should supply more of the prose, the substance, set up most of the argument," Mario Cuomo told me last week. "My job was to make the case for the Democrats. I wasn't the subject. I concentrated on the issues."

Cuomo's speech in 1984 was a stemwinder, no doubt about it. In a torrent of florid prose, he said President Reagan "believed in a kind of social Darwinism," and that Reagan's "shining city on a hill" was "more a *Tale of Two Cities*," where "there are people who sleep in the city streets, in the gutter, where the glitter doesn't show. . . . There is despair, Mr. President, in the faces that you don't see, in the places that you don't visit in your shining city." Heavy stuff. Cuomo's long sermon—he never used one word where he could use seven—even included a credo. All that was missing was the benediction.

Ann Richards's 1988 keynote was a lighter affair. Whereas Cuomo waxed—and waxed—eloquent, Richards assembled a litany of biting one-liners. "After listening to George Bush all these years," she began, "I figured you needed to know what a real Texas accent sounds like." After that the audience was putty in her hands. Richards was merciless. "Now that he's after a job that he can't get appointed to," she said of (the first) President Bush, "he's like Columbus discovering America. He's found child care. He's found education. Poor George. He can't help it. He was born with a silver foot in his mouth."

Barbara Jordan, the late congresswoman from Texas, was such a talented orator that she delivered the keynote twice, in 1976 and 1992. (Perhaps uncoincidentally, the Democrats won the presidency in both years.) Jordan's speeches were partisan, to say the least. The 1992 address was also esoteric, postmodern even. "I want you to listen to the way I have entitled my remarks," she said then. "'Change: From What to What?' From what to what? This change—this is very rhetorically oriented—this change acquires substance when each of us contemplates the public mind. What about the public mind?"

Apparently it's not very bright, because in between attacks on the "thinly disguised racism and elitism which is some kind of trickle-down economics," Jordan felt it necessary to repeat herself again and again. "We know what needs to be done. We know how to do it. . . . We know what needs to be done and how to do it. . . . The Democratic party is alive and well. It is alive and well. . . . Change. Change. . . . That's not easy. That's not easy. But we have to do it. We have to do it." And the repetitions are annoying. And the repetitions are annoying.

The address sounds better than it reads. The climax of Jordan's 1992 speech is an exemplar of liberal rhetoric. "We must change the deleterious environment of the 80s," she said, "that environment which was characterized by greed, and hatred, and selfishness, and megamergers, and debt overhang." Debt overhang! "Change it to what? Change that environment of the 80s to an environment which is characterized by a devotion to the public interest, public service, tolerance, and love. Love. Love. Love." It's all you need.

According to Cuomo, compared with centrists, liberals have an easier time giving speeches. "It's easier to make the case for the middle class or the poor than it is to make the case for the people who are not middle class or poor," he says. "It's easier, emotionally, to get people aroused to talk about the people in the gutter where the glitter doesn't show. It's not 'liberal.' You're talking about people in trouble, people struggling." And the audience responds to sympathetic stories.

It may have seemed back in 2004 that Barack Obama was a centrist. In retrospect, however, it is clear that was not the case. Obama's speech contained a fair amount of biography, to be sure, but it also contained more than a few sob stories of the Barbara Jordan school of speechwriting. And it relied heavily on calls to national unity, a recurring trope of the liberal keynotes. "There are those who are preparing to divide us," Obama said, "the spin masters and negative ad peddlers who embrace the politics of anything goes." But, Obama went on, "there's not a liberal America and a conservative America—there's the United States of America." One people. Listening to this, you hear echoes of Richards—"We are one nation"—as well as Cuomo—"We Democrats believe that we can make it all the way with the whole family intact."

I asked Cuomo what made Obama's speech such a success. "His eloquence, his voice, the surprise factor," Cuomo said. "They didn't know him, and what they got was far, far better than they expected. It's going to be difficult for him to give a more effective speech—ever. He is the best I have heard, and I have heard a lot of good ones." If the speech had a flaw, Cuomo said, it was that it lacked specifics. "If you ask people, was it a good speech? They say, 'Yes!'" he went on. "But then you ask them, name two things from the speech . . . they can't do it."

Cuomo is right, of course, but he discounts Obama's real achievement, which was delivering a Democratic convention speech that continues to impress the public. It's a gift peculiar to liberals. Ted Kennedy's 1980 convention speech—"The dream shall never die"—is one of few notable speeches in the senator's long career. People won't soon forget it, or Obama's. The burden on centrists like Mark Warner is to deliver a speech that people remember at all. ♦

Don't Cry for Russia

The world's unlikeliest "victim."

BY CATHY YOUNG

As Russian tanks rumble through Georgia, and Western pundits talk of the "new Cold War," one trope keeps reappearing in their discourse. Russia's newly aggressive stance, we are told, is partly our fault: After the fall of Communism, the West went out of its way to humiliate and trample Russia instead of treating it as a partner—and now, an oil-powered Russia is striking back.

"Russia's litany of indignities dates to the early 1990s when the Soviet empire collapsed," Samantha Power, a professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and former Barack Obama adviser, wrote in *Time*. "A bipolar universe gave way to a world in which the 'sole superpower' boasted about how it had 'won' the Cold War. Russia was forced to swallow the news that NATO would grant membership to former client states in Eastern Europe, along with former Soviet republics." This theme, particularly NATO expansion as an affront to Russia, has been echoed by many others, from Tom Friedman in the *New York Times* to Pat Buchanan in his syndicated column.

By contrast, few of the Russians who lament their country's slide into belligerent authoritarianism under Vladimir Putin blame it on "humiliation" by the West. "Russia humiliated itself," says human rights grande dame Elena Bonner, widow of the dissident and scientist Andrei Sakharov. "It spent 70-plus years building Communism, and reaped the results."

Victor Davidoff, an independent Moscow journalist and former Soviet political prisoner who became a U.S. citizen but returned to Russia in 1992, told me in an email exchange that he was "nauseated" by talk of Russia's humiliation. "How did the West humiliate Russia? Gave it money—much of which was pilfered? Sent humanitarian aid? Paid for the dismantling of missiles? Invested in Russian businesses? The Germans don't consider the Marshall Plan a humiliation; why is aid to Russia humiliating?"

Davidoff's mention of the Marshall Plan is fitting, since Samantha Power explicitly contrasts the West's treatment of post-Cold War Russia with that of post-World War II Germany: "On occasion, Western countries have consciously avoided humiliating militant powers. . . . Having neutered Germany following World War I, the Allies showed West Germany respect after World War II, investing heavily in its economy and absorbing the country into NATO."

This is a breathtaking inversion of reality. If ever a defeated power was "humiliated," it was postwar Germany—forced to endure several years of occupation, de-Nazification, a massive education campaign promoting the idea of collective German guilt for Nazi crimes, reparations to countries affected by the war, and loss of territories accompanied by the expulsion of millions of Germans. There was also the small matter of the country being split in half.

The contrast with the West's treatment of post-Communist Russia is stark indeed. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States and Europe eagerly embraced Russia's young democracy. Western economic aid to Russia totaled $55 billion from 1992 to 1997 (not counting private charity). While some aid was conditioned on the continuation of market-oriented economic reforms, none of it was tied to political demands for a formal condemnation of the Soviet legacy. Russia was not required to dump the Lenin mummy from the mausoleum in Moscow, to put former party apparatchiks or KGB goons on trial, or to restrict their ability to hold government posts and run for public office. Nor was it forced to pay reparations to victims of Soviet aggression, or surrender territories such as the Kuril Islands, seized from Japan after World War II.

What about the much-maligned NATO expansion? Friedman asserts that it was particularly galling to Russians since Russia itself was disinvited from joining NATO, sending a message that it was still seen as an adversary. Ira Straus, founder of the Committee on Eastern Europe and Russia in NATO, tells a more complex story in a paper for a 1997 George Washington University conference on Russia and NATO.

Russia first expressed cautious interest in NATO membership in 1991, when NATO was not prepared to admit any Eastern Bloc countries. By the time the admission of former Communist states was seriously considered, Boris Yeltsin's administration was already backing away from its embrace of the West, mainly as a result of pressure from the neo-Communists and nationalists who scored victories in the 1993 and 1995 Duma elections. In 1995, pro-Western foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev was replaced by Evgeny Primakov, who, Straus writes, emphasized "multipolarism" and (foreshadowing the leitmotif of the Putin-era Russian political elite) criticized "American attempts at unipolar domination of the world through NATO."

Initially, supporters of NATO expansion envisioned Russia's eventual inclusion, and Yeltsin seemed receptive to the idea. But NATO enlargement soon became a bone of contention.

Cathy Young, a contributing editor to Reason, *is author of* Growing Up in Moscow: Memories of a Soviet

Straus writes that in the mid-1990s, the United States often misinterpreted Russia's opposition to the fast-track admission of smaller states into a Russia-less NATO as opposition to expansion per se. Russia in turn sent many conflicting signals. Above all, it was clearly unwilling to commit to a broad acceptance of NATO strategic policy, one of the main criteria for membership set in the organization's 1995 "Study on NATO Enlargement." This was a serious hurdle, since NATO operates by consensus, giving every member country a de facto veto over the alliance's policies.

Samantha Power dismisses Russia's inclusion in NATO's 1994 "Partnership for Peace" as "largely symbolic." Yet the partnership's framework document not only provided for extensive military cooperation but gave each member guarantees that it would be consulted by NATO about any perceived threats to its security. Straus wrote, in 1997, that Russia "held back from full participation" in the Partnership "due to domestic pressures [and] to suspicions of NATO." This was followed by the creation of the NATO-Russia Council in 2002. Its work included not only joint antiterrorism efforts but programs that provided job training and other assistance to discharged military personnel in Russia.

Bonner believes that, far from treating Russia as an enemy out of habit, Western politicians and pundits have been too prone to "wishful thinking" in treating it as an ally in the war on terror. Says Bonner, "Russia wasn't even treated as an equal partner but a favored child who was petted and given treats."

One such treat was an invitation to join the G7 group of industrial democracies in 1998. Despite Russia's dubious qualifications for membership in a club based on such criteria as economic performance, political stability, and low level of corruption, the group became the G8. In January 2006, after Putin had crushed his independent media and political opposition, Russia actually assumed chairmanship of the G8—just as its Freedom House ranking slipped from "partly free" to "not free." (According to a December 2005 National Public Radio report, some eternal optimists hoped that giving Russia G8 leadership would encourage liberal tendencies.)

Much Western hand-wringing over Russia's wounded pride seems to accept the premise that Russia is entitled to dominate its smaller neighbors and to have its ego coddled as no other former empire has had. Such entitlement is also deeply entrenched in the mindset of many Russians. "At least they used to be afraid of us" is a sentiment I heard repeatedly on my trips to Russia in the early 1990s. Another popular phrase in those days, "*za derzhavu obidno*," can be roughly translated as "makes you feel bad for the country," but really means much more: *derzhava* has overtones of "great power" and "autocratic state"; *obidno* conveys shame, hurt and resentment. With such a mentality, Putin's bully rhetoric—"Russia can rise from its knees and sock it to you good and hard," he remarked in 1999—found an eager audience.


Vladimir Putin

THOMAS FLUHARTY

The painful humiliation of Germany after World War II had one major positive aspect: The Nazi virus was purged from the nation's system. Russia never truly confronted or rejected the evil of its Communist past. Yeltsin, to his credit, sought to do just that. He outlawed the Communist party (which successfully challenged the ban in court) and spoke of the Soviet Union as "the evil empire." This changed under Putin, whose idea of resurgent Russian pride includes celebrating Soviet-era "accomplishments" while treating the crimes as deplorable, but fundamentally no worse than the blots on any other nation's history.

The new Russia bristles at any effort to account for those crimes, be it Ukraine's attempt to have the state-engineered famine of 1932-33 recognized as genocide by the United Nations or Estonia's prosecution of veteran Communist Arnold Meri for his role in the deportation of Estonian "undesirables" in 1949. In July, the Russian foreign ministry issued a peevish protest against President Bush's Captive Nations Week proclamation that mentioned "the evils of Soviet Communism and Nazi fascism," decrying it as an attempt to "continue the Cold War." "But how can it not continue," asked Soviet-era dissident Alexander Podrabinek in an article on the EJ.ru website, "when those in charge of Russia's foreign policy openly try to whitewash Communist ideology?"

National humiliation is not a thing to wish on anyone. But perhaps, after Russia's 20th-century history, a few lessons in humility would have been useful—and well deserved. ♦

Would You Hire Barack Obama?

The résumé of a chronic underachiever.

BY DEAN BARNETT

For over a decade I worked as a headhunter specialized in placing lawyers. I've often wondered what I would have made of Barack Obama's résumé if it had come across my desk.

I'd start off being impressed—*very* impressed. In the legal industry, almost regardless of a candidate's seniority, the first thing anyone looks at is the candidate's education. Even 17 years after graduating from Harvard Law School, Obama's work there remains his greatest strength. Obama graduated magna cum laude, near the top of the class. This is a real achievement. Being editor in chief of the *Harvard Law Review* is an even greater one.

It's when Obama leaves law school in 1991 that his résumé starts raising questions. He didn't begin a full-time job until 1993. Between 1991 and 1993, Obama divided his time between lecturing at the University of Chicago Law School, writing a book, and returning to his pre-law school activity, community organizing.

In 1993, Obama went to work for the small Chicago law firm of Davis, Miner, Barnhill and Galland. He could have gotten a job with any major law firm in America. His belated selection of a boutique law firm that offered lower pay but a better lifestyle than the top firms is striking. A lot of people in the legal industry, rightly or wrongly, would infer a certain softness from Obama's chosen path.

Between 1993 and 1996, Obama was a full-time associate at Davis, Miner. On the side, he continued lecturing at the University of Chicago Law School, and his autobiographical *Dreams From My Father* came out in 1995. (Initial sales of the book were poor, though they would take off years later, once Obama became a national figure.) By 1996, Obama was also running for the Illinois legislature. After winning that race, he became a part-timer at Davis, Miner and a member of the Illinois senate, also a part-time job, while continuing to lecture at Chicago.

As a former legal headhunter, I am interested in Obama's law firm work. Last week, I spoke with George Galland of Davis, Miner—now known as Miner, Barnhill and Galland. When I asked about Obama, Galland raved. His enthusiasm was unqualified.

What is striking about Obama's résumé circa 2004, as he began his U.S. Senate campaign, then, is that 13 years out of law school, he had yet to commit himself to one line of work. More important, potential employers would wonder about a gulf between the ability Obama showed at Harvard and his actual accomplishments. Obama never made it beyond lecturer at Chicago, where he wrote no scholarly articles. He wrote one book, then stopped writing for over a decade. And he was less than a force in the Illinois legislature. After roughly three years practicing law, he had turned away from that career.

As a former legal headhunter, I am interested in Obama's law firm work. Last week, I spoke with George Galland of Davis, Miner—now known as Miner, Barnhill and Galland. When I asked about Obama, Galland raved. His enthusiasm was unqualified. I asked Galland how his relatively tiny firm managed to get a guy with Barack Obama's multitude of options to choose them back in 1993 over the better paying big boys. He said his partner Jud Miner "spent months convincing him it was a better place to work" and that Davis, Miner offered a "superior lifestyle."

Galland added, "Barack could have been as good a lawyer as he wanted to be." This is high praise, and reflects Galland's genuine regard for his erstwhile associate. At the same time, the pattern is familiar: Obama did fine work for Davis, Miner, but his vast potential remained untapped.

So if you'd hired Barack Obama at the end of 2004, let's say to be a United States senator, you would have been on notice: You were getting a wonderfully gifted individual, but one with a history of failing to focus for long on the task at hand. And that's exactly how it worked out for Obama's constituents in Illinois. Shortly after becoming a senator, Obama began writing his second book, and shortly after that he began running for president. His accomplishments in the Senate have been virtually nonexistent.

Looking at Barack Obama's résumé today, part of you would really want to hire him. Talent like his is rare. The feeling would only intensify after an interview process, in which Obama would certainly shine. But you'd still have the cold, hard facts of his résumé staring you in the face. You'd reluctantly have to conclude that Obama's failure to commit himself to any career sufficiently to excel at it suggests some unexplained restlessness. The net effect is this: His accomplishments haven't been commensurate with his talents. ♦

Dean Barnett is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

An Awkward Alliance

McCain neither embraces Bush, nor criticizes him.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

Shortly after 1 P.M. on March 5, 2008, John McCain strode into the White House Rose Garden with George W. Bush. McCain wore a dark gray suit and a colorful, striped tie. Bush appeared in a slate blue suit with his trademark light blue tie. The president grinned broadly and seemed relaxed, almost playful.

The two men had battled one another in an unexpectedly fierce Republican primary in 2000. The previous evening, McCain had captured enough delegates to win the Republican nomination that he had lost to Bush eight years earlier.

For McCain, it should have been a moment of triumph, even joy. And yet he stood alongside Bush looking tense and uncomfortable. The expression on his face suggested he understood that the pictures being snapped by the photographers on risers just 15 feet away would one day be used against him.

Bush spoke first. "He's going to be the president who will bring determination to defeat an enemy, and a heart big enough to love those who hurt," he said of his former rival. "And so I welcome you here. I wish you all the best, and I'm proud to be your friend."

McCain followed. "Well, I'm very honored and humbled to have the opportunity to receive the endorsement of the president of the United States, a man who I have great admiration, respect, and affection [for]." A reporter watching McCain told a colleague that McCain looked like a man being forced to read a hostage statement. They chuckled before it occurred to them that McCain's history might make such a joke inappropriate.

McCain continued. "I intend to have as much possible campaigning events together, as it is in keeping with the president's heavy schedule. And I look forward to that opportunity. I look forward to the chance to bring our message to America," he said.

He reiterated the point in stilted language moments later. "I hope that the president will find time from his busy schedule to be out on the campaign trail with me, and I will be very privileged to have the opportunity of being again on the campaign trail with him."

Bush, it seems, has had a very busy schedule. The two men have not appeared together since then. And Bush will almost certainly be "very busy" through November.

The George W. Bush issue is about to get much more complicated for McCain. At the Democratic Convention in Denver this week, Barack Obama and his fellow Democrats will continue to do everything they can to suggest that electing McCain will result in a third Bush term. And beginning with the Republican National Convention a week later, McCain will make what amounts to a two-month closing argument to the American people. His central point—that he is better qualified to keep the country safe from another attack—rests on the singular accomplishment of the Bush administration.

I asked McCain about this in mid-August. One day earlier, at a town hall meeting in York, Pennsylvania, McCain had praised Tom Ridge for his work as secretary of homeland security under Bush. "It's not been an accident

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that there's never been another attack on the United States of America," he said.

I read his words back to him and reminded him that he had said Tom Ridge deserved credit for keeping us safe. McCain anticipated my next question.

"So does the president," he said before I could ask. "And I give the president credit all the time. He sure would be getting the responsibility if there had been."

McCain is right, of course. If there had been another attack, Bush's critics would have laid the blame at the president's feet. And McCain is also right that he often goes out of his way to credit Bush for keeping the country safe.

"I also think it might be nice for President Bush to get a little credit that there's not been another attack on the United States of America," McCain said in Tyler, Texas, one week before he appeared with Bush at the White House. (He also said that Texas has produced two of America's "greatest" presidents and that "their name is Bush.")

I asked McCain what specific policies Bush has pursued that have kept us safe.

> If Ridge were here I think he'd tell you that we've certainly increased our security at airports, we've cooperated with our friends and allies in identifying individuals and cells that have been formed or attempted to form both here and overseas. The president's mentioned a couple of times the breakup of plots, both here and in other countries in the world. I think that we have increased our border security, but we have a long way to go in that respect. I think there's just been general progress. The reorganization of our intelligence capabilities.

McCain says he's concerned the country has grown "complacent" about the possibility of another attack and says he intends to keep talking about threats even if it means aligning himself with Bush.

"I don't mind reminding people that we have not had another attack," he says, "nor do I mind giving credit to President Bush." ♦

Unsuper Delegate

Detroit's Kwame Kilpatrick, unwelcome in Denver

BY RICHARD BURR

Detroit

He is African American, charismatic, and controversial. Barack Obama's campaign would prefer that he not attend the Democratic National Convention. And he is *not* the Rev. Jeremiah Wright.

Meet Detroit mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, perhaps Denver's least welcome superdelegate. He has helped turn Democratic-leaning Michigan into something approaching a tossup state.

Michigan was already in play because Obama is an extremely liberal candidate for a working-class state, and because John McCain has had a good track record here, winning the 2000 Michigan primary over George W. Bush. But Kilpatrick has made life even more difficult for Democrats.

The mayor faces eight charges of perjury, misconduct in office, and obstruction of justice related to his testimony in a Detroit police whistleblower lawsuit. Complicating matters, Kilpatrick also faces two charges of assault for allegedly attacking a detective who was delivering a summons to the house of the mayor's sister. Michigan Democrats from firebrand attorney Geoffrey Fieger to longtime congressman John Dingell to several black city council members have called on the mayor to step down, but Kilpatrick won't go.

No wonder Brent Colburn, a spokesman for Obama's Michigan campaign, issued a statement that said, "The focus of our convention to people back here in Michigan should be on Barack Obama and how the party intends to get America back on track, not a distraction involving the troubles of one individual."

The courts, not peer pressure, may grant Obama his wish. A judge in the assault case has barred the mayor from traveling out of town and put him on a tether. This negated a ruling by a different judge in the perjury case that removed the tether and allowed Kilpatrick to travel. Kilpatrick requested an August 25 hearing to see if he can get the tether removed, which still might allow him to go to Denver.

Republicans and Democrats alike think Kilpatrick could be influential in the fall election. Obama praised him as a "great mayor" during a May 2007 appearance at the Detroit Economic Club. "I'm grateful to call him a friend and colleague," Obama said. Later, Kilpatrick lauded the Rev. Wright while introducing him for an April keynote address to the Detroit NAACP annual dinner. This was just a few days after Wright's raucous appearance at the National Press Club in Washington—after which Obama finally disowned his longtime pastor.

"The fact that Kilpatrick can be linked to Obama/Wright at a time when Kilpatrick has a 2 percent favorable rating outside of Detroit makes the link devastating," says Michigan GOP pollster Steve Mitchell of Mitchell Interactive.

"During the primaries, Obama dismissed some white voters by saying they 'cling to their guns or religion,'" Mitchell wrote earlier this month in RealClearPolitics. "Democrats must now worry that white voters in Michigan may well cling to their enormous antipathy toward Kwame Kilpatrick and take it out on Barack Obama."

Some Democrats agree. "Kilpatrick scares white mainstream voters and could cost Obama Michigan and thus the presidency in a tight election," says Sam Riddle, a Michigan

Richard Burr is associate editor of the Detroit News *editorial page.*

African-American political consultant who called early on for Kilpatrick's resignation. Riddle worked for Mary Waters, a former state representative who almost beat Kilpatrick's mom—six-term U.S. representative Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, the head of the Congressional Black Caucus—in a three-candidate August primary. The two challengers carried 54 percent of the vote in Detroit, signaling the electorate's displeasure with the Kilpatrick name.

But Detroit voters' antipathy toward Kilpatrick won't translate into an anti-Obama vote. African Americans remain solidly behind Obama. The real worry is about white voters. Still, Obama himself will determine how well he does in Michigan. If voters identify him with specific policies that they like, he may well win. But if his campaign sticks to rhetorical vagueness, then he will remain vulnerable to attacks involving how he handled his relations with the controversial Wright and Kilpatrick.

The question may become how completely Obama and Democrats can get Kilpatrick off the voters' minds. Their best chance comes September 3, when Michigan's Democratic governor, Jennifer Granholm, holds a hearing about removing Kilpatrick from office. The mayor and governor, while from the same Wayne County political machine, do not get along. Granholm, who has poor approval ratings in a state with the nation's worst unemployment rate, might show uncharacteristic guts and remove Kilpatrick. It could help her earn a spot in an Obama administration.

But Kilpatrick likely will go to trial on either the assault or the perjury charges before the November 4 election. That would put the embattled mayor in the spotlight during the stretch run of the presidential campaign and give plenty of ammunition for outside political committees to run ads linking Kilpatrick to Obama.

Obama may avoid a Kilpatrick embarrassment this week in Denver, but the scandal-ridden mayor promises to throw a long shadow over the Democratic campaign into the fall. ♦

Hillary Supporters for McCain

West Virginia Democrats aren't warming up to Obama. BY SALENA ZITO

Chestnut Hill, West Virginia

West Virginia's registered Democrats, like their cousins in western Pennsylvania and eastern and southern Ohio, are having a hard time fitting anywhere within Barack Obama's vision of the Democratic party.

"Obama and his message just do not gel with me," said Mark Lamp as he climbed into his utility truck. Lamp, 47, from neighboring Weirton, is a registered Democrat who voted for Clinton in the May primary.

"My first problem with him is taxes, the second is experience," he explained.

Lamp has worked in construction all of his life, and the company he works for builds houses in the tri-state area. "We have been busy all year." He sees very few signs of the economy or gas prices hurting him, and they are not what drives his vote.

"I vote leadership. That is why I voted for Hillary and why I will vote McCain."

Al Gore failed to connect with West Virginia voters in 2000—the state had gone Democratic since Reagan's 1984 reelection campaign. John Kerry carried that tradition forward by only getting 43 percent of the vote in 2004.

All signs are pointing to Obama facing similar numbers.

"I will admit we have an uphill battle," said Tom Vogel, West Virginia's Democratic state party executive director, "but I haven't given up yet."

"West Virginia went big for Hillary Clinton in this spring's primary," admits Vogel. "They love her, and they loved her husband."

Vogel's field director Derek Scarbro says part of the problem Obama has is the same problem that any national Democrat has coming to West Virginia: "West Virginians have to get to know you and develop a relationship with you."

Getting to know Obama may be a problem. Once thought to be a battleground state, all indications are that West Virginia is off Obama's campaign map. Turn on the television today and you won't find any Obama ads running, and he has no trips to the state planned in the immediate future. (Sources within the campaign say they are keeping their eye on the state.)

West Virginia is still home to the Jacksonian Democrats, those descendants of Scots-Irish immigrants who vote God, country, and guns, and have a stronger than average distrust of government. They are white, lower middle-class union members who work hard, play by the rules, have faith in God and a hefty dose of patriotism.

In a change election when the country goes one way, a few states always trend the other. Kansas went Republican during the liberal trend of the 1960s, and West Virginia may go conservative during the liberal swing of today.

In a state that has just one area code (in Jackson County everyone shares the same exchange, so when you ask for a number they only give you the last four digits), the geopolitical breakdown is monolithic. The only section that has proven liberal

Salena Zito is a political reporter for the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.

Democratic is the eastern panhandle which is fast becoming a suburb of Washington, D.C.

But from the southern coalfields to the northern panhandle (which is really southwestern Pennsylvania, and Catholic Democrat country) you are entering the land that the national Democratic party forgot.

Conversely on the state level there is only one party that controls everything: Democrats, old school Democrats. The state's long-time senator, Robert Byrd, is the perfect example. He endorsed Obama, but only after Obama was pummeled by Hillary in his state's primary. He joined West Virginia's other senator, John D. Rockefeller IV, who was an early supporter of the Illinois senator.

You might have thought that the endorsement of a former governor and sitting senator, and the institutional support that comes with it, would have carried more weight and votes. It did not.

Rockefeller's appeal is based on spending lots of money to win his office. "When he ran for governor and then later for senator," Purdue political scientist Bert Rockman explains, "one would have thought he was running from Pennsylvania since he blanketed the Pittsburgh television stations. He spent money as though he was, er, a Rockefeller."

Rockman says that is how he got there and stays there. Which makes it hard to call someone from, say, southern West Virginia a "Rockefeller Democrat." Voters may vote for him, but they don't identify with him.

The only Republican who looks a likely challenger to this Democratic hegemony is Representative Shelly Moore Capito. The daughter of a former governor, Arch Moore, she will likely run for senator or governor by 2010 or 2012.

Vogel has his eyes on Capito's seat, though; he thinks he can take her out with an Obama win in West Virginia. "She came in on Bush's coat tails and will go out with Obama's," said Vogel, who pauses and then says, "hopefully."

Kent Gates, a GOP strategist working on Capito's House race, dismisses Vogel's weak optimism. "Democrats in West Virginia are just not in line with the national Democratic party."

Gates says Bush's victory in 2000 and the election of Capito show the state is moving right.

Vogel is from western Pennsylvania, and he sees similarities between his Democrats and the ones he grew up with. "There are large pockets of Ohio and Pennsylvania where the mindset and voting patterns are very similar." "If [Obama] comes here, it will make a difference," insists Vogel.

Mark Lamp doesn't see multiple visits making a dent in anyone's view of Obama in West Virginia: "He just does not display any of the qualities that gave Hillary my vote." ♦

MICHAEL RAMIREZ

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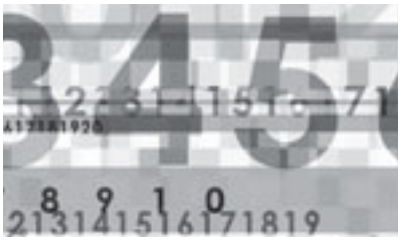

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Arthur T. Benjamin is Professor of Mathematics at Harvey Mudd College, where he has taught since 1989. He earned a Ph.D. in Mathematical Sciences from Johns Hopkins University. The Mathematical Association of America honored him with national awards for distinguished teachingin 1999 and 2000 and named him the George Pólya Lecturer for 2006–08.

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Misfortunes of War

Success in Iraq confounds the Democrats

U.S. DEPT. OF DEFENSE

By Noemie Emery

A funny thing happened this summer: John McCain taunted Barack Obama into making a trip to Iraq, whereupon the press looked around and finally noticed what those who were paying attention had known for some months now. The country portrayed for the last four years by the press and the Democrats as Vietnam-in-the-Desert is doing much better, what with al Qaeda on the run, the Sunnis and Shias coming together, the Shia militias largely defeated, and the war itself looking more or less . . . won.

"The combat phase finally is ending," trilled the Associated Press, which had been warning of doom only weeks earlier. "The United States is now winning the war that two years ago had seemed lost. . . . People are expressing a new confidence in their security forces. . . . Parks are filled every weekend with families playing." Was this good news for McCain, who had staked his career on calling for the surge when all appeared hopeless? Well, no. But it was, apparently, good news for Obama, as less stress in Iraq made the

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Barack Obama and David Petraeus ride over Baghdad's Sadr City on July 21, 2008.

world seem less threatening, made his lack of experience in foreign relations appear less disturbing, and made voters more likely to feel safe taking chances on him. When Iraqi prime minister Nuri al-Maliki said that Obama's plan for a 16-month-long phased withdrawal of American troops struck him as not an illogical timeline, it seemed yet another leg up for the audacious contender. For McCain, it was the old, unfair rule that to solve a problem was to make oneself seem redundant, as shown by the dismissal in 1945 of British prime minister Winston Churchill.

But wait! If the war is now "won," it may help Obama, but doesn't it also help President Bush? His catastrophic, failed, mess of a war in Iraq—the worst decision ever made, by the worst president ever (as the ranters tell us)—was supposed to be the battering ram that would break the Republican hold on the White House, the core of the case Democrats intended to make that his administration had been a disaster like no other in history, Vietnam cubed. When Bush doubled down with the surge in early 2007, Democrats placed a huge bet on failure and sat back to enjoy and cash in their winnings. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Senate majority leader Harry Reid released a joint letter that said a surge would be useless; Senators Joe Biden and Chuck Hagel introduced a resolution opposing the buildup; votes of no confidence followed in rapid succession. "We are going to pick up seats as a result of this war," Reid exulted. Democrats in the Senate spent much of their time forcing a series of votes designed to get their opponents on record as backing the war and the president. In June 2007, Reid declared the war lost.

By the end of that summer, disturbed by some hint that better news might be coming, Democrats tried a preemptive strike on the testimony to Congress of General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker. "Dead flat wrong," Biden pronounced their assessment, before it had even been delivered. Rahm Emanuel predicted a report deserving of a "Nobel Prize for creative statistics or the Pulitzer for fiction." Hillary Clinton said the reports of improvement in Iraq required a "willing suspension of disbelief." Signs of success gave Democrats the vapors. In the face of an optimistic report from General Jack Keane, one of the principal authors of the surge strategy, Representative Nancy Boyda of Kansas became so unnerved that she fled from the hearing. "There was only so much that you could take until we in fact had to leave the room for a while," she said.

If the mere possibility of small signs of progress could so unnerve Democrats last summer, the party might want to lie down and rest for a while as it contemplates a convention, a campaign, and an election to follow, with no failed war to run on, and no George Bush to blame for it. If the war has been won, somebody has to have won it. They can still claim the war failed (in spite of succeeding), or is likely to flare up again at any moment, but that makes Obama's lack of experience still more disturbing. On the other hand, if Iraq is now tame enough to trust Obama to mess with, it means that the president has done something right. Or does it? Can a commander in chief be detached from a victory? Can Obama be trusted if there isn't a victory? Can the president be losing a war while the country is winning it? These are the small contradictions the party will have to explain.

Meanwhile, the party is losing its signature issue, losing the use of the president as an all-purpose piñata, and

has to channel the wrath of its base into alternative venues that may lack the original's pop and oomph. Added to this is the fact that the Democrats' exertions last year to get Republicans on record supporting the surge now seem to have been a complete waste of effort, as these votes are now assets, and Democrats are the ones being asked to explain why they voted to block it. When Harry Reid laid his traps for an "Iraq Summer," this was not quite the outcome he sought.

The conventional view is that the success of the surge has leveled the field between McCain and Obama, leaving each with one "good" and one "bad" call apiece: Obama with his opposition to the war in 2002 (which McCain supported), and McCain with his vote for the surge in 2007 (which Obama opposed). Opinion polls tend to sustain this division, noting that while Americans feel that the surge has been working—and think for the first time in years that the larger war on terror is being won by their country—they still think by something close to a two-to-one margin that the war in Iraq has been a mistake.

This is the good news in the eyes of the Democrats. The good news for the Republicans is that the same polls show that these views go along with the mistaken and outdated conclusion that the war in Iraq has been lost. Polls taken as recently as May and June showed that 54 percent of respondents thought victory in Iraq was not possible; 61 percent thought Iraq would never become a democracy; 62 percent thought the war was going "badly" or "very badly." But those numbers reflect the state of affairs in October, November, and December of 2006, the dark night of the war that coincided with and was the cause of the Democrats' sweep of the 2006 midterms, when violence peaked, and civil war seemed imminent.

In the spring of 2007, the surge met and merged with the Anbar Awakening. Before long, al Qaeda was fleeing from the Sunni-held provinces, the Shia started to turn on their own sectarian radicals, and Sunnis were rejoining the army and government. Late in the summer, casualty rates started to plummet. At the end of September 2007, Bartle Bull became the first journalist to use the *w* word in print and in public, titling a piece in the *Times* of London, "How We've Won the War in Iraq." "The country is whole," Bull wrote. "It has embraced the ballot box. It has created a fair and popular constitution. It has avoided civil war. . . . Iraq's violence has largely become local and criminal. . . . The violence, while tragic, has ceased being political, and is therefore no longer nearly as important as it was."

In the event, the decision of both the Sunnis and Shia to turn their backs both on jihad and on sectarian violence was an act of remarkable political consequence, creating the Iraqi center that Bush had hoped for when he invaded in 2003, but that had not yet existed. In 2008, the laggard Iraqi government finally began to cohere. In April, the overwhelmingly Shiite Maliki government did the unexpected and attacked and defeated the Shiite Mahdi Army in the city of Basra, a definitive act that impressed the Sunnis enough to make them want to come back to the national government. This was the state of affairs that prevailed in late July when Obama made his celebrated visit to Baghdad, and prompted the assertion of victory just days later by the Associated Press.

The AP story was the first inkling most Americans had of Iraq's real conditions and came several months after the last set of polls on Iraq had come out. Over time, if conditions remain as they are, the AP-Bartle Bull view of Iraq will probably replace the 2006 view in the minds of the public, though how soon, and to what extent, is less clear. Some people will always believe that the cost and the chaos of 2004-2006 make the war an epic Bush failure, but if the opinion of others rests on the view that the war was lost, their minds over time may be changed. This means that while the success of the surge is now established beyond refutation, the verdict on the war itself may be open to revision. It will be up to McCain and his backers to make their case strongly, and it may have only a marginal impact on this election. But in a close race, even the margins can be important. And it is no longer a wholly lost cause.

For Obama, his vote on the surge is quite a complication, and one that he never foresaw. Some claim it won't hurt him, as it will have been cast almost two years ago come November, and elections are fought over the future, not the past. But try telling that one to Hillary Clinton, who lost the Democratic nomination on the strength of the go-to-war vote that she cast five years earlier, and that her party's voters refused to forgive or forget. The final insult was that she refused to apologize for it, or at least to apologize for it abjectly enough to please Democratic primary voters. And no one hammered her for it more than Obama, who providentially enough is now being asked to explain his against-the-surge vote in 2007, or at least to admit he was wrong. If he refuses, as *USA Today* said in a July 24 editorial, he is clearly denying the obvious. But if he admits it, he is compromising his campaign's rationale. In the place of experience, of which he has little, he is basing his claim to leadership on his superior judgment, shown by his opposition to the invasion, expressed in 2002 when he was still a state senator, and unable to vote on the issue. But this is called into question by his stance on the surge, which he was able to vote on, and in which case the judgment of John McCain

(and of the president) was demonstrably better than his.

As *Slate*'s John Dickerson noted, it was the most important vote Obama has cast. "As Obama pointed out regularly during the Democratic primaries," he said, "a person's past vote tells you something about his or her judgment. Obama talked a lot about the clarity of his judgment in opposing the Iraq war." On the surge, however, he flunked his own standard. "When he voted against the surge in January 2007, he claimed on more than one occasion that it would lead to increased casualties and sectarian violence. It didn't. How'd he get that one wrong?"

As Dickerson notes, that's not all he got wrong—he's been mistaken in nearly everything he said on Iraq since he came to the Senate. He claimed that the Anbar Awakening took place as a result of the Democrats' congressional victories, but it began in September 2006, two months before the voting took place. He opposed not only the troop surge, but the strategic changes that took place along with it, that did so much to enable the victory. He said the American military had nothing to do with the Anbar Awakening or with the retreat of the Sadr militia, something denied by the military and by the Iraqi Sunnis themselves. He was also wrong in his predictions of what would occur. "In January 2007, Obama claimed that the Iraqi government would make no hard choices if the United States stayed," wrote Dickerson, noting however that "they *have* made hard choices," such as Maliki's decision to attack and defeat Sadr and his Mahdi Army. This of course casts doubt on the senator's current projections. "If Obama was wrong about the tactical gains that would be made by the new strategy, and wrong about how the Iraqi political leaders will react, can his larger theory about how Iraqis will respond to a troop pullout remain intact?"

It can't, and neither can his claim to superior judgment. Picture this ad, as it might be run by the McCain forces sometime this fall:

Cut to Obama, praising his own judgment.

Cut to Obama, opposing the surge, repeatedly, as it is bound to prove useless.

Cut to Obama after the surge has succeeded, claiming he had always said that adding additional troops would improve security.

Cut to Obama telling ABC News's Terry Moran that he would vote against the surge all over again, as he was opposed to the president's overall strategy.

Cut to Obama again, touting the strength of his intuition and judgment.

From the GOP's standpoint, the ads write themselves.

Such are the perils of seeking advantage in this strange new political age. McCain needs Iraq to be won, as it was his war and he knew how to fight it, but not won so thoroughly as to be handed off risk-free to the neophyte challenger. Obama needs the war to be won to make it safe to elect him, but if it is won it indicts his own poor judgment and deprives his party of its favorite issue and most emotional line of attack on his rival, and on Bush.

McCain and his party at least wanted to win the war all along, but for Obama and many Democrats, the sudden lurch from the catastrophic Bush failure to unexpected victory has caused incoherence. Last year, in dam-

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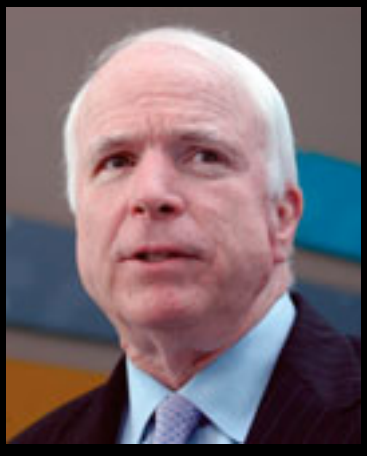

age control, Chuck Schumer declared that the surge itself had been counterproductive: "The violence in Anbar has gone down despite the surge, not because of the surge," he insisted, without quite explaining it. "It wasn't that the surge brought peace." Nancy Pelosi said the surge hadn't worked, and then said it worked only because Iran let it. To *Time*'s Joe Klein, the surge is whipped cream on top of the pile of excrement that is the war, a debacle that somehow produced undeniable victory. "The reality is that neither Barack Obama nor Nuri al-Maliki nor most anybody else believes that the Iraq war can be 'lost' at this point," Klein wrote on July 22, a day after he compared the war effort to fertilizer, and the same day he called the war he said had been won a "disastrous" enterprise. Obama tried the same thing when he called the surge a tactical success within a larger strategic debacle, but a success he would still vote against—knowing in advance it would still be successful—if once again given the chance.

A commander in chief who votes against the success of his own armed forces? Is this the judgment—and change—that we can believe in? ♦

The Faith-Based Campaign

What brought John McCain and Barack Obama to Rick Warren's megachurch

By Terry Eastland

Lake Forest, California

Finishing up his interviews of Barack Obama and John McCain at Saddleback Church on August 16, Rick Warren asked each candidate what he would say "to people who oppose me asking you these questions in a church." Warren emphasized the word "church," and of course it was the church he founded and still pastors that was the venue for the Saddleback Civil Forum on the Presidency. Both candidates gave bland answers to Warren's question, with Obama observing that "these are the kind of forums we need, where we can have a conversation" and McCain that he'd "like to be in every venue in America," adding that he was "happy"—though sadness probably wasn't really an option—"to be here in a church."

Warren seemed already to have that church question in mind when, in opening the forum, he said, "We do not believe in the separation of faith and politics." It was a needlessly defensive remark. For notwithstanding those who opposed Warren for "asking you these questions in a church," there is, as the scholar of American religion D.G. Hart has observed, "a present-day consensus about religion and American politics—that politics needs the ideals, inspiration, and morality of faith." Hart wrote that in 2006. Two years later during a sharply contested presidential race, that consensus seems even stronger—thanks mainly to Barack Obama, who has discussed matters of faith and politics more frequently than any Democratic candidate since Jimmy Carter.

The Saddleback forum stands out as the most faith-involved political event so far in an extraordinarily faith-involved election. John Green of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life told me he could not recall an event quite like it, one in which a pastor interviewed on

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Rick Warren preaching at the Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California.

MONICA ALMEIDA / THE NEW YORK TIMES

national television the majority party presidential nominees in his church.

Yet those who think politically conservative evangelicals were the prime movers in creating the forum at a church whose members, Warren himself has speculated, voted 85 percent for George Bush in 2004 will have to think again. Indicative of today's consensus about religion and politics is the fact that an interfaith organization, Faith in Public Life, established out of concern that in the 2004 election year the Religious Right had dominated the faith-and-politics discussion, made the move that led to Saddleback.

During the primary season, Faith in Public Life organized a "Compassion Forum" at Messiah College in Pennsylvania. There were three presidential candidates still running when it was held—McCain on the Republican side, and Obama and Hillary Clinton on the Democratic—but McCain was unable to attend. So members of the "Compassion Forum Board," described on the Faith in Public Life website as "a diverse coalition of faith leaders from across the ideological spectrum," asked the two Democrats questions designed "to elevate" such "compassion issues" as "poverty, HIV/AIDS, climate change, abortion reduction, genocide in Darfur, and torture."

Pleased with that event, Faith in Public Life wanted to have another. Looking this time to partner with an evangelical but not one associated with the religious right, the organization asked Warren whether he might host a compassion forum, this time with the two presumptive nominees, Obama and McCain. Warren was prepared to do it, but the two campaigns were unable to agree on a time even as they had ideas about how the event should be structured: They wanted it to go beyond the issues discussed in the first compassion forum; they wanted only Warren to ask the questions; and they wanted the event open for all media to cover, in contrast to the Messiah College forum, which CNN exclusively televised.

Warren, who knows both candidates and counts them as friends, sought to jump-start the stalled discussions. As reported by *Time*, he sent a personal "Let's do it" email to the two. An agreement was reached: with the date set, with Warren as the host, with no media exclusivity, and with a broadened subject matter as indicated by the change in name from "compassion forum" to "civil forum on the presidency."

The two campaigns saw political opportunities in an event hosted by Warren. Their agreement to participate can be best understood in the context of the intense competition between Obama and McCain for white evangelical voters. In the past two elections, Bush won these voters by overwhelming margins (he got 78 percent in 2004). A shift to Obama of a mere 10 or 15 percentage points in certain states could help win him the White House. The fact that Warren, who has an enormous profile in evangelical circles, would host the event and actually do the interviewing meant that evangelicals across the country would pay attention.

There are two dangers here. One is that faith may be asked to do more for politics than it is given to do. The other is that faith, in terms of what it is truly about, will be trivialized. After all, what does it mean to say, as McCain did, that 'our faith encompasses not just the United States of America but the world'?

Warren is one of America's most compelling figures, a leader with few peers. Born in San Jose in 1954, he grew up in the tiny northern California town of Ukiah. He graduated from California Baptist University and then, having been called to full-time ministry, received a Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. He later earned a doctorate in ministry from Fuller Theological Seminary in Los Angeles, which had been founded in 1947 as the flagship seminary of the nascent neo-evangelical movement.

When he finished at Southwestern in 1979, Warren and his wife Kay returned to California having decided to start a church—one he could pastor for the rest of his life. He especially wanted to attract those not going to church—the "unchurched." Warren did some research and discovered that Orange County was both the most populous and least churched county in the state. He moved there. Knowing no one, having no money and no job, he somehow managed to rent a place. The guy he rented from became the first member of his church.

Warren spent 12 weeks going door to door conducting a survey in which he asked those who didn't go to church why people didn't go and what they'd look for in a church if they decided to go. The four big reasons people didn't attend church, Warren found, were that sermons are boring and irrelevant; that members are unfriendly to visitors; that churches seem more interested in your money than in you as a person; and that quality children's programs are lacking. Warren called these "sociological reasons," as opposed to theological ones. So he undertook to build "a whole new kind of church"—one without those deterrents. Warren put together a Bible study group and then, 10 days before Easter Sunday in 1980, mailed 15,000 letters describing a new church that was to have its first service on that Sunday. Some 205 people showed up, with only a handful of them people who had ever spent much time in church.

Saddleback Church, which is part of the Southern Baptist Convention, met in 79 different locations before buildings were erected in 1995, the largest being the worship center, which seats 3,500 and has space outside for another 2,000 (this is southern California). Today the average church attendance on Sunday (there are six services) is 22,000.

Saddleback is one of the three largest churches in the United States, a megachurch indeed. Warren is an advocate of big churches, but even as a church grows larger and adds more members, he says, it should grow smaller, as his does, with members joining "small groups" that meet during the week for Bible study, fellowship, and prayer. Saddleback has small groups meeting as far south as Tijuana to as far north as Santa Barbara. The church also has more than 300 community ministries aimed at, among other groups, prisoners, children with Down syndrome, single parents, and people with HIV/AIDS.

Warren is best-known outside his church for the book he wrote in 2002, *The Purpose Driven Life*. It offers a 40-day spiritual journey (one chapter is to be read each day) during which a reader is to answer the question, "What on earth am I here for?" It has become one of the bestselling books in American history, with sales now exceeding 30 million copies.

But Warren's reach is even more extensive than the church he founded and his bestseller might indicate. Seven years before *The Purpose Driven Life* he wrote *The Purpose Driven Church*, in which he said that churches should be driven by the purposes found in the New Testament (worship, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, and disciple-

ship). The book found a huge audience among pastors not only in Southern Baptist churches but in denominations around the world. Warren says he has taught more than 400,000 pastors in 162 countries. Every week he sends out a newsletter to 230,000 pastors, who are free to use the message he preaches on Sunday.

Warren's agenda continues to expand. He is superintending a big alliance—called the P.E.A.C.E. Coalition—of churches, businesses, ministries, and universities that he assembled earlier this year. Through it he aims to get one billion Christians in local churches worldwide to take on five "global giants"—spiritual emptiness, self-centered leadership, poverty, pandemic disease, and illiteracy. (P.E.A.C.E. stands for Promote reconciliation; Equip servant leaders; Assist the poor; Care for the sick; and Educate the next generation.)

Warren is a man of evident conviction and demonstrated executive ability. He is also extremely likeable. It is easy to see why he's received so many tributes. In 2003, *Christianity Today* named him "America's Most Influential Pastor." And in 2005 *Time* stroked him twice, first as "The Most Influential Evangelical in America" and then as one of "The 100 Most Influential People in the World." The thought that Warren might make a good president, if he were not a committed pastor, isn't that ridiculous.

John McCain, Rick Warren, and Barack Obama greet the crowd at the Saddleback Civil Forum on the Presidency on August 16.

ASSOCIATED PRESS / RICHARD VOGEL

Warren is a social conservative, but he's not been involved, at least not in public ways, in politics, and he's never sought any association with the religious right. Still, four years ago Warren considered whether he should try to use his influence among Republicans. He decided against that. "I'm a pastor, not a politician," he told ABC News, and, to *Time*, "I don't believe politics is the most effective way to change the world."

Even so, Warren, whose issue interests in recent years have expanded to include global warming and HIV/AIDS, had no qualms about interviewing the two candidates. He interviewed Obama first (McCain didn't watch or listen) and then McCain, each for an hour. Warren posed the same 22 questions to each candidate. Among other things, he wanted to know how the candidates evaluate people: "Who are the three wisest people you know in your life, and who are you going to rely on heavily in your administration?" And he wanted to find out about their character: "What would be the greatest moral failure in your life?" and "What's the most gut-wrenching decision you ever had to make?" And he got into certain issues: "At what point does a baby get human rights?" and "Define marriage" and "What about stem cells?" and "Define rich" and "What would be the criteria that you would commit troops to end the genocide . . . in Darfur . . . or anywhere else?" He also went philosophical: "Does evil exist?" And, of course, religious: "What does it mean to you to trust in Christ?"

Warren won well-deserved plaudits for holding a conversation with the candidates that, as an approving Faith in Public Life statement put it afterwards, "moved beyond the gotcha-questions and partisan sniping of traditional debates." That was one of Warren's conscious goals—to sponsor a *civil* discussion.

But the forum also was one that most social conservatives probably liked. Differences between the two candidates on a range of issues, especially abortion, were apparent. And McCain came across as more presidential. For example, he emphasized, as Obama did not, that we must defeat evil. And Obama, in answer to the question about when "a baby gets human rights" said that answering the question was "above my pay grade." What else might be above the pay grade of a man aspiring to be our chief executive?

As for that question about what his faith means, Obama said it means

> I believe . . . that Jesus Christ died for my sins, and that I am redeemed through him. That is a source of strength and sustenance on a daily basis. Yes, I know that I don't

> walk alone. And I know that if I can get myself out of the way, that I can maybe carry out in some small way what he intends. And it means that those sins that I have on a fairly regular basis, hopefully will be washed away.

Obama added that his faith also means he has an obligation to think about and act in behalf of, quoting from a statement of Christ's in Matthew 25, "the least of these."

For his part, McCain, gave an answer to the faith question that was short—"It means I'm saved and forgiven"—but continued with: "We're talking about the world. Our faith encompasses not just the United States of America but the world." Then McCain suddenly asked, "Can I tell you another story real quick?" and proceeded to tell his oft-told Christmas Day story while he was a POW in Vietnam, the story about when he was outside his cell in a courtyard, a guard, using his sandal, drew a cross in the dirt and stood there by it for a minute before rubbing it out and walking away. "For a minute there, there was [sic] just two Christians worshipping together. I'll never forget that moment," at which point, as did not happen during Obama's answer to the same question, the audience applauded.

Whether Obama made much progress with evangelical voters as a result of his Saddleback performance is doubtful. But the event demonstrated afresh the current consensus about faith and politics. It is quite okay to ask a presidential candidate what his faith means to him, even though, from the standpoint of the Constitution, our officeholders may be of any faith or none at all, and even though Christianity (the usual faith of those seeking the presidency) does not require a government (or those holding office) to be Christian in order to have legitimacy. It is also the case that the truths found in the Bible don't produce clear policy prescriptions. Consider Obama's mention of his obligation to the "least of these." People who take that obligation seriously nonetheless may fairly disagree about what government might do to help the poor or the handicapped or the widows and orphans—the least of these.

It would be interesting if a presidential candidate, asked a question about his faith, replied by actually making those points. But that's not likely to happen so long as the present consensus about faith and politics holds strong. If anything, there's likely to be demand for more details about one's faith "narrative," more demands for what faith can provide politics. There are two dangers here. One is that faith, specifically the Christian faith, may be asked to do more for politics than it is given to do. The other is that faith, in terms of what it is truly about, will be trivialized. After all, what does it mean to say, as McCain did, that "our faith encompasses not just the United States of America but the world"? Meanwhile the desire to make faith publicly relevant can even affect the most important hour of the church week, the worship service.

On the Sunday morning after the forum, in the same worship center in which it was held, Warren preached on "The Kind of Leadership America Needs." Noting that the two men he had interviewed were "very different in personality, in philosophy, in direction, in goals and in vision, and there's nothing wrong with that," Warren asked the congregation to look not just at where the candidates stood on issues but at their character. He had three points: God blesses leaders who "live with integrity," "serve with humility," and "share with generosity." As is customary for Warren, the message came laden with citations from Scripture, 21 in all—13 from Proverbs and two from the Psalms; three from the Gospels, two from James, and one from Philippians. He used the verses to lend support to his points.

Notably absent from the message, however, was the distinctive content of the Christian faith, even though this was a worship service. Warren didn't discuss the verses he used in the context of the Bible's overall redemptive message. Had he done that, he would have made it to the Good News of Jesus Christ. Even when citing a text explicitly mentioning Jesus, Warren didn't go into what it was actually about. "When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36) is fundamentally not about how leaders need to be compassionate, though they do, but about how Jesus the shepherd has come for his lost sheep.

You don't have to be a Christian to accept the essence of Warren's message. We all tend to agree on the need for integrity, humility, and compassion in our leaders. A non-Christian might pass on Warren's closing exhortation to pray for God's guidance in deciding whom to vote for on November 4. But to his other exhortations—to study what the candidates stand for, to register to vote, and then to vote on Election Day—who can say no?

Plenty of pastors mine the Bible for moral teachings and character lessons. Warren's approach to Scripture on this particular Sunday was hardly unusual. And taken as a civics lesson, his message was fine. But as a sermon for a church, it left something to be desired.

The irony of Saddleback is that one of the two candidates—it was not McCain, but Obama, in his remarks about Christ dying for his sins and redeeming him—actually said more about the Christian faith in the civil forum than America's most influential pastor did in his message on Sunday to his congregation. Such are the oddities that attend the present moment, in which our faith-involved politics carries on, triumphant. ♦

The New Jews?

East Pyne Hall, Princeton

CORBIS

Asian admissions at the Ivies

By Jennifer Rubin

A young man who was brought to the United States as a toddler, Jian Li, has shaken up the civil rights establishment and Ivy League colleges and rekindled a fierce debate over racial preferences at America's elite institutions of higher learning. For parents and applicants navigating the college admissions process, Li has stoked fears that the deck is stacked against even the most able students.

Li was, by any measure, a superstar college applicant: a perfect SAT score, near-perfect scores on the SAT IIs, a ranking in the top 1 percent of his class, and plenty of extracurricular activities. Yet Princeton turned him down. Although he got into Yale (and later transferred to Harvard), he suspected his exclusion from Princeton was due to discrimination against Asians. As a matter of principle, he decided to challenge it.

He filed a claim with the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in August 2006 claiming that Princeton requires Asian Americans to meet higher standards for admission than whites, Hispanics, and blacks. Li cited a study by two Princeton researchers who determined that without racial preferences black admission rates would fall from 33.7 percent to 12.2 percent, and Hispanic acceptance rates would plunge from 26.8 percent to 12.9 percent, while Asians' rate of admission would go up from 17.6 percent to 23.4 percent. Asians would then make up over 30 percent, rather than less than 23.7 percent, of the students admitted.

In January 2008, over a year after receiving Li's claim

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Asians make up as much as 30 percent of the top college candidates, but the percentage admitted to Ivy League schools has held steady just below 20 percent. The consistency of the Asian share is almost as noteworthy as the disparity itself.

of individual discrimination, OCR responded by announcing a schoolwide compliance review to determine whether Princeton's admission standards violated federal law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin. Princeton has denied that it discriminates.

Advocates on both sides of the racial preferences debate expect no quick resolution. OCR spokesman James Bradshaw says these investigations normally take six months. "Some take longer," however, he says, "and this is complex." He declined to say what information OCR had requested.

Whatever the merits of Li's claim, something is afoot at elite academic institutions that has adversely affected Asian admissions. On the basis of their academic performance and high school records, Asian Americans should be gaining admission in much higher numbers than they are. In his 2006 book *The Price of Admission*, Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Daniel Golden called Asians "the new Jews, inheriting the mantle of the most disenfranchised group in college admissions." Golden observed, "Average SAT scores for Asian Americans admitted to the Ivy Leagues are substantially above those for any other group, including whites; frustrated Asian applicants refer to any score below the maximum as an 'Asian fail.'"

This was already the case back in 1988, when an investigation by OCR at Harvard found that Asian Americans were turned down in greater numbers despite higher test scores. The study also uncovered multiple notes by admissions officials in applicants' files that reflected stereotyping of Asians. Still, OCR concluded that federal law had not been violated. A similar OCR investigation at UCLA in 1989, however, did find discrimination against Asians in the graduate math department. And in 1992, Boalt Law School of the University of California, Berkeley, was forced to drop a policy that restricted Asian admissions by comparing Asian applicants against each other instead of against the total pool of applicants.

The disparity between Asian test scores and GPAs and those of other groups has been much remarked upon. In a 1987 article in the *Public Interest*, John Bunzel and Jeffrey K.D. Au concluded that at Harvard in 1982, "Asian Americans had to score on average 112 points higher on the SAT than Caucasians who were admitted. The data reveal a similar pattern for Princeton in 1982 and 1983 and for classes entering Brown in 1979-1983." At Berkeley, a 1990 study showed that Asians and whites had a median GPA of 4.0, while blacks and Hispanics averaged slightly higher than 3.5.

Russel Nieli, a Princeton political science lecturer, contends that, although they deny it, elite schools strive mightily to reach a goal of 5 percent to 7 percent for blacks and a similar share for Hispanics in their admissions. In a June 30, 2008, article "Is there an Asian Ceiling?" he wrote:

> Underlying the huge admissions preferences that Black and Hispanic students receive at the most competitive colleges is the simple fact that college bound students in these groups do not exist in sufficient numbers to satisfy the 5-7 percent representation goal that most elite institutions strive for. Were college administrators to enroll students primarily on the basis of academic performance without regard to race or ethnicity, projections show that Asian students would increase substantially at the most competitive colleges, while Black enrollment would sink to the 1-3 percent level, and Hispanic enrollment would similarly plunge, though somewhat less steeply.

Although Asians currently make up as much as 30 percent of the top college candidates as determined by SAT scores, National Merit and AP Scholar awards, and grades, the percentage of Asians admitted to Ivy League schools has held steady just below 20 percent. The consistency of Asians' share of elite college admissions is almost as noteworthy as the disparity itself. UCLA law professor Jerry Kang (who favors preferences for minorities) calls this "suspicious" and suspects that the top schools have decided "what constitutes a good mix."

In 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court cases concerning racial preference policies at the University of Michigan's law school (*Grutter* v. *Bollinger*) and undergraduate school (*Gratz* v. *Bollinger*) highlighted further evidence of great disparities between groups. At Michigan's law school, the admission rates of "preferred" minorities miraculously held steady between 10 percent and 17 percent in the years for which data were provided. According to Peter Schmidt's *Color and Money*, "Among applicants with certain grade point average and LSAT-score combinations, the university was admitting *virtually every black applicant while white and Asian American applicants had a less than 1 in 40 chance of getting in*." (Emphasis added.)

When racial preferences favoring Hispanics and blacks are lifted, the impact on Asian Americans is significant. A 2008 study of changes at the Universities of California,

Princeton undergraduates learning about Chaucer.

NAJLAH FEANNY/CORBIS

Texas, and Florida after racial preferences were eliminated showed:

> At UCB [Berkeley], for example, Asian-American FTIC [first time in college] enrollment jumped from 1,277 or 37.30 percent in 1995 to 1,632 or 43.57 percent in 2000 following the implementation of Proposition 209, and, since that date, the number and percentage of Asian-Americans has increased steadily at both UCB and UCLA, reaching 46.59 percent at UCB and 41.53 at UCLA. For UCSD [San Diego], the number of Asian-American students continues to increase as both a number and percent of the student body, from 1,070 or 35.93 percent in 1995 to 1,133 or 36.33 percent in 2000 and to 1,684 or 46.88 percent in 2005. At Texas, the number of Asian-American FTIC students went from 886 or 14.26 percent in 1995 to 1,311 or 17.74 percent in 2000 and has leveled off at 17.33 percent in 2005, while in Florida, which has a much smaller Asian-American population, the UF numbers grew from 342 or 7.50 percent in 1995 to 518 or 7.84 percent in 2000, and to 531 or 8.65 percent in 2005.

The authors concluded:

> Clearly in an open admissions process where affirmative action does not enter into enrollment decisions and where legacy and donor issues are discouraged, Asian-American students compete very well. What the data also reveal is that Asian-American students filled the gap as black and Hispanic enrollment fell following the elimination of affirmative action in California.

(Critics of Proposition 209, which banned use of racial preferences in California state schools, contend that pre- and post-209 data in California are unreliable.)

These and other studies have convinced many that racial preference systems at top public and private colleges in all likelihood have deprived Asian Americans of slots that went to less academically qualified applicants. Steve Balch, president of the National Association of Scholars, says bluntly, "If a merit-based system replaced the current system, Asians would be the greatest beneficiaries." As Lee Cheng, secretary and cofounder of the Asian American Legal Foundation (which opposes racial quotas and preferences and filed amicus briefs for the plaintiffs in *Grutter* and *Gratz*), says, "The bottom line: If you hold people to a different standard it is discrimination."

So are elite schools like Princeton illegally discriminating against Asian Americans in the name of achieving some ideal racial mix? Hard evidence is difficult

to come by because Princeton, like all elite private colleges, jealously guards information that would help divine what its admissions office is up to.

The Supreme Court, moreover, has given them ample room to operate. In *Grutter* and *Gratz*, the Supreme Court held that explicit quotas were illegal, but race could be "one of many factors" in college admissions. In short, colleges could continue their quest for diversity, provided they exercised individual decision-making and avoided stark quotas and blatant numerical boosts for minorities.

Largely in response to these cases, colleges have devised "holistic" review processes, which rely on admissions officers' subjective views of students, yielding a sort of gestalt assessment that pretends to evaluate the "whole student."

Like many other racial-preference foes, Balch thinks this system is nothing but a dodge to mask the effort to maintain a racial balance because colleges "have absorbed the notion we need a campus that looks like America." Cheng concurs that the current system is designed "to fulfill a distorted and unlawful view of what constitutes diversity." Opponents of racial preferences perceive a great deception at work to mask the true objective, which is to get more blacks and Hispanics into top colleges. Nieli writes:

> There is no other area of academic life, with the possible exception of the relaxation of standards for athletic recruits, where college administrators, admissions deans, and college presidents are more likely to lie—and to engage routinely in deception and double-talk—than on the question of racial preferences in their respective institutions.

The result of nondisclosure and the fog surrounding diversity policies: No one has been able to figure out exactly what the admissions officials are doing. Cheng contends that colleges' defense for nondisclosure of the data—that they will be "misinterpreted"—is a weak excuse, arrogantly implying that only the schools themselves can grasp the meaning of the data. He believes the real reason for secrecy is to prevent the public from seeing the enormous disparities between applicants from various groups.

But even groups supportive of the preference system are dismayed by the unavailability of information. Khin Mai Aung, an attorney with the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, says, "Institutions are understandably afraid of litigation, so they haven't made their policies very public." She explains that some colleges won't disclose to her organization which racial groups are included in their diversity plans, and "whether underrepresented Asian ethnicities [e.g., Cambodians, Laotians] are given affirmative action consideration." Vincent Pan, executive director of Chinese for Affirmative Action, likewise acknowledges that the current system is "opaque" and frustrating. Both call for more transparency and disclosure by admissions programs.

But if colleges are taken at their word—that their goal is an exquisitely diverse array of racial groups, a veritable model U.N.—applicants from a group whose academic records would qualify them for admission in large numbers must be restricted if they don't magically fit their allotted piece of the pie. Kang acknowledges that there will be "winners and losers" when the goal is a specific racial mix. A former attorney for OCR explains that these schools "appear to be trying to make an ideal city."

A November 20, 2006, Harvard *Crimson* editorial explained the rationale:

> Essentially, any group which is overrepresented in universities compared to the overall population—Asian-Americans and Jews jump to mind first—will face de facto discrimination in the admissions process so long as some preference is given to underrepresented minorities. . . . [T]his is very unfortunate for overrepresented groups, but is necessary to ensure that applicants from underrepresented groups can still be admitted.

Pan of Chinese for Affirmative Action echoes the diversity rationale, counseling that we should not, after all, be thinking of admission to elite schools as a "prize for high school performance." Rather, he argues, "Universities have a public responsibility to prepare future leaders, and we need to prepare a generation of leaders that will look like America." He concedes, "It does seem arbitrary at times," but he insists that "it does work out. The 'best applicant' is thinking about it the wrong way."

It is ironic that advocates of racial preferences have taken refuge in an entirely subjective, idiosyncratic decision-making system. Michael Rossman, general counsel of the Center for Individual Rights, notes that civil rights advocates in the employment realm railed for years against subjective selection processes, suspecting that, when decision makers are left to their own devices, "subconscious opinions lead to choosing people who look like them." Civil rights advocates opined that more objective criteria were needed to ensure everyone was fairly considered and the best candidates were selected.

Opponents of racial preferences concede that many important life decisions are subjective and take into account a whole variety of factors to be weighed in good faith. Unfortunately, there is reason to believe that the "holistic" process is biased. At a 2006 meeting of a national association of college counselors, several of those advising high schoolers admitted that Asians are in essence battling against each other and against the stereotypical view that they are boring, insular, only interested in math, shy, and excessively bookish. A report on the meeting from *Inside Higher Education* noted: "One high school guidance counselor told the panel of experts that a sign of the distrust of the system is that he is increasingly asked by Asian Amer-

ican students if they would be better off applying to college if they declined to check the race/ethnicity box on the applications."

Rosalind Chou, author of *The Myth of the Model Minority*, explained in a July interview that

> Asian Americans are associated with academic excellence and overachievement. Whereas black and Latino students are negatively stereotyped in academia. Either way, these stereotypes are externally imposed and can have a great effect on individual students internally, but also may impact other students, their teachers, professors, and administrators. Stereotyping, whether positive or negative, can be damaging.

In its 1989 review of Harvard, OCR found notes in applicants' files with comments to the effect that Asians were "grinds." In his book Golden wrote:

> Asians are typecast in college admissions offices as quasi-robots programmed by their parents to ace math and science tests. Asked why Vanderbilt poured resources into recruiting Jews instead of Asians, a former administrator told me "Asians are very good students, but they don't provide the kind of intellectual environment that Jewish students provide."

One activist, convinced that admissions officers think of Asians as one-dimensional, privileged, and uninteresting, says that this "definitely is of concern. They paint the Asian community with a broad brush." One result is that Asians with a refugee experience or whose parents are not wealthy immigrants from East Asia do not get sufficient credit for overcoming adversity. Indeed, Jian Li grew up in a home where English was not spoken, a factor that is supposed to provide evidence of a student's ability to overcome hardship and boost his chances in the "holistic" process.

Negative bias, moreover, may be responsible for a cap on the number of Asians schools are willing to admit. Kang contends that when elite institutions reach a critical mass of Asians, such that the institution might "flip" from majority white to majority Asian, people "get quite uncomfortable." No less a figure than President Bill Clinton gave away this mindset when in a 1995 interview with the *Sacramento Bee* he declared that if it were purely an academic consideration, "there are universities in California that could fill their entire freshman classes with nothing but Asian Americans." The clear implication: Schools must restrict Asians or they will be inundated.

Cheng has interviewed prospective students for his Ivy League alma mater for 14 years and says that even within the vague contours of the "holistic" system the standard for Asian Americans is "not close" to that of other groups. Indeed, Golden's research on "the new Jews" offers one example after another of Asian applicants with varied and impressive extracurricular activities, who had overcome adversity and displayed every mark of "leadership," yet were denied admission at elite schools where less-qualified minorities and whites gained entry. But by constructing opaque selection systems, diversity advocates have made it difficult, if not impossible, to prove the extent to which negative stereotypes actually are affecting admissions of Asians.

In *The Price of Admission*, Daniel Golden called Asians 'the new Jews,' noting that 'average SAT scores for Asian Americans admitted to the Ivy Leagues are substantially above those for any other group; frustrated Asian applicants refer to any score below the maximum as an "Asian fail."'

In fact, there is another reason colleges are quite happy with nontransparent, mysterious admissions processes: They protect the luster of the elite schools, perpetuating the idea that these high-minded institutions, conduits to successful careers, are immune to base considerations like finding star athletes or pleasing top donors by admitting their underperforming offspring. If colleges were to pull back the curtain, then the public, alumni, and potential applicants would see how "far down" into the pool admissions officers go, not just to create diversity but also to create geographic balance and accommodate legacy students, children of the rich and famous, and athletes. (Athletes may have SAT scores 200 points below those of "regular" admittees.) Once these considerations are revealed, the luster of the institutions might be dimmed. Says Kang, "Once you see how sausage is made in that factory, then for that institution, some of mystique is lost."

In their defense, elite colleges often explain the "holistic" process with the claim that they really are seeking well-rounded people, and "half the students with perfect SATs are turned down." But that leaves the question, What percentage of the rejected students with "perfect SATs" are Asians? Virtually no one who has studied the matter believes that blacks or Hispanics with perfect SAT scores are denied entry to any elite school. A former OCR attorney confides that, to the contrary, the elite schools

fight feverishly over a few thousand academically qualified blacks and Hispanics.

In addition, legacies, athletes, and children of wealthy donors account for an increasingly large share of the admissions—over 20 percent—at elite schools, resulting in fewer spots for all students who lack a compelling "hook." Both independent observers and racial-preference supporters contend that these nonracial preferences may play just as great, if not a greater, role in limiting the spots that highly qualified Asians might fill. Even geographic diversity may adversely impact Asians, who tend to be concentrated in a few urban centers.

In a recent speech Golden explained:

> Elite colleges, most of which haven't increased their student body size significantly in years, reserve slots for children of privilege while turning away outstanding middle-class and working class applicants, mainly white and Asian-American. As Notre Dame's admissions dean told me, "The poor schmuck who has to get in on his own has to walk on water."

But other preferences, whether for the rich, athletic, or famous, while unfair and galling, do not constitute invidious, illegal racial discrimination under the Constitution. What is illegal are overt moves, even masked in diversity jargon, to specifically limit the influx of any racial group.

As for Li (and others who may seek to challenge the current system), it could be months or years until OCR finishes its attempt to establish illegal discrimination. It is far from certain that OCR will uncover careless comments in files, telltale emails, or a conscience-stricken admissions employee willing to tell the inside story. In the absence of such proof, it is not clear whether OCR will use the available statistical evidence to construct, as is commonly done in such claims, a circumstantial case for discrimination.

But even if OCR cannot prove a legal violation (which must be more than just a showing that race was one consideration), suspicion and animosity will continue so long as the goal of the admissions process is not a merit-based consideration of each applicant, but admission based on each racial or ethnic group's allotted share. Some of this mistrust may be misplaced, of course, since many excellent students are rejected for legitimate reasons. But given the schools' lack of transparency about nonracial preferences, it is understandable, as Peter Schmidt writes, that "whites and Asians leap to the conclusion that race-conscious admissions have kept them or their children out of a prestigious college."

Rampant suspicion, justified or not, is one of the many harms flowing from the current system. Nieli contends that blacks admitted to elite schools often feel they are looked down upon as undeserving, while rejected whites and Asians stew about groups who are less worthy depriving them of opportunities they feel they've earned. He writes, "Interracial friendships and understanding—the supposed goal of affirmative action diversity—are not likely to be struck in such an environment. If you doubt this, just look into the self-segregated cafeterias and social clubs at almost any mixed-race college campus today."

Although Asians are the obvious victims of racial preferences, Cheng learned firsthand as a student that some whites wrongly suspected that he and other Asians got *preferential* treatment under the diversity system. Cheng explains that students know what grades and test scores they and their peers received and see the perverse outcomes. Resentment, moreover, is heightened, he argues, because the vast majority of racial preferences are extended not to the poor, but to middle and upper class members of preferred groups. He says, "There is resentment and stereotyping when the playing field is not level."

The process is an eye-opener for high school seniors and parents who operated on the belief that hard work and excellence would get them into a college of their choice. Nieli described in a recent article the startling realization that some applicants and their parents face:

> They watch with bewilderment and dismay as some of their much better qualified white and Asian classmates get the thin letters of rejection from some of the very same elite institutions that have sent out the fat letters of acceptance to some of their much less qualified black and Hispanic peers. "It's not fair," they say, and their resentment can oscillate in its focus between the individual students who benefit from racial preferences and the institutional policies which support them.

If the harm to Jian Li personally seems abstract—he did study at Yale and Harvard, after all—the sea of disappointment, resentment, and stereotyping perpetuated by college admissions conforming to a preordained diversity pattern is real. Nevertheless, the behavior of elite institutions won't change soon. Few people have the fortitude to file lawsuits. As Rossman notes, "Lawsuits are expensive and difficult, and even when you get a positive result [the colleges] have a lot of ways to get around it."

Moreover, admissions officials no doubt believe they are serving noble ends. As Shelby Steele explained in *White Guilt*, many baby boomers who came of political age in the Civil Rights era have a strong desire to right the wrongs of the past by using affirmative action to help propel more blacks and Hispanics into the ranks of national leadership. Nieli assumes that "things will change only when the post-60s generation passes from the scene."

Whether Jian Li can provoke college administrators—and more important the general public—to insist we abolish the racial spoils system before that remains to be seen. ♦

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Smyrna burning, September 1922

No Way Out

Ethnic cleansing, by fire and atrocity BY CHRISTOPHER J. WALKER

The destruction of Smyrna—modern Izmir—in 1922 was one of the great atrocities of the early 20th century. A great trading city of western Anatolia, a place of wealth and civilized values, vibrant with culture, was reduced to ashes, and perhaps 100,000 of its multiethnic population, especially the Greeks and the Armenians, were either drowned, burnt alive, or bayoneted by the army of the new Turkey or its irregulars.

How could this be? This question is answered with a searing truthfulness by Giles Milton in his energetic and terrifically readable narrative of the events, *Paradise Lost*.

Smyrna had had a Greek population since about 1000 b.c. It was one of the cities which claimed to be the birthplace of Homer. The Ionian cities of the eastern Aegean seaboard, of which it became the most important, were (apart from Athens) the most civilized cities of ancient Greece, where poets, philosophers, and painters flourished and created the unforgettable heritage of classical civilization, which became civilization for all of us.

Paradise Lost
Smyrna 1922, The Destruction of Islam's City of Tolerance
by Giles Milton
Basic Books, 464 pp., $27.95

Its importance continued in Ottoman times, when the Greek genius had transformed itself into a talent for commerce and shipping. Smyrna's commercial significance continued into modern times, with the establishment of foreign consulates in the city from the 17th century—of which the English was arguably the most important. By the early 19th century vast palaces were being built in the suburbs for the city's merchant families, who lived in a style of unrestrained luxury.

These expatriate families, of whom the leaders were the English Whittalls, were known as "Levantines." They were tolerated by the Ottoman authorities: The unwritten deal was that they could do virtually what they liked, and make as much (untaxed) money as they wished, but that they would support the Ottoman Empire in any political dispute it had with the powers of Europe.

Smyrna was virtually untouched in World War I. The Ottoman Turkish governor was enlightened, and spent much time disobeying or evading orders from the extremist ruling group in the imperial capital. The city saw no real warfare. Even in the post-1918 period, following the Ottoman defeat, things started to return to normal, with the return of extravagance and display for the families of the mer-

Christopher J. Walker is the author, most recently, of Islam and the West.

chant houses. At this time Smyrna had a Greek governor, similarly enlightened and opposed to ethnic politics.

The city's problems started at the peace conference. Here Giles Milton is at his best, because he shows us the many-sidedness of the causes of the catastrophe which overcame the city. He does not foist one single answer on us. Often people try to reduce historical causation in the eastern Mediterranean to a single cause—usually "nationalism" or "Islam"—but history is more complex, as Thucydides demonstrated.

The catastrophe at Smyrna had many causes. Among them were the irresolute and disputed aftermath of World War I, with its conflicting secret imperial deals, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George's simplistic support for the Greeks, the moody manner in which the Italian delegation had stormed out of the Peace Conference upon realizing that they were to be denied spoils, the weakness of the Greek army in Anatolia (combined with the craziness of the manner in which it had overreached itself in campaigning eastwards), the punitive ethnic singularity of the Kemalist vision, and the pitilessness of the irregulars attached to the Turkish army.

All these elements combined to bring about an inferno of destruction on those terrible days in September 1922.

One can go further and say that there was little overt nationalism in the area, unless it was stoked. Most of the population realized that, as inhabitants of a trading city, they depended for their livelihood on serving people of all nationalities. Nor was there much place for Islam. Since the 1908 Young Turk revolution, the Ottoman Empire had been growing secular and positivistic, downgrading religion. Smyrna, a maritime trading city like Beirut, Alexandria, Trieste, or Marseille, was too busy making money to be devout. The conquering army of 1922, like its leader Mustafa Kemal, creator of the new Turkey, owed nothing to religion.

The issue has been problematic for Turkey's modern historians, and for nations and people who wanted to be Turkey's friends. For a long time the myth persisted that the Greeks and Armenians burnt their districts themselves. The eyewitness accounts that Milton gives us here show that this view is unsustainable: The barrels of kerosene were unloaded, guarded, and directed by Turkish troops.

Politically, the landing of the Greek army in Smyrna in May 1919 has also been characterized as the Allies' attempt to "carve up" Turkey. This, too, was based on uncertain political logic. It was certainly a grave political mistake. But "Turkey"—the Kemalist republic—at that time did not exist. There was only a defeated Ottoman Empire. Smyrna and its surrounding region had, according to Woodrow Wilson's principles, a reasonable, though not watertight, claim to be a liberated Greek area rather than a still-imperial Turkish one.

For a long time the myth persisted that the Greeks and Armenians burnt their districts themselves. The eyewitness accounts that Milton gives us here show that this view is unsustainable: The barrels of kerosene were unloaded, guarded, and directed by Turkish troops.

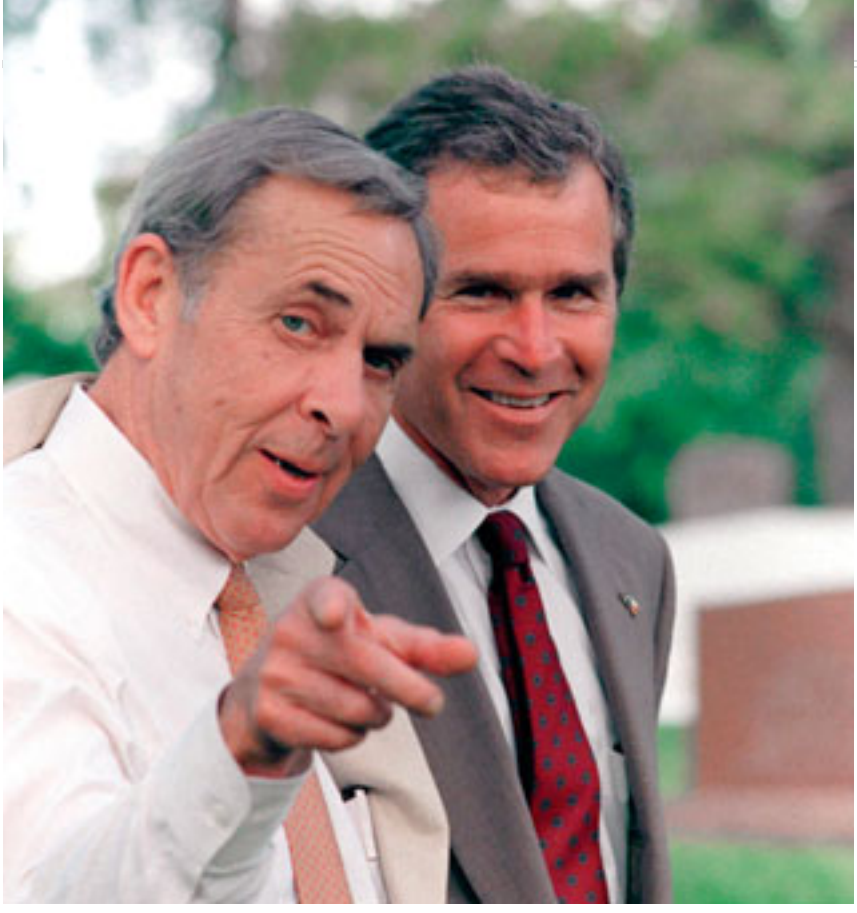
One question to which Milton's devastating narrative seems to demand an answer is: How did the Turkish troops coordinate their activities with the irregulars, who performed the work of death, looting, raping, killing, and burning? What was the chain of command? It appears that a number of the Levantine observers of Kemal's capture of Smyrna were entirely taken in by the smart uniforms and impeccable drill of his army as it entered the city. The ladies loved their military elegance.

The account in *Paradise Lost* makes us ask: What was the connection between those fine social and military manners, and the murderous, horrific violence perpetrated on the streets? Kemal's revolution, though widely acclaimed, had a massive shadow side.

Who are the heroes and villains of the story? The heroes must be the Americans Asa Jennings and Esther Lovejoy, who at incredible risk to themselves sought to rescue hundreds of thousands of stranded refugees on the city's quayside. There was a good cast of villains, beyond those who rolled barrels of kerosene along the city's streets: chiefly the commanders of the Allied warships in the harbor, who with precise bureaucratic cowardice and cruelty refrained from any action of humanity which might alleviate the condition of the starving, frying mass of humanity, threatened with murder by the local militia, on the grounds that any humane action might he construed as endangering Allied "neutrality."

The British poured boiling water on desperate refugees who swam up to their vessels. And Admiral Bristol, the representative of official America, a man whose liking for the Turks led him to despise and detest members of the other communities, insisted that American reporters cable home reports favorable to the Turks. (Fortunately, they stopped obeying him and reported what they saw.)

There is not much in the way of a moral to be drawn from the frightful narrative of Smyrna's inferno of destruction—except for the need for ordinary humanity in extraordinary circumstances, and for the best intelligence at all times. It would also seem advisable to distrust those, like Lloyd George, whose politics are driven by a schoolboy view of good and evil. Giles Milton's account, by reason of its forthrightness, its brilliant use of hitherto- unseen archival Levantine sources, its feeling for the day-to-day life of the city, and its devastating quest for the hidden truth, seems also to lay to rest some of the ghosts of that shocking and shameful event. ♦



Lieutenant Governor Bullock, Governor Bush, 1995

ASSOCIATED PRESS / HARRY CABLUCK

The Texas Way

There once was a Democrat who worked with George W. Bush. BY WILLIAM MCKENZIE

There's a side of me that wants to say that George W. Bush never would have become president without Bob Bullock. But that's taking things too far. What is true is that Bob Bullock put George Bush on the path to becoming president. Before he died in 1999, the Democratic power broker served as a state representative, comptroller of Texas's public accounts, and lieutenant governor. It was in that last position where he became part of American history in a way that neither he nor Bush could have envisioned in 1994.

As veteran Texas reporters Dave McNeely and Jim Henderson tell it in this biography of the mercurial, profane, Machiavellian, compassionate, devoted son of Texas, Bullock and Bush met up in the summer of 1994 when George W. Bush was trying to unseat Ann Richards as the popular Democratic governor of Texas. The pair had a clandestine get-together at Bullock's house in Austin, where the inexperienced Bush made it known he wanted to work with the legendary veteran.

Bob Bullock
God Bless Texas
by Dave McNeely
and Jim Henderson
Texas, 328 pp., $27

And work they did, once Bush became governor and Bullock won a second four-year term for lieutenant governor, which in Texas is arguably the more powerful post. The lieutenant governor presides over the Senate, determining which bills survive, making all committee assignments, and sitting on the influential Legislative Budget Board. David Sibley, a former GOP state senator, describes the Bush/Bullock era as a golden period in Texas politics. And it was.

During Bush's first year as governor, the legislature passed all four parts of his agenda: a new education code, revised liability laws, tougher penalties for juveniles, and an overhaul of welfare laws. Lieutenant Governor Bullock was right there with him, as were Democrats such as House Speaker Pete Laney. Bush later wrote to the *Dallas Morning News* to suggest the newspaper had given him too much credit: The Democratic leaders deserved it, too.

The Bush/Bullock relationship wasn't always pacific. Bullock's moods could turn volcanic—and instantly, as the authors describe in detail. Bush had to learn to let him vent. Sometimes the venting would help. Senator Sibley tells of overhearing a profane Bullock outburst at the governor, then watching Bush go cut the legislative deal that Bullock suggested was the right thing to do. Some Texas Democrats think Bullock was too taken with Bush. Maybe he was. He signed onto a property tax cut that he probably didn't care that much about. And he didn't just sign on; he helped sell it. Former GOP state senator Bill Ratliff tells of senators being called in to see Bush and Bullock in a room off the governor's office, where both men pitched for a big cut in the spring of 1997: "It was extraordinary seeing a Republican and Democrat calling in folks," Ratliff recently remembered, as we talked about that period.

McNeely, who covered politics for the *Austin American-Statesman* for 26 years, and Henderson, who wrote for the *Dallas Times Herald* and the *Houston Chronicle*, tell their own stories. The book includes one about Bush getting up and kissing Bullock for shock value after Bullock threatened to—how shall we say?—mess with

William McKenzie is a columnist at the Dallas Morning News.

one of Bush's priorities. And given how rich this period was in Texas's history, and eventually the nation's history, I'm surprised more Bush/Bullock stories weren't included. Readers could have benefited from additional reporting about this unique twosome. After all, it was one reason Bush could point to his experience in Texas as his reason for being considered presidential material.

Before he left office, Bob Bullock came to see the *Morning News*'s editorial board. During the interview, he got tears in his eyes and said George W. Bush could become president. I remember being surprised at how choked up he was getting, and how interesting it was that this prediction was coming from the state's most powerful Democrat. Whether he would have liked the way the Bush presidential years turned out, especially Washington's partisan divisions, is a guessing game in Texas. But Bullock certainly made it possible for Bush to make one of his strongest selling points in 2000: that he knew how to work with both parties.

Beyond George W. Bush, Bob Bullock was an interesting figure for another important reason, one that others in state governments would do well to remember. He was a modernizer. For a small-town son of the raw days of Texas's past, when good old boys ran the state and rural lawmakers kept a tight grip on the purses, he constantly pushed the state to recognize its future. McNeely and Henderson detail how Bullock, who went to Texas Tech and Baylor Law School, brought a very antiquated comptroller's office into the 20th century when he first won that post in 1974. He hired professional staff, employed new technologies, showed Texans where their money was being spent, and chased down tax cheats.

His legacy as a modernizer, though, went far beyond the comptroller's office. Bullock hated that the state had so poorly funded its schools and mismanaged its prisons that the courts had stepped in to have the final say. In the same way you could hear him ask what's best for Texas whenever a subject came up, you could hear him argue that legislators shouldn't duck the state's challenges. The people's representatives should own up to the problems; they shouldn't need a bunch of judges to force them to act responsibly.

Bullock's most important legacy was the water planning process he launched in 1997, his last session as lieutenant governor. Given today's droughts in Texas and around the country, his ideas seem visionary. At Bullock's behest, legislators passed a plan that would look 50 years into the future. Texans previously had ignored water plans because the experts in Austin dictated them. Knowing that, Bullock insisted that locals around the state come up with their own ideas for water supplies. Those local plans now serve as the guides for 16 different regions of the state. No offense to the people in such drought-stricken states as Georgia, but they would do well to come up with an approach like this.

[Bullock] loved signing all his letters with "God Bless Texas," and handing out little bumper stickers that said the same. A love of place can get you past a lot of partisanship.

Bullock also had the audacity to propose a state income tax. The idea went nowhere in a state where having no income tax is considered sacred. But he understood that Texas couldn't fund itself through the tax equivalent of bailing wire. His fallback position was to get the legislature to fund a new business tax to fund schools. Like Governor Bush, he knew that the state could only rely so long on property taxes to support schools. (For the record, Governor Bush adamantly opposed an income tax.)

One of my favorite Bullock stories, which McNeely and Henderson recount, is how he persuaded the state's telecom executives to invest more than $1 billion in a fund to wire the unwired parts of the state. Basically, this meant the rural areas of Texas, and the CEOs didn't blink when Bullock told them that the billion was the price of getting the state to deregulate their industry.

To be sure, some Americans may want to push Texas aside for a while after the Bush years. But what happens politically in megastates such as Texas, California, New York, and Florida ultimately matters to the rest of the nation. And politicians like Bob Bullock can have an enormous say without becoming household names. Bullock was one of those rare pols who liked it that way. He never embraced national politics; he would send fundraisers to collect money for him in Washington, he so hated going there. But the proud Texan understood his state had the responsibility to govern itself. While the rest of the nation paid attention to the Clintons, Gingriches, Reagans, and Kennedys, he stayed close to home. He loved signing all his letters with "God Bless Texas," and handing out little bumper stickers that said the same. A love of place can get you past a lot of partisanship. Of course, George W. Bush is not without blame for the political divisions of the last eight years. But he surely misses having Democrats like Bob Bullock with which to whom, putting country above party.

A final note about Bullock: His journey showed that you can come back from horrible personal failures and still make a difference. That's almost impossible to comprehend in the antiseptic environment of today's politics. He had five marriages (twice to the same woman!), was a recovering alcoholic, and, according to biographers, suffered bouts of deep depression. There's been controversy among Bullock loyalists about whether McNeely and Henderson present too dark a picture of their late leader, who notoriously would fire aides and rehire them the next day. But it paints the portrait of a complex Democrat who loved his state, and who particularly liked the Republican governor he served alongside. ♦

Crime Pays

The rewards of following two masters of the form.

BY STEVEN J. LENZNER

Over the past half-dozen years I have had the privilege to write reviews of new books by *the* comic (crime) novelist, Donald E. Westlake, and by Bill James, who is at once the most unconventional and underappreciated detective novelist writing today—as well as the best such novelist. I was particularly grateful for those assignments, for I feared that there might not be many more timely opportunities to pay tribute to the two men. I imagined that, as they moved into their seventies, they might grow weary of the strain of writing.

What's So Funny?
by Donald E. Westlake
Grand Central, 416 pp., $7.99

Baby, Would I Lie?
by Donald E. Westlake
Brilliance Audio (MP3-CD), $39.25

Dirty Money
by Richard Stark
Grand Central, 288 pp., $23.95

Girls
by Bill James
Foul Play, 224 pp., $23.95

I was wrong. Since 2001 the 75-year-old Donald E. Westlake—who essentially lost a year to an eye ailment—has published nine novels, four of which appeared under the name of his amoral alter ego, Richard Stark. And Bill James, whose real name is James Tucker but who has also written as David Craig and Judith Jones, has published an astonishing dozen novels in the past five years.

My mistake was the product of a false premise. Most of the people I know well are academics, for whom writing is a necessary evil, often more evil than necessary. We face writing as an inspiration to procrastination rather than a task to be savored. But as we write to live, Westlake and James live to write.

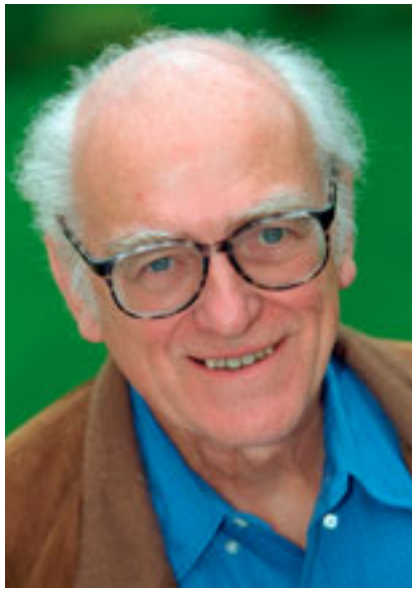
With regard to Westlake, my anxieties were not altogether irrational, for I thought a fitting tribute should focus on the adventures of his character, John Dortmunder—master criminal and plaything of the gods. But if Westlake could be counted on to produce, Dortmunder could not. 2001's *Bad News* was the tenth in a series (unequalled either for comic genius or consistent excellence) inaugurated in 1970 by *The Hot Rock*, but the first since 1996. Dortmunder's infrequent appearances, however, were not the product of authorial indifference towards a character grown stale; rather the reverse. To judge from Westlake's own account, it took a considerable degree of self-restraint to refrain from writing on Dortmunder more frequently. He summoned that restraint with a view towards keeping Dortmunder fresh:

> Many years ago I made a mighty vow that I would never write two novels in a row about John Dortmunder, but would always write at least two books about other people and other things in between. The reason was I didn't want to overwork John, me, or the reader.

Westlake had seen all too many novelists give in to the temptation to go with the tried, if not necessarily true, and produce novel after novel with the same characters. The all-but-inevitable result is a decline into formula and, sometimes, self-parody. Westlake has avoided that trap, even as he has broken his vow by writing three novels in a row about Dortmunder. More precisely, he has written three "Westlake" novels in a row about Dortmunder, each of which has been succeeded by a "Richard Stark" about that embodiment of criminal amorality, Parker.

To get a sense of these characters you could do worse than begin with *What's So Funny?* and *Dirty Money*. Its title notwithstanding, *Dirty Money* is less about money acquired in an unsavory manner than about money that needs to be "laundered." Parker has a dilemma. His spectacular armed robbery of $3 million from a bank in transit—recounted in 2004's *Nobody Runs Forever*—proved to be a bit too spectacular: In post-9/11 America, the federal government tends to frown on the use of sophisticated military hardware.

Due to the swiftness and intensity of the government's reaction, Parker and his associates were forced to hide the proceeds in rural New England before their getaway. So rather than the better part of a million dollars,



Donald E. Westlake

each man walked away with only a handful of bills for travel expenses. And when one of his confederates was arrested trying to spend such a bill, Parker wrote the money off. The only thing that money could buy was a lighter sentence for his erstwhile partner.

Yet at the outset of *Dirty Money*, Parker learned that his associate had

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escaped prior to employing the money as a (plea)-bargaining chip. Hence Parker's knotty dilemma: Was there a way to move the money that averted the gaze of unusually vigilant authorities? If so, could the dirty money be cleaned? And what would such a laundry bill cost? To explore those latter questions, Parker turned to a mobster with whom he had a somewhat ambivalent past. Their exchange perfectly captures Parker's worldview *and* the insightful economy of Stark's prose:

> "There's no such thing as a deal," Parker told him. "There never was, anywhere. A deal is what people say is gonna happen. It isn't always what happens."
>
> "You mean we didn't shake hands on it. We didn't do a paper on it."
>
> "No, I mean so far it didn't happen. If it happens, fine. If it doesn't, I'll make a deal with somebody else, and it'll be the same story. It happens, or it doesn't happen."
>
> "Jesus, Parker," Meany said, shaking his head. "I never thought I'd say this, but you're easier to put up with when you have a gun in your hand."
>
> "A gun is just something that helps make things happen."

Admirable as the Parker novels may be, it is the Dortmunder novels that best display Westlake's genius. Whereas the former have spawned many imitators, the latter are simply inimitable. Moreover, the Dortmunder novels are the only extended series I know in which the later stories are at least as good as the early ones. The two finest—*Don't Ask* (1993) and *What's the Worst that Could Happen?* (1996)—were published more than 20 years after the series' debut.

Which brings us to Westlake's latest Dortmunder tale of woe narrowly and amusingly averted—*What's So Funny?*—which in no way disappoints. The problem confronting Dortmunder is an ex-cop looking to establish himself as a private detective, whose business card reads simply "Johnny Eppick, For Hire" ("I didn't want the clients to feel restricted"). Eppick possesses compromising photos of Dortmunder's after-hours

Westlake goes Hollywood, 1967

computer acquisitions, which at a 100 percent discount, initially seem a real steal to Dortmunder. Eppick seeks to enlist Dortmunder's art of retrieval on behalf of his very first client, Mr. Hemlow, a wealthy and elderly invalid with a lifelong grievance. It is this grievance for which Dortmunder's professional skills are a means of redress, and Eppick prepares Dortmunder's recruitment by means that are presumably at odds with progressive corporate practice everywhere but Hollywood or Moscow:

> "Listen, John," Eppick said, then paused to pretend he was polite, saying, "You don't mind if I call you John, do you?"
>
> "Kinda, yeah."
>
> "That's good, John, the point is, if I wanted to turn some evidence on you to some former co-workers of mine…"

The item to be retrieved is a 700-pound chess set with gold pieces adorned by precious gems—an undelivered gift to Czar Nicholas II—that fell into the hands of an American platoon in the aftermath of World War I, only to be appropriated by the sergeant entrusted with its conversion into cash. The sergeant had prudently disappeared, leaving Mr. Hemlow's father with nothing to hand down but a legacy of resentment, which the son skillfully nursed. Yet after more than eight decades off the radar, the chess set providentially turns up, offering Mr. Hemlow the prospect of one final satisfaction, and Dortmunder one less reason to resist the siren song of despair.

For the chess set is now at the center of a bitter lawsuit among the sergeant's 17 children and grandchildren, and Mr. Hemlow's granddaughter, Fiona, is a (very) junior associate at the firm entrusted with its safekeeping. Therein lies the rub: It is being held in a sub-basement vault "in a building owned by a bank that used to be called Capitalists and Immigrants, two groups of people with *really* no sense of humor." When Dortmunder—a man who, in *Good Behavior*, declared that "I don't like to believe there's a place I can't get in and back out again"—learns of its current housing, he immediately *knows* it would be impossible to get in and back out again.

He briefly considers flight: "He thought his best move now was to go straight over to Grand Central, take the first train out to Chicago. That's supposed to be an okay place, not that different from a city." But Eppik warns him that as technology ("the Internet

ROBERT ERIC / CORBIS SYGMA

and all") has advanced, so has interdepartmental police cooperation, and to such an extent that it's impossible to disappear. Dortmunder believes him. And that's just the beginning.

The original dust jacket of *Baby, Would I Lie?* declared that "Donald E. Westlake does everything but sing." That still may be true; but it has not prevented him from releasing a CD of that title on which his is the only voice heard. For those who missed it the first time around in 1994, *Baby, Would I Lie?* is chiefly the tale of country music star Ray Jones, a clever, likable rapscallion whose life has hit something of a rough spot. It's been 10 years since he's made the charts, and he's reduced to headlining twice daily at the Ray Jones Country Theater in Branson, Missouri. He owes the IRS $2 million. He is about to stand trial for the gruesome rape and murder of one of his employees. Yet Ray maintains a proper concern for decorum: "[He] still wasn't sure it was right to let his songs play on the radio during the trial; seemed disrespectful somehow. Seemed as if he wasn't taking that poor bitch's death seriously."

Making Ray's life even more of a headache is the press, which descend like locusts on celebrity trials—and like locusts on performance enhancers for celebrity murder trials, even one held where the ratio of "family entertainment centers" to watering holes would drive reporters to drink. Particularly vexatious is the *Weekly Galaxy*, "the nation's—probably the world's—most despicable supermarket tabloid." Yet Ray is far from believing that all reporters are created evil.

In the midst of these storm clouds he spots a silver lining: "Sara Joslyn, intrepid girl reporter from New York's *Trend* magazine." Ray has every confidence that Sara, surreptitiously guided by a skillful hand (his), will prove the agent of his deliverance. Her earnestness, enthusiasm, and eagerness make her perfect for the role Ray (and Westlake!) leave shrouded in obscurity until the book's end. Of course, there is more to Sara than meets the eye. Capable as she is of lapsing into a wooly enthusiasm, guaranteed to irritate editors, her intelligence and experience generally keep it well within bounds. (That experience includes a stint as reporter at the *Weekly Galaxy*, recounted by Westlake in *Trust Me on This*.)

Probably the only ironclad rule of Donald E. Westlake's fiction is that the characters tell the story. The reader does not hear the author directly. So on those exceedingly rare occasions in which Westlake steps forth, we're apt to take notice. And in no book are the glimpses more revealing than in *Baby, Would I Lie?* Westlake not only discloses that he has long been an aficionado of country music—a courageous statement for a onetime resident of Greenwich Village—but he shares with us the grounds for that admiration. Country music, he says, evinces a genius that doesn't insist on being recognized as such:

> Country music fans don't envy or begrudge the material success of the performers, and that's because they don't see the country stars as being brilliant or innovative or otherwise exceptional people (which they are), but firmly believe the Willie Nelsons and Roy Clarks are shitkickers just like themselves, who happened to hit it lucky, and more power to them. It meant anybody could hit it lucky, including their own poor sorry selves. . . .

Properly translated into the realm of crime fiction, that description equally well applies to Westlake's work.

A refrain of *What's So Funny?* is Balzac's famous statement that behind every great fortune lies a great crime. Were Dortmunder familiar with this piece of wisdom, he would no doubt regard it as twice damned: For it was the animus fostered by one such crime that led to the dilemma in which he finds himself. And for a man who has committed more than his share of great crimes without coming within hailing distance of any fortune, great or small, it would be an unwelcome and unnecessary reminder of the fickleness of the gods.

By a nice coincidence, Balzac himself has a prominent place in the 23rd Harpur and Iles novel, *Girls*. The series protagonists—clever, levelheaded Detective Chief Superintendent Colin Harpur and brilliant, indifferently sane Assistant Chief Constable Desmond Iles—are as distinctive a duo as anyone could find in the realm of detective fiction. Unlike other twosomes, Harpur and Iles rarely act in tandem, and though they tend to work to the same ends, their relationship cannot be described as a partnership. Moved by differing temperaments, virtues, and limitations, each works alone. What they share is an unambiguous recognition of moral ambiguity, ambition, a certain mutual competitiveness, a sense of public responsibility—and a milieu: "grey areas." The character of their relationship is beautifully summarized in James's *Pay Days* (2001). Having received a revealing post humous letter, Harpur, as befits a good subordinate officer, defers to Iles: "Yes, he might have a look into what the letter said on his own. Iles would expect such improper secrecy of Harpur, and it was wrong to thwart the [assistant chief constable]."

Iles's and Harpur's is not policing by the book, at least not the police handbook. They rely not on procedures, subtle deductions, or forensic miracles, but on informants ("grasses") and accommodation. In *The Detective Is Dead*, Harpur's reliance on informants—and in particular, the infallible Jack Lamb—is summarized this way:

> Jack was perhaps the greatest informant ever. People like Keith Vine were only starters and would never match him, even if they lived to twenty-eight . . . [To Jack,] you listened. You listened and you'd better believe it. This was how a detective's mucky liaison with his grass operated. It is more blessed to receive rather than to give. That would be Harpur's escutcheon motto. As to title, Lord Harpur of Grey Areas.

In *Girls* James goes one better by telling us the unwritten police manual by which Harpur lives: "Harpur thought in his retirement he might write a guidebook for young detectives called *Tending Your Grass*."

Though *In the Absence of Iles* is a title that admirers of the ACC are apt to be concerned about, it does make

for effective commentary on the most recent Harpur and Iles novels—in which detection is not quite dead but on extended holiday. The protagonists are the two drug lords central to Iles's policy of enlightened blindness: Mansel Shale and "Panicking" Ralph Ember, toward both of whom James has an almost Westlake-like sympathy.

Since Occasionally Ruthless Drug Magnate occupies a far less respectable place on the social ladder than Clever Thief Who Eschews Violence and Targets the Unsympathetic, this seems anomalous. Until you make their acquaintance. Take the following abridgment from the opening chapter of *Girls*, where Shale makes a persuasive case to Ember that the spectacular execution of a violent Albanian newcomer is necessary to preserve the unofficial arrangement Iles had crafted for them. An arrangement that, for a number of years, had ensured tranquil streets for citizens and mighty profits for the two business associates:

> "The Albanians think they can sneak in here and set themselves up, like entitled. Remember Hitler in Czechoslovakia. It got to be stopped early, Ralph. We got to hit one of their high people. The one they call Tirana. It's the name of some town over there. Where he came from."
>
> "Albania," Ember said. "The capital."
>
> "Ah, the way they called George Washington after Washington."
>
> "Well, no, the—"
>
> "If we slay this Tirana in a nice spot, the crew who work with him, or want to be like him will know what we're saying to them, Ralph. They'll know it exact."
>
> "What do you mean 'a nice spot'?"
>
> "This Tirana, he got to be done, Ralph, and he got to be done by us and they got to know he been done by us. This got to be an execution and it got to be spectacular. You heard of that chopping the king's head off in history? That really signified something. Same with this Tirana."

In so doing, Shale shows himself to be among the handful of students of Machiavelli's *Prince* who never so much as held the book in their hands; for it was Machiavelli who claimed that a single stupefying execution, well timed, can avoid countless inconveniences down the line.

Ember is a different kettle of fish. He is a smooth, handsome man subject to violent panic attacks at the most inopportune times—and for which his chosen career path provides plenty of opportunities. Ember, the character James seems most to enjoy writing about, is a master of self-deception. In *Girls*, we see Ember flash back to an episode in which his assistant, Beau Derek, was knifed to death in his presence: It "had to be regarded as a very unsuccessful commercial trip." In *Girls*, it is Ember who brings Balzac's genealogy of wealth to the fore. Yet what, for Dortmunder, is part of a nightmare is for Ember an inspiration: Balzac's line "buckled" him, "it gave a fruition promise to come." Or put more simply, big bucks down the line.

Yet Ember is no mere prop for comic relief. He has the ability to look at himself without blinders, and since self-knowledge is in no larger supply in James's universe than anywhere else, Ember's depths impress.

Even more impressive than the latest Harpur and Iles novels is the range, quality, and productivity that James has shown in recent years. In *A Man's Enemies* (2003)—the sequel to 2001's *Split*—he brings back that most unlikely member of the British intelligence services, Simon Abelard, who as a half-black, non-Oxbridge graduate from Cardiff, falls amiss of the traditional demographic profile of those employed by Her Majesty's Secret Service. Yet in the Britain of the 1990s, things are changing. Abelard seizes the opportunities afforded to him by those changes, and does so with a refreshing perspective: "[He] adored positive discrimination and if he'd had a cat he would have called him after it."

Both novels examine Abelard's struggles to adjust to the new conditions of post-Cold War espionage. In *Split* he wrestles with the dilemma, personal and professional, of tracking a rogue colleague and former friend who has turned his training and talent in deception to the pursuit of private gain (chiefly by large-scale drug smuggling), and the situation only becomes more daunting when, confronted by such professional treachery and the prospect of ill-gotten gains, Abelard's professional colleagues join the fray. The results aren't pretty.

In *A Man's Enemies*, Abelard faces the flip side of the coin: a former colleague who, repelled by the internecine struggles related in *Split*, decides to blow the whistle by turning author, Official Secrets Act be damned. Taken together, the two provide a nice portrait of someone steering a morally murky course without falling prey either to the temptation to eschew morality altogether, or embrace it in a manner that gratifies vanity at the expense of responsibility.

As David Craig, James has written two novels, *Hear Me Talking to You* (2005) and *Tip Top* (2006), featuring the precocious Welsh detective Sally Bithron, who nicely sums up the villain's quest for respectability: "Milton Avenue would have conferred on Tully a surface of decent, on-the-up bourgeois status. Surfaces mattered, and not just to geometry."

Moving away from crime fiction, there is *Between Lives* (2003), which examines the dilemmas faced by a biographer as fact meets fiction or, more precisely, meets Hollywood. Among its highlights is a film executive, Ted Burston, who prides himself on his gift for disarming by playing the fool. Finding it desirable to gain support for *Broken Light*, a film seeking to rehabilitate a young man executed for treason during World War II, Burston decides to consult the man's elderly sister: "On file from the very earliest planning days of *Broken Light* was a surviving sister of Pax. Her name was Elsie, which could have been acceptable when she was born, but did suggest a distant period now, and some decline."

Though the conversation does not go quite according to plan, Burston's qualities shine through:

"[Your actor] had Andrew very accurately in the picture—that silly little intellectual whiz. Excuse me, I can't help feeling like that about Andy. I saw him not long before the hanging. With my mother. My father wrote him off, and didn't want to know. My father was religious, very. We all were. In fact I am still. Where else for comfort? Where else for the rock on which to build, Mr. Burston?"

"I know. Religion's quite a thing in Wales, I heard." He considered that one of his best for brainlessness.

James, who taught literature and creative writing at the University of Wales College of Cardiff, has also written a comic novel about life at a third-rate Welsh university, *Making Stuff Up*. Among the faculty in its Creative Writing department is novelist Len Maldave, eminent author of the self-published *Nursery Scimitar*. Maldave's current project is *In Times of Broken Light*, a dark satire of life in suburbia. With it, and with Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* in mind, Maldave aims to revive the epistolary novel, with a post-modern sensibility. And as a tribute to this fine character, James completed the novel for him, published last year as *Letters from Carthage*. Few novels can rival its depiction of the depths of marital venom; the wife, in particular, has a gift for evocative loathing, which she freely disposes on friends, lovers, counselors, and "My dear Mother."

Naturally, enough, and like any human being, however marginal, he loves to believe there are positive aspects to his personality, the damp cut-out.

Don't get me wrong, he has very sound aspects, and in another time and overseas conditions he would probably be acceptable, and entirely unthreatening.

Women do find his shallowness winning, being unable to believe there can be so much of it, and wishing to plumb—how it happened to me, possibly. Also, there is vigour. He can look almost exotic and more or less unpoignant in sweatshirt and olive green summer trousers.

But enough! Read Westlake and James. You'll enjoy them. And if you don't, try reality television. ♦

Richard Grenier sets up a shot

CYNTHIA GRENIER

Hef's Cold War

On the trail of Warsaw Pact pulchritude.

BY CYNTHIA GRENIER

Passing a newsstand not long ago on K Street in Washington, I was startled to spot the cover of a recent issue of *Playboy*. "Red-Hot Russian Sex Bombs" proclaimed the cover line above a photograph of a slim blonde-headed young woman wearing a white fur *chapka*, and demurely holding a large matching muff over her private parts.

I was startled because, in March 1964, *Playboy*'s cover featured a pensive young blonde clad in just a voluminous black cashmere sweater. The only text on the cover, other than the name of the magazine, were these words: "Girls of Russia and the Iron Curtain Countries."

During the summer and fall of 1963, my husband Richard and I and a photographer traveled on assignment from *Playboy* to the old Soviet Union, then on to what was then Yugoslavia, then to Poland, and then to Hungary. It was in Budapest that our photographer defected, as it were, to get back to his Danish bride in Copenhagen. A few weeks later I set off again alone—by then Richard had signed on with the *Financial Times* in Paris—with another photographer to cover the terrain in Czechoslovakia and catch up with some well-recommended Polish candidates

Cynthia Grenier is a writer in Washington.

for *Playboy* (the recommender was Roman Polanski).

Actually, it was Polanski who had advised us to start our travels in Moscow. "See Moscow first, then you'll really appreciate Warsaw," he said. And was he ever right. Despite being under the same political regime as Russia, the Poles proved infinitely more sophisticated and oriented to Western culture—Parisian culture, to be exact. This proved to be true of Hungary as well.

So how did we get involved with *Playboy* and the likes of Hugh Hefner? First, you need to know that Richard and I were passionate movie buffs—our first date was seeing Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* at Harvard's Fogg Museum—and in Paris, where we were to spend the first 30 years of our marriage, we became regulars at the Cinémathèque Française, a weird and wonderful institution that screened three different films every night of the week, 52 weeks of the year.

In those days its director, Henri Langlois, an icon today of the film world, showed movies from all the major and most of the minor movie-producing countries, with the first silent films working up to the most recent. Many a night we would be seated next to François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and the other young film devotees who, in a few years, would be introducing the *Nouvelle Vague* to the world.

Then, too, Europeans were passionate and deeply serious about cinema, far more than Americans were at the time. In the warm months of the year you could go from one film festival to another: Cannes, Berlin, Karlovy Vary, San Sebastian, Venice, Moscow. I wanted desperately to get to Cannes, the queen of festivals, where you not only saw the latest films but got to meet all the directors, actors, actresses, screenwriters, and producers. Talk about networking!

A friend at UNESCO asked, why don't you try to get that new American publication to accredit you? I promptly sent off a letter to *Playboy*, citing some articles I'd written for the British film publication *Sight and Sound*, and a few days later was flabbergasted to hear Hugh Hefner himself calling me from Chicago. He informed me that not only was I accredited, but he would be coming to attend the festival as well.

So what can one say about the young Hef? He was bright, hardworking, good company, and never missed a single screening. Every morning he was out on the beach with his Dictaphone. A lot of the European players at the festival were let down by Hef's flying in his current girlfriend—a quiet, pretty, young, Midwestern woman, something of a prom queen—when they were expecting a Playmate of the Month at the least.

As one sign of the shift in the *Zeitgeist* over the decades, I recollect occasionally using the term "nookie" in conversation with Hefner. I should explain that I had grown up almost excruciatingly innocent, and it was not until I met up with one Richard Grenier in my senior year at Harvard that I enthusiastically, and perchance innocently, adopted his naval vocabulary. But after hearing "nookie" fall from my lips a few times, Hef very gently placed a hand on my arm and said, in a kind, big brotherly tone: "Cynthia, you know that's not a word that a nice girl like yourself should be using."

(When my article on the Cannes Film Festival appeared in *Playboy* it ran under the byline of "C.B. Grenier" because, as one of the editors explained to me, "Our readers wouldn't understand a woman giving advice to men in our pages about picking up girls." But I'm happy to report that, a few years later when the piece was anthologized in *The Best of Playboy*, my proper byline was restored.)

In any case, having seen more than a few films from Iron Curtain countries featuring naked young women, and wanting to get to see more of those lands myself, I wrote to Hef suggesting it could make for a different sort of "Girls of" feature. He agreed, and we were off, starting at the Moscow Film Festival.

Having the festival in Moscow meant that all the attractive young actresses from Eastern Europe would be available to us—although we were on our honor to take no nude shots of any daughter of the Soviet Union. We knew none would be condemned to the gulag for posing, but life could be made exceedingly uncomfortable for a long time. So we settled for scantily clad or bikini shots.

It was interesting to observe how the young women responded to our copy of *Playboy*. It was equally interesting to deal with customs officials. (One uniformed Russian at the border, turning its pages, staring goggle-eyed at the riot of material goodies on display, asked, "*Playboy*? Is for boys who play?") The young women, however, thoroughly enjoyed studying the photographs of the Playmate of the Month: "Oh look! She's making cookies with her mother!" or "What a darling little puppy!" To a woman, however, they were knocked over by the abundance of products: automobiles, record players, tape recorders, and radios—all inaccessible to the average Soviet citizen in 1964.

All 12 of our pages of Eastern European pulchritude were pictures of totally nonprofessional women from a fairly wide range of activities, with a decent share of actresses, students, and airline hostesses. Of course, we got lots of offers of help from young (and not-so-young) males eager to get acquainted with our lasses, and we met mothers and sisters and aunts, were served innumerable glasses of tea, fed all manner of cookies, and for a decade or more would receive greeting cards. We were later told that our Czech cover girl, Olga Schoberová, had married a vice president of Warner Brothers and was embarrassed when the director Jean-Claude Tramont recognized her from the *Playboy* spread on a yacht trip.

Today, of course, just about all the onetime Iron Curtain countries have their own editions of *Playboy*, so the task of rounding up models for this latest issue was surely simplified compared to our adventure. "The Women of Putin's Russia"—they're "women" now, not "girls"—ran to 10 full pages of undeniably attractive young females, all shot by photographer Marlena Bielinska. Minimal identifying information was furnished to readers.

Say what you will, and with all due respect to this year's crop: Looking over *our* collection, I can't help feeling that, while some may be grandmothers now, they look more spontaneous and, well, happier, even if their homelands were decidedly less pleasant 45 years ago. ♦

Le Film Médiocre

What Keanu Reeves rejected, the French embrace.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

The French cinema was once arguably the world's best.

The glorious films of Marcel Pagnol (*Fanny*) and René Clair (*Under the Roofs of Paris*) and Jean Renoir (*The Rules of the Game*) were among the highlights of the 1930s. The beautiful work of Marcel Carné (*Children of Paradise*) and Jean Cocteau (*Les Enfants Terribles*) helped keep French culture alive in the 1940s. The wonderful productions of Max Ophüls (*La Ronde*) made eyes pop in the early 1950s. And the spiky, quick, ultra-naturalistic "New Wave" flicks by François Truffaut (*Jules and Jim*) and Claude Chabrol (*The Cousins*) and Louis Malle (*Zazie dans le Métro*) and Jean-Luc Godard (*Breathless*) revolutionized the craft of moviemaking from the late 1950s through the early 1970s.

Time was, when a French film was released in the United States, its audience would leave the theater with the distinct sense that they had just been present at a cultural feast no American movie could match.

But that was then and this is now, and the only arguably great film made in France in the past three decades is Claude Berri's *Jean de Florette* from 1986, a magnificent epic on a small scale about a disputed water hole in Provence. Otherwise, with the exception of the brilliant farces of Francis Veber, whose *The Dinner Game* (1998) and *The Valet* (2006) are among the funniest movies of our time, French cinema is all but moribund. French films that hit the export market have tended to be long on production design—like *Diva*, a fashion spread posing as a movie that made a sensation in 1982, or the *oeuvre* of Jean-Luc Besson, auteur of *La Femme Nikita* and producer of dozens of similarly well-photographed pieces of mindless nonsense.

Tell No One
Directed by Guillaume Canet

Now, direct from winning many prizes at the 2007 César Awards (the Gallic Oscars), comes *Tell No One*, a thriller that may be the best-reviewed French movie in years in the American press. The praise and the awards indicate not only how far French films have fallen, but just how easily seduced movie critics can be by a few subtitles.

At the beginning, a nice pediatrician and his lovely wife are skinny-dipping when they have an argument. She swims away angrily onto shore and, out of sight, yelps. He goes to see what has happened and gets hit on the head. We cut forward eight years. The authorities have ascribed his wife's death to a serial killer. But then some bodies turn up near the site where she was killed. The police begin to think he might have killed them all. And then he gets an email from his wife.

It's a strong opening, but what follows from it is a muddle. When the plot makes sense, it is ludicrous; but mostly it's incomprehensible, and like all bad thrillers, relies on characters acting foolishly or knowing far more than it is possible for them to know. It turns out that the pediatrician's wife, his wife's father, his fashionably lesbian sister, and his own father were all caught up for months in a child-abuse scandal about which he knew absolutely nothing, even though he seems like a reasonably intelligent fellow. The plot requires an industrialist to have had a team of people shadowing our hero for eight years when they have no reason to doubt that his wife (who is the subject of their interest) is long since dead. That she is not, in fact, dead is actually a complete coincidence.

The cowriter/director of *Tell No One*, Guillaume Canet, has made a movie whose proper home would be on Saturday night as a Lifetime made-for-television feature. In fact, the film is based on an American potboiler by Harlan Coben that was originally purchased by Hollywood for Keanu Reeves. Reeves, demonstrating that he is not as dumb as the characters he plays, wisely refused, and Canet secured the rights to it. At least when François Truffaut decided to film a dime-store American novel called *Down There* back in 1962, he came up with the stunning *Shoot the Piano Player*. What is Canet's excuse?

If *Tell No One* proves anything, it is that Jack Lang, the notoriously anti-American culture minister in the early years of François Mitterrand's government, may have had a *soupçon* of a point when, in 1982, he railed against "this domination, against—let us call a spade a spade—this financial and intellectual imperialism." Of course, no imperialist power forced Guillaume Canet to make *Tell No One*, and no imperialist power compelled France's cultural pooh-bahs to garland it with awards. But it does demonstrate that France, once a great power in the world of film, has become a provincial backwater eager and hungry to forage for Hollywood's scraps. ♦

François Cluzet and Kristin Scott-Thomas

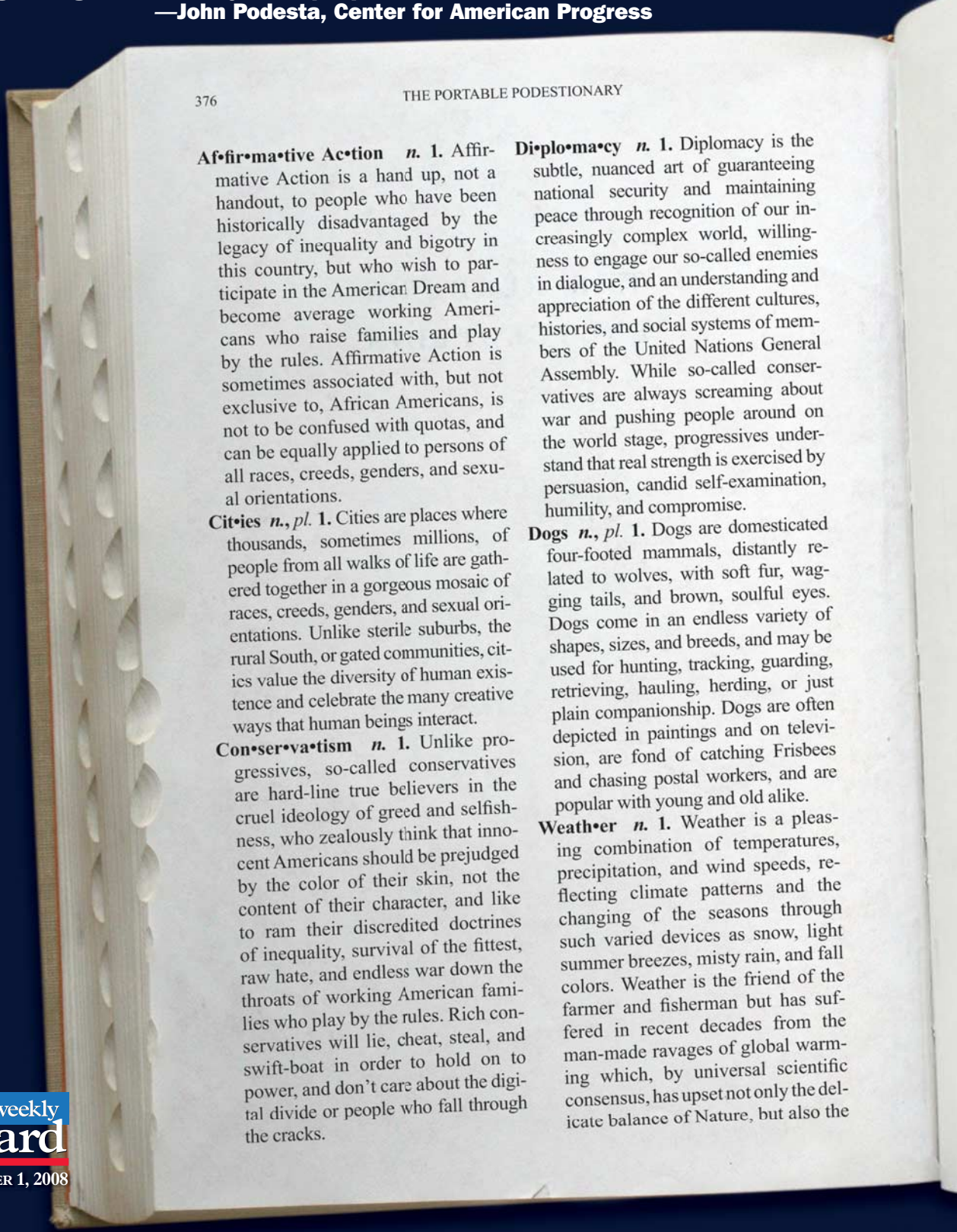
MUSIC BOX FILMS

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

"What is progressivism? We all have our own answers to this question.... As I travel the country speaking with students and activists, I'm often asked to offer my own definition of progressive. This is what I frequently suggest: 'Progressives believe that America should be a country of boundless opportunity, where all people can better themselves through education, hard work, fair pay, and the freedom to pursue their dreams. We believe that this will be achieved only with an open and effective government that champions the common good over narrow self-interest while securing the rights and safety of its people.'"

—John Podesta, Center for American Progress

Parody



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Af•fir•ma•tive Ac•tion *n.* **1.** Affirmative Action is a hand up, not a handout, to people who have been historically disadvantaged by the legacy of inequality and bigotry in this country, but who wish to participate in the American Dream and become average working Americans who raise families and play by the rules. Affirmative Action is sometimes associated with, but not exclusive to, African Americans, is not to be confused with quotas, and can be equally applied to persons of all races, creeds, genders, and sexual orientations.

Cit•ies *n., pl.* **1.** Cities are places where thousands, sometimes millions, of people from all walks of life are gathered together in a gorgeous mosaic of races, creeds, genders, and sexual orientations. Unlike sterile suburbs, the rural South, or gated communities, cities value the diversity of human existence and celebrate the many creative ways that human beings interact.

Con•ser•va•tism *n.* **1.** Unlike progressives, so-called conservatives are hard-line true believers in the cruel ideology of greed and selfishness, who zealously think that innocent Americans should be prejudged by the color of their skin, not the content of their character, and like to ram their discredited doctrines of inequality, survival of the fittest, raw hate, and endless war down the throats of working American families who play by the rules. Rich conservatives will lie, cheat, steal, and swift-boat in order to hold on to power, and don't care about the digital divide or people who fall through the cracks.

Di•plo•ma•cy *n.* **1.** Diplomacy is the subtle, nuanced art of guaranteeing national security and maintaining peace through recognition of our increasingly complex world, willingness to engage our so-called enemies in dialogue, and an understanding and appreciation of the different cultures, histories, and social systems of members of the United Nations General Assembly. While so-called conservatives are always screaming about war and pushing people around on the world stage, progressives understand that real strength is exercised by persuasion, candid self-examination, humility, and compromise.

Dogs *n., pl.* **1.** Dogs are domesticated four-footed mammals, distantly related to wolves, with soft fur, wagging tails, and brown, soulful eyes. Dogs come in an endless variety of shapes, sizes, and breeds, and may be used for hunting, tracking, guarding, retrieving, hauling, herding, or just plain companionship. Dogs are often depicted in paintings and on television, are fond of catching Frisbees and chasing postal workers, and are popular with young and old alike.

Weath•er *n.* **1.** Weather is a pleasing combination of temperatures, precipitation, and wind speeds, reflecting climate patterns and the changing of the seasons through such varied devices as snow, light summer breezes, misty rain, and fall colors. Weather is the friend of the farmer and fisherman but has suffered in recent decades from the man-made ravages of global warming which, by universal scientific consensus, has upset not only the delicate balance of Nature, but also the