the weekly Standard
SEPTEMBER 8, 2008
$4.95

ERIC COHEN ON TECHNOLOGY AND DEMOCRACY
ANDREW FERGUSON

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## Barnes, Hayes & Kristol on the McCain-Palin ticket

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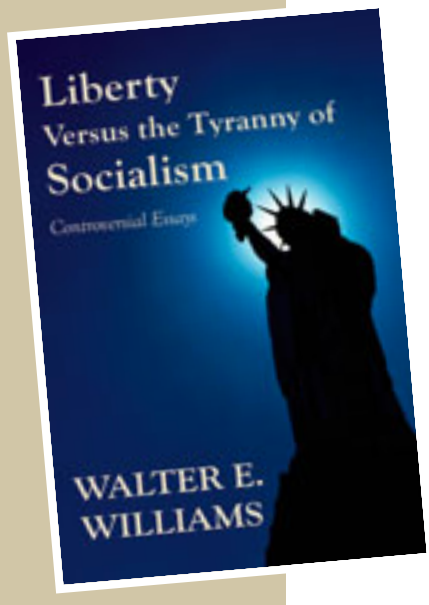


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the weekly Standard

The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013), a division of News America Incorporated, is published weekly (except the first week in January, third week in April, second week in July, and fourth week in August) at 1150 17th St., NW, Suite 505, Washington D.C. 20036. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 50108, Boulder, CO 80322-0108. For subscription customer service in the United States, call 1-800-274-7293. For new subscription orders, please call 1-800-283-2014. Subscribers: Please send new subscription orders and changes of address to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 50108, Boulder, CO 80322-0108. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-850-682-7644 for subscription inquiries. American Express, Visa/MasterCard payments accepted. Cover price, $3.95. Back issues, $3.95 (includes postage and handling). Send letters to the editor to The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th Street, N.W., Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036-4617. For a copy of The Weekly Standard Privacy Policy, visit www.weeklystandard.com or write to Customer Service, The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th St., NW, Suite 505, Washington, D.C. 20036. Copyright 2008, News America Incorporated. All rights reserved. No material in The Weekly Standard may be reprinted without permission of the copyright owner. The Weekly Standard is a registered trademark of News America Incorporated.

# A Cuppa Joe Biden

In his roundup of this cycle's presidential books ("Read, Weep, and Vote," Dec. 3, 2007), Andrew Ferguson assessed then-presidential hopeful Joe Biden's volume, *Promises to Keep*, which told the amazing story of Biden's upbringing as the poor son of a coal miner in Wales, his ascent through the ranks of the Labour party, and his accomplishments as the first member of his family in a thousand generations to go to university. Or something like that. In view of Biden's selection to be Barack Obama's running mate, we thought you might enjoy rereading Ferguson's comments on Biden from that article:

"What does a discerning reader learn from Biden's book that we didn't already know? Perhaps not much, if you're a regular watcher of C-SPAN or a longtime resident of Delaware. But there is something unforgettable about watching the man emerge on the page. His legendary self-regard becomes more impressive when the reader sees it in typescript, undistracted by the smile and the hair plugs. Biden quotes at great length from letters of recommendation he received as a young man, when farsighted professors wrote movingly of his 'sharp and incisive intellect' and his 'highly developed sense of responsibility.' These qualities have proved to be more of a burden than you might think, Biden admits. 'I've made life difficult for myself,' he writes, 'by putting intellectual consistency and personal principle above expediency.'

"Yes, many Biden fans might tag these as the greatest of his gifts. Biden himself isn't so sure. After a little hemming and hawing—is it his intelligence that he most admires, or his commitment to principle, or his insistence on calling 'em as he sees 'em, or what?—he decides that his greatest personal and political virtue is probably his integrity. Tough call. But his wife seems to agree. He recounts one difficult episode in which she said as much.

"'Of all the things to attack you on,' she said, almost in tears. 'Your integrity?'

"This lachrymose moment came during Biden's aborted presidential campaign in 1988, when reporters discovered several instances of plagiarism in his campaign speeches and in his law school record. Biden rehearses the episode in tormenting, if selective, detail, and true to campaign-book form, his account serves as the emotional center of the book. The memoir of every presidential candidate must describe a Political Time of Testing, some point at which, if the narrative arc is to prove satisfying, the hero encounters criticism, most of it unjust, but then rallies, overcomes hardship and misfortune and the petty, self-serving attacks of enemies, and emerges chastened but wiser—and, come to think of it, more qualified to lead the greatest nation on earth.

"In Biden's case, the ritual also allows him to dismiss these old charges by placing them in the least clarifying light possible. It's true that he was disciplined for plagiarizing a paper in law school, he says offhandedly; but those long paragraphs taken verbatim from other people's work were simply an oversight—a matter of not knowing how to cite sources properly. (A fun-loving student, he had skipped the class in which the rules of citation were taught.) As for the lines he'd lifted from others and dropped into his own speeches—these were misunderstandings. In at least one instance, a speechwriter had inserted a quote from Bobby Kennedy into Biden's speech without attribution, meaning that while Biden was delivering remarks he knew he hadn't written, he was also delivering remarks that he didn't know his speechwriter hadn't written.

"It's confusing, yes, but Biden's explanations serve a dual purpose: He appears forthright even as he tries to bury once and for all the accusations that forced him from presidential contention 20 years ago. Now, officially, they are 'old news,' the settled stuff of history and memoir. To any detailed questions about them that might arise from young reporters covering his current campaign, he can say: Just read my book.

"That's a lot to ask, however. Like most conventional campaign books, *Promises to Keep* is so light in tone, so breezily written, that it becomes, paradoxically, extremely difficult to read. Its superficiality and general insincerity may explain why the traditional campaign book has become a dying genre."♦

## The Party of LBJ

Anybody who thinks politics can't be a brutal, unsentimental business—as THE SCRAPBOOK believes—should think back to the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City. President John F. Kennedy had been shot to death just 9 months earlier, yet the podium was flanked—no, dwarfed—by two gigantic, multistory photographs of the new president, Lyndon B. Johnson. Yes, there was a smaller—much smaller—portrait of JFK behind the stage, but it was one-third of a triptych featuring Kennedy, Franklin Roosevelt, and Harry Truman (who was very much alive, but did not attend).

Fast-forward 44 years to Denver, where the Democrats have just nominated their first black candidate for president, and you would expect that Lyndon Johnson—creator of the Great Society, the man who pushed the 1964


*(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of October 6, 2003)*

Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act through Congress, and appointed the first black cabinet member and Supreme Court justice—would be mentioned, if ever so briefly, in the course of his party's convention. But you would be wrong.

The Scrapbook was, frankly, astonished: Last Wednesday was even LBJ's centennial, for gosh sakes—but not a peep. Indeed, when Barack Obama spoke to the multitudes on Thursday night, the only predecessors he mentioned were Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. No Truman, whose foreign policy set the course for the postwar era; and no LBJ, whose vision of civil rights and the role of the federal government remains the Democratic standard.

It is possible, of course, that the omission was deliberate—Johnson, of course, was the principal author of the Vietnam war—and it is equally possible that Senator Obama (who was born in 1961) and senior members of his campaign apparatus have only the haziest notion of what Truman and Johnson—and FDR and JFK, for that matter—actually did as presidents.

Still, The Scrapbook would think that, at a national convention where the delegates listened patiently to the likes of Jimmy Carter, Joe Biden, and Al Gore, a minute or two might have been set aside in memory of the president who, as much as any Democrat, invented his party's current ideology, and set the stage for Barack Obama. ♦

## Sentences We Didn't Finish

"If Obama loses, our children will grow up thinking of equal opportunity as a myth. His defeat would say that when handed a perfect opportunity to put the worst part of our history behind us, we chose not to. In this event, the world's judgment will be severe and inescapable: the United States had its day, but in the end couldn't put its own self-interest ahead of its crazy irrationality over race.

"Choosing McCain, in particular, would herald the construction of a bridge to the 20th century—and not necessarily the last part of it, either. McCain represents a cold-war style of nationalism that doesn't get the shift from geopolitics to geoeconomics, the centrality of soft power in a multipolar world, or the transformative nature of . . . " (Jacob Weisberg, *Newsweek*, September 1, 2008). ♦

## Leading Indicator?

A good friend of The Scrapbook called gleefully last week. His wife is a high-powered television correspondent. "In 30 years," he said, "my wife has never covered the winner of a political race"—he paused dramatically—"she has just been assigned to Barack Obama." ♦

# Casual

## Cool Chapeau, Man

Earlier this summer, I was discovered to have a basal carcinoma, which sounds terrifying, but is in fact merely a precancerous sore that was easily cut away by a dermatologist. The sore was at my hairline—wasn't it William James who said of Josiah Royce that he showed "an indecent exposure of forehead?"—and was the result of too much sun. I was told to begin using sunscreen and, on sunny days, to wear a hat.

The hat I bought, at a shop too quaintly called The Things We Love, is a straw fedora, with a slender black ribbon running round its base. The brim is of normal size, and it is a fairly serious piece of goods: no Aussie Outback hat or Indiana Jones replica. An adult hat, I call it, and I wear it at an only slightly rakish angle. (Euclid, unfortunately, does not take up rakish angles, a small flaw in one of the great books in Western civilization.)

The press this hat has been bringing me all summer is noteworthy. "Nice hat," more than one passing stranger has said to me. "Cool chapeau, man," I've also heard. "Very dapper" is the most frequent comment. So far no one has called me "natty." Dapper I can live with, but natty suggests two-colored shoes and monogrammed shirts. You don't ever want to be natty—at least I don't.

The reason my hat seems to be garnering so much attention is that it is unusual today to see a man wearing a—how shall I put it?—grown-up hat in a serious way. I suspect that most people who see me approaching from the middle distance ask themselves, "Is this guy in the hat kidding or what?" As a surety of my earnestness, I do my best not to smile as I pass. When I pass people I know, I am not above tipping my hat, or before women taking it off in a sweeping gesture as if it had a plume.

John F. Kennedy is often cited as the man who killed men's hats in America, and perhaps around the world. With his thick head of hair, low-hairline division, a hat probably would not have sat well on Kennedy. One thinks of FDR as, characteristically, wearing a hat and brandishing a cigarette holder; Harry Truman—a haberdasher, after all—also comes most readily to mind behatted. But today there is no politician that one automatically thinks of in a hat.

DARREN GYGI

John McCain is often shown on television walking around Iraq in a baseball hat. A mistake, this, I feel. For the candidate who is supposed to represent gravity and the wisdom of experience, a baseball cap, even one with Navy written across it, is all wrong. McCain doesn't look good in the damn thing. Barack Obama, the youth candidate, I can easily envision wearing a baseball cap backwards. The picture makes me, in one swoop, lose hope and want to fight hard against change.

The baseball cap marks a steep decline in elegant male attire. Not even baseball players look good in them—just as no Greek fisherman has ever looked good in a Greek fisherman's cap. In his baseball cap, the pitcher Randy Johnson, the Big Unit, looks like a 6′10″ geek. With his cap off, he's more than passable. Yet the baseball cap is endemic in our day, worn forward, backward, or off the side, rapper style. Anywhere you wear them, though, they don't come off.

Men of my father's generation wouldn't leave the house without their hats. In the movies, Humphrey Bogart, Robert Mitchum, James Cagney punched thugs out without removing their hats. A *noir* flick is unthinkable without fedoras. Hat shops were a fairly common feature in the cityscape. Many dry cleaners and shoeshine parlors also blocked hats; blocking was a mysterious steaming process that gave new life to a man's hat.

In my thus far brief return to wearing a serious hat, I discover that doing so entails certain inconveniences. The infrastructure, as we should say today, for serious hats is no longer in place. I shall not, for example, be able to travel on an airplane with a hat, unless I sit with it in my lap through the flight, for surely there will be no room for it in the invariably crowded overhead luggage compartments. Hats also present a problem in restaurants, for the vast majority of even good restaurants no longer have a hat-check facility. Hat racks, too, are less and less common.

I intend nonetheless to persist. I have long owned a green felt fedora that I intend to bring out and wear in the autumn. I may well become known, at least in my neighborhood, as the guy in those strange old-fashioned hats. I shall instead think of myself as among the last men attempting to pass themselves off as grown-ups in America.

**Joseph Epstein**

the weekly Standard

# Let Palin Be Palin

A spectre is haunting the liberal elites of New York and Washington—the spectre of a young, attractive, unapologetic conservatism, rising out of the American countryside, free of the taint (fair or unfair) of the Bush administration and the recent Republican Congress, able to invigorate a McCain administration and to govern beyond it.

That spectre has a name—Sarah Palin, the 44-year-old governor of Alaska chosen by John McCain on Friday to be his running mate. There she is: a working woman who's a proud wife and mother; a traditionalist in important matters who's broken through all kinds of barriers; a reformer who's a Republican; a challenger of a corrupt good-old-boy establishment who's a conservative; a successful woman whose life is unapologetically grounded in religious belief; a lady who's a leader.

So what we will see in the next days and weeks—what we have already seen in the hours after her nomination—is an effort by all the powers of the old liberalism, both in the Democratic party and the mainstream media, to exorcise this spectre. They will ridicule her and patronize her. They will distort her words and caricature her biography. They will appeal, sometimes explicitly, to anti-small town and anti-religious prejudice. All of this will be in the cause of trying to prevent the American people from arriving at their own judgment of Sarah Palin.

That's why Palin's spectacular performance in her introduction in Dayton was so important. Her remarks were cogent and compelling. Her presentation of herself was shrewd and savvy. I heard from many who watched Palin—many of them not predisposed to support her—about how moved they were by her remarks, her composure, and her story. She will have a chance to shine again Wednesday night at the Republican convention.

But before and after that, she'll be swimming in political waters infested with sharks. Her nickname when she was the starting point guard on an Alaska high school championship basketball team was "Sarah Barracuda." I suspect she'll take care of herself better than many expect.

But the McCain campaign can help. The choice of Palin was McCain's own. Many of his staff expected, and favored, other more conventional candidates. The campaign may be tempted to overreact when one rash sentence or foolish comment by Palin from 10 or 15 years ago is dragged up by Democratic opposition research and magnified by a credulous and complicit media.

The McCain campaign will have to keep its cool. It will have to provide facts and context, and to hit back where appropriate. But it cannot become obsessed with playing defense. It should allow Palin to deal with the charges directly and resist the temptation to try to shield her from the media. Palin is potentially a huge asset to McCain. He took the gamble—wisely, we think—of putting her on the ticket. McCain's choice of Palin was McCain being McCain. Now his campaign will have to let Palin be Palin.

There will be rocky moments. But they will fade if the McCain campaign lets Palin's journey take its natural course over the next two months. Millions of Americans—mostly but not only women, mostly but not only Republicans and conservatives—seemed to get a sense of energy and enjoyment and pride, not just from her nomination, but especially from her smashing opening performance. Palin will be a compelling and mold-breaking example for lots of Americans who are told every day that to be even a bit conservative or Christian or old-fashioned is bad form. In this respect, Palin can become an inspirational figure and powerful symbol. The left senses this, which is why they want to discredit her quickly.

A key moment for Palin will be the vice presidential debate, to be held at Washington University in St. Louis on October 2. One liberal commentator—a former U.S. ambassador and not normally an unabashed vulgarian—licked his chops Friday afternoon: "To steal an old adage of former Secretary of State James Baker . . . putting Sarah Palin into a debate with Joe Biden is going to be like throwing Howdy Doody into a knife fight!"

Charming. And if Palin holds her own against Biden, as she is fully capable of doing? McCain will then have succeeded in combining with his own huge advantage in experience and judgment, a politician of great promise in his vice presidential slot who will make Joe Biden look like a tiresome relic. McCain's willingness to take a chance on Palin could turn what looked, after Obama's impressive speech Thursday night in Denver, like a long two months for Republicans and conservatives, into a campaign of excitement and—dare we say it?—hope, which will culminate on November 4 in victory.

*—William Kristol*

# It's All About MARIA

## Musings from California's mom

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

"When I think of California, I like to believe that WE [sic] are one big family," says Maria Shriver. She is the state's first lady and wife of Arnold Schwarzenegger, the beefcake governor who is expected to do another of his star turns at the Republican convention this week. Maria has acted on this idea of hers, of state-as-family, in a way that casts a soft but revealing glow on the government of California, and perhaps on the national government too, soon enough.

If California is a family, Maria gets to be mom, *ex officio.* The revelation came upon her only recently. She describes the painful parturition in her new book, *Just Who Will You Be?* The book climbed the *New York Times* bestseller list after its author made an appearance on *Oprah*. ("I cried," Maria told the host, as all Oprah guests must. "I still cry.") It's a very short book. The first line is this: "Just who I am has a lot to do with me."

For a while there, though, Maria didn't know who she was, and the consequences of her identity crisis have been far-reaching. The crisis followed her husband's election in 2003. She had been working for many years as a second-string on-air personality at NBC. In one of those weird, pointless spasms of scrupulosity that convulse television people at random intervals, her network bosses asked her to resign to avoid any potential conflicts of interest. This is when she started crying.

"Sometimes life happens to you," she recalls, "and—bingo!—your idea of who you thought you are just goes up in smoke. That's what happened to me." So she embarked on a "journey" to answer the question, "What do I want to be when I grow up?" She's 52. "I'd have to take the time to know what I feel," she writes, "in order to know who I am and who I want to be."

The journey is over, for now anyway. At its conclusion, you won't be dumbfounded to learn, she discovered that she, Maria, this lost soul, this searcher, was, down deep, really pretty terrific: a "free-spirited, adventurous, and creative person inside," is how she describes herself. She goes on: "I've been amazed to discover I'm actually a nurturing and spiritual person who seeks joy, peace, and meaning in her life." Who could have guessed? "That's who I am," she repeats, for emphasis. "What matters most to me now is what *I* expect of myself. What matters most to me now is that I *know* myself—what my heart feels, what my inner voice is telling me."

Here's where the state of California comes in. Not long after finishing her book, and as a consequence of her journey, Maria used her replenished vigor to launch "It's All About WE," a hydra-headed program and "call to action" aimed at Californians, which

PAUL MOYSE

*Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at* The Weekly Standard.

is good since they're paying for it. It's an unexpected role for her to pursue with such enthusiasm. As Maria made clear to Oprah and in her book, being a Kennedy (John F. Kennedy was her uncle) and a semi-famous TV star, being the mother of four kids and helpmate to the world's most famous mesomorph—none of these roles had been finally fulfilling for her. But the role she resisted most fiercely, at least at the beginning, was that of First Lady of California.

"'You've got to be kidding!'" she recalls thinking. "'That's not me! I didn't grow up wanting to be First Lady of *anything*!' But there I found myself, and I didn't have a clue what to do."

Now at her journey's end, however, with her new identity as nurturer safely in hand, she has embraced the role and the title. In open letters to the people of California, she even signs herself as "Your First Lady." And "It's All About WE" is the first fruits of the new Maria. The phrase has been trademarked.

So what is it, exactly? I'm not sure. I've been studying it for several days. The name is as good a place to start as any. It's a play on the cliché, "It's all about me," obviously. This is supposedly what narcissists say. "He thinks it's all about him" and "It's not all about you" have become common insults, directed at a person so lost in himself that he fails to take account of other people. So Maria took the phrase, turned it upside down, and invented a rhyme with a new plural pronoun: "It's All About WE" instead of "It's All About ME." Okay? She wanted to emphasize that her program's communitarian nature is an antidote to self-absorption. I can't explain why she uppercased the "WE."

I've noticed also that the grammatical problem—using the subjective pronoun "we" as the object of a preposition—doesn't seem to faze her, even though it makes solecisms inevitable. "We can be a state powered by WE," Governor Schwarzenegger has been forced to say on a few public occasions. English is his second language, of course, so maybe nobody notices, but Maria, who has written a great deal about WE, isn't a stickler about these things, either. You can tell by reading her stuff. She insists that she was a "TV journalist" in her earlier career, and the prose in her recent columns bears this out. "It is important," she wrote last fall, "for ideals that encompass service, such as compassion and caring, are woven in roles of leadership."

Even so, "It's All About WE" has a lot to do with words. It's heavily word-dependent, you might say. Maria's first lady web page, featured prominently on the State of California's website, would generate reams of paper if you were dumb enough to print everything out. There are pages upon pages of pictures too. They show Your First Lady surrounded, Ceausescu-like, by amputees, derelicts, Special Olympians, oldsters, soldiers, farmers, and children of every human variety. They are all smiling at Maria. And the words tell why.

"Maria Shriver has transformed the role of First Lady," we read on her website,

> issuing calls to action that have resounded across the state and have transcended party, gender, and economic lines. She believes "It's All About WE" and in the transformative power of working together to achieve a positive legacy for California. . . . "It's All About WE" represents Shriver's boldly creative, nurturant, and entrepreneurial vision.

Read it as often as you like, you'll get only hints of what it is that "It's All About WE" actually *does*. Hints may be all there are. Under "It's All About WE," Maria "partners with" (new verb, meaning: "shakes down") dozens of large corporations, most of whom do business with the state, to pay for an annual Women's Conference attended by 14,000 women. At the conference Maria awards "Maria's Minervas" to deserving "California women," including her mother, Eunice Shriver, who lives in Maryland. The food booths are sponsored by Lean Cuisine.

"WE" also sponsors "the most complete source of school gardening resources in the State." It provides a website for charities that need volunteers. It "provides disaster preparedness" tools—booklets mostly, including a "customizable children's story designed to teach children how to be disaster prepared in a fun, non-threatening way." It sponsored an event called WE eat, WE play, WE prepare, and WE serve, "to communicate information that teaches families how to connect to each other." It encourages visits to the California Museum for History, Women, and the Arts, in Sacramento, where "WE dream." (Dreaming in Sacramento?) It "provides individuals with developmental disabilities a chance to excel in jobs that give them satisfaction"—an up-to-date version of the old program, "Hire the Handicapped."

In fact everything about "It's All About WE" is up-to-date. That's why it's so instructive to those of us outside California. Like so many west-coast innovations, it is state of the art, the modern welfare state in its spiffiest form. With boundless optimism, Maria has shown us the next phase of governmental do-goodery, now that welfare reform and bottomless budget deficits have made Great Society grandiosity unthinkable. It exists with Maria's other journey in the realm of feelings and intentions, where saying makes it so. And nothing actually gets done. It's a "call to action" because action itself is too expensive. It "promotes," "partners," "facilitates," "supports," "creates opportunities," "provides tools." If it doesn't do much good, it doesn't do much harm, either, and it keeps a lot of people occupied who, in an earlier age, would have been busy nationalizing the banks or computing manufacturing quotas for drill bits and shirt buttons.

We should thank Governor Schwarzenegger's wife for showing us the soft socialism of the Golden State at the dawn of the 21st century. This may be the coming thing. For as Maria herself has said, "If Barack Obama were a state, he'd be California." ♦

# Providential Palin

## She may be the one conservatives have been waiting for. BY FRED BARNES

*St. Paul*

John McCain was inching up on Barack Obama last week in the presidential polls as his campaign cleverly picked and pecked at Obama's vanity. At the Democratic convention, speeches by the Clintons and Senator Joe Biden, Obama's running mate, salved the campaign a bit. Then came the address by Obama before 85,000 people at Invesco Field in Denver. The event was a grandiose spectacle that overwhelmed the doctrinaire content of the speech. But as a political happening, it worked like nothing I've seen before.

Republicans were demoralized, which could be fatal in an election year in which most of the larger political forces are working against them. I'm not going to list those forces. Read the newspaper. And it looked like we were in for the selection by McCain of a humdrum vice presidential running mate, followed by a not very interesting Republican convention in St. Paul.

Sarah Palin changed all that. She was not only a surprise choice but also an electrifying one, and her selection has far-reaching implications. Her entry will change the nature of the presidential race. And if the McCain-Palin ticket wins, it has the potential to carry Republicans through a rough patch and even ensure conservative dominance of the party—for years to come.

That's an awful lot of political significance to ascribe to a vice presidential pick. But given who Sarah Palin is and what her future might be, it's not too much.

Let's start with the presidential race. Republicans have made some serious headway in recent weeks. You might have thought House speaker Nancy Pelosi would have enough sense not to spark a fight with the Catholic bishops on abortion. But no. She came up with the insight that Catholic doctrine on abortion is in flux, justifying support of legalized abortion by Catholic politicians.

One of the most politically savvy of the Catholic prelates, Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver, rebutted Pelosi. But she wouldn't give up. And Biden, also a Catholic, jumped in on Pelosi's side. After all these years, Democratic politicians still don't understand that picking a fight with the Catholic bishops on abortion is a political loser. It energizes the Republican base.

Palin is a different kind of Republican. She's a conservative reformer who, somewhat like McCain but more like Ronald Reagan, is forever poised to challenge the sluggish (or corrupt) establishment and shake up the status quo.

Democrats also awakened another member of the Republican coalition, an unreliable member: the business community. It has belatedly come to understand that a Democratic sweep of Congress and the White House would lead to the enactment of "card check," a tactic to avoid the secret ballot in union elections and thus dramatically improve the prospect of success in organizing drives.

The Democratic convention made the hostility of Democrats even clearer. Speech after speech demonized business. Obama credited workers with the productivity gains of recent years, ignoring the more important role of a massive investment in technology. If he knew better, he didn't let on.

So Republicans were beginning to come together, but it was thanks largely to Democratic noisemaking. Republicans weren't on offense. Now, with Sarah Palin's elevation, they are. McCain couldn't mobilize the Republican base, but Palin can. Indeed, she already has. By 10 P.M. Friday, the day her selection was announced, the McCain campaign had raised $4 million online—more than six times its previous daily record.

Palin is a different kind of Republican. She's a conservative reformer who, somewhat like McCain but more like Ronald Reagan, is forever poised to challenge the sluggish (or corrupt) Republican establishment and shake up the status quo. "I didn't get into government to do the safe and easy things," she declared after McCain introduced her as his running mate. "A ship in harbor is safe, but that's not why the ship is built."

She brought down Alaska's governor, attorney general, and state Republican chairman (see my "Most Popular Governor," July 16, 2007). She killed the "bridge to nowhere." She used increased tax revenues from high oil prices to give Alaskans a rebate. She slashed government spending. She took on the biggest industry in Alaska, the oil companies, to work out an equitable deal on building a new gas pipeline. Obama can't match even one of these accomplishments.

McCain gets enormous credit for naming a conservative woman to his ticket. But it was Palin herself, rather than the boldness of McCain, that instantly galvanized conservatives. Palin's reform credentials, her social and economic conservatism, and her personal story had become well known to conservatives. This was a surprise to me.

With Palin on board, the change issue is no longer Obama's exclu-

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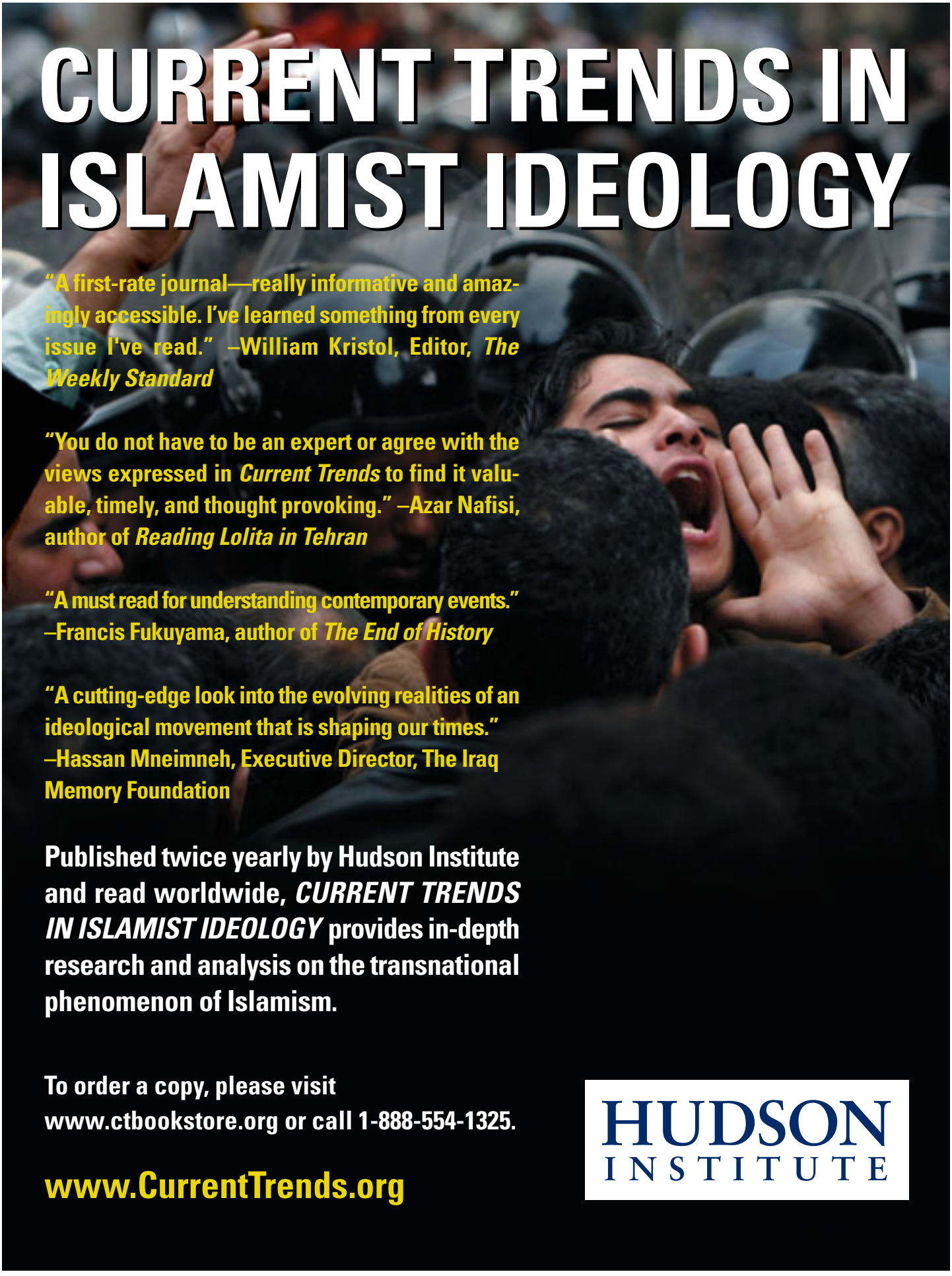

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sive possession. She and McCain are more likely to clash with special interest groups than are Obama and Biden, who have yet to buck a single liberal pressure group. Palin and McCain are more likely to produce both "change we can believe in" and "change we need." And Palin will attract more women to the ticket than McCain and Vice President X ever would have.

What if McCain and Palin win? As vice president, Palin would be next in line for the Republican presidential nomination after McCain. Assuming she didn't wander off the conservative reservation—an unlikely occurrence—she'd be hard to stop. And just to be clear about her conservatism:Palin is pro-life, pro-gun, pro-military, pro-Iraq war, pro-spending cuts, pro-tax cuts, pro-drilling for oil everywhere (including ANWR), pro-family, and pro-religion.

Republicans desperately need younger leaders. To paraphrase Democrats, the torch must be passed to a new generation. There are a number of impressive young leaders in Congress—Eric Cantor, Paul Ryan, Kevin McCarthy, to name three in the House—but they've been leapfrogged: If McCain loses, Palin will be the hope of the future. If he wins, she'll actually be the future.

Conservatives have a lot riding on Palin, too. They haven't had a leader since Reagan left the scene, and they need one. A leader can adapt conservatism to new times and popularize the faith. Many of the contenders for the Republican presidential nomination this year insisted on likening themselves to Reagan, but it was a pathetic exercise. They weren't credible.

Dubbing someone the new Reagan is silly, especially someone who's been a national figure all of a few days. A conservative leader, should one emerge, doesn't have to be Reagan-like. Maybe Palin is the leader conservatives have been waiting for. Maybe not. But she certainly is good for Republicans right now. She just improved McCain's chances of being the next president. ♦

# The Joke's on Al Franken

## The comedian's Senate race is in deep trouble.

**BY BARRY CASSELMAN**

*St. Paul*

For the past two years, political commentators have been predicting that the 2008 U.S. Senate race in Minnesota would be close and that Republican incumbent Norm Coleman was vulnerable. That made a lot of sense, considering that in the 2006 race Democrat Amy Klobuchar had clobbered GOP veteran congressman Mark Kennedy here in a race for an open seat, anti-Bush sentiment in the state was increasing, well-known TV comedian Al Franken was likely to be Coleman's challenger, and the Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama was initially very popular.

As in so many political races this year, however, reasonable predictions have turned out, so far, off the mark.

While President Bush remains quite unpopular here, the situation in Iraq (which has driven much of this sentiment) has faded from the center of the political debate. And after being close to the administration for four years, Senator Coleman has put considerable distance between himself and many of Bush's unpopular policies.

At the same time, unlike Mark Kennedy two years ago, Coleman has sprinted to the political center.

Al Franken, who has spent most of his professional life making fun of others, has found himself potentially the political joke in Minnesota this year. His failure so far to make himself competitive against Coleman has strategists and candidates for the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party (the Minnesota Democrats) worried that he will be a drag on the entire ticket.

Franken has mostly himself to blame for his predicament. Republican bloggers and the state party did turn up damaging information about him, including his failure to pay workman's compensation for employees of the corporation he owns and the failure to pay income taxes to at least 17 states over several years (he claims to have paid all of his Minnesota taxes). Although serious, these revelations alone would not have been so damaging if Franken had not first denied them and then appeared to try to cover them up.

Perhaps more damaging in this state where a large number of voters are rural or suburban, and conservative, are videotapes and transcripts of Franken's TV shows, scripts, books, and speeches. These show him to have been an on-the-edge comedian and writer whose humor is very Hollywood and New York City, where he has lived most of his professional life. It is not apparently a humor that appeals to most Minnesotans.

Particularly unhelpful have been his numerous jokes denigrating women. At the DFL state convention that endorsed him, Franken appeared to apologize for some of these jokes, but the state GOP continues to roll out new tapes with controversial humor. Two of the most prominent DFL women officeholders, U.S. senator Amy Klobuchar and 4th District congresswoman Betty McCollum, denounced Franken's humor and refused to endorse him. Now, days before the September 9 primary, they have made perfunctory endorsements, but clearly there

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is little enthusiasm for him among many DFL women activists.

In an appearance in northern Minnesota, Franken was asked to comment on Coleman's efforts to build a hospital in the area. Franken offered that such projects were "small bore." The local mayor then went on the radio in a Coleman ad, heard throughout the region, saying that, for local residents, the hospital was very important, and they were grateful to Coleman for enabling it.

Political missteps like this have marked Franken's campaign from the beginning. What he has done successfully is raise a great deal of money. On the other hand, the Franken campaign has also spent a great deal, in contrast with the Coleman campaign, which has a decided advantage in cash on hand.

To complicate matters for Franken, at the last moment, lawyer Priscilla Lord Faris filed in the DFL primary, and she has been running TV ads sharply critical of Franken. A member of a prominent DFL family, Faris has no political experience, and is not expected to come close, but she provides an outlet for DFL voters to express their dissatisfaction with Franken, and if she gets a notable vote in the primary, it could be embarrassing for the endorsed candidate.

The Franken campaign has criticized Coleman for his ties to President Bush, and for the circumstances surrounding his rented apartment in Washington. Coleman, in his first four years in office, was a reliable vote for the administration, but as the war in Iraq became problematic and unpopular, Coleman began moving away from Bush. At the same time, Coleman also cast a notable vote against drilling for oil in Alaska, a move hailed by the state Sierra Club and other environmentalists. That vote is not so popular today, but Franken is in no position to attack Coleman on the issue.

Coleman leases a small one-room apartment in the basement of a Washington townhouse for $600 a month from one of his political friends, who is seen as doing the senator a favor. Still, the issue does not seem to have legs. The rent may be somewhat below market rate, but the issue only highlights that Coleman is one of the least affluent members of the Senate and that he has not enriched himself after three decades of public service, including years as state solicitor general and mayor of St. Paul.

Al Franken

AP

Recent polls indicate that Franken is in deep trouble. While the race started close, Coleman now has nearly a double-digit lead. The automated-telephone Rasmussen Poll continues to show the race as tight, but the most recent poll, according to Rasmussen, indicates that Coleman is beginning to pull away. A newer MPR/Humphrey Institute poll shows the race as a draw, but overweights DFL voters and underweights independents, and is considered an outlier.

After the September primary, there will be less than two months to go. The Franken campaign has money in the bank and is undoubtedly counting on a large infusion of funds from Senator Schumer and his Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

The fact that the race between Barack Obama and John McCain in the state is now considered competitive is more bad news for Franken, who may not be able to count on the Illinois senator's coattails. There will also be an Independence party (IP) candidate in November who is likely to draw 5 percent or more of the vote. Historically, IP candidates draw significantly more votes from DFL voters than Republican voters.

The Franken campaign has new leadership and is expected to go heavily on the attack against Coleman in the closing days of the campaign. The question is whether Minnesota voters, already soured on Franken, will see these attacks as valid or as desperate.

Negative ads do work, although in "nice" Minnesota, they have their limits. Both candidates have high name recognition, and Minnesotans are paying attention to the race. But, in the end, it will likely be how voters feel about the two men, and not any campaign strategies, that determine the outcome. Franken's controversies and personality have made him the issue. Anything can happen in politics, but if Coleman and his record are not the issue, it is very difficult to see how he can be defeated in November, or even how the race can be close. ♦

# Shut Up, They Explained

## The Obama campaign tries to suppress an ad.

**BY ALLISON R. HAYWARD**

It's not so much what you say, as how you say it. Never is that more true than in the funding of campaign speech. The latest presidential dust-up involves the irresistible combination of a billionaire corporate raider, the sixties, the Department of Justice, and something judges dreamed up called the "major purpose" test.

The billionaire, Harold Simmons, is number 136 on the Forbes 400 ranking of the super rich, with a net worth of $6.9 billion. A group called the American Issues Project (AIP), with roughly $2.9 million of funding from Simmons, has produced and purchased air time to set before the American people—in certain swing states—their issue du jour.

The AIP spot, shot in dark tones with ominous music, asks viewers whether they "know enough" to elect Barack Obama president. Knowing enough, in this context, means knowing about his ties to a Weather Underground activist turned college professor. To fully appreciate the significance, the viewer must also learn that William Ayers, said activist, is not (as one might assume from the name of the group) a climatology blogger. No, he was instead a leading man of the left during the sixties, whose group, among other exploits, set off bombs at the U.S. Capitol, the Pentagon, police stations, banks, and courthouses, not to mention in their own Greenwich Village townhouse, killing three and injuring two members.

*Allison R. Hayward is assistant professor of law at George Mason University School of Law.*

Stipulate for a second that a presidential candidate with ties to such a character would prefer not to account for those ties. The Obama campaign, faced with this broadcast, has mounted a multifaceted campaign to break AIP's kneecaps. Supporters have flooded TV stations running the ad with complaints. Obama's lead attorney has written the criminal division of the Department of Justice, demanding prosecution for "blatant" violations of the law. (Likely, the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Election Commission will be hearing from him, too, but agents for these departments don't carry sidearms so they are a bit further down the list.) Obama's aggressive reaction will also no doubt give his other critics reason to pause before launching their own messages.

I leave for others to debate the accuracy of AIP's facts. Instead, it is worth taking seriously the claim by Obama's camp that the means chosen to make the communication are "blatantly" unlawful. Is it the case, as the Obama complaint contends, that "facts have come to light that underscore the patently illegal nature of AIP's formation and operation"? That this "disregard of federal law is motivated by [AIP's] need for unlimited amounts of Mr. Simmons's money"? Unfortunately for the campaign's credibility, AIP's setup may be completely sound. Or it may not. Beneath it all lurk unanswered legal questions that make law professors swoon and candidates curse.

One fundamental tenet of American campaign finance law is that an individual may spend as much of his own money spouting off about candidates as he desires, provided his efforts are not coordinated with a campaign. Coordinated spending equals contribution, and Simmons's contributions could then not exceed $2,300 per election per candidate. Harold Simmons *qua* Harold Simmons could produce an ad and buy television time, spending his own money. The problem is whether he can do exactly the same thing through AIP.

The Amerian Issues Project is a tax-exempt social welfare organization, meaning that it pays no tax on money it receives, yet donors do not get a tax deduction as they might if AIP were a charity. It is also incorporated. Federal law in general prohibits corporations from spending money on campaign advocacy. Aha! This must be the blatant violation, you say.

Not aha. Justice William Brennan, writing for the Supreme Court in 1986's *Massachusetts Citizens for Life*, articulated an exception to the corporate spending ban. If an incorporated group was formed to promote political ideas, had no shareholders, and took no corporate or labor funding, the Court concluded that the corporate spending ban could not constitutionally apply. Unless . . . the campaign activity became the major purpose of the group. Then, the group would be required to register and report as a *political committee*, could take no more than $5,000 per year from any one donor, and couldn't take any money from corporations or unions.

AIP declares that it was formed to promote political ideas, but that campaign advocacy is *not* its major purpose. Can you measure "purpose"?

AIP is a new name for an older tax-exempt group. Do the activities of its former incarnation count when assessing its present purpose? You might argue that new name equals new group. Or you might argue that the name change is immaterial.

You might measure its purpose by how much it spends (this is what the IRS does) during some period of time. Or you might look at how

it depicts its purpose in advertising and solicitations. Must campaign activity be *the* "major purpose" or must it register if that activity is *a* "major purpose"?

By the way, AIP has filed FEC reports documenting the source of funding for the expenditures, so nobody can complain about theirs being a *shadowy* enterprise.

The smattering of court cases involving the major purpose test offer no definitive answer. The FEC has attempted several times to write a "major purpose" rule, but has never produced language that would satisfy a majority on the commission. "Major purpose" has been a factor in some FEC enforcement matters, but these carry no precedential power. As former Vice President Gore might observe, there is no controlling legal authority. To buttress Obama's criminal complaint, his counsel contends not only that Simmons has done something illegal, but has been knowing and willful in breaking the law. (Knowing and willful violations can be prosecuted criminally, less odious violations are pursued in civil enforcement.) But when the question is as bereft of clear standards as this one, how could that be?

Harold Simmons undeniably has the right to spend his own money on a campaign ad berating Barack Obama. But that right buckles under the weight of campaign finance regulation as soon as Simmons sponsors a group effort. Does this make sense? How can it be that the distinction between laudable and criminal rests in filing the right paper?

And what does it say about the Obama campaign's lawyering priorities that it is so eager to make a moral crusade and pathbreaking political prosecution out of campaign finance hyperformalism? Heads explode at the DNC at the mention of Alberto Gonzales or Monica Goodling for their alleged politicization of the Bush Justice Department. Well? Here's one context in which we can anticipate Obama will be something other than the candidate for "change." ♦

# To Have and To Hold

## Can Chris Lee keep New York's 26th district in the GOP column? BY BRENDAN CONWAY

*Akron, New York*

It's Cruise Night on Main Street in Akron, population 3,085. Attendees at the vintage auto show are sizing-up gleaming Oldsmobiles and Fords and swatting bugs. Chris Lee is out, too. A Republican first-timer looking to succeed retiring Representative Tom Reynolds, Lee hops among clusters of middle-aged and elderly folks in folding chairs. He talks jobs and gas prices and touts his record as a manufacturing executive. That's *executive*, as in, *I'm a businessman, not a politician*. "Just don't be a politician," requests one blue-haired lady between swats. *Check.*

Lee campaigns for a little over an hour in this hamlet, and not once do I hear the word "Republican." This has been a Republican district, and not so long ago Tom Reynolds was one of Congress's most powerful Republicans, the chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee. But he was battered two years ago by the Mark Foley scandal and nearly unseated. In March, he made a surprise announcement that he was retiring. Reynolds has endorsed Lee, but the candidate, despite absorbing parts of the incumbent's campaign staff and enjoying strong party backing, makes it quite clear that he intends to be different.

"Everybody has a certain shelf life," Lee tells me over lunch as I probe him on the state of Republicanism. The party suffers from a "Bush hangover" and "deserved to be taught a lesson" in 2006. Lee is concerned about climate change, is visibly uncomfortable when asked about abortion—he is "personally pro-life" but considers abortion to be a matter for a man, woman, and physician—and stresses above all his acumen with pocketbook concerns. Jobs, energy, taxes, health care, and education are this campaign's bread and butter.

In a tough year for Republican House prospects, the race for New York's 26th congressional district—representing a swath from the Buffalo suburbs through farmland and Rockwell-esque small towns to Rochester's edge—is notable chiefly for what it isn't, a Democratic wipeout. It's even more notable when you consider the New York state GOP's own particular incapacity. Four of the party's six House seats are up for grabs thanks to the retirements of Reynolds and Jim Walsh, Vito Fossella's out-of-wedlock child, and the struggles of second-term representative Randy Kuhl with his perennial opponent, ex-Republican Eric Massa.

But this race has tilted toward the Republican column in recent weeks. It's not just Lee pitching his own brand of change, but two Democratic candidates have engaged in a primary battle that can be likened to the Hillary-Barack marathon for its length and brutality. By the August 20 pre-primary reporting deadline, the rival Democrats had *spent* nearly five times as much as Lee had *raised*, much of it on television and radio attack ads.

On one side is Jack Davis, a colorful, self-made multimillionaire who used to be a Republican. He came within 2 points of unseating Reynolds in 2006 and shows a Hillary-like determination to stay in the game this time. In late July, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of his lawsuit against the FEC striking down the McCain-Feingold "Millionaires'

*Brendan Conway, a former member of the editorial board of the* Washington Times, *is a writer in Hoboken, N.J.*

Amendment," which helped the opponents of wealthy, self-funded candidates by relaxing fundraising limits. Davis has pledged to spend as much as $3 million of his own money on his third try at the seat.

On the other side is a 30-year-old Netroots-funded Iraq veteran: Jon Powers. He is the Democratic party's preferred candidate and very much the Obama of this race. Groomed by Washington power brokers impressed with his biography, he has been featured throughout the national media and in a war documentary, blogs for the *Huffington Post*, and thrills the partisans of Daily Kos. In spite of this, it is not easy to say what he has accomplished since returning from Iraq in 2004 save for assimilating into the New York-Washington political circuit.

Among the healthy drubbings administered during this primary: The Davis campaign and Republicans alike suggested that Powers bilked a charity for Iraqi children he founded when it was revealed that "War Kids Relief" all but collapsed last year with its founder's salary its biggest expense. "The bottom line is that Powers ran War Kids Relief off a cliff," Davis's gleeful spokesman told the *Buffalo News*. In April, Powers was forced to return thousands of dollars he wrongly charged his own campaign for "renting" space inside his home. Then it was revealed that he had been charged with disorderly conduct in Ohio in 2004 after a confrontation with a police officer.

Davis would not come out of the primary unscathed, either. He recently apologized for hiring the wives of local Independence party power brokers as "consultants." Bloggers call him "Crazy Jack Davis" and wonder whether the ex-Republican, who left the party after Dick Cheney snubbed him at a 2003 fundraiser, is actually a GOP plant. Their recent activities include posting on YouTube an April speech in which Davis said that "our country has been invaded, occupied, and settled by 10 million illegal aliens" and warned that states with large populations of Mexican immigrants could "secede from the United States, and then we might have another civil war." Activists paint him as a greedy, aloof has-been and question his military service in the 1960s.

The Democratic primary isn't until September 9, so there may be more last-minute fireworks. And perhaps beyond, as Davis has filed papers to run as the "Save Jobs Party" candidate if he loses the primary.

As the Democrats spent the last few months in self-immolation, Republicans quietly coalesced around Lee. Facing financial difficulties, they had sought a self-financing candidate. With the party's reputation in tatters, they wanted a newcomer. They got both in Lee, who was president of a division of International Motion Control, an industrial manufacturer his father founded. The family sold the company to ITT last year, for a reported $395 million. Lee


MICHAEL RAMIREZ

has spent $320,000 of his own money and figures on spending another $150,000 before the race is finished. (There was no Republican primary.)

Herein lies the irony: The Millionaires' Amendment provisions that Davis defeated would have kicked in the moment Lee topped $350,000. Any opponent would have been able to raise three times the standard "hard money" limit and coordinate spending closely with the party. Advantage Lee thanks, again, to Davis.

Over lunch, Lee's words are measured and enunciated. He's the epitome of the mild-mannered fiscal conservative with seemingly every discussion returning to "pocketbook" issues.

Lee opposes gay marriage not on moral grounds but by the unusual logic that taxpayer interests might be affected—paying for benefits for spouses of government workers, etc. His position on FISA reform hinges on telecom immunity—a needed bulwark against greedy lawyers. Earmarks should be severely curtailed. Balancing the budget is a high priority.

Lee suffers from the problem of every would-be congressional budget-cutter; it's not quite clear what the candidate would actually cut. When I point out that the earmark issue is a matter of public corruption and mostly symbolic, what with the minimal impact on the federal budget, he agrees. He promises not to target Social Security or Medicare, and doesn't raise defense at all.

New York's 26th is one of those districts where an average Republican candidate generally beats an average Democrat. President Bush's 51-44 victory over Al Gore here in 2000 increased to a 55-43 victory over John Kerry in 2004. The national Democratic voter-registration surge of recent years is not evident here. March 2008 figures show that the Democratic voter registration is up only about 3 percent since 2004.

The lesson here is a familiar one. In what was surely slated to be a historically Democratic year, one too many office-seekers spoiled it by refusing to let go. ♦

# The Importance of Being Mahdist

## Among Iran's Twelvers.

**BY TIMOTHY R. FURNISH**

*Tehran*

The second week of August, I was in Tehran and Qom for the Islamic Republic of Iran's fourth annual "International Conference of Mahdism Doctrine," sponsored by the Bright Future Institute. This organization was founded four years ago to "introduce Imam Mahdi to the world" and "pave the ground for his reappearance," according to Grand Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, who spoke at the opening session. All Islamic sects have traditions about the future coming of al-Mahdi, "the rightly guided" leader who—assisted by the returned Muslim prophet Jesus—will make the entire world Muslim. Sunnis and Shias, however, differ in that the latter maintain the Mahdi has already been here, as the twelfth of the Imams, the descendants of Muhammad through Ali. The Shias have to a much greater degree than Sunnis, institutionalized the doctrine.

Rumors swirled during the heady days after Iran's 1979 revolution that Ayatollah Khomeini was the Mahdi, or at least his herald. Khomeini's death in 1989 effectively killed this belief but not his status as harbinger, and active anticipation of the twelfth imam's return was given official sanction with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's 2005 election as president. A parade of speakers at the opening ceremonies of the conference thanked him for this support, and Ahmadinejad's own remarks showed—yet again—his intense devotion to Mahdism as both a doctrine and a means of opposing the West, particularly the United States and Israel.

Speaking on the subject of "Global Government: A Divine Necessity," Iran's president opined that "globalization is not just happening, but is Allah's plan." Problems such as "the killing of a million innocent people in Iraq" and "the false, fabricated, criminal Zionist regime" will not be solved "in the absence of the Perfect Man, the Mahdi." And the job of the Bright Future Institute is "to help bring all of humanity to knowledge of the true savior of mankind, Imam al-Mahdi." As for those predicting Ahmadinejad's defeat in his reelection bid: If the crowd of supporters mobbing him post-speech was any indication of his true popularity, four more years is a foregone conclusion.

A sample of papers from the conference shows that Ahmadinejad is far from alone in his devotion to Mahdism as a panacea for humanity's ills. Dr. Bahram Kazemi, from Iran, spoke about the jihad component of the future Mahdiyah (the Mahdi's regime); I wasn't all that reassured by his contention the Mahdi would be more likely to convert non-Muslims than to simply kill us all. Canadian Fatima Chagpar referred to the U.N. Security Council as "the highest form of formalized oppression" and "Western common law as legalized adultery." Another Iranian, Dr. Mariam Tabar, asserted that "the military capabilities of the future Mahdist state depend on Islamic governments in the here and now acquiring abilities to stand against the enemies of the imam"—presumably including nuclear weapons. Dr. Jasim Husain, a

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British Shiite, spoke about the recent emergence of false Mahdi claimants in Iraq and how this indicated a yearning for the coming of the true Mahdi.

Other papers at panels going on simultaneously with mine covered topics such as "Strategic Futurism in Mahdism," "Islamic Revolution and the Role of Mahdism in Awakening the Nations," and the intriguing, if oxymoronic, "Mahdian Democracy." My own presentation, on previous Sunni leaders who had declared themselves the Mahdi, was largely uncontroversial, although a number of Shia scholars and clerics afterwards expressed surprise that Sunnis even had such a belief.

On the other hand, the keynote speaker at the closing session, Ali Larijani—current speaker of parliament and former chief nuclear negotiator—clearly knows about the power of Mahdism outside the world of Twelver Shias, and his devotion to Mahdism as a pan-Islamic ideology, if perhaps not as a personal belief, appears every bit as intense as Ahmadinejad's. Larijani opened by gloating over the American "quagmire" in Iraq—the surge's success being either unknown or inadmissible—and the failed efforts of "the West and the Zionist regime to erase 'holy jihad' from the minds of Muslims." Likewise, Westerners try to convince Muslims that Mahdism is either merely a mode of personal devotion or a lifeless historical force, whereas true Mahdism is religious, social, and political.

Said Larijani: "The time of the supremacy of one religion over another is not over, and Islam is promised final victory. The Islamic Republic and other Islamic governments need to prepare for the Mahdi's governance by promoting justice and development and, although we have long-distance missiles, we are not war-like." Larijani clearly believes that history is not over. And in a clear rebuke to those adherents of Mahdism who see it as purely peaceful, Larijani quoted Imam Muhammad Baqir, a famous scholar from early Islamic history, who said that "there must be bloodshed and jihad to establish Imam Mahdi's rule."

In the crux of his address, Larijani posed the question, "Why are the Americans having such problems in Iraq, and the Zionists in Lebanon?" Those Western academics, analysts,

*Ali Larijani*

and politicians trying to banish the word *jihad* from the lexicon need to heed his answer: "Because their power is only a façade, and jihad scares them—they are afraid to risk it. They say Hamas and Hezbollah are 'terrorists' because they do not understand jihad. This is the West's major weakness: that they do not have their own religious-based jihad, as we Muslims do! In fact, Mahdism has three pillars: spirituality, rationalism, and jihad."

Is Mahdism, then, necessarily violent? Most likely the weeping Iranians I saw in Qom's Jamkaran Mosque—alleged site of the Twelfth Imam's brief post-disappearance epiphany centuries ago—are looking more for a savior than for a warlord to wipe out the American army and lead them to Jerusalem. The same is probably true of most members of the Bright Future Institute, who appear to be sincere, well-meaning Iranians dedicated to fostering Muslim-Christian dialogue. But in the view of Iranian leaders like Ahmadinejad and Larijani, the peace of the Mahdi will be that of a victor striding over a battlefield strewn with his enemies.

Long before the Islamic Revolution, Shiite clerics had ruled that in the absence of Imam Mahdi, offensive jihad could not be waged—only defensive jihad. Hence Larijani's remark that Iranian long-range missiles would be purely "defensive." But the doctrine of defensive jihad has its own troubling aspects: It can be waged in the Mahdi's absence; treaties and truces with *dhimmis* (Christians and Jews, who enjoy second-class status under Islamic law) can be broken at will; Muslims who cooperate with non-Muslim occupiers of Muslim land can be killed; and, most alarming, there are even fewer limits on the types of warfare that can be employed in defensive jihad than in offensive—in effect sanctioning the use of WMDs.

The Tehran conference verified what I have long suspected: that the Islamic Republic of Iran is using Mahdism as a pan-Islamic ideology to challenge Saudi Arabia. And it is succeeding. A recent University of Maryland poll indicated the most popular Muslim leaders in the Arab world are Hassan Nasrallah, Lebanese Hezbollah leader; Bashar al-Assad, president of Syria; and Ahmadinejad—non-Sunnis all.

Everyone likes a winner, and the Iranian government carefully cultivates its image as such via constant assertions of Israeli and American troubles in the region and assurances that the Mahdi's coming is nigh. Perhaps peaceful Mahdists can gain the upper hand over their jihadist brethren, but the longing for the Mahdi is so fervent—in Jamkaran, at Khomeini's tomb, on Iranian TV, on the Iranian street—that an event unthinkable even a few years ago, an open Mahdist claimant in Twelver Shiism, no longer seems out of the question.

And this time, unlike with past self-styled Sunni Mahdis such as Muhammad Ahmad in 19th-century Sudan or Juhayman al-Utaybi in Saudi Arabia in 1979, the Mahdi will have access to the Internet, cell phones, and—if he appears in Iran in the near future—quite possibly nuclear weapons. ♦

# Jihadist Recruiting Behind Bars

## 'Individually disloyal patriots' make poor recruits for terror. BY BERT USEEM

Frightening claims are being made that U.S. prisons are breeding grounds for Islamic terrorism. The premise is that the dangerous and unstable people who populate prisons can all too easily be swept into radical religion and terrorism. A 17-person blue-ribbon task force, assembled by researchers from George Washington University and the University of Virginia Medical School, issued a report in 2006 that concluded that because Islam feeds on bitterness and alienation (now ubiquitous in American prisons) the United States "is at risk of facing the sort of homegrown terrorism currently plaguing other countries." Ian Cuthbertson, the director of the Counterterrorism Program at the World Policy Institute, makes similar claims, calling prisons an ideal place for recruitment into jihadist organizations. Just as prisons are "schools for crime," he says, in which petty offenders "graduate" into more serious criminal careers, so too our prisons have become "universities" for advanced training in terrorism.

Based on recent field research, including extensive interviews of inmates and prison staff in state and federal prisons, I have come to a far less pessimistic assessment. My research, conducted with Obie Clayton of Morehouse College, involved visits to 27 prisons in nine jurisdictions. In total, we interviewed 200 prison officials and 270 inmates. Our central finding is that the rate of prisoner radicalization is not just low but falling. Those on the inside—inmates, line correctional officers, intelligence officers, and senior administrators—consistently report that not only is inmate radicalization far below the alarmists' claims, but barely a trace can be found.

Our interviews suggest that inmates, as a whole, are patriotic, or more precisely 'individually disloyal patriots'—that is, they do not see themselves as bound by the laws of society, but do not take delight in damaging the country. While they are willing to exploit criminal opportunities, they do not perceive American society as the enemy.

The primary reason is the increased safety and order in U.S. prisons. As Anne Piehl and I reported last spring in THE WEEKLY STANDARD (see "The Other Big Crime Drop" in the April 28, 2008 issue), the quadrupling of the prison population over the past 30 years has been associated with *increased* safety and security behind bars. Across a wide set of measures, U.S. corrections has become safer and more orderly. For example, in 1972, there were over 90 prison riots. By 2005, prison riots had become rare, almost to the point of disappearing. The prison homicide rate is now lower than the homicide rate for the U.S. population. (This lower prison homicide rate exists *before* adjusting for demographics, not to mention criminality.) Prisons have become zones of safety—not the dangerous snake pits that *New York Times* crime reporter Fox Butterfield has portrayed as close cousins to the abuses uncovered in the Iraqi prison of Abu Ghraib.

Prisoner radicalization is like any other challenge to corrections officials, from gangs and crowding to high rates of inmate violence and inmate suicide. These are problems to be attacked and solved, rather than inevitable or overwhelming circumstances.

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, for example, stresses down to the lowest staff levels the importance of watching for signs of radicalization and reporting them up the chain of command. A central office collects and collates this information, and ensures the flow of information to and from external law enforcement. We interviewed inmates in the state's two toughest high security prisons and one medium security prison. (The two high security facilities were largely out of control a decade ago; both are now relatively safe and orderly.) No signs of Islamic radicalization appeared in any of the three prisons. The greater order achieved during the prison buildup, moreover, would allow officials to quickly see, and do something about, any signs of radicalization.

Our interviews also suggest that inmates, as a whole, are patriotic, or more precisely "individually disloyal patriots"—that is, they do not see themselves as bound by the laws of society, but do not take delight in damaging the country. While they are willing to exploit criminal opportunities, they do not perceive American society as the enemy. One inmate stated, "Even though we're criminals, we see ourselves as Americans. Couldn't turn against this country." Some inmates even said that they would see it as their *duty* to report to

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authorities if they learned of a terrorist cell within the prison. This sentiment, however, was moderated by a (perhaps) stronger antipathy toward "snitches."

Whatever the balance between the two sentiments, most inmates describe prison as a hostile environment for the formation of a radical cell. An inmate in a maximum-security prison told us, "If someone comes in slanting toward terrorism, we will know before the officers. This is our house, and we were all born Americans."

Also inhibiting inmate radicalization is the social standing of the estimated 2.5 to 3 million Muslims in America. For the most part, Muslim Americans are solidly middle class. Forty-one percent have household incomes of $50,000 or more, about even with the rate of the population as a whole (44 percent). This is in sharp contrast to the Muslim populations in Great Britain, France, Germany, and Spain, which are much less affluent than the general populations of those countries. In surveys, Muslim Americans express generally positive views of their own lives and American society. There are not large pockets of radicals found in the general Islamic population. For radicalization to take place behind bars, U.S. prisoners would have to reach further, to foreign lands and cultures, to find groups with which to identify. This is outside the realm of possibility of most inmates.

Prisons bring together society's most dangerous, and often deeply troubled, individuals. The claims that prisons are breeding grounds for terrorism have it backward. Those individuals truly dangerous to the country will certainly be more, not less, dangerous if left on the streets. Behind bars, they will be incapacitated for a period and, if all goes well, perhaps even turned around. The fact that prison authorities have been able to create a relatively safe environment is a tribute to their skill and dedication. An unanticipated benefit of these efforts is lowering the risk of homegrown terrorism. ♦

# The Autumn of Mubarak

## The high price of Washington's going soft on Egypt's autocrat.

**BY JEFFREY AZARVA**

Like most aging autocrats with declining legitimacy, Egypt's Hosni Mubarak seeks to perpetuate the prevailing order. Today, the man who has ruled longer than almost any pharaoh is leaving no stone unturned in his quest to secure the longevity of the regime and a seamless transition of power. Determined to pass the baton to his son, Gamal, he has embarked on an unbridled campaign to crush dissent and consolidate autocratic rule.

But at what price? Coupled with an appeal to nationalist sentiments, Mubarak's repression has stoked tensions that may destabilize the Arab-Israeli arena.

Examples abound. Just last year, members of his National Democratic party (NDP) advocated "trampling over" the Camp David Accords in response to Israeli excavations near the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, claiming that "war with Israel is still ongoing." Following Israel's 2006 war in Lebanon, Mubarak warned that no map can be imposed on the region, and NDP members of parliament voiced similar protests.

Such bluster is nothing new: Mubarak has long used the Arab-Israeli conflict as a release valve for popular discontent. In a bid to deflect attention from its domestic deficiencies, his regime has often used rhetoric to fan the anti-American and anti-Israeli flames.

Yet, for years, Mubarak has walked a tightrope, billing himself as a stalwart U.S. ally and secular dike against the rising tide of extremism. This balancing act has paid off. For maintaining nominal peace with Israel and strengthening strategic cooperation with the United States, his regime has been rewarded with approximately $2 billion annually, behind only Iraq and Israel as the largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid.

Now the sun is setting on his rule, and Mubarak is approaching the end of his high-wire performance. Indeed, as he digs in his heels rather than relax his grip on power, the assumptions that have long held Egypt to be an anchor of peace and stability could prove mistaken.

At home, economic problems are mounting. Abroad, Egypt's influence is waning. And Mubarak has done little to pull the Arab world's most populous country out of its paralysis. Instead, he is preoccupied with choreographing a succession that has deepened the country's stagnation.

Take recent events: On July 23, Egypt's independence day, security forces arrested and beat 14 Facebook activists who had congregated on a beach to sing patriotic songs and wave Egyptian flags. The charge? Attempting to "topple" the regime.

The accusation would have been comical had such tactics not become commonplace: The clampdown on activists whose weapons are keyboards and digital cameras is par for the course as Cairo retreats from its modest feints toward democratization. Once considered a testing ground for the Bush administration's freedom agenda, Egypt has now abandoned even reform. Since Mubarak permitted Egypt's first multicandidate presidential election in September 2005, only to imprison

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his runner-up, he has cracked down with abandon.

It was not always so bad. In the 1990s, Mubarak reserved the brunt of his repressive energies for Islamist extremists. Later, high-profile critics who had the temerity to challenge him in elections, speculate about his health, or question the sanctity of U.S. aid were imprisoned, tortured, or harassed by the regime. Now, with that political opposition defanged, he has turned his sights even on anonymous critics who have broken taboos and crossed government red lines.

It seems a long time ago that President Bush, in his 2005 State of the Union address, exhorted Egypt "to show the way toward democracy in the Middle East." When, a month later, Mubarak announced the contested presidential election, there was even talk of an "Arab spring."

But Mubarak's reelection and the subsequent success of Islamists in parliamentary elections gave his regime a pretext to renege on reform and once again remind Washington of Egypt's indispensable role in the fight against al Qaeda. The Bush administration took the bait, and has refrained from playing hardball ever since.

Today, Mubarak brims with confidence. In the Middle East as elsewhere, autocrats like him do not see weakness as an invitation to compromise. Now assured it will outlive the Bush administration, his regime treats U.S. largesse as an entitlement and dismisses Washington's demarches as "unacceptable interference" in Egyptian affairs. Still, if the Bush administration's abandonment of its democracy project helps explain Mubarak's rollback, it does not account for his retreat to something more ominous than the status quo ante.

The question of succession does. Since 2000, Gamal Mubarak, a former banker, has gone from a political neophyte to one of the most powerful officials in the NDP. But even as his father stacks the deck in his favor, Gamal's ascent is not guaranteed. Egypt's military, from which every post-1952 president has emerged, opposes civilian rule that could encroach on its domain.

Much depends on how the 80-year-old Mubarak makes his exit. Should he relinquish power when his current term ends in 2011, observers expect a smooth filial inheritance. But should Mubarak die or become incapacitated in office—and he has hinted at hanging on until the bitter end—Gamal's perceived weakness might lead the military to thrust him aside. That in turn would anger even regime opponents, and thus would settle little.

Eliminating all opposition to Gamal has not bought the regime security. In the event of a contested succession, an Islamist takeover is unlikely, but Egypt's continuing pro-Western orientation cannot be taken for granted. As a new U.S. administration prepares to enter office, it would do well to send Mubarak and the one-in-three Arabs he rules the message that U.S. aid cannot be taken for granted, either. ♦


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# How Palin Got Picked

*The maverick candidate decided he wanted a maverick veep.*

**By Stephen F. Hayes**

At 5:20 A.M. Friday, August 29, Bill McAllister awoke to the ringing of his home phone. McAllister had turned his BlackBerry off before heading to bed. He usually leaves it on, but "It was a slow news day here," he says with a laugh.

McAllister, a former television news reporter in Anchorage, had become Alaska governor Sarah Palin's press secretary just two months earlier, in June, after covering her administration. At one point, he'd even done a story on her vice presidential prospects. "She really didn't think it was in the realm of likely," says McAllister.

On Thursday, McAllister was having lunch with his wife and revisited that subject. "I said if McCain were down 10 points, he would have to throw the Hail Mary," McAllister recalls. "He threw it anyway."

McCain's selection of Palin ended a long and gut-wrenching selection process driven by the senator's desire to do something unconventional. For weeks, McCain advisers said that the pick would be "transformative"—and for much of that time, after McCain told The Weekly Standard that he was open to picking a pro-choice running mate—speculation focused on former Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge and independent Democratic senator Joe Lieberman.

Although McCain mentioned Ridge by name in his TWS interview, his focus remained on Lieberman, who received a second round of vetting. Lieberman was encouraged when McCain seemed to back off his previous statements that picking a pro-choice running mate would be difficult. The two men have been close friends for years, and McCain saw him as not only a transformative pick but also a comfortable one. Senator Lindsey Graham, who is close to both McCain and Lieberman, pressed the choice on the Republican nominee and quietly made phone calls to key conservatives to gauge whether they would support a McCain-Lieberman ticket. They received word back from such prominent social conservatives as former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, former Ohio secretary of state Ken Blackwell, Utah governor Jon Huntsman, conservative activist Gary Bauer, among others—some of whom enthusiastically agreed to support the pick and others who said they would not oppose it. Several pro-life senators also signaled their willingness to support a Lieberman pick. New York representative Peter King won support for a McCain-Lieberman ticket from several of his House colleagues.

Rudy Giuliani, too, supposedly placed a call to McCain urging him to pick Lieberman. In a telephone interview Thursday, Giuliani acknowledged talking to McCain about the selection but would not confirm—or deny—that he pushed Lieberman.

It wasn't enough for McCain, apparently. On Sunday the 24th, he met with his closest advisers to discuss the process. "One adviser, tasked with taking the temperature of the conservative base, had strongly made the case to McCain that it would be a disaster for the party and that the base would revolt," reported ABC's Jan Crawford Greenburg. "McCain concluded he could not go that route."

Earlier in the day, McCain had spoken to Palin, who was visiting at the Alaska State Fair in Palmer. According to McAllister, that conversation had its roots in a comment McCain made in his TWS interview ten days earlier. McCain had called Palin "a remarkable woman" and said that he planned to consult her as he reexamined his position on oil exploration in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Palin is for drilling; McCain—for now—is against it.

"He called her at the State Fair following up on a promise he made to The Weekly Standard magazine," McAllister told a press conference Friday in Anchorage. The call was brief—maybe five minutes—and Palin had difficulty hearing in the noisy surroundings. A McCain campaign summary of the selection process provided no details of the conversation. "Last Sunday, Governor Palin and John McCain

THOMAS FLUHARTY

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had a conversation over the phone," it reads. "Governor Palin was at the Alaska State Fair, and John McCain was at his home at Phoenix."

With Lieberman ruled out, McCain spent Monday and Tuesday looking at other candidates—chiefly Tim Pawlenty and Mitt Romney. Pawlenty was appealing—a smart, articulate governor of a potential battleground state that is hosting the Republican National Convention. And Pawlenty had several strong backers on McCain's staff, including longtime McCain aide Mark Salter, one of the senator's most trusted advisers.

Romney had been asked to submit vetting materials early in the process, but unlike Pawlenty did not have a strong top-level supporter among McCain's advisers. Romney was seen as something of a default candidate and never seemed to get the close examination that Lieberman and Pawlenty received.

Neither Romney nor Pawlenty, moreover, was the transformative pick McCain wanted. McCain thought that Palin might be.

McCain has had a long and sometimes heated rivalry with Alaska senator Ted Stevens, the upper chamber's greediest collector of congressional pork. Going back more than a year, McCain has used Stevens's pet project—the $389 million dollar bridge between Ketchikan, Alaska, and the island that hosts its airport that is known as the "Bridge to Nowhere"—in his stump speech as an example of the problems besetting Washington. Palin, who was skeptical of the project, ordered the state to find a "fiscally responsible" alternative. She has challenged the state GOP as corrupt and openly chastised establishment Republicans for failing to live up to conservative principles.

Not only has she bucked her own party, she has praised Democrats and done so at times that carried significant political risk. Earlier this month, at a time when she was regularly mentioned as a (longshot) McCain running mate, and just 24 days before McCain ultimately picked her, Palin put out a statement praising Barack Obama.

"I am pleased to see Senator Obama acknowledge the huge potential Alaska's natural gas reserves represent in terms of clean energy and sound jobs," she said of Obama's energy plan, released that day. "The steps taken by the Alaska State Legislature this past week demonstrate that we are ready, willing and able to supply the energy our nation needs."

She also praised Obama for recommending $1,000 rebates to help cover increased energy costs. "We in Alaska feel that crunch and are taking steps to address it right here at home," Governor Palin said. "This is a tool that must be on the table to buy us time until our long-term energy plans can be put into place. We have already enjoyed the support of Alaska Senator Ted Stevens, and it is gratifying to see Senator Obama get on board."

In a telephone interview on August 22, one week before she was announced as McCain's running mate, I asked her about reports that she had "embraced" the Obama energy plan. She laughed and said:

> I'm not embracing his plan. I said a couple of good things about it. But you know I find myself getting crucified once in a while for having dared say anything positive about a plan, or an aspect of a plan that comes from a Democrat. When you consider the gravity of the problems that we're dealing with right now—and that is dependence on foreign sources of energy to such a great extent that when someone sees the light, in this case Obama seeing the light, doing a little flip-flop there on offshore drilling, I'm going to say: "Yeah!" I'm going to say: "Good job, I'm glad you did that." So yeah I come out and I say something quasi-positive about it and yeah, you get in trouble for it.

Perhaps not surprisingly, while her praise for Obama did anger several McCain staffers, it did not upset the senator, who had met her in Washington shortly before he won the Republican nomination.

On Wednesday of last week, Palin flew with her top aide, Kris Perry, to Flagstaff, Arizona, where she met with Steve Schmidt and Mark Salter from McCain's campaign. The following day this group traveled to McCain's home in Sedona and met with the candidate and his wife, Cindy. McCain took Palin outside to his deck and offered her the job. (Decks are fast becoming the traditional location for Republican nominees to offer the job to their running mates, as George W. Bush asked Dick Cheney to join his ticket on the deck of his ranch.) Palin accepted and set in motion a plan that would shock the political world just 24 hours later.

Palin flew with Salter and Schmidt to Middletown, Ohio, and checked into the Manchester Inn. (She registered under the name Upton.)

No one on Palin's staff back in Alaska had any idea that she was going to explode onto the national political scene the following morning. "The only reason I ever thought anything is because I was asked by reporters if she was vetted by the McCain campaign," said McAllister. "And I told them no. The only thing I knew about was some biographical materials that they requested for the convention itself, for her speech." Some of her staff believed she was still in Alaska and planning to be at the State Fair on Friday.

Matthew Scully, a former speechwriter for George W. Bush and Bob Dole, had drafted a generic speech to be delivered by an unknown vice presidential candidate. (Scully had experience with the difficult task. In 2000, he and John McConnell coauthored Dick Cheney's convention acceptance speech without knowing who would be delivering it.) Palin worked on the speech Thursday night, adding pas-

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sages—including the much-discussed ones about Geraldine Ferraro and Hillary Clinton—and tweaking several others.

As late as Thursday night, only a handful of McCain advisers and staffers knew whom the candidate had selected. Many of them assumed, like most of the political world, that it would be Pawlenty. Among those still in the dark was Maria Comella, a former spokesman for Rudy Giuliani, who had been brought aboard the McCain campaign to serve as the top press aide to McCain's running mate. She would not learn who her new boss would be until Friday morning.

Many political observers are astonished the secret held. The McCain campaign is not. "The key to keeping secrets is not telling people," says Matt McDonald, a McCain adviser, who was one of only a handful to learn about the pick Thursday night.

Shortly after noon, McCain officially unveiled his pick. "She's got the grit, integrity, good sense, and fierce devotion to the common good that is exactly what we need in Washington today," McCain said. "She's exactly who I need, she's exactly who this country needs, to help me fight—to help me fight the same old Washington politics of me first and country second. My friends and fellow Americans, I am very pleased and very privileged to introduce to you the next vice president of the United States—Governor Sarah Palin of the great state of Alaska."

Palin thanked McCain. With her husband and four of her five children behind her—her eldest son, Track, is preparing to be deployed to Iraq in three weeks and could not attend—she made an impressive debut. Palin described herself as a "hockey mom" and spoke directly about her place in history.

> I think as well today of two other women who came before me in national elections. I can't begin this great effort without honoring the achievements of Geraldine Ferraro in 1984, and, of course, Senator Hillary Clinton, who showed such determination and grace in her presidential campaign.
>
> It was rightly noted in Denver this week that Hillary left 18 million cracks in the highest, hardest glass ceiling in America. But it turns out the women of America aren't finished yet, and we can shatter that glass ceiling once and for all.
>
> So for my part, the mission is clear. The next 67 days I'm going to take our campaign to every part of our country and our message of reform to every voter of every background, in every political party, or no party at all. If you want change in Washington, if you hope for a better America, then we're asking for your vote on the 4th of November.

McCain's advisers expected that the attacks from the Obama campaign would be swift and harsh and focus on her lack of experience. They were right. "Today, John McCain put the former mayor of a town of 9,000 with zero foreign policy experience a heartbeat away from the presidency," said Obama spokesman Bill Burton, in a statement. "Governor Palin shares John McCain's commitment to overturning *Roe* v. *Wade*, the agenda of Big Oil and continuing George Bush's failed economic policies—that's not the change we need, it's just more of the same."

The McCain campaign hit back hard, accusing Obama of belittling Palin's accomplishments and denigrating small-town America. Within minutes, the Obama campaign struck a different tone, with Obama adviser Anita Dunn praising Palin's compelling story and offering only the gentlest of criticism of the Alaska governor for the rest of the day.

By mid-afternoon, Obama was distancing himself from his own staff. The campaign put out a gracious statement from Obama and Joe Biden, praising Palin. And when Obama was asked about the initial statement from the campaign, he suggested it was too negative. "I think that, uh, you know, campaigns start getting these, uh, hair triggers and, uh, the statement that Joe and I put out reflects our sentiments."

The McCain campaign welcomes a debate over experience. Democrats devoted much of their convention to making the case that Barack Obama—despite his lack of experience—was ready to lead. The team McCain dispatched to Denver was sent with the task of raising doubts about that proposition and many of the Democratic speakers seemed to be responding to those attacks. It was the theme of Bill Clinton's speech and Obama himself tried to make that case on his own behalf.

Some Republicans are concerned that a McCain-Palin ticket diminishes the power of McCain's attacks on Obama's lack of experience. McCain's top strategists don't see it that way.

"When they're comparing our vice presidential candidate's experience to their presidential candidate's experience and John McCain is just flying above it all," says one senior McCain adviser, "that's a good place for us to be."

McCain's selection of Palin is, without question, one of the riskiest political gambles in the recent history of presidential politics. Her entrance onto the national political stage was impressive, and there is much to like about her compelling personal story and her aggressive conservatism. But Democrats who drive around with bumper stickers announcing the end date of the Bush administration are too invested in winning this November to give her a pass. Her past—every aspect of it—will now come under intense scrutiny and she will be subject to near-daily hostile questioning from political reporters eager to make news by tripping her up.

McCain drove the selection process and, from the outset, was determined to make a bold, transformative pick that would help him win the White House in the worst political environment for Republicans in decades. He has accomplished the former and we have two months to see if Sarah Palin will help him accomplish the latter.

There is no such thing as a slow news day anymore. ♦

# Listening to the Sam's Clubbers

*Immigration is very much on their minds.*

**By Irwin M. Stelzer**

Conservative intellectuals and pundits who are overcome with enthusiasm for wooing "Sam's Club Republicans," as opposed to the more traditional country club Republicans, might want to stop off at a Sam's Club or, just as good, a Wal-Mart store to chat with the customers who are not new immigrants—about half, by some reckonings. If they did, they might find that this sought-after constituency is not quite in agreement with the relaxed immigration policy that John McCain and President Bush favor. At least not with the rules as they now are.

The resentment of illegal immigration is more than a mere under-the-breath mumble and isn't assuaged with talk of eventual assimilation, of adding to the cultural richness of America, of how hardworking the newcomers are (as, indeed, many of them are). But hardworking at creating and tending to the gardens and pools of upper income Americans, many of whom wouldn't know how to find a Sam's Club without a GPS, doesn't butter the parsnips of working-class Americans, typified by the folks I talked to this August in many parts of Colorado, a swing state.

The first complaint is about the cost of health care. Not the cost of fixing whatever is wrong with themselves, or even for uninsured and poorer neighbors, but the cost of caring for immigrants, many or most of whom they assume are illegally in this country. One woman talks of holding down three jobs so that she can pay off an expensive operation she endured. Meanwhile, the hospital has to bear the costs—some of them loaded onto her bill, she is certain—of maternity wards crowded with immigrants, most of whom she believes are illegal who either cannot or do not pay the costs of bringing into the world the new American citizens who they hope will make their own deportation less likely.

A father of a young teenager rails at the fact that his daughter is being held back in school because so many of her classmates can't speak English and, bored by lessons they don't understand, disrupt the class—teachers being helpless to prevent such mayhem in part because they feel physically threatened by the young miscreants. And these Sam's Clubbers are more than a little annoyed when they hear it suggested that the teachers—not to mention cops and doctors—should learn to speak Spanish. "Press 2 for Spanish" is one of the most derided terms in this part of America.

Others talk of the destruction of property values in towns that were once peaceful, indeed sleepy places, but now are uninhabitable in the evenings and on weekends because young male immigrants—unfettered by family constraints with their wives and children left behind in Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, or other Hispanic countries—consume more beer than they should, and behave as you would expect under the circumstances.

No use trotting out the argument that the economy needs these workers, and that in states that are driving them away by deploying novel law-enforcement techniques—Arizona is a recent example—employers are groaning about shortages of agricultural and construction labor. To the Sam's Club crowd, this is nothing more than an argument by employers eager to keep wages down and preferring to deal with a workforce made docile by its illegal status, or by a weak bargaining position due to the need for a paycheck, and now. They don't need studies by Harvard professor George Borjas to tell them what their eyes reveal—that immigrant workers put downward pressure on wages.

Or try the argument that one of the aspects of American exceptionalism and greatness has been its ability to absorb immigrants, to turn the huddled masses into hardworking, tax-paying American citizens. Even throw in the heroism of newcomers who are serving in the armed

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forces. Again, no dice. Sam's Clubbers know the difference between the self-reliant immigrants who came here before the welfare state was in place and the newer arrivals who know that the benefits on offer include access to free medical care—free in the sense that they do not have to pay for it—and other perks. Indeed, many have grandparents who came to this country because they were told the streets were paved with gold, found out they weren't, and learned English so that they could vote and set their children on the path of the American dream.

Most of all, the Sam's Club voters hold to the old-fashioned notion that illegal means illegal, that illegal behavior requires punishment not a reward, and that even newly arrived legal immigrants are making their lives more difficult. They know, deep down, that it is impossible to deport 12 million, or is it 13 million or 15 million, illegal immigrants. And they know, too, that many of the people who have them up in arms are, one-on-one, quite decent and even nice. And some, such as overseas doctors training here, are darned useful to have around in an emergency. Most of all, they know this: The government either has no idea of the impact clusters of immigrants are having on their daily lives, or just doesn't care. They don't believe studies that show that immigrants do not reduce property values, because anecdote trumps data, and they all know someone who has had to sell a home or trailer for a fraction of what the property would have brought before their neighborhood was affected by immigration. And they certainly don't believe studies that show that the crime rate among immigrants is no different from that of people like themselves, because they know that their local police are so steeped in studies urging them to "understand" the newcomers that law enforcement is no longer applied with an even hand.

Before reaching for your poison pen to accuse me of nativism, racism, or whatever accusation substitutes for rational argument, ask yourself this: Can Republican candidates hope to find a new constituency in the aisles of Sam's Clubs if they ignore the most salient fact of life for these voters? So, as Lenin asked in another connection, "What is to be done?" The broad outline of a pro-Sam's Club policy is easy to articulate, but more difficult to implement. Immigration confers benefits on employers and costs on native workers, mostly workers at the lower end of the income scale—the Ronald Reagan-Hillary Clinton Democrats. It is no surprise that the *Wall Street Journal* and employer groups favor few restrictions on immigration. To borrow from the language of my undergraduate days, the employer class benefits from a workforce that does not demand higher wages; depresses, even if only slightly, the wages of American workers (5 to 8 percent is the best but highly contested estimate); and is docile. In technical jargon, employers want the labor supply curve to be highly elastic, so that it takes only a slight increase in wage rates to induce a flood of job applications. In more earthy terms, employers prefer what Henry Ford was wont to call "a few hungry men at the gate."

In a world in which transport costs are low and knowledge of job opportunities and living standard differentials is readily available to anyone watching an American soap opera, people will move to the highest paying jobs almost as surely as capital will seek out the highest return. Not quite as readily, as it is far easier for a young banker to push a button and move millions of dollars around the world than it is for a potential immigrant to pull up stakes and seek out opportunities in another country.

But readily enough, as anyone who has stayed in an American hotel with a workforce that is increasingly drawn from Eastern Europe and South America will attest. Not a bad thing—if the beneficiaries of this work force do not pass the costs off to our typical Sam's Clubbers. Which is now the case: Employers do not bear all the costs created by their decision to hire immigrants, and the hotel guests pay less than they would if the hotel's labor costs were higher.

There is a solution. Employers can be prevented from fobbing off the costs of their hiring practices onto others by laws forcing them to internalize these costs, just as we force polluters to pay for permits that reimburse society for the costs their manufacturing activity creates.

Such cost internalization can be accomplished by requiring employers to purchase import permits for immigrant workers they choose to hire. The funds can follow the worker, and go to the hospitals, schools, and other facilities that must bear the burden of caring for and educating the newcomers—and that means paying the costs of assimilation: funding language and other courses necessary to get immigrants to buy into the society they are joining. If the employer chooses to hire illegals, when he is found out—and enforcement must be stepped up—whatever monetary penalties are imposed on him should include reimbursement to the community for the costs his workers have imposed on the hardworking Sam's Clubbers.

This proposal, I know, will upset some conservatives. It might not be a call for mandatory, employer-purchased insurance, but it does require employers to reimburse the affected community for, among other things, the health care costs of immigrant employees. The justification is clear: Otherwise, those nontrivial costs come out of the pockets of the Sam's Clubbers, who Republicans know are tempted to defect to the Democrats in search of the tax cuts that Barack Obama is promising them.

In a rather indirect way, the Democrat's proposal to tax the rich, which includes many employers, and distribute the proceeds to middle-income families, a group that includes many Sam's Clubbers, will accomplish the reimbursement of losers by winners that should be the goal of immigration policy. But only very, very indirectly and wastefully indeed.

Robert Solow, the left-of-center Nobel economics laureate, recently told a conference in Landau, Germany, that economists must develop ways of redistributing income "to those who are damaged by otherwise useful developments in the economy from those who profit." His is the old liberal cry for a more equitable distribution of wealth. But as John Selden pointed out in 1869, "Equity . . . is . . . what everyone pleases to make it. Equity is a roguish thing."

The best answer to such a policy call for "equity" is a policy based on economic efficiency, which is served when the consumer of a good or service pays all the costs associated with the creation of that good or service. If the consumer pays less, the good will be overconsumed. Which is what happens when an employer can avoid some of the costs of his decision to hire immigrant workers: He will use such labor in greater quantities than if he had to pay its full cost, which includes the cost imposed on society. Conservatives who for years have opposed setting a minimum wage for young workers on the ground that employers will therefore use fewer such workers, must surely understand this.

Such is the architecture of an immigration policy that will appeal to Sam's Clubbers, and not merely to Hillary's shot-and-a-beer in the back of a pickup crowd. It won't be easy to craft. But I leave that chore to legislative carpenters.

America needs immigration. We need the young workers who are daring enough to try to make their way in a foreign country. We need the infusion of cultures different from our own, so long as they come along with the desire to assimilate. Most of all, we need to regain our pride as a haven for the hardworking and the persecuted. John McCain once asked a small group, in response to a hostile question about his views on immigration, "What is America about if it is not a place that welcomes hardworking people?" Now, if only he would match an economically sophisticated immigration policy to the grandeur of that vision of what this country is all about, he might indeed be able to garner votes in the aisles of Sam's Clubs. ♦



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# The Icarus Syndrome

*Should we pay any price to avoid the consequences of global warming?*

**By Jim Manzi**

William Ewart Gladstone, in his 1866 budget speech, warned that Britain faced the prospect of exhausting its domestic coal within a century and had poor prospects of finding sufficient alternative energy sources. This was not an idiosyncratic point of view. The year before, the economist William Stanley Jevons's influential book *The Coal Question* had made the same prediction and proposed a set of policies to conserve coal for the inevitable lean times. John Stuart Mill supported both the thesis and Jevons's proposals. Newspapers took up the "Coal Panic," and a Royal Commission on Coal was created. Eventually the issue fizzled, and Britain moved on to other, more pressing, concerns.

It was true that British coal production could not grow indefinitely, and it did not. The essential points that Jevons missed, however, were the feasibility of displacing coal with petroleum as a source of energy and the decreasing centrality of low-cost coal to the industries that were to lead Britain in the 20th century. But then again, as the great physicist Niels Bohr reportedly said, "Prediction is hard, especially concerning the future."

Successful modern economies create unprecedented wealth and material ease, but they also tend to generate characteristic anxieties. One of them is the recurring belief that the whole thing is a house of cards. Psychologically, this is the fear that there is some hidden danger that will cause modern society to collapse, and that we would have been better off if we had stayed lower to the ground and not tried to build such an overwhelming success. The most compelling of these stories often involve problems that the modern system has supposedly created itself. Call it the Icarus Syndrome.

The British Coal Panic might seem quaint from our vantage point more than a century later, but many similar fears are fashionable today. "Peak oil" is the almost perfectly analogous theory that the world is about to reach, or already has reached, maximum possible production of oil, and that we are about to experience rapid reductions in output with dire global consequences. Like Jevons, most peak oil advocates argue that we need to begin to husband our resources, rather than innovate our way around this projected problem.

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*Al Gore has proposed a target for emissions that could cost something like $23 trillion in excess of the benefits.*

The peak oil theory usually proceeds from the correct prediction in 1956 by Shell Oil geologist M. King Hubbert that oil production in the United States would hit its high sometime in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Advocates, however, much more rarely note that in 1974 Hubbert also predicted that global oil production would peak in about 1995. Whoops. It turns out that it's more feasible to predict peak production in very well-understood geography, such as the United States, than for the world as a whole.

Unsurprisingly, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)

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has taken a serious look at this question. They project rising global production through 2030 and do not forecast beyond that date. The International Energy Agency, sponsored by the OECD in Paris, also projects rising production through 2030. So does OPEC. In 2005, Guy Caruso, the head of the Energy Information Administration, the responsible agency within the DOE, made his best guess that peak production would probably be reached "sometime in the middle of this century."

Caruso identified 36 academic forecasts for peak oil published between 1972 and 2004. There is an obvious pattern in the data. Roughly speaking, academic forecasts indicate that we are about 20 years from peak oil today, just as such forecasts generally indicated that we were about 20 years from peak oil throughout the 1970s and 1980s. What if we had reacted to these earlier, incorrect predictions of resource exhaustion with, as many advocated at the time, government coercion to force a decrease in petroleum use and to limit growth? We very likely would not have found ourselves on the other side of one of the greatest periods of wealth creation in American history, and therefore would probably not be in the happy position of paying, even at 2008 prices, a smaller share of GDP for oil than we did in 1980.

There is a finite amount of oil in the world, so we will eventually reach a production maximum. We have, however, a very poor track record in predicting when this will happen, and the world's leading experts will provide only the most general guidance that it looks like we probably have several decades of production growth in front of us. Much like the British looking forward from the 1860s, we don't have a very good idea of what the technology landscape, and much else besides, will be when or if this occurs. Almost certainly, the best course of action is the simplest: Let markets integrate this information into prices for oil and alternative energy sources, and then let entrepreneurs use this information to guide the deployment of resources through markets.

The current concern over global warming is similar to the Coal Crisis and the Peak Oil debate. It also starts with a valid observation. Modern economies emit a lot of carbon dioxide ($CO_2$), and all else being equal, the more $CO_2$ molecules we put into the atmosphere, the hotter it gets. If we were to emit enough $CO_2$ and drive temperatures up high enough, it would be disastrous for humanity. If you believe that such a disaster is in the offing, there is a fairly simple solution: Emit less $CO_2$. The typical methods that are proposed to do this are either to tax carbon emissions or to introduce a "cap-and-trade" system (in less fancy language, to ration $CO_2$ emissions and have the government auction off the ration cards). But this once again raises the huge question of prediction. Namely, how much hotter would our expected rate of carbon dioxide emissions make the world and how bad would this be?

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the largest existing global effort to answer these questions. Its current consensus forecast is that, under fairly reasonable assumptions for world population and economic growth, global temperatures will rise by about 3°C by the year 2100. Also according to the IPCC, a 4°C increase in temperatures would cause total estimated economic losses of 1-5 percent of global GDP. By implication, if we had reached 3°C of warming by 2100, we would be well into the 22nd century before we reached a 4°C rise, with this associated level of cost.

This is a big problem for advocates of rapid, aggressive emissions reductions. Despite the rhetoric, the best available estimate of the damage we face from global warming is not "global destruction" but costs on the order of 3 percent of global GDP in a much wealthier world well over a hundred years from now.

One serious objection to this logic is that the forecasts for warming impacts might be wrong, and global warming could turn out to be substantially worse than the IPCC models predict. Now, climate and economics modelers aren't idiots, so it's not like this hasn't occurred to them. Competent modelers don't assume only the most likely case, but build probability distributions for levels of warming and associated economic impacts (e.g., there is a 5 percent chance of 4.5°C warming, a 10 percent chance of 4.0°C warming, and so on). So, the possibility of "worse than expected" impacts really means, more precisely, "worse than our current estimated probability distribution." That is, we are concerned here with the real, but inherently unquantifiable, possibility that our probability distribution itself is wrong.

The argument for emissions abatement, then, boils down to the point that you can't prove a negative. If it turns out that not just the best estimate, but even the outer edge of the probability distribution of our predictions for global-warming impacts is enormously conservative, and disaster looms if we don't change our ways radically and this instant, then we really should start shutting down power plants and confiscating cars tomorrow morning. We have no good evidence that such a disaster scenario is imminent, but nobody can prove it to be impossible. Once you get past the table-thumping, any rationale for emissions abatement that confronts the facts in evidence is really a more or less sophisticated restatement of the Precautionary Principle: the somewhat grandiosely named idea that the downside possibilities are so bad that we should pay almost any price to avoid almost any chance of their occurrence.

One could argue that we should therefore push down carbon dioxide emissions far faster than the odds-adjusted risk of global warming costs appear to justify. How much

faster? One widely discussed benchmark for a "safe" level of emissions is to set a target limit for atmospheric concentration of $CO_2$ of no more than 150 percent of its current level. Suppose we did this via what most economists believe is the most efficient imaginable means: a globally harmonized and perfectly implemented worldwide tax on carbon. According to the modeling group led by William Nordhaus, a Yale professor widely considered to be the world's leading expert on this kind of assessment, we, humanity, could expect to spend about $17 trillion more under such a regime than the benefits that we would expect to achieve. To put that in context, the annual GDP of the United States of America is about $13 trillion. That's a heck of an insurance premium for an event so unlikely that it is literally outside of a probability distribution. But I can find major public figures who say that this level of atmospheric carbon dioxide is still too dangerous. Al Gore has proposed an even lower target for emissions that if implemented through an optimal carbon tax is expected to cost more like $23 trillion in excess of benefits. Of course, even this wouldn't eliminate all risk, and I can find highly credentialed scientists who say we need to reduce emissions even faster. Once we leave the world of odds and trade-offs and enter the Precautionary Principle zone, there is no nonarbitrary stopping point. We would be chasing an endlessly receding horizon of zero risk.

But to force massive change in the economy based on such a fear is to get lost in the hothouse world of single-issue advocates and become myopic about risk. We face lots of other unquantifiable threats of at least comparable realism and severity. A regional nuclear war in central Asia, a global pandemic triggered by a modified version of the HIV virus, or a rogue state weaponizing genetic-engineering technology all come immediately to mind. Any of these could kill hundreds of millions of people. Specialists often worry about the existential risks of new technologies spinning out of control. Biosphere-consuming nanotechnology, supercomputers that can replace humans, and Frankenstein-like organisms created by genetic engineering are all topics of intense speculation. Sometimes, though, we face monsters from the deep: The cover of the June *Atlantic Monthly* said of the potential for a planet-killing asteroid, "The Sky Is Falling!"

A healthy society is constantly scanning the horizon for threats and developing contingency plans to meet them, but it's counterproductive to become paralyzed by our fears. The loss of economic and technological development that would be required to eliminate all *theorized* climate change risk or all risk from genetic and computational technologies or, for that matter, all risk from killer asteroids would cripple our ability to deal with virtually every other foreseeable and unforeseeable risk, not to mention our ability to lead productive and interesting lives in the meantime. The Precautionary Principle is a bottomless well of anxieties, but our resources are finite.

In the face of massive uncertainty, hedging your bets and keeping your options open is almost always the right strategy. Money and technology are the raw materials for options. The idea of the simple, low-to-the-ground society as more resilient to threats is, like the story of Icarus, a resonant myth. But experience shows that wealthy, technologically sophisticated societies are much better able to withstand resource shortages, physical disasters, and almost every other challenge than poorer societies.

Consider that if a killer asteroid were actually to approach the Earth, we would rely on orbital telescopes, spacecraft, and thermonuclear bombs to avert disaster. In such a scenario, we would be very glad that we hadn't responded to the threat of peak coal back in the 1860s by slowing our development to such an extent that we lacked one of these technologies. In the case of global warming, a much more appropriate approach than rationing energy and forgoing trillions of dollars of economic growth is to invest a fair number of billions of dollars into targeted scientific research that would give us technical alternatives if a worst-case scenario began to emerge.

**In the face of uncertainty, hedging bets and keeping options open is almost always the right strategy. Money and technology are the raw materials for options.**

We should be very cautious about implementing government programs that require us to slow economic growth and technological development in the near-term in return for the promise of avoiding inherently uncertain costs that are projected to appear only in the long-term. Such policies conceal hubris in a cloak of false humility. They inevitably demand that the government coerce individuals in the name of a nonfalsifiable prediction of a distant emergency. The problem, of course, is that we have a very bad track record of predicting the specific problems of the far future accurately.

We can be confident that humanity will face many difficulties in the upcoming century, as it has in every century. We just don't know which ones they will be. This implies that the correct grand strategy for meeting them is to maximize total technical capabilities in the context of a market-oriented economy that can integrate highly unstructured information into prices that direct resources, and, most important, to maintain a democratic political culture that can face facts and respond to threats as they develop. ♦

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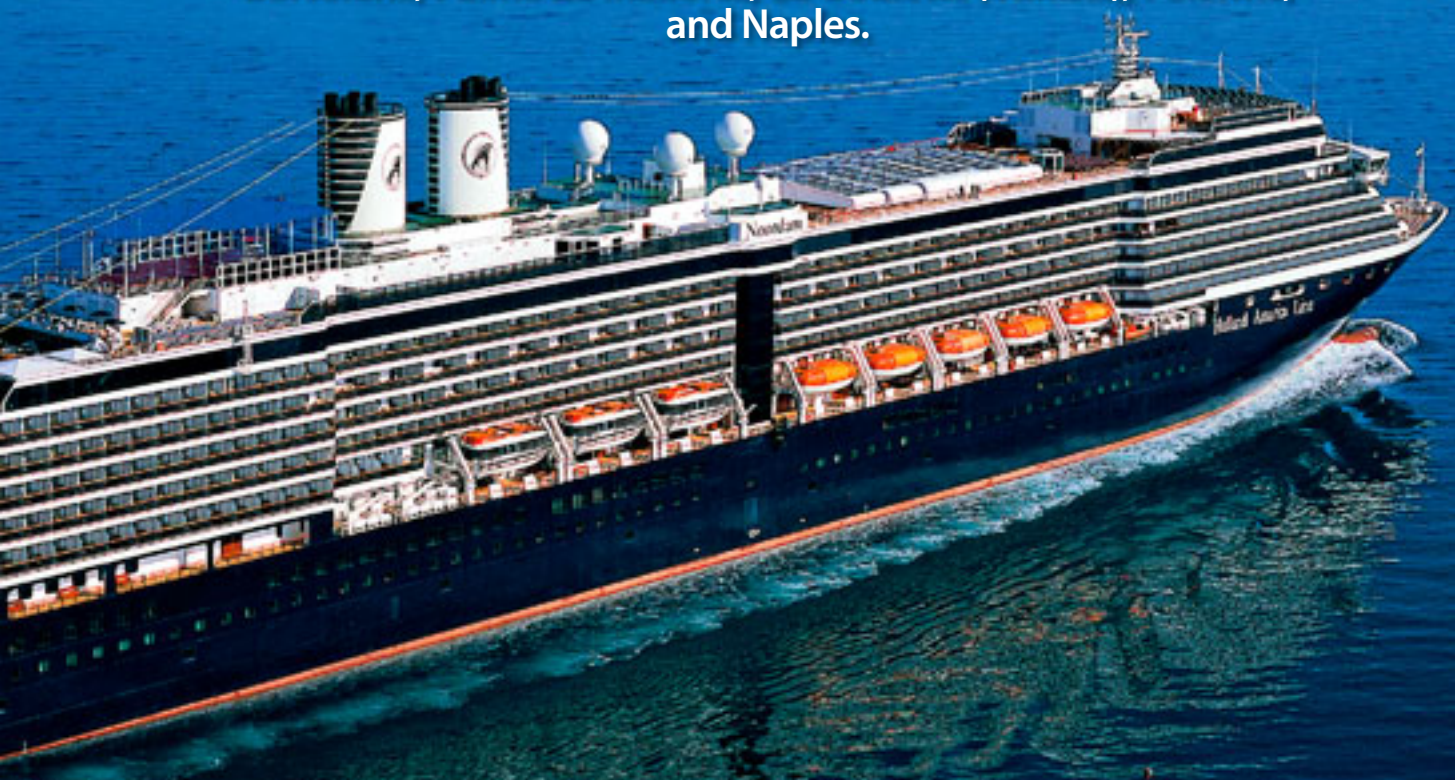

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*Stem cell research in Bombay*

# Can We Talk?

## *About the moral dimensions of science*

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

Eric Cohen's measured, well-reasoned book on the ethical implications of new medical advances, *In the Shadow of Progress*, arrives like a spring breeze, fresh and calm and cleansing, something to be welcomed by anyone who follows bioethics and its controversies.

Let me tell you: It's getting brutal out there, this culture war between superstitious theocratic thugs and baby-killing pagan nihilists. By superstitious theocratic thugs, of course, I mean those religiously inclined folk who object to embryonic stem cell research, therapeutic cloning, genetic engineering, and other projects of today's biomedical science. The baby-killing pagan nihilists are the scientists themselves, or a lot of them anyway, along with their publicists and cheerleaders in the press, who think the objections to unfettered research are specious, irresponsible, and murderous.

**In the Shadow of Progress**
*Being Human in the Age of Technology*
by Eric Cohen
Encounter, 181 pp., $21.95

Foremost among the second group, the pagan nihilists, is Steven Pinker, a psychologist at Harvard and a suave and gifted writer of popular science books. Pinker is rightly admired for his quick wit and light touch, yet even he has lately succumbed to the grinding, pitiless tone of the politico-cultural debate.

In a much-noticed, less-read article in the *New Republic* not long ago, called "The Stupidity of Dignity," he told a dark story of the reactionaries who would restrict the ability of scientists to do the research they want to do. The reactionaries form a "powerful" movement, Pinker said, that has its origin in such Christian strongholds as Georgetown University. The leader of this movement of Christian theocrats is—couldn't you just guess—a Jewish philosopher, Leon Kass. Like the Christian soldiers he captains, Kass is "pro-death [and] anti-freedom." His position as Maximum Leader was confirmed in 2001 when President Bush appointed him chairman of a government advisory

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council on bioethics. Kass proceeded to fill it with his theocratic allies. The council was stacked! When two commission members dared to oppose Kass on the issue of embryonic stem-cell research—he's against it—the chairman fired them. Just like that. As thugs do.

The thugs are philosophically shabby, too, according to Pinker. (This was the intellectual rather than the *ad hominem* part of his article.) Kass and his allies have fixated on this idea of "human dignity." Anytime a scientist wants to do something interesting with a human being, like harvest its stem cells or make an itty-bitty clone of it, Kass complains that the research violates something called human dignity. But the word "dignity" has too many meanings to be useful in describing reality, Pinker wrote. Much better, he said, to use the idea of "autonomy" as a guide to making judgments in bioethics. *Autonomy* is what makes human beings worthy of respect. *Dignity*, by contrast, is a "squishy, subjective notion," "slippery and ambiguous," "a mess."

Speaking of messes—Pinker's article not only lacked his usual humor and lightness of touch, it was unaccountably shot through with factual inaccuracies and clumsy thinking. Of the dozen blue-ribbon bioethics councils convened over the last 20 years, Kass's alone was genuinely diverse, as Pinker must know. It was the first *not* to be stacked with members of the research establishment, especially bioethicists in the employ of hospitals and corporations who all pretty much agree with each other. On Kass's panel there were researchers, philosophers, theologians, physicians, psychiatrists, and neuroscientists—even, God help us, a journalist.

In contrast to previous councils, Kass took care that his panel represented the full range of views on hot subjects like cloning and stem cells, from full-speed-ahead to whoa-nelly. And Pinker should have known the easily findable truth about those two "dismissed panelists." One was asked to leave because she attended fewer than half the council's meetings, and the other denied he was dismissed at all, in a public letter that praised Kass and the council's work. Other panelists who disagreed with Kass were never dismissed.

*Steven Pinker*

Along with the canards and the tone of paranoia, Pinker's piece was full of unintentional ironies. Shall we talk about "powerful movements"? Kass's band of skeptical bioethicists is dwarfed by the movement that Pinker is a member of, the one that aims to remove as many barriers to biomedical research as possible. This movement is lavishly funded by high-tech corporations, not-for-profit foundations, free-floating venture capitalists, and massively endowed research universities like that school in Cambridge where Pinker works.

The movement hires highly paid lobbyists, showers politicians in campaign money, and trumpets its message through most of the opinion-generating organs in the country, including a large majority of science reporters and newspaper editorial boards. In opposition to this roaring freight train is a little ragtag band of pro-lifers, Christers, biblical scholars, theologians, professors of philosophy at schools you've never heard of, and two or three magazines with circulations in the four figures. And Pinker pretends to find them ominous. It's odd how some big guys always complain they're being picked on by the little guys.

Oddest of all, though, was Pinker's own fixation on what he thinks is Kass's fixation. Surely Pinker's *autonomy* is just as slippery and subjective as Kass's *dignity*. That's the thing about ethics talk. Most of these phrases are slippery in one way or another, relying heavily on the context in which they're used and a certain good-faith assumption of shared understanding. Besides, autonomy is a strange idea for Pinker to champion as an ethical lodestar. Though he's always denied he's a "genetic determinist"—another slippery phrase—he has nonetheless been explicit in his belief that a person's sense of his own autonomy, also known as free will, is ultimately illusory. Pinker doesn't explain how an illusion can be a sound basis for thinking about what's ethical and what isn't.

And thinking, of course, is what bioethicists are supposed to do. It's nice work if you can get it, and no one approaches the task more carefully, more painstakingly than Eric Cohen (you thought I'd forgotten?). *In the Shadow of Progress* is a testament not only to his care but also to his stout heart. Cohen is a protégé of Kass (as well as an acquaintance of mine and occasional contributor to these pages). He knows that thinking long thoughts about technology's moral consequences and cultural effects is not something many of us are inclined to do, especially when it comes to questioning the riches that technological progress has brought us: Start with indoor plumbing and dental floss and work your way

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up to the polio vaccine and quadruple bypass surgery, and you've got a sense of what we owe to science and technology. And it simply doesn't occur to most people to think that material advances might come at a spiritual or moral cost. We assume the wonders of technology arrive no-strings-attached.

But what if they don't? Nuclear fission, Cohen points out, is a plain example: The technology that might provide us with safe, unlimited power generation might also, placed in the wrong hands, lead to mass slaughter. The same goes for biomedicines that increase our powers to heal—and also the capacity of terrorists to do their worst. With gratitude for "the tremendous blessings of the modern age," Cohen nonetheless writes that "this book aims, with some trepidation, to lean against America's faith in progress . . . the book questions progress by exploring its incompleteness as an answer to man's deepest longings—the longing to be loved, the longing to be virtuous, the longing to be redeemed."

Cohen's "trepidation" is well-placed. It's a thankless task he's set himself, standing athwart technological progress and shouting, if not "Stop," then at least "Can't we talk this over for a minute?" News about medicine and technology comes to us filtered through the superficiality of popular journalism, which doesn't have much room for pondering long-term effects, as watchers of *The Today Show* and *The View* may have noticed. ("Up next, a fresh look at our longing to be redeemed!") The only criticism you'll find of new technologies in the popular press turns on whether they're "safe" or "unsafe."

Pinker and other publicists of the new science do their own share of complaining about the "built-in biases" of science journalism, but even they must admit that the mass media prefer breathless reporting of wondrous discoveries to a good chin wag about what the unintended and unhappy consequences of those discoveries might be. The popular presentation of technology is sharply disposed toward the uncritical. Scientists are always the good guys, and party-pooper Jeremiahs like Kass and Cohen wind up getting the Pinker treatment.

But if you've managed to resist the happy talk about unimpeded technological progress—whether the fatuous variety on the network news or Pinker's more sophisticated version—you will find in Cohen a provocative guide, with a sharp eye for paradox and an appreciation of ambiguity. He notes how strange it is that scientists who proudly describe themselves as materialists and naturalists should show such a disdain for matter and for the limits that nature imposes on us. But this is part of a larger paradox that Cohen sees lurking behind the secular faith of modern science: "an extreme belief in both human greatness and human smallness." Human greatness is seen in the confidence that scientists have in their ability to manipulate nature, grasp it with their intelligence and bend it to their will. At the same time the final triviality of human beings is seen in science's view of human origins: "its view of man as emerging from the dust of the ground," with no higher obligation or purpose built into the fact of his existence.

*Leon Kass*

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Taken together the two ideas make for a creepy and combustible blend—as imaginative artists from Hesiod to Hawthorne have tried to show.

It's all the creepier as the success and power of science increase. Not only has the new science given us the ability to harvest human embryos and pick them apart for the useful bits—always, of course, with the noblest intentions—it has also allowed for pregenetic screening of fetuses in the womb, so that those not suited to our tastes can be identified and discarded. It has brought us to the brink of cloning and man/animal hybrids—always, of course, for research purposes only. Through psychotropic drugs it allows for the minute manipulation of consciousness, reprogramming faculties like memory and perception, refashioning the self.

In the face of these awesome powers we tend to forget that the expertise of scientists is limited. They can tell us whether such things can be done. Whether they *should* be done is a question for all of us—a matter on which scientists have no special claim to expertise.

Addressing this second question, Cohen writes, "requires not just the peer review of fellow scientists"—or, for that matter, the say-so of bioethicists on their payroll. "It requires moral deliberation and democratic debate, and in some cases it requires the willingness to say 'no,' 'stop,' or 'here but no further.'"

Saying no may be harder now than ever, owing partly to the dazzling temptations of the new science, but also to a change in the democratic tide. The political push for unlimited scientific research has made for strange bedfellows. Not so long ago, "it seemed as though the culture of technology and the counterculture were mortal enemies. The machine vs. the spirit. Rational investigation vs. Dionysian feeling. Gradual progress vs. spontaneous liberation." But now,

Cohen says, the two opposing strains have discovered a more fundamental unity: "a connection grounded in the belief that human limits should be overcome, taboos are anathema, and human shame is an illusion. Both cultures believe that no knowledge or experience should be off-limits."

The promise of the new science, with its hope of liberation from nature and its ancient constraints, has brought the counterculture together with the culture of technology and commerce it once despised. Politically the combination seems unstoppable, thanks in part to publicists like Pinker.

"What do we live for?" That, Cohen writes, is "the central question of bioethics." People dislike the deep-digging bioethics of Kass and Cohen because they dislike being confronted with the question. It is, by democratic custom, a question that everyone is supposed to answer for himself—a private matter ill-suited to bickering in the public square. And we especially dislike imposing our answer, our "values," on others, so we tell ourselves.

At first glance, this is a position worthy of respect, showing a kind of modesty that democracies can't survive without. It would be more convincing, though, if we weren't already trying to impose our values on one another all the time anyway. The question "What do we live for?" is unavoidable. Every step of the new science's accelerating progress throws it right back at us. Those who want an unlimited pursuit of embryonic stem cell research, for instance—they declare their modesty by refusing to make a judgment about the moral status of the embryo, and then immodestly work to impose their agnosticism by law, as a general principle.

When it comes to the new science, even declining to impose our values is an imposition of values. Refusing to try to answer the question "What do we live for?" is an answer to the question. And a pretty sneaky answer it is, too.

Eric Cohen deserves our admiration for having the nerve to raise the question and to answer it—in good faith and in public. Amazing, for a theocrat. ♦

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*Queen Sofia en route to you-know-where*

BCA

# Pilgrims' Progress

## *Another trek to Santiago?*

BY THOMAS SWICK

"Location, location, location," as everyone knows, is the appropriately redundant rule of contemporary travel writing. It's proven in every bookstore, where titles on Italy and France sometimes outnumber those on the rest of the world combined.

I have a friend who believes that very few of these books ever get read. People see a book on Italy, he says, they know someone who loves Italy (who doesn't?), and so they buy the book and give it as a birthday gift or Christmas present. The recipient may put it on his coffee table, or give it to a friend who shares his affection for Vespas, but he will not feel inspired to read it himself.

Travel books: the fruitcakes of the publishing industry.

What makes this most-favored-nation policy all the more annoying is that it doesn't even apply to the entire country. There are very few new books on southern Italy, and even fewer on northern France. (*Jamais Alsace*.) Publishers of travel books have reduced the world to a pair of regions that share a number of things, including a border.

Obviously, other places get written about, often by writers who've established a name, but no cottage industry grows up around them. And some countries are deemed flat-out unworthy of books, victims of a kind of geographical blacklisting. For years, a friend of mine has been shopping around an excellent travel book about Germany—a large, influential European country—only to be told that, sadly, there would be no market for it. Never mind that it would be something different, rare, enlightening, well-written. Young writers who peruse the travel shelves at Borders and Barnes & Noble cannot help but conclude that the one thing this country could use is another book on Italy or France. As with Starbucks, the more you have the more you need.

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Mounting a small challenge to the Franco-Italian hegemony is Spain (another large, important European country). But it's usually the sunny south that gets the advances. When Mayle & Co. turned the travel book from an exploration of place—think Elliot Paul's *The Last Time I Saw Paris*—into a guide to the good life, climate became paramount.

But it's not *always* Andalusia that gets into print. There exist a number of books that illustrate another rule of travel writing: You may write about the north of Spain, but only if you're walking to Santiago de Compostela.

*El camino de Santiago* is a route that has been traveled by pilgrims for centuries, and by foreign writers for about two decades. And not all of them have been in the travel biz. One of the first footsore scribes was Paulo Coelho, who in his wispy-mysti way walked the route in 1986. His account of this journey, *The Pilgrimage*, brought both him and the ancient religious tradition into the spotlight.

A pilgrimage holds an obvious attraction to writers, with its built-in narrative (will the author make it?), its cast of colorful characters, its mingling of the sacred and the profane, its themes of spirituality and quest which can be visited, repeatedly and fruitfully, during the long stretches of monotonous marching.

I know, because I walked on a pilgrimage in 1982, to the shrine of the Black Madonna in Czestochowa. I was nearing the end of two eventful years in Poland, where I had married (two months after Lech Walesa successfully led the strikes at the Gdansk shipyards) and found a job teaching English in Warsaw. In December 1981 the leaders of Solidarity were arrested and martial law was declared. It was still in effect that August when I, along with thousands of Varsovians, arrived on Plac Zamkowy for the nine-day walk to the monastery of Jasna Góra. It was the first mass gathering of Poles since the institution of martial law, and as such, it constituted not just a religious procession but a political demonstration. One that lasted for over a week and gathered steam as it moved through the country.

The experience was so rich—the pilgrims, the villages, the sermons, the stories, the hymns, the solidarity—that when I returned home I wrote a book about it. I sent it around to publishers, with no success. An editor at one house seemed to speak for all of them when he wrote that there would be little interest "in a book about a pilgrimage in Poland."

Writers love to pick apart rejection letters—questioning the reasoning, deploring the language, disagreeing, vehemently, with the verdict (it's our only defense). But in retrospect, this one seems remarkably prescient. Remember, this was 1983, still four years before Coelho's book appeared. With two words—"in Poland"—the editor, if not foresaw, at least allowed for the possibility of a pilgrimage every publisher could love.

And so it has come to pass. Not everyone who walks to Santiago writes a book about it (yet), but virtually everyone who writes about a pilgrimage does so about Santiago. It is to the writer crowd what Dale Earnhardt still is to NASCAR fans: the one and only, eclipsing all others.

A search on Amazon.com for "pilgrimage to Santiago" will bring up about 875 results, at least two dozen of which are travel books (the majority of them written within the last eight years). So pilgrims setting off for the renowned cathedral—which holds, according to legend, the remains of St. James—have no excuse for arriving ill-informed. They can read Edwin Mullins's *The Pilgrimage to Santiago* (a book that predates Coelho's by 13 years) or *Pilgrimage to the End of the World: The Road to Santiago de Compostela* by Conrad Randolph.

Their curiosity piqued, they can move on to *Off the Road: A Modern-Day Walk Down the Pilgrim's Route into Spain* by Jack Hitt; *The Way Is Made by Walking: A Pilgrimage Along the Camino de Santiago* by Arthur Paul Boers; *Walking the Camino: A Modern Pilgrimage to Santiago* by Tony Kevin; *Walking the Camino de Santiago* by Bethan Davies and Ben Cole; *Walking to Santiago: Diary of a Pilgrimage* by Mary Wilkie; and *Camino Chronicle: Walking to Santiago* by Susan Alcorn.

If those books don't do it, there's *Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela: Chronicle of Love* by Jack deGroot; *Fumbling: A Pilgrimage Tale of Love, Grief, and Spiritual Renewal on the Camino de Santiago* by Kerry Egan; and *El Camino de Santiago: Rites of Passage* by Wayne Chimenti.

For the starstruck, there's *To the Field of Stars: A Pilgrim's Journey to Santiago de Compostela* by Kevin A. Codd; *Road of Stars to Santiago* by Edward F. Stanton; *Following the Milky Way: A Pilgrim on the Camino de Santiago* by Elyn Aviva; and *The Camino: A Journey of the Spirit* by Shirley MacLaine.

People looking for some comic relief can try *Travels with My Donkey: One Man and His Ass on a Pilgrimage to Santiago* by Tim Moore or *I'm Off for a Bit, Then*, by the German comedian Hape Kerkeling. (A bestseller in Germany, it has yet to appear here; but since the author's style has been compared to that of Bill Bryson, it will.)

Perhaps you'd prefer your pilgrimage filtered through a more literary sensibility? Once again, the old *camino* does not disappoint, giving you Cees Nooteboom's *Roads to Santiago* and Kathryn Harrison's *The Road to Santiago*.

The road to Santiago is paved with pages.

Finding the proper title for a book is always tricky, and just because these titles (with the exception of the German's) possess a depressing sameness doesn't necessarily mean that the books do. Every person is unique, we know, and reacts to life in an individual way.

But do we need all these reactions to the same undertaking? Publishing's addiction to the sure bet is as strong as Hollywood's, but it's more troubling because of an inherent mission that goes beyond entertainment. How much of value is being ignored because of this tiresome pursuit of the proven? Even Hollywood stops after one remake.

Like Tuscany and Provence, the pilgrimage to Santiago (to coin a phrase) has been anointed with properties of inexhaustibility—and of course, profitability. While the rest of the world elbows for space on the shelf. ♦

# Pierce the Veil

*The women of Saudi Arabia are finding their voices.*

**BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ**

These three volumes should all be required reading for anybody, inside or outside Saudi Arabia, who seeks an understanding of the unpredictable future of that strange country. Their authors are women—which in itself, given the notorious restrictions on women in the kingdom, makes them special—and all are Muslims, and have written less for a foreign audience than for their peers.

Each of these works belongs to a different and distinct genre. *Girls of Riyadh* is "chick lit" of an extraordinary kind, a volume relating the adventures of young Saudi women in search of love and self-definition. It is the kind of book that would seldom be read—much less be considered important—by Western policy experts; yet like other writings emerging from deep social crises, it illustrates the principle that the least pretentious chronicles of life under a tyranny may be the most revealing and significant. *Girls of Riyadh* could even be compared to the satirical classics of East European writers like Milan Kundera in providing a look at Saudi reality from deep inside the Wahhabi dominion.

Al-Rasheed's *Contesting the Saudi State* is composed in the idiom of social science, but is no less revealing of the oppressive but complex nature of Saudi Wahhabism as a state ideology, and of the global jihadist violence it has spawned. Ahmed's *In the Land of Invisible Women* is a personal, deeply affecting, and exhaustively detailed account of the author's experience as a female professional in the desert domain.

**Girls of Riyadh**
by Rajaa Alsanea
Translated by Rajaa Alsanea and Marilyn Booth
Penguin, 304 pp., $14

**Contesting the Saudi State**
*Islamic Voices from a New Generation*
by Madawi Al-Rasheed
Cambridge, 332 pp., $30

**In the Land of Invisible Women**
*A Female Doctor's Journey in the Saudi Kingdom*
by Qanta A. Ahmed, M.D.
Sourcebooks, 464 pp., $14.99

Rajaa Alsanea was a 24-year-old orthodontics student when *Girls of Riyadh* attracted vast attention with its publication in Arabic in Beirut three years ago. Its plot, a kind of *Sex in the Wahhabi City*, is based on emails sent by an unidentified female narrator, describing the lives of four close friends: Michelle, born Mashael, who is Saudi-American and educated in computer science; Sadeem, a management graduate; Lamees, a medical student; and Gamrah, a college dropout.

Lamees stands out because her family comes from the sophisticated commercial city of Jedda, in the more pluralistic Hejaz in the western Arabian peninsula, also the location of Mecca and Medina. But the four reside in the Saudi capital, built in the primitive district of Najd that produced Wahhabism and still flaunts a tribal arrogance, far from the Red Sea coast. To behave like typical Muslim and other young girls elsewhere in the world, they are constantly forced to overcome the obstacles imposed by the Wahhabi order. Such challenges include dating and falling in love, in addition to the one diversion on which there are no limits: high-end shopping.

As the book opens, the group is celebrating Gamrah's wedding to Rashid, a man preparing to take her to the United States, where he will seek an engineering doctorate, after a honeymoon in Venice. But Rashid is cold to Gamrah, refusing to consummate the marriage she has so romanticized. The tale then flashes back to events preceding the wedding, in which the girls of Riyadh are nothing if not ingenious in their struggle against the restrictions. On an evening drive through town in a rented BMW, Michelle and Lamees dress as boys and ride in the front seats, with their friends in traditional, all-concealing black *abayas*. When they arrive at a popular mall, they are crowded by young men who shower them with telephone numbers through the windows of their own vehicles.

The second of the quartet to get married is Sadeem, but her destiny is, like Gamrah's, blighted by Saudi male chauvinism. Sadeem is assiduously courted by her suitor, Waleed, but the couple's idyll is interrupted when Sadeem asks to delay wedding plans until after she has completed her university exams. To revive Waleed's enthusiasm, she engages in unspecified sexual play with him before the marriage, and the result is predictably disastrous: Waleed now considers her tainted, the wedding is abandoned, and when Sadeem returns to college, she begins failing her classes.

To emphasize, these stories would rarely excite the attention of journalists, academic experts, and other observers of the crisis in the Saudi kingdom, yet they provide a precious and thorough perspective on the human problems created by the demands of Wahhabism.

When *Girls of Riyadh* was first published in Lebanon, it was banned in Saudi Arabia, but as is frequently the case, copies were easily smuggled into the kingdom. A Wahhabi lawsuit was initiated against Alsanea, but in late 2006, after the reforming King Abdullah had ascended the throne, the case was thrown out. Soon another woman, a media figure named Aiza Ibrahim, produced an Arabic-only book titled *Girls From Riyadh* (rather than *of Riyadh*) that addressed Saudi social issues, but according to Saudi commentators, had nothing new to offer. Then another

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Arabic language book called *Reflected Mirror* was published, by one Sara al-Zamil to counter Rajaa Alsanea's work. Last year Wahhabi radicals called on the Saudi embassy in Washington to prevent English-language publication of *Girls of Riyadh*, which the extremists denounced as a defamation of Saudi womanhood. And this year the Arabic edition was removed from the Riyadh international book fair. Yet, in the end, a barrier to free expression by Saudi women had been abolished.

Rajaa Alsanea now lives in the United States, but her courageous and pioneering work has been neglected by the hive of commentators on the Middle East. Having just come out in paperback, it may perhaps get a second chance at the attention it unarguably deserves in the West.

Madawi Al-Rasheed's *Contesting the Saudi State* is an entirely different kind of work, but no less important. An anthropology professor at Kings' College London, Al-Rasheed has carefully traced the evolution of Wahhabi state ideology in the context of the atrocities of September 11, 2001. Her book includes many important and provocative arguments and disclosures.

Overly schooled in the obscurantist methods of the Western academy, she exaggerates the deviations of Osama bin Laden from Wahhabism, based on his defiance of current Saudi rulers. She correctly supports the claim that the history of Wahhabism and its involvement with the royal family is complex, but fails to grasp the dynamics of revivalism among adherents of radical ideologies. The paradox of al Qaeda's support for Wahhabi beliefs, combined with opposition to the Saudi order created by the Wahhabi sect, is hardly new in the history of totalitarianism. The same contradiction was visible in the movement that claimed the mantle of Jacobinism against the Jacobin rulers at the end of the French Revolution, and in Stalinist and Maoist efforts to "cleanse" the Communist bureaucracies of Soviet Russia and China by mass murder.

Al-Rasheed makes a similar mistake in attempting to explain the incoherent, inconsistent, and self-contradictory products of Osama bin Laden's mental confusion. Here, too, parallels with the Soviet experience are useful. Like the analysts who mistakenly believed that Maoism, Castroism, and the politics of Ho Chi Minh and the Sandinistas were different in some major way from Russian communism, Al-Rasheed assumes that major distinctions among variants in a single ideology may be deduced from minor divergences in the historical process. Nevertheless, Al-Rasheed's work is indispensable in its detailed description of Internet discourse, and related controversies among Saudi radicals, and deserves wide reading and debate.

Qanta Ahmed's chronicle is similarly valuable as a record of the daily struggle of a highly educated woman—a physician and leading expert on sleep disorders—of Pakistani origin, trained in the United States and employed in the Saudi medical system. Her experiences are pervasive, ranging from an encounter with Saudi fanaticism while examining an elderly female with pneumonia whose face is kept covered in black fabric while undergoing treatment, to her experience in *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. Throughout Ahmed's account, she relates the vexations of female life under Saudi rule: from insults for wearing Western-style clothing, even among women, and harassment by the *mutawiyin*, or religious police, to what by now should be the familiar abuse of marriage and divorce by Saudi men. As a pilgrim, she found her Islamic beliefs reinforced by the vibrant presence of Malaysian Muslim women, who embodied cultural pluralism and defiance of Wahhabi strictures.

*At the Kingdom Tower Mall, Riyadh*

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All three authors are articulate in their defense of Islam as a faith. Alsanea and Al-Rasheed are proud of the Saudi people and their strength of character. As a physician, Ahmed has the additional virtue of a sharp eye for the health problems of the *hajj*, which seem to exemplify the deep problems of the entire society. The future of Saudi Arabia, if not of Islam as a whole, is in the details, and the books of these three Muslim women establish an inexhaustible catalogue of evidence. ♦

# Forty Years On

*Tom Stoppard's 'Rock 'n' Roll' and the end of the Soviet empire.* **BY MICHAEL WEISS**

Not long ago in the *London Times*, Tom Stoppard published an essay that surely had most of his West End friends wincing. Titled "1968: The year of the posturing rebel," it was a look back in "embarrassment" at the spectacle of anti-establishment consensus 40 years ago, and an attempt to hoist a generation by its own *soixante* petard. The playwright—who even back then enjoyed a reputation as a bohemian conservative, with a heritage rooted in actual Bohemia—marveled at how little loved England was by its native sons and daughters. If Stoppard could claim a greater appreciation of the island nation with a well-functioning liberal democracy, it was because

> I had not been born into it. You don't need to be a qualified psychologist to work out that in England in 1968, 22 years after I arrived, I was much more disposed to champion my adoptive country than to find fault with it. For all I knew to the contrary, if my father had survived the war (he was killed in the Far East) he would have taken his family back to my birthplace in Czechoslovakia in 1946 and I would have grown up under the communist dictatorship which followed two years later.

The ominous contingency in that passage is more or less the biography of Stoppard's protagonist in *Rock 'n' Roll*, his latest play, set between two seismic years, 1968 and 1991, and two diametric locations, Cambridge and Prague. Jan is a gifted Czech graduate student posing as a Marxist, and the loyal protégé of a curmudgeonly Red don called Max, who has remained in the party well after all the old comrades have quit. Max tentatively downplays the recent Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, even if he doesn't quite bring himself to condone it. But beyond being a mere ideologist, he's also a riotously funny culture critic. He, too, finds the sixties a period of pseudo-rebellious "street theatre."

"It was like opening the wrong door in a highly specialized brothel," he reflects decades on, after the Berlin Wall has come down. "To this day there are men in public life who can't look me in the eye because I knew them when they went about dressed like gigantic five-year-olds at a society wedding."

Born in that other seismic year 1917—"exactly as old as the October Revolution"—and modeled roughly on the historian Eric Hobsbawm, Max has seen and done it all: Fascism in Spain, the Arctic convoys, world war. When he sighs that his flower child daughter Esme "thinks a fascist is a mounted policeman in Grosvenor Square," he is not just channeling Orwell but his own creator. Thus does Stoppard impart his slightly fusty cultural sensibility in a graying Communist who still believes the Soviet Union was worth the trouble. And that is not the least of what makes *Rock 'n' Roll* so interesting.

Immediately following the occupation of his homeland, Jan, whose actual obsession is not historical materialism but Western rock music (Pink Floyd, the Beach Boys, Cream), returns home to find the reformist leader Alexander Dubcek, hero of the Prague Spring and herald of "socialism with a human face," deposed and replaced by a regime of "normalization" led by the apparatchik Gustav Husak.

At first, Jan is sanguine about what he finds. He was expecting "mass arrests, the government in gaol, everything banned … the whole Soviet thing, with accordion bands playing Beatles songs … I came back to save Rock 'n' Roll, and my mother actually." But apart from some mild chivvying from the Ministry of the Interior, life doesn't seem so bad with Russian tanks parked outside and journalists exercising "self-censorship": "My mum's okay, and there's new bands ripping off Hendrix and Jethro Tull on equipment held together with spit." Then come the mass arrests, the state censorship, and the crackdown on those imitative bands, particularly a psychedelic group known as the Plastic People of the Universe, who took their name from a Frank Zappa lyric. After further repression and self-abasement, Jan is conscripted into a dissident movement he formerly mistrusted, and his philosophic disposition slowly changes.

By Stoppard's own admission, the play is a modified rendering of the extended argument that took place between Václav Havel and Milan Kundera about their country under communism. Stoppard tells us in his excellent introduction to the *Rock 'n' Roll* script that Jan was originally called Tomás, not just because this is the playwright's own birth name but because it is that of Kundera's lothario physician in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Jan's friend and sparring partner in Prague, the passionate intellectual Ferdinand, is named for Ferdinand Vanek, Havel's alter ego in three of his plays, *Audience*, *Private View*, and *Protest*. So here, roughly, are our stand-ins for a great Czech debate between two titans of 20th-century resistance.

There are four major exchanges that take place between Jan and Ferdinand over the course of several years—1968, 1972, 1974, and 1975—as each grows alternately disillusioned and encouraged with the prospects for liberal reform. The matter is largely one of how to categorize the true rebels. Are they the intellectuals and activists who draw up manifestos and sign earnest letters to the Husak government demanding amnesty for prisoners, or are they the musicians and burnouts and longhairs without political consciousness but a natural ability to provoke a police state simply by doing their own thing, like attend rock concerts?

*Michael Weiss is a writer living in New York.*

In December 1968, shortly after the invasion, Kundera published an essay entitled "Czech Destiny," in which he sounded hopeful about the resilience of his people in the face of yet another foreign tyranny. In noticeable contrast to Kundera's pessimism of later years, and from the perch of his French exile (which began in 1975), he was at this point committed to reforming communism from within. Czech culture did not succumb to permanent amnesia; rather, it reasserted itself *in extremis*. And the Prague Spring was not "defeated. . . . The new politics survived this terrible conflict. . . . It retreated, yes, but it did not disintegrate, it did not collapse."

Jan, now employed as a journalist, phrases it like this: "For once this country found the best in itself. We've been done over by big powerful nations for hundreds of years but this time we refused our destiny." But Ferdinand sees this as the height of interpretive fallacy: "It's not destiny, you moron, it's the neighbors worrying about *their* slaves revolting if we get away with it." Echoing Havel's rebuttal to Kundera, he accuses Jan of "turning disaster into a moral victory" and of not coming to terms with a far grimmer situation to which Jan, an exile so recently lost in the dreaming spires, has only just returned.

The second exchange occurs in the summer of 1972. Jan has been tossed out of his newspaper and forced to work in a factory, though he is still an unremitting critic of the Havel-styled opposition. The Communist Party College rector, Milan Hubl, and some others, have just stood trial for disseminating "provocative printed matter"—pamphlets that informed citizens of their constitutional right to strike names from the ballot or boycott the upcoming elections. Hubl is sentenced to 61 years. Their plight draws the attention of honest Communists in Italy, France, and Britain (Angela Davis in the United States was pilloried for her refusal to censure the Czech government and demand his release).

Domestically, Havel circulates a polite letter to Husak asking for a pardon; Ferdinand presents it to Jan to sign. He refuses, once again mouthing Kundera's grievance with the ostensibly ignoble motive impelling such action: "First because it won't help Hubl and the others, but mainly because helping them is not its real purpose. Its real purpose is to let Ferdinand and his friends feel they're not absolutely pointless. It's just moral exhibitionism." This recapitulates almost perfectly the scene in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* in which Tomás, reduced to the role of a window washer by his refusal to recant a trenchant editorial in which he compared Communists to King Oedipus, is confronted by his estranged son and an editor with a similar letter for him to sign. The editor knows "perfectly well that his petition would not help the prisoners. His true goal . . . was to show that people without fear still exist. That, too, was playacting."

*Tom Stoppard, 1968*

BETTMANN / CORBIS

Kundera's implicit critique here is one of moral equivalence, namely that Czech dissidents have become dangerously like their persecutors, applying the same bullying tactics to enlist in a dubious campaign apolitical men who just want to be left alone. Tomás notices a propaganda poster from the Russian Civil War hanging in the room where this set piece transpires; the poster's original slogan read, "Citizen, have you joined the Red Army?" The words have been crossed out and replaced with, "Citizen, have you signed the Two Thousand Words?"—the very document that now lies before him and to which he will in fact lend his name.

It's a well-executed satire, but at whose expense?

For Havel, there was no moral equivalence: He admitted years later in an interview that Hubl may not have been pardoned by his and his co-thinkers' grandstanding efforts, and that the sole immediate effect of their agitation was that the "beauty of our characters was illuminated." But what Kundera neglected to address was how buoyed political prisoners were by mere "playacting." It "helped renew the broken solidarity" and "marked the beginning of a process in which people's civic backbone began to straighten again." Sanctimony and *amour propre* are permissible vices if they inspire confidence in the luckless victims of ideology. Stoppard's great achievement with *Rock 'n' Roll* is to remind Western audiences that the forces that brought down communism in Czechoslovakia were by no means symphonic; they were as discordant as the ravishing popular music playing in the background.

Of course, as reality in Eastern Europe changed, so, too, did the illusions of Czech optimists. Nineteen

seventy-four marks a turning point for Jan, who finds himself now peddling a petition for Ferdinand to sign—demanding the release of the newly arrested Plastic People of the Universe and their famous Warholian artistic director Ivan Jirous. Jan's preference for the anarchic underground and his scorn for what he sees as the "official opposition" has come back to haunt him. His beloved rock stars are the ones behind bars, and he needs a favor from the intellectuals.

Ferdinand asks, "And this would be different from moral exhibitionism, would it?" Jan replies that it would because these kids don't care about politics, they just want to play their music. They didn't choose the roles of dissidents; the roles chose them. Ferdinand needles Jan, demanding to know who wields greater influence, who is "going to lay bare the ideological contradictions of bureaucratic dictatorship," the intellectuals or the Plastics? Jan delivers the most forceful speech of the play, explaining that Jirous is in jail and Ferdinand is walking around free

> [b]ecause the policeman insulted *him*. About his hair. Jirous doesn't cut his hair. It makes the policeman angry, so he starts something and it ends with Jirous in gaol. But what is the policeman angry about? What difference does long hair make? The policeman is angry about his fear. The policeman's fear is what makes him angry. He's frightened by indifference. Jirous doesn't *care*. He doesn't care enough even to cut his hair. The policeman isn't frightened by *dissidents*! Why should he be? Police *love* dissidents, like the Inquisition loved heretics. Heretics give meaning to the defenders of the faith. . . . But the Plastics don't care at all. They're unbribable. They're coming from somewhere else, from where the Muses come from. They're not heretics. They're pagans.

Here Stoppard is at his most dialectical. Where the counterculture in London may have been defined by adolescent solipsism masquerading as revolution, in Prague the selfsame characteristic birthed the genuine article. This is why the Czech revolution was named for the Velvet Underground. "The story that *Rock 'n' Roll* is telling," Stoppard writes, "is that, in the logic of Communism, what the band wasn't interested in and what the band wanted could not in the end be separated." Jan has begun to

*Václav Havel, 1968*

appreciate the earnestness of Havel, and Havel has absorbed more of Jan's anarchic worldview.

It really *did* all have to do with the Plastics. Havel's about-face occurred in 1976 when he was reintroduced to Jirous, whom he had first met years earlier. (Like Jan, Jirous originally thought the absurdist playwright was a square, a member of the "official" and "officially tolerated" opposition.) After listening to an old tape recording of the Plastics, Havel was hooked: "There was a strange magic in the music, and a kind of inner warning. Here was something serious and genuine . . . Suddenly I realized that, regardless of how many vulgar words these people used or how long their hair was, truth was on their side." But before he was able to attend the band's next performance, they and Jirous were arrested. (In the play, Jan is nicked, too, and his fourth major dialogue with Ferdinand credits his friend and "the other tossers" with getting him out.)

Havel wasted no time in rallying his own cerebral side to their defense by covering their absurd "trial" and fashioning Charter 77, the famous petition that accused the government of failing to live up to the Helsinki Agreement. Shortly thereafter, Havel penned his classic essay "The Power of the Powerless," affirming the more mundane aspects of what he called "living in truth," a simple but devastating challenge to the "thick crust of lies" that envelopes the "post-totalitarian" society. One can write a petition, or one can attend a rock concert—both will disrupt the hypocrisy and sham equilibrium of the Communist order.

Havel and 10 other banner Chartists were imprisoned for their troubles two years later, and although the Husak regime inaugurated another period of reaction following this *cause célèbre*, the warp and woof of Czech dissidence was forever changed. It became more unified. Indeed, the "pop" qualities of revolt would later be glimpsed in some of the sillier accoutrements of the post-Communist era, such as the neon heart that adorned Prague Castle under Havel's presidency, and the naming of Frank Zappa as the Czech representative of trade and culture.

*Rock 'n' Roll* ends perfectly with the Rolling Stones playing Strahov Stadium in 1990. Mick Jagger and the boys mincing around the Paris of the East as the entire edifice of Stalinism was collapsing around Europe is a vignette worthy of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Havel had given the band a tour of the castle, and when he went to present them to the throng of cheering fans gathered outside, he found the door to the balcony was locked and no one had the key.

A windblown hat tumbling into Husak's open grave could scarcely have punctuated the historical moment better. ♦

SAM FALK / THE NEW YORK TIMES / REDUX

# Woody's World

*The old man and the sea of beauties.*

**BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

Woody Allen's *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* is, quite literally, the work of a dirty old man. This is not a criticism, merely a description. Allen is 72 now, and he has made a movie whose most notable scenes involve a lesbian embrace between the luscious blonde Scarlett Johansson and the equally luscious brunette Penélope Cruz followed by a ménage à trois featuring the two women and the glamorous leading man, Javier Bardem.

**Vicky Cristina Barcelona**
Directed by Woody Allen

Also on display, although far more modestly, is a ravishing British actress named Rebecca Hall. She plays Vicky, an American graduate student spending the summer in Spain in pursuit of a master's degree in "Catalan identity"—which is odd, since she speaks no Spanish and since "Catalan identity" is not the name of a recognized field in which one is awarded a master's degree.

But then, Vicky is not a resident of the real world. She is a creature in Woody Allen World, a place that only superficially resembles our own. In Woody Allen World, for example, people speak in the overly deliberate manner of characters in a mediocre drawing room comedy.

The ensemble of *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* discuss death and love and pain and art with a deadly seriousness entirely unleavened by the irony, wit, and humor that made people think, once upon a time, of Woody Allen as a man with something significant to say.

Even omniscient narrators living in Woody Allen World, who might otherwise be expected to have a modest command of the English language, deploy pretentious malapropisms that reveal their creator's profound intellectual insecurity. *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* has just such a narrator, given fussy voice by a fussy stage actor with the fussy name of Christopher Evan Welch.

The narrator is also something of a bore (not that Allen knows this) since he keeps describing to us in words exactly what we're watching. As Vicky and her friend Cristina take photographs around Barcelona, the narrator says, "They spent the day taking pictures in Barcelona." And with the ham-handed obviousness that, at times, afflicts the old when discussing the actions of the young, he informs us that, for one character, "the thought of them in bed caused her some conflict."

Listening to narration this dreadful causes me some conflict, too—conflict between my desire to throw things at the screen and my need for the money I will receive for this review.

And yet *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* is not entirely without interest. For one thing, it is rare to see a work of such profound misogyny. This is a movie about how impossible it is for women to be satisfied, how women do everything in their power to destroy their own happiness and the happiness of others, and how they perpetrate emotional violence on themselves and the men hapless enough to cross their paths. Interesting perspective on the opposite sex from a man who allowed his girlfriend to find nude photographs he had taken of her teenage daughter, his lover.

Vicky, the Catalan identity student, is tightly wound, nasty, and depressed. When Juan Antonio proposes that he, Vicky, and her friend Cristina all go to bed together, Vicky responds with shock, horror, and disgust—which, to be sure, only reveals how desperately she wants it. She is a proper bourgeois, engaged to a businessman who works for a company called Global Enterprises. She thinks she wants stability and certainty; but of course, what she really wants is some romantic guitar playing and an hour in a glen with Juan Antonio.

Cristina is hungering for "something more." She wants to be an artist but doesn't know how to express herself (another condition that afflicts Allen women). She is, one character says, chronically dissatisfied. The bourgeois life is not for her, but when she finds herself in the more adventurous ménage à trois situation with Juan Antonio and his ex-wife, Maria Elena, she decides that isn't for her, either.

The only woman who seems to have any sense of herself is Maria Elena, who is passion personified—which means she is sexually omnivorous, nasty, suicidal, and homicidal. Her spiritual ugliness is captured perfectly by Penélope Cruz in a knockout performance. Of course, since most of the time she is speaking in idiomatic Spanish, I have no idea whether her dialogue is as ludicrous as everyone else's.

Allen is often praised for the roles he writes for women. It is true that he writes many roles for women, unlike other comic moviemakers. So what if many of them are whores, psychotics, or bipolar lunatics, either sexually withholding or sexually demonic? He gives them a lot of lines, and for actresses, that's all that matters.

Coming up next from Woody Allen: a movie about a man in his sixties and his obsession with an actress very much like Scarlett Johansson. (Google her name and Allen's and look at the pictures that come up and you will see image after image of him staring straight at her breasts.)

About this I'm not kidding. Larry David plays the Jewish man in his sixties. That makes sense. Allen's entire life has become a routine straight out of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. ♦

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***"Even in a sea of tourists, it is easy to spot the Britons here on the northeast coast of Crete. . . . They are the ones, the locals say, who are carousing, brawling and getting violently sick. They are the ones crowding into health clinics seeking morning-after pills and help for sexually-transmitted diseases. They are the ones who seem to have one vacation plan: drinking themselves into oblivion."*** **—New York Times, *August 24***

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# British Invasion of Greece

## City officials roll out the not-so-welcome carpet

By Adam Tabor

**ATHENS:** As the summer twilight settles on this ancient metropolis, a sinister sound can be heard in the neighborhoods between Constitution Square and the Acropolis: a distant rumble, at first, and then a shrill, cacophonous roar as delegates to the 125th convention of the British Association for Classical Studies stagger from their hotel bars and weave through the narrow streets of Plaka, to the foot of the Acropolis.

Holding an empty bottle of Ouzo in one hand, and pointing to the zipper on his mud-stained trousers with the other, Alistair Digby-Throbbing, 51, Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge and author of a seminal study on Mycenaean trade and commerce, shouts, "I'm pissed! And I'm going to piss in the Parthenon!"

With those words, he begins running up the hill past the museum entrance, trips on some rocks, and pitches face-first into the dirt.

"Alistair's down!" yells Sir Nigel "Digger" Phelps, the 78-year-old dean of British archaeologists and distinguished visiting fellow at the British Academy in Athens. He kicks the unconscious Mr. Digby-Throbbing two or three times, in an attempt to revive him, and then empties the Ouzo bottle onto the classicist's head—to no avail.

"The bugger's out cold," says Sir Nigel to his giggling companion, 59-year-old Prof. Ian Hunter-Gaitherer of University College London, and the two scholars, their arms wrapped around each other's waist, belch and stagger a few yards toward the portico of the nearby Erecthion before Mr. Hunter-Gaitherer, groaning audibly, clasps his chest, falls to his knees, and vomits onto the ground. Sir Nigel Phelps, pulled down by Mr. Hunter-Gaitherer's fall, lies helplessly on his back, alternately laughing and mumbling obscenities in English, modern Greek, and an obscure Sumerian dialect from the 7th century BC.

Shrugging his shoulders, Capt. Tassos Beatannapolis, the 44-year-old commander of the Athens police tactical squad, takes a long drag from his cigarette: "It's like this every year," he says. "These British aren't content to just steal our Elgin marbles. They have to spoil our evenings, too."

Every year when the classicists gather in Athens or Rome, local officials brace themselves for liquor-fueled fistfights, hotel vandalism, sex with prostitutes and Tourism Ministry guides, as well as

**ATHENS, Continued on page 4**

# *Chinese Hurdler Liu Xiang Loses Life*

By Gaylan Tinsley

Eckhard Pecher

**BEIJING:** Liu Xiang, the 25-year-old Chinese track and field star whose inflamed Achilles' tendon forced his withdrawal from the 110-meter hurdle competition at the Olympic Games last week, was executed by gunshot in the multi-million-dollar Savory Golden Lotus Sports Complex here yesterday, after a military tribunal convicted Liu of humiliating the People's Republic of China, and dashing the hopes of hundreds of millions of workers and peasants who had tuned into the Beijing Games.

Early Sunday morning the verdi

On the streets of Beijing, little sympathy was offered for the expensively-trained athlete who was the first Chinese to win a gold medal in track and field, at the 2004 Athens Games.

"What he did was very bad," said Hu Flung, a 38-year-old electrical technician taking a lunch break in the shadow of the Forbidden City. "He not only let down ancestors, he make us look weak in eyes of foreigners." Mr. Hu, a sports enthusiast and fan of US rapper Kanye West, said that the hi

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