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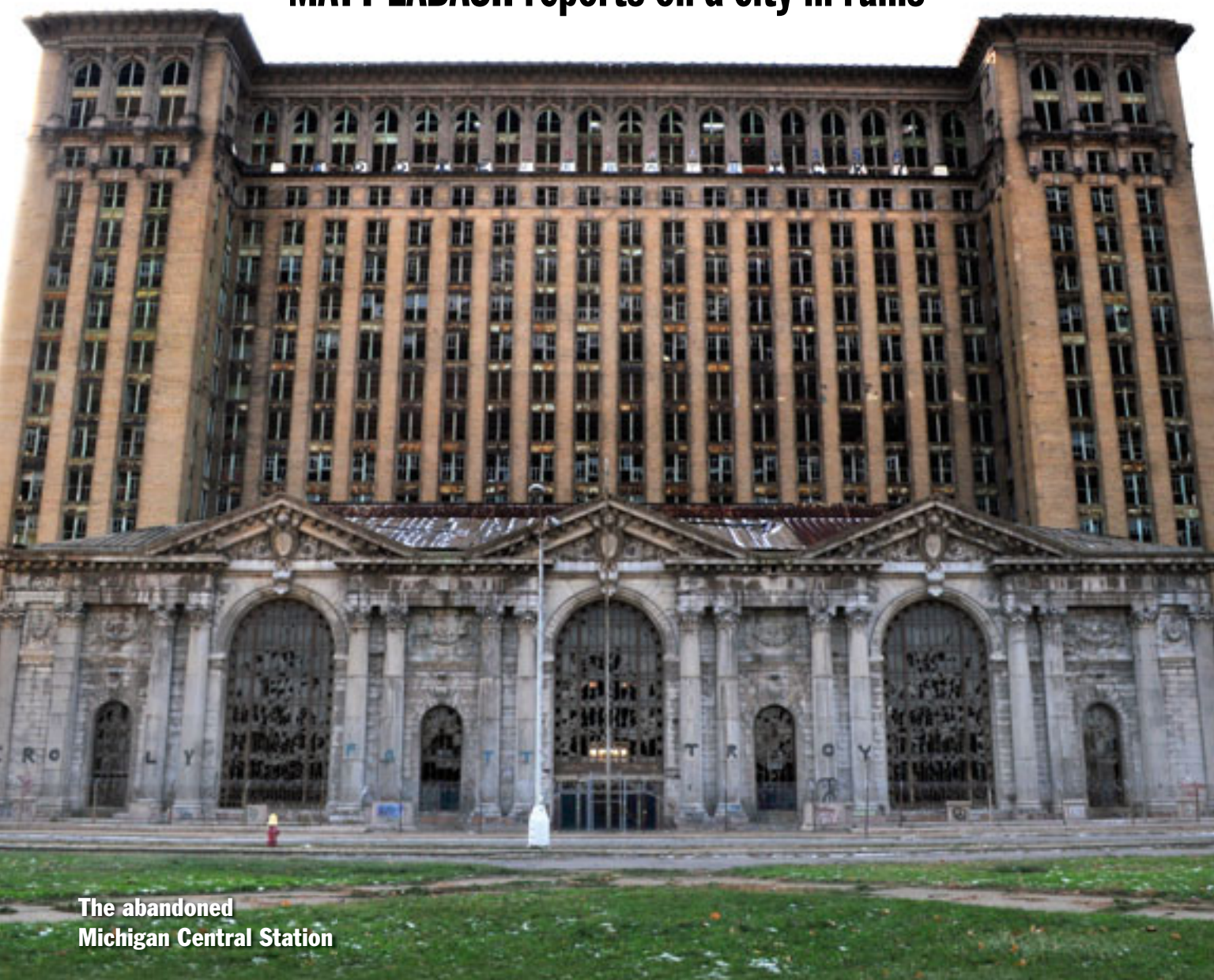

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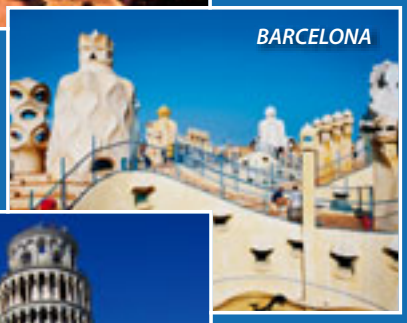

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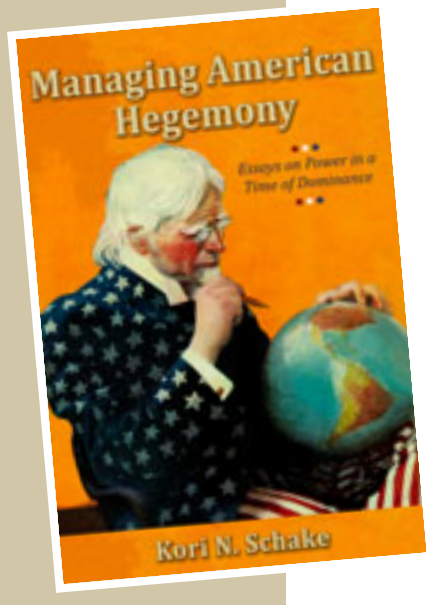

Managing American Hegemony

Essays on Power in a Time of Dominance

BY KORI N. SCHAKE

Schake examines key questions about the United States' position of power in the world, including Why is the United States' power so threatening? Is it sustainable? Does military force still matter? How can we revise current practices to reduce the U.S. cost of managing the system? What accounts for the United States' stunning success in the round of globalization that swept across the international order at the end of the twentieth century? The author also offers suggestions on which issues the next president should focus on to build an even stronger foundation of U.S. power.

She concludes that the United States has succeeded internationally for reasons deeply rooted in the political culture of the country, namely, tolerance of risk and failure, veneration of individual initiative, encouragement of immigration, fewer constraints on social and economic mobility than most other countries, and—critically—a malleable, absorptive definition of itself.

Kori N. Schake is senior policy adviser to the McCain campaign. She is on leave from being a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and the Distinguished Professor of International Security Studies at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York.

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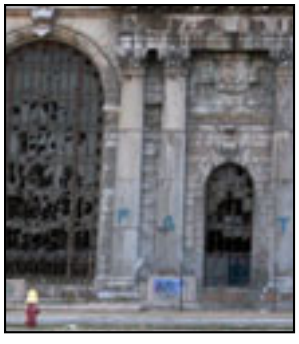

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Books & Arts

the weekly Standard

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Reporters in Extremis

The Scrapbook got a vision of the deep abyss into which the news business might soon fall—and frankly, it was truly horrifying. Yes, we're talking about the byline strike conducted last week by reporters at the Associated Press.

Their contract expired at the end of November, and the AP journalists' union—the News Media Guild, not to be confused with the Newspaper Guild—has been in contentious negotiations with the management of the Associated Press. We won't bore you with the details that separate labor from management—the usual wage and benefit packages, employment guarantees, mutual recriminations, and so on—but the union felt so strongly about the issues that they resorted to this nuclear option comparatively early in the process.

What, you may ask, is a byline strike? Answer: It is exactly what you think it is. Reporters write their stories but demand that their names—their "bylines," in newspaper lingo—be withheld from the final version. In the annals of journalism, there is no more eloquent example of professional self-sacrifice—of defiant labor unity in the face of intransigent Big Capital—than the byline strike. By withholding his/her byline, the journalist is at once throwing down the gauntlet to management and signaling to readers that this is serious business!

It is also, from The Scrapbook's humble perspective, a near-perfect example of the kind of professional arrogance, and suicidal self-absorption, that has gotten so many journalists (and their employers) into their present economic pickle.

A byline strike! Only an experienced, fully credentialed AP reporter could believe that the absence of his name would make the slightest difference to readers—assuming, of course, that readers are aware of his name in the first place. It may be that journalists are acutely aware of the bylines of other journalists as they appear on the front page, or on the wire; but if they think readers share their curiosity or consuming interest in the matter, they're kidding themselves.

In journalism, it's the content of the story, not the name of the writer or the state of his career, that draws in readers. And as consumers of these pages must surely know, The Scrapbook has been on a byline strike since its inception. Sure, we wouldn't mind a little personal publicity—maybe a photograph or a mention by name elsewhere in the magazine—but who, apart from The Scrapbook's mother, would be interested? ♦

But What He Really Wants to Do Is Direct

Our friends think we're crazy, but The Scrapbook actually read all 2,200 words of the *Washington Post*'s fawning front-page profile of 27-year-old Obama speechwriter Jon Favreau. Really; we couldn't put it down. It's rare you find such concentrated badness.

Try to read the following without gagging:

> Three months ago, Favreau lived in a group house with six friends in Chicago, where he rarely shaved, never cooked and sometimes stayed up to play video games until early morning. Now, he has transformed into what one friend called a "Washington political force"—a minor celebrity with a downpayment on a Dupont Circle condo, whose silly Facebook photos with a Hillary Rodham Clinton cutout created what passes for controversy in Obama's so far drama-free transition.

Leave aside the "silly" photo, which shows Favreau groping a cut-out of his boss's former rival. Can anyone seriously claim that the Obama transition has been "drama-free"? What about that whole crooked-pol-caught-trying-to-sell-the-president-elect's-Senate-seat thing? Does that not count as "drama"?

In any event, once you remove all the clichés *Post* staff writer Eli Saslow heaps on him, Favreau may still turn out to be a walking cliché himself. Here, Saslow describes the boy wonder at work:

> Favreau believes he will transition well if he focuses exclusively on writing, which is why he has buried himself in the inaugural address. He moves while he writes to avoid becoming stale—from the Starbucks, to his windowless transition office, to his new, one-bedroom condo, where the only furniture in place is a blow-up mattress on the hardwood floor. He sometimes writes until 2 or 3 a.m, fueled by double espresso shots and Red Bull. When deadline nears, a speech consumes him until he works 16-hour days and forgets to call home, do his laundry or pay his bills. He calls it "crashing."

(Saslow seems unaware that everyone under the age of 50 calls this crashing.) And then Favreau ruminates on his future:

> No matter how it goes, Favreau believes this will be his last job in politics—"anything else would be so anticlimactic," he said. Someday, he wants to write in his own voice, for himself. "Maybe I'll write a screenplay, or maybe a fiction book based loosely on what all of this was like," Favreau said. "You had a bunch

of kids working on this campaign together, and it was such a mix of the serious and momentous and just the silly ways that we are. For people in my generation, it was an unbelievable way to grow up."

A mix of the serious and momentous and just the silly ways that we are. Eat your heart out, Peggy Noonan. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'Here's a contrarian thought: Before Obama assumes the burdens of commander in chief, maybe he should dust off that copy of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and give the radical theorist another look. In doing so, he would remind himself of the special opportunity he will have as president to speak to a world that still suffers from the anti-Western fury that . . . " (David Ignatius, "Obama the Healer," *Washington Post*, December 14). ♦

Error in the *Times*

Frankly, we are stunned that the *New York Times* could whiff on something as basic as this. Certainly The Scrapbook would never make such a mistake. *Nie und nimmer!*

An article last Sunday about the film adaptation of the novel "The Reader" misspelled the German expression that means coming to terms with the past. It is *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, not *Vergangenheitsbewaltigung*.

—*New York Times*, December 14, 2008

Great Moments in Eminent Domain

Last year Carla Main published *Bulldozed*, a book that told the story of Freeport, Texas, a working-class, Gulf Coast town that had fallen on hard times. Then, in 2001, a developer named H. Walker Royall decided to revitalize Freeport by building a private marina, which would, he contended, attract businesses, tourists, and other investment. The only problem was that Royall needed the land occupied by one of Freeport's few successful businesses, a family-owned shrimping outfit called Western Seafood.

So Royall and the town set about invoking eminent domain to take Western Seafood's land. Main's book paints a highly unflattering picture of Royall and the town fathers. Royall has responded by suing Main and her publisher, Encounter Books, for defamation.

But wait, there's more! Royall also sued University of Chicago law professor Richard Epstein, who had the temerity to blurb the book. And Royall wasn't done. His lawsuit further includes Mark Lardas, a journalist in Texas who reviewed Main's book. And the *Galveston County Daily News*, which published Lardas's review.

If any of this sounds surprising, it shouldn't. The first defamation suit Royall filed was against the family who owns Western Seafood. They had the gall to complain that Royall was trying to take their land in the first place. ♦

Casual

Blind Beagle

A little over 12 years ago I brought home a beagle pup to the welcoming arms of my son and daughter, then aged 11 and 5. The last of our three hounds had died two years earlier, and the interregnum had merely intensified their longing for a new beagle.

The pup in question, a fetching female we baptized Beatrice, was an offspring of the hunting pack I have run with—the Wolver Beagles of Middleburg, Virginia—for many years, and a genuine aristocrat of the breed. Her grandfather, as I like to mention at almost any opportunity, had been a member of the Eton College Hunt; and between her Virginia provenance and English background, she was the first, and by far the most extravagantly, purebred hound it has been my privilege to know.

Apart from all that, she was—and remains—a beagle. An acquaintance of ours, when informed of this latest addition to the family, raised one quizzical eyebrow, and asked, "You *knowingly* got a beagle?" She was quickly housetrained and never showed evidence of any behavioral anomalies, but she was, withal, one of those merry hounds who put their nose to the ground and follow the scent, wherever it leads them. She has the stubborn streak characteristic of the breed—obedience is not Beatrice's strong suit—and my saxophone playing is often complicated by her sung accompaniment.

Beatrice was swiftly and passionately adopted by my children, who would spend countless hours admiring her floppy, velvety ears and tricolored coat. In the evening she would go on her rounds, journeying from the bed of one sleeping child to the other, before retiring in the master suite. When taken for a walk around the block she would be descended upon by the gleeful neighborhood children and would patiently stand and lick the proffered hand or face as they squeezed and caressed her.

As I often point out to admiring visitors, Beatrice has an air of glamour about her and, between an elegant Hampden-Sydney College collar and a shiny Fairfax County (Va.) dog tax tag, an impeccable sense of fashion. Even with a damp coat, or an elongated nose topped off with snow, she has the look and bearing of the natural patrician she is.

DARREN GYGI

This is not to say that Beatrice has wasted her existence in a series of regal poses. When I retire to my study at night, she enters silently, curls herself into what we call a "beagle ball" on the nearby pillow, and keeps me company. The fact that a small wooden box containing dog treats sits on an adjacent table has nothing to do with it, of course. She is always likely to sit at one's feet—or in one's lap, or at the foot of one's bed, depending on the circumstances—and her penetrating gaze and occasional snores and wheezes are, by any measure, therapeutic. As I have always said, the sight (and sounds) of a beagle curled up on a plaid pillow in front of a fireplace, with or without fire, is the closest thing to a homegrown narcotic I know.

Now, as it happens, the 11-year-old has grown to be a medical student four hours away, and the 5-year-old is about to abandon the homestead for college. Beatrice, too, is showing her age. The tricolored coat is now heavily flecked with gray, and the scope of her universe is considerably shrunk. She also has Cushing's disease, the production of excess hormones in the adrenal glands, which has yielded a series of classic symptoms that have significantly slowed her down in the past year and will, I suppose, lead ultimately—and perhaps even prematurely—to death.

In the meantime, and to our considerable surprise, she developed Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration Syndrome, which is to say she has become blind, practically overnight. No doubt, this has been a considerable shock to her otherwise resilient system, but I am pleased to report that she seems to have taken the darkness in stride. To be sure, she is at times confused and only gradually learning the obstacles and contours of her invisible world, but she is evidently not agitated or in any sense tormented by this sudden calamity, in which case we should be sadly contemplating ending her misery.

She is, in fact, behaving largely as a beagle would: Except for a certain disposition toward incontinence—which, we pray, she is slowly correcting—Beatrice's instinct for personal comfort and quiet sociability is, so to speak, seeing her through. She has lengthened the hours of her beauty sleep and putters contentedly about, gently bumping into piano legs and door jambs. Her appetite is diminished, and she has suddenly grown finicky about food, but what else is new? After a lifetime of service to the Terzian household, and a lot of laughter, she deserves a comfortable exit.

Philip Terzian

Religious Freedom

In his review of Thomas F. Farr's *World of Faith and Freedom*, Joseph Loconte wrote, "The National Endowment for Democracy promotes programs largely indifferent to the question of religious freedom" (December 8).

This will come as news to the many NED grantees actively promoting religious freedom and interfaith dialogue with our funding. To cite just a few of many examples:

Sudan's Inter-Religious Council investigates and publicizes violations of religious liberty, surveys educational institutions and orphanages to identify religious biases, and trains Christian and Muslim youth on issues of religious freedom.

The China Aid Association's quarterly journal analyzes and documents human rights abuses of religious believers, and maintains an online library of Chinese and English-language laws and regulations governing religious practice in China.

In Pakistan, the Lahore-based Democratic Commission for Human Development runs an educational and advocacy program to counter the influence of religious extremism and to foster principles of religious freedom and tolerance.

Que Me, the leading international advocate of human rights in Vietnam, has worked extensively with the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam and the Paris-based International Buddhist Information Bureau in promoting freedom of worship in the communist state.

The International Forum for Islamic Dialogue supports and assists liberal Muslim democrats in promulgating modern interpretations of Islam and highlighting the compatibility of Islamic values with universal values of human rights, democracy, pluralism, cultural diversity, and women's rights.

The NED is a grant-making body and not a programmatic organization. However, while the Endowment is not specifically charged with promoting religious freedom, it is clearly an integral part of our work in so far as freedom of worship is inextricably bound up with basic democratic rights, including freedom of speech, association, and conscience. In many respects, religious freedom is, to coin a cliché, the canary in the coal mine: Where freedom of worship is denied or compromised, other liberties are invariably and equally vulnerable. For that reason, promoting religious freedom will remain an important dimension of the NED's wider commitment to democracy assistance.

Jane Riley Jacobsen
Director, Public Affairs
National Endowment for Democracy
Washington, D.C.

Joseph Loconte responds: I'm glad to know of these examples of the NED's interest in promoting religious freedom, and it would have been helpful if I had referred to them in my review of Tom Farr's book.

Nevertheless, it's important to ask whether the NED has adopted an integrated approach to religious liberty. The issue isn't the number of grants going to groups advocating religious toleration—which I suspect is a small portion of the NED's budget. The deeper issue is whether the promotion and protection of religious freedom is a central objective of the NED's agenda, inseparable from its overall strategy.

A recent speech by NED president Carl Gershman, delivered to mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, suggests the problem. There was not a single reference in the speech to the importance of freedom of conscience, religious freedom, or religious pluralism. Even an Enlightenment skeptic such as Thomas Jefferson called religious liberty America's "first freedom"—based on his conviction that the other basic human freedoms would be meaningless without it.

My hope is that the fine work of the NED could be significantly strengthened by rethinking the moral and religious foundations of liberal democracy—the inalienable rights of conscience in matters of faith.

The Unknown War

Andrew Nagorski's review of Louis Rubin Jr.'s book on World War I is quite correct in pointing out the relative imbalance of attention given to World War I and World War II ("Over There," December 8). Within that imbalance there is a further disproportion in the attention given to World War I. Over the past decade, World War I has received a good deal more attention than it had in many years. Most of those works, however, deal with the western front, and are more particularly concerned with the British experience. While Britain, despite ghastly losses, survived relatively intact, for Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary, the war was a catastrophically transformational event. Yet amid the renewed spate of interest in the war, the only attention given to the eastern front has been a smattering of works by a few military historians. For the general public, the eastern front in World War I remains, to use Winston Churchill's phrase, "the unknown war."

Richard L. DiNardo
Stafford, Va.

Manhattanville Blight

Since the "blighted" property of Manhattanville, New York ("Columbia University, Slumlord," by Jonathan V. Last, December 8), is owned exclusively by Columbia University, save only one property, it would be wise for the state of New York to give Nick Sprayregen the spoils of eminent

domain and let him develop the area. He would put it to productive use, beautify it, and keep it on the tax rolls. Hats off to Sprayregen, who seems to be a man of principle, but a victim of established and unconstitutional liberalism.

MIKE BARNETT
Ocean Springs, Miss.

VARIATIONS ON 'CUE

I WAS PRIVILEGED TO READ Terry Eastland's review of *Holy Smoke: The Big Book of North Carolina Barbecue* (December 8) shortly after a lunch engaged in solitary contemplation over a "small" plate at the Barbecue Lodge in Raleigh. I was even lucky enough to have eight cornsticks left over for my evening repast.

However, as a native of Burlington—on the fault line of North Carolina barbecue—I feel obligated to point out an apparent typographical error in your review. That error must have been made by some lowly minion not previously privileged to partake of "the great sacrament of our people." That error attributed tomato enhancement to the East, not to the Piedmont.

I must say that I have changed taste preferences during my long familiarity with the late great pigs of our state. From Burlington, I moved to Charlotte, back to Winston-Salem, thence to Charlotte, and finally to Durham. My career has entailed eating in our state's finest establishments—and a few that were not so fine. Most of my clients are in the East and I confess to now having evolved to a strong preference for vinegar sans tomato. However, unlike some of my acquaintances, I will occasionally seek out a good establishment in Lexington or points west; but only in the interest of ecumenicalism and bodily nourishment.

This transgression may not enhance the consistency of my principles, but it does provide a basis for continuing comparison.

EDWARD THOMAS
Raleigh, N.C.

TERRY EASTLAND RESPONDS: Alas, as Mr. Thomas so delicately points out, I inadvertently wrote that tomato is likely to be in the sauces used in eastern North Carolina and unlikely in the Piedmont. Of course, the reverse is true. I attribute this mistake to barbecue distraction, a condition that momentarily disables someone writing about barbecue who believes (wrongly) that it is about to be served.

AS THE CAPTAIN OF THE (presently inactive) Coors Connoisseurs World Famous Championship Barbecue Cooking & Show Team of Memphis, I am amply qualified to comment on Mr. Eastland's essay.

None of these North Carolina 'cue joints would survive in Memphis.

I've eaten at nearly all the famous, near famous, highly recommended, my-sister-is-the-cashier places in the Eastern part of the state, and in and around Lexington, N.C., even off the beaten path in Ayden, N.C., and can say with profound authority that the only thing these places have in common with Memphis barbecue is that they are all cooking the same meat—pure pork.

With only a few exceptions, the dozen or so best barbecue restaurants on the planet are in or near Memphis. If I had but one meal left it would be at the Rendezvous, America's rib joint in Memphis. They're only open for supper, so if I knew beforehand I'd have a pulled pork sandwich at Neely's or the Cozy Corner for lunch.

HOUSTON E. BALL
Knoxville, Tenn.

AMBITION VS. JUDGMENT

JOSEPH EPSTEIN hits it right on the head ("Obama's Good Students," December 8) when he writes about the folly of assuming that the so-called "best educated" among us will make outstanding public servants. As a graduate of Northwestern University and Harvard Law School, I can attest to the more-ambition-than-judgment phenomenon and its terrible results.

For several years I shared classrooms with young men and women who were resolutely going Somewhere Important. Nurtured with awards and accolades from their earliest years, they knew how to do only one thing: get more. And more. Along the way very few developed independent judgment or a true concern for others. They are exactly the wrong type of people to look to for leadership.

KEVIN O'SHEA
Birmingham, Mich.

SOUTHERN AUTOMAKERS

FRED BARNES'S "The Other American Auto Industry" (December 22) elucidates the many attractive factors that have resulted in Asian and European car manufacturers locating in the rural South. Having lived in Lexington, Ky., and interacted with the Toyota workers and leadership, it was apparent that an additional important aspect has led to success—young workers from rural, mostly farming backgrounds are used to hard work and are facile with machinery. These features greatly facilitate developing a competent and reliable workforce.

ALFRED M. COHEN
Tucson, Ariz.

CORRECTION

THE ARTICLE "Policing Afghanistan" (December 22) mistakenly asserted that the use of hashish and marijuana is legal in Afghanistan and tolerated by the Afghan National Police. In fact, it is illegal and tolerated. Thanks to public affairs officer LTC Christian Kubic for the correction.

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the weekly Standard

A President-Elect's Progress

Until last week, the most important and most famous man of the cloth with whom Barack Obama was associated was the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, his longtime pastor from Chicago's South Side. Today, that distinction belongs to the Reverend Rick Warren, best-selling evangelical author (*The Purpose Driven Life*) and pastor of Saddleback Church, thanks to Obama's inviting him to deliver the invocation at the Inauguration. Talk about growing in office! Obama's growing even before he assumes office.

Is this smart politics on Obama's part? Sure. Does it mean Obama has studied the mistakes of his predecessors, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton? Probably. Obama may have learned from their examples that, even though everyone says the economic crisis has put social issues on a far back burner, mishandling those issues can severely damage one's presidency: Recall gays in the military under Clinton and the IRS ruling on Christian schools under Carter.

If Obama's selection of Warren is smart politics, it's of a piece with four years of smart politics. In his 2004 Democratic Convention speech, with his statement that "We worship an awesome God in the blue states," Obama tried to reassure red-state awesome-God-worshipers about the Democratic party. Indeed, he has generally gone out of his way not to disparage social conservatives. He knows—better than many Republicans—that social conservatism is the strongest political force on the right.

So social conservatives may want to respond with some smart politics of their own. They might try taking Obama at his word. He's for overturning Don't Ask, Don't Tell—but he's also concerned about the military's smooth functioning. Social conservatives could offer to join a bipartisan commission to study how the policy has been working and to consider alternatives—asking for assurances up front that Obama isn't dogmatically committed to the conclusion that there's nothing problematic about open gays serving anywhere and everywhere in the military.

Similarly, Obama has said he wants to reduce the number of abortions. Maybe pro-lifers should offer to work with him on this. He and the Democratic Congress are going to try to funnel gushers of money to Planned Parenthood. How about some money for crisis pregnancy centers? Obama says he's not hostile to faith-based initiatives. Social conservatives might offer to work with him to make sure his ACLU-type appointees don't inadvertently—contrary to Obama's wishes—shut down many of those fine programs.

No conservative should kid himself about what the Obama administration is going to be like. Many of its key policies will be anathema to social conservatives. But social conservatives need to persuade some social moderates, and social undecideds, and social conflicteds, and social uncertains of the reasonableness of conservative concerns, and the sincerity of conservatives' claims that they seek progress in these areas, not merely conflict. There will be plenty of occasions to draw lines with the Obama administration. For now, it might be a good idea to offer a few olive branches to Obama as well.

And the selection of Rick Warren may turn out to have significance beyond short-term political maneuvering. One can see this from the hysteria on the left and among gay activists. They sense that Obama isn't willing to sign on to their campaign to delegitimize, to cast out beyond the pale of polite society, anyone who opposes same-sex marriage—and in particular, anyone (like Warren) who supported Proposition 8 in California, the initiative that overturned the California Supreme Court's legalization of same-sex marriage.

The assault on Prop 8 supporters has been extraordinary in its mean-spiritedness and extremism—but the left knows what it's doing. The purpose has been to intimidate people with an opposing point of view from defending their position. To be against same-sex marriage, even against the judicial imposition of same-sex marriage, is to be a bigot. As one leftwinger said on CNN, Warren is a "hatemonger" comparable to "the grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan." Or, as the Human Rights Campaign's Brad Luna told Byron York of *National Review*, dismissing the

fact that the benediction will be delivered by the Reverend Joseph Lowery, who is more friendly to gay marriage: "I don't think any Jewish Americans would feel much comfort in knowing that an anti-Semite is starting the inauguration with an invocation, but we're going to end it with a rabbi." So the claim is, opposing same-sex marriage is tantamount to being a racist or an anti-Semite.

Making that charge is at the heart of the agenda of the gay lobby. They don't want to debate same-sex marriage. They want to demonize its opponents. Ironically, Lowery himself, who is a (somewhat equivocal) supporter of gay marriage, refuses to equate the gay rights and the civil rights movements: "Homosexuals as a people have never been enslaved because of their sexual orientation," he told the Associated Press. "They may have been scorned; they may have been discriminated against. But they've never been enslaved and declared less than human."

And, one could add, gender and sex are at least potentially morally relevant in a way a decent society will not allow skin color to be. Skin color is skin deep. Gender and sex are more complicated—which is why even in our "enlightened" age, all distinctions based on gender and sexual orientation haven't collapsed.

God knows, Obama isn't going to be out there defending such distinctions, or explaining which are reasonable and which aren't. And it's certain Obama is going to govern as a pro-abortion rights, not-particularly-pro-traditional-family, social liberal. But he at least seems open to a discussion of these issues. And that leaves some political space for social conservatives to continue making their case over the next few years.

Conservatives have to be ready to stand up for themselves—and for each other—if and when the left comes at them from the academy, Hollywood, and the media. Obama's invitation to Rick Warren doesn't mean his administration won't put a heavy thumb on the left side of the scale in our cultural conflicts. It doesn't even mean that organs of the federal government, over which Obama will of course be presiding, won't try to stifle nonconforming opinions. But the Warren invitation means that one can at least appeal to Obama's own precedent against suppressing out-of-favor views.

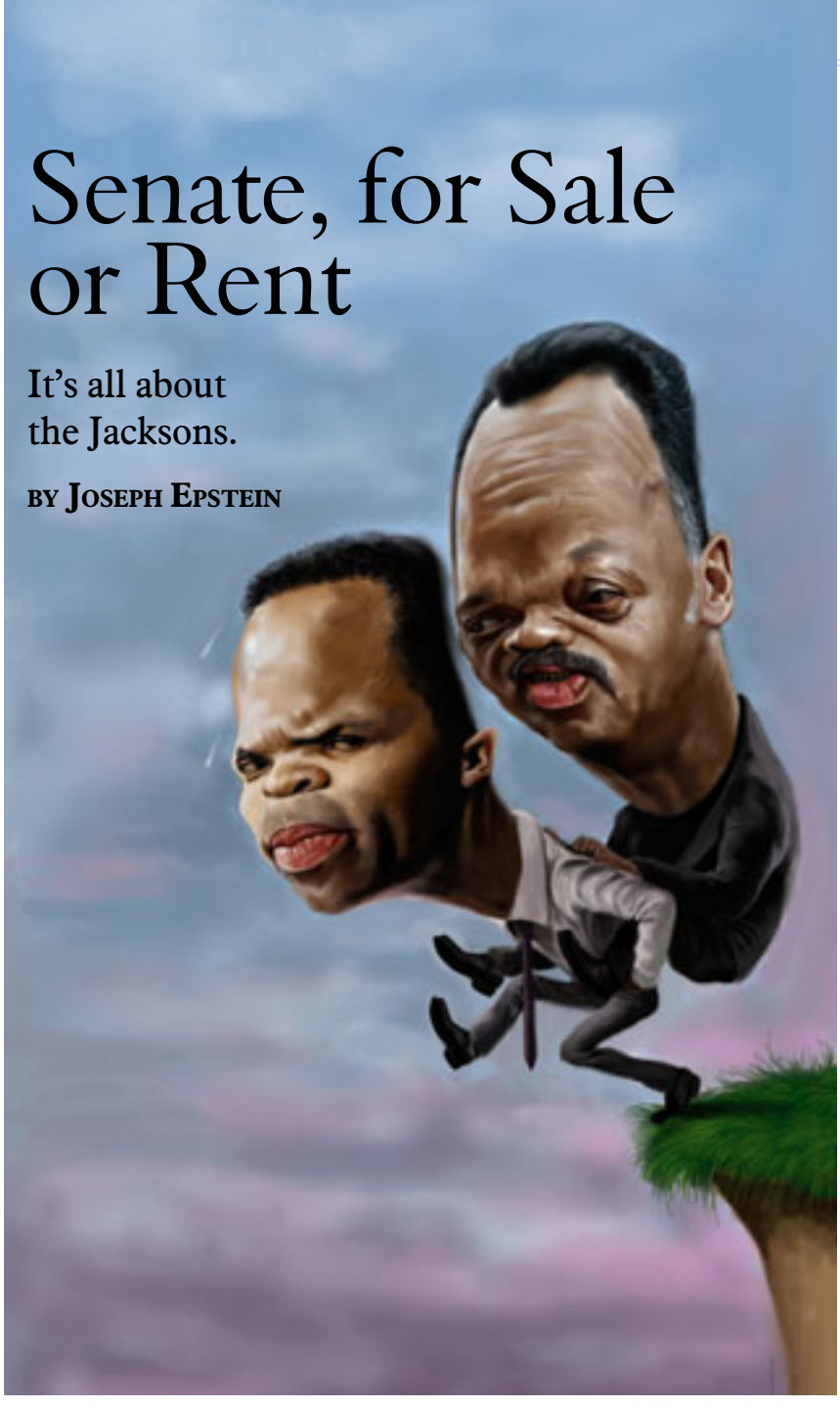
The left senses that the invitation to Rick Warren is a blow to their effort to establish a soft tyranny of "correct" opinion, to enforce society-wide political orthodoxy, on social issues. They're right. This isn't the time for conservatives to snipe at Obama's motives. It's time to welcome him into the American mainstream, to salute the president-elect's progress from Reverends Wright to Warren.

—William Kristol

Senate, for Sale or Rent

It's all about the Jacksons.

BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN



PAUL MOYSE

Early on the evening of November 25, I was met at the reception desk of WTTW, the PBS station in Chicago, by a pretty intern named Jennifer. She led me to what passes for the station's green room, a handsome conference room with a plasma television set playing along the far wall. I was left to await my seven minutes on a show called *Chicago Tonight*, where I was to flog a book I had written on Fred Astaire.

Two other men were in the room, both black. One was on a cell phone, seated at the edge of the table near the door, the other intently watching the *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* on the television set. Then a small, cheerful man, Hispanic, walked in, took off his raincoat, and introduced himself to me.

"Hello," he said, "my name is Luis Gutierrez." I knew of him as a longtime Chicago alderman, who is now in Congress. He had the professional politician's handshake and smile.

The man watching the television set greeted him and then came up to me. "Jesse Jackson Jr.," he said, offering me a handshake and smile of roughly the same well-practiced earnestness.

I would not have guessed he was Jesse Jackson Jr., so little does he resemble his father, the ubiquitous Reverend Jackson. He is compact, neatly pressed and polished, smallish, as opposed to his father's considerable height and bulk, with nothing of the ministerial bearing about him in either speech or manner.

Cheerful and lively, Gutierrez has a natural ebullience. He started talking about how pleased he is to have recently left his house and moved into what one gathers is a luxurious apartment. He talked about no longer having to worry about mowing lawns, shoveling snow, and the rest of the normal householder's quotidian duties. Jesse Jackson Jr. chimed in by saying that he rather looked forward to such chores. They were an outlet for him, gave him a chance to expend pure physical energy. As the two men talked, it occurred to me that neither, as minority congressmen, would have been permitted to hire, as a Second City comedian once put it, "a truckload of our good friends from across the border," and he didn't mean Canadians, to do these jobs.

The congressmen were to go on before I did. Gutierrez was called off to have makeup applied; Jesse Jackson Jr., a real pro at such matters, brought his own makeup and brush, which he carried in a smart leather kit.

Their segment was with a political reporter who asked them their views on the recent bailout moneys. These are Chicago politicians, simple if far from pure, and neither, outside the realm of getting himself elected and reelected, qualifies as a deep thinker. They handled the questions well enough, Jackson—his platitudes better enunciated and assembled— sounding rather more knowledgeable than Gutierrez: No doubt the economy needs all the stimulus it can get, but we want serious oversight here, we can't just pass out billions of dollars without taking genuine responsibility for the tax-

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payers' money, yaketa, yaketa, yaketa.

Toward the close, the interviewer asked each man if he were interested in taking up President-elect Obama's vacant seat in the Senate. "I am," Jackson averred, "very interested." Gutierrez allowed that he too was interested and had only a few days before been called in by Governor Rod Blagojevich to talk about the prospect of his doing so.

Their time on camera over, both men returned to the conference room. Slipping into their coats, Jackson, talking to Gutierrez now, said (best as I remember it): "You know, I'm a bit hurt that Blagojevich didn't call me in to talk about taking over the Senate seat. I wonder why he didn't?" They then all departed, including the man who had been on the cell phone, and I was left alone to watch an interview, held outside the studio, with William Ayers, before I, too, went on camera, to take my seven-minute turn.

Then, on a Tuesday morning, December 9, as they said at the end of the Pahlavi regime in Iran, the shah hit the fan. U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald revealed that Rod Blagojevich, the governor of Illinois, was auctioning off a gift that was his to bestow but not actually to sell: a two-year occupancy of a seat in that best of all American clubs, the United States Senate. A seat in the Senate is obviously a valuable thing, especially to those who have drunk the potion of political power, so why not attempt, the governor figured, to find out precisely how valuable it really is by putting it up on the open market? The entire country, while secretly pretending to be aghast by such corruption, was not so secretly charmed by the simple rawness of the governor's venture, quite new in politics, of cutting out the middleman and himself directly selling political offices.

The significance of the Blagojevich story isn't really that of a corrupt Illinois governor. There has been no paucity of these in the Land of Lincoln. The previous governor, a Republican in his mid-70s named George Ryan, is currently doing time for corruption. Corruption in Illinois may be the only true bipartisan politics practiced in the nation. As for Blagojevich, who is now in his second term of office, he is a man of monumental unsubtlety. When asked on the *David Letterman Show* if he thought Blagojevich ignorant or just nuts, John McCain said that he thought him "a rare blend of both." Everything about Blagojevich seems fraudulent, including his ambitiously coiffed hair, which turns out to be real.

No, the significant story buried within an old and obvious corruption story is what many people suspect will be the end of yet another American political family, the Jacksons of Chicago, Illinois. From what has thus far been released of Patrick Fitzgerald's report about Blagojevich's prospective buyers, we know that Jesse Jackson Jr. was mentioned on the telephone tapes as Candidate 5, and that serious money might appear on his behalf to pay for the president-elect's vacant Senate seat. Later it came out that an Indian-American businessman named Raghuveer Nayak, who has sought influence for the pharmaceutical and surgical centers he owns and runs, had offered to raise a million dollars to obtain the Senate seat for Jackson. According to the *New York Times*, Nayak had earlier contributed more than $200,000 to Blagojevich's various campaigns and at least $22,000 to Jackson's.

Whether Nayak offered to buy the Senate seat with Jackson's approval or not is unknown. Jackson claims to have no knowledge of it. Nayak may well have thought how pleasing to present the gift of a Senate seat, and how delightful, not at all by the way, to own a United States senator. In America, as we know, everything is possible.

Either way, if Jackson knew or didn't know, his career has been badly tainted. "He'll never serve in the United States Senate," an Illinois legislator said. On CNN, Jackson, himself has said that he is fighting for his life, by which of course he means his political career, though the two, life and career, in so thoroughly politicized a man, may well be coterminus.

Jesse Jackson Jr. has long had a serious problem, whose name is Jesse Jackson Sr. On the one hand, he owes his career to his father; on the other hand, his father is a bit—and often more than a bit—of an embarrassment. When his father, unaware that he was talking into a live microphone, mentioned his desire to castrate Barack Obama for lecturing blacks on the responsibilities of fatherhood, the son had to repudiate the father. In personal style, in manner, Jesse Jackson Jr. has quietly attempted to establish himself as apart from (if not be the actual anti-) Jesse Jackson Sr.

One of the richest fruits of Barack Obama's presidential victory for many is that it seems to spell the demise of Jesse Jackson Sr. as a major player in American politic life. With the rise of Obama, the Reverend Jackson—always at the factory gates, hovering over the graves of celebrities, inviting himself to speak wherever television cameras are humming—looks drearily dated, practicing a politics that seems antiquated and unnecessary, a dead letter walking. Jackson Sr. survived all the piquant scandals (his description of New York as "hymietown," his fathering a child with a woman not his wife, all the accusations of loose bookkeeping at Operation PUSH, the beer distributorships that seem to have fallen into the lap of his family), but he now seems to have been done in by history. His politics of victimhood, of moral blackmail, of dubious martyrdom have all, one hopes, been extinguished by the new president-elect, who, insofar as possible, admirably eschewed almost all mention of race through his long campaign.

The historical scenario called for the Reverend Jackson to shuffle off to Buffalo and for Representative Jackson to come on stage, all wonky earnest and nonministerial, the very model of the new African-American politician, 21st-century edition, bound for who knew what great things. But one cannot finally escape one's origins, and for a politician, when these origins happen to be the city of Chicago, state of Illinois, they are, as Jesse Jackson Jr. is discovering to his chagrin, even more difficult to escape. He may well have to serve out the rest of his political life languishing in the House of Representatives, a bleak fate this for an immensely ambitious young politician. ♦

Nobody Knows the Trouble He'll See

A few clouds on Obama's horizon.

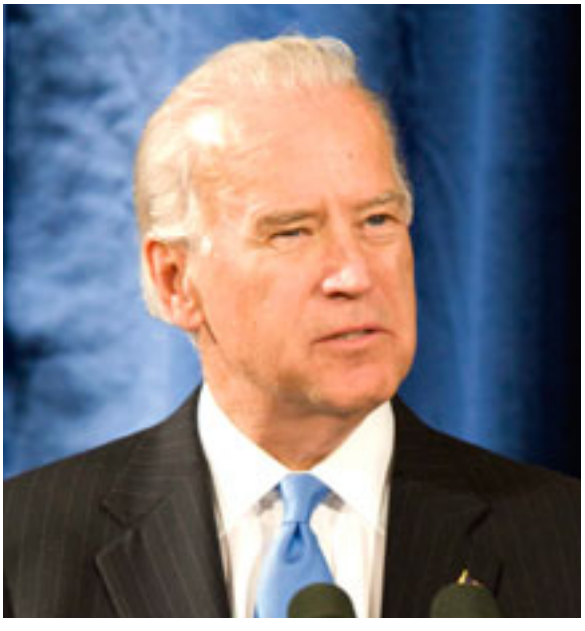
BY FRED BARNES

Except for the distraction (or worse) caused by the Blagojevich scandal, President-elect Barack Obama has had a wonderful transition. His cabinet picks have been widely praised. His press conferences have been short, orderly, and mostly sweet. And the excitement over his inauguration as America's 44th president has been growing palpably. But there is trouble ahead.

Some of the trouble is self-inflicted, the product of an unrealistic campaign promise or Obama's unique idea for the architecture of his administration. Part comes from the political situation he's stepping into. And part is the result of Obama's political roots. The trouble begins the day he steps into the Oval Office.

Let's start with the foolish campaign boast. Obama said his transition and his presidency would be "transparent." Before and during the Democratic primaries, the phrase he used was "open and transparent." His campaign website said the Obama presidency would create "a new level of transparency."

Obama should have known better. Transparency or anything close to it in the White House won't happen. It's a standard that no president has ever met or tried to. That's because transparency is neither possible nor desirable. Deliberations and decision-making require privacy, even stonewalling at times. But that's not the problem. The press is. Reporters are bound to remind Obama of his promise, as one did last week. "You ran on a platform of transparency," the reporter said. "How difficult is all this having to wait to release your inquiry [on staff contacts with Blagojevich] when the American people expect transparency?" This was the respectful version of the questions about transparency that Obama will get as president.



Butt out: Democratic senators tell Joe Biden to keep away.

The media are likely to be relentless on this point. Highlighting a president's failure to live up to a promise is a hardy perennial of Washington journalism. But reporters also have a vested interest in Obama's transparency promise. A White House with little or nothing hidden is every reporter's dream. So the media won't let this promise fade. Obama's boast will come back to haunt him.

This is also true of his insistence on putting a team of "czars" in the White House, people who deal with the same issues as cabinet members. Obama has named an energy secretary and an Environmental Protection Agency chief, along with a czar on his presidential staff to deal with energy and environmental issues. He'll have a housing secretary *and* an urban affairs czar at the White House.

The problem here is obvious. Secretaries and czars will fight for the president's attention. When they disagree, the czars will have the advantage of working nearer to the president. Cabinet members will fume. There are already two czar-like advisers at the White House: the national security adviser and the national economic adviser. In past presidencies, their influence grew at the expense of the secretaries of state, defense, and treasury. Conflict ensued. More czars mean more conflict, plus story after story in the press about infighting.

As president, Obama will step into an ideal political situation, at least on the surface. He'll be dealing with a Congress with solid Democratic majorities in the Senate and House. What more could a Democratic president ask for? What's the problem?

Obama and Democrats agree on the big issues, but on power-sharing, process, and priorities they part ways. Senate majority leader Harry Reid has declared that once Joe Biden becomes vice president, he won't be invited to the weekly meetings of the Democratic caucus. This had to be a bitter pill for Biden. He was a senator himself for 36 years and, as veep, actually has a constitutional role in the Senate. But, as a White House man, the senators don't want him butting in. They prefer to decide things on their own.

If Reid's message wasn't clear to the Obama team, House speaker Nancy Pelosi removed any doubt.

NEWSCOM

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She told Rahm Emanuel, her former House colleague and now Obama's choice to be White House chief of staff, to stay out of internal House Democratic matters. According to John Bresnahan of *Politico*, she was clear about what she expects from Obama and his aides, a wish list including "no surprises, and no backdoor efforts to go around her and other Democratic leaders by cutting deals with moderate New Democrats or conservative Blue Dogs."

The subtext is that Reid and Pelosi fear Obama may be more willing to compromise on liberal issues than they are. And they don't want a repeat of President Clinton's so-called "triangulation" with Republicans, despite Obama's promise to pursue bipartisanship. Bottom line: The relationship between Obama and congressional Democrats will be tense. It is already.

There's another aspect of that relationship that's potentially troublesome. More than Obama, congressional Democrats are sensitive to the wants of liberal special interest groups. They're impatient to pass the entire liberal agenda, sooner rather than later. They're eager to fill the $850 billion economic "stimulus" package that Obama is expected to sign soon after being inaugurated with goodies for these groups, notably organized labor and environmentalists.

The problem is Obama didn't run on the liberal agenda and the public didn't vote for it. Imposing that agenda on the country, as Reid and Pelosi would like to do, tax increases and all, might backfire politically. But the combined force of congressional Democrats and liberal special interests could be too great for Obama to resist.

And then there's Chicago, Obama's adopted hometown. He rose through the Democratic machine in Chicago without being tainted by it. But the Blagojevich scandal and the fraud conviction of Democratic fundraiser and developer Tony Rezko suggest we haven't heard the final word on Obama and Chicago. Could his ties to the Chicago machine come back to haunt Obama? If they do, that will be the biggest trouble of all. ♦

Guess Who Doesn't Like the Press

And the feeling may be mutual.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

On April 21, 2008, the day before Pennsylvania's Democratic primary, Barack Obama sat at the counter of the Glider Diner in Scranton. Senator Bob Casey Jr., who had endorsed Obama and was traveling with him throughout the state, occupied the next stool. It had all the makings of a great photo-op—home state senator, local eatery, lots of cameras. There was just one problem: those pesky reporters.

As Obama cut into his butter-soaked waffle—fork in his left hand, knife in his right—one newshound wanted the candidate's reaction to the news of the day. Former President Jimmy Carter had traveled to the Middle East to meet with leaders from Hamas. In an exchange during one of the primary debates, Obama had promised that his administration would seek to engage America's enemies—a position that Hillary Clinton had called "naïve" and "irresponsible."

"Senator, did you hear about Jimmy Carter's trip?"

"Why is it that I can't just eat my waffle?" Obama snapped with his mouth full. One reporter at the diner wrote that the candidate glared "sternly" at the questioner—the wrong kind of audacity, apparently.

"Just asking," said the reporter.

Obama, perhaps realizing how his reaction might look, offered a little smile. But he still refused to answer.

"Just let me eat my waffle."

Obama finished his breakfast, lost the Pennsylvania primary, won the Democratic nomination, and after riding a wave of media adulation unseen in recent times, is now less than a month from becoming our 44th president. And he still doesn't like the press.

At a press conference in Chicago on Wednesday to introduce Obama's longtime friend Arne Duncan as the nominee to be secretary of education, John McCormick, a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, asked Obama a two-part question about the fallout from the arrest of Illinois governor Rod Blagojevich. "First of all, . . . do you favor or oppose a special election to fill your vacancy?" McCormick asked. "And secondly, you told us at your first press conference after the election that you were going to take a very hands-off approach to filling that spot. Over the weekend, the *Tribune* reported that Rahm Emanuel, your incoming chief of staff, had presented a list of potential names . . ."

Obama had heard enough. "John, let me just cut you off, because I don't want you to waste your question. As I indicated yesterday, we've done a full review of this. The—the facts are going to be released next week. It would be inappropriate for me to comment, because the—the—for example, the—the story that you just talked about in your own paper, I haven't confirmed that it was accurate, and I don't want to get into the details at this point. So do you have another question?"

McCormick tried once again to ask Obama about his "hands-off" approach to filling the seat, and Obama once again refused to discuss it. So McCormick tried to get an answer on the special election. It didn't work. "You know," said Obama, "I've said that I don't think the gover-

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nor can serve effectively in his office. I'm going to let the state legislature make a determination in terms of how they want to proceed."

Having tried gamely to get the president-elect to answer one of his questions, McCormick gave up. "Do you or Duncan have a better jump shot?" he wondered.

"Duncan, much better. That one's an easy one."

It was easily the most direct response Obama gave in any of his five press conferences last week, and it was probably the most direct response he has given since winning the presidential election on November 4.

Barack Obama has promised to run the most transparent White House in history. As he said throughout the campaign, this election was about us, not him. So it makes some sense that he would let us see what we will be doing. The president-elect has held a record number of press conferences, and quite naturally he has earned lavish public praise for the frequency of his appearances.

But take the time to look at what he has actually said in these engagements and you will be less impressed.

At his first press conference, three days after the election, he backed some kind of stimulus package and artfully dodged several tough questions. CNN's Candy Crowley, for instance, noted that Obama had begun receiving intelligence briefings and asked whether he thought the intelligence agencies were doing a good job sharing information. "I have received intelligence briefings. And I will make just a general statement. Our intelligence process can always improve. I think it has gotten better. And, you know, beyond that, I don't think I should comment on the nature of the intelligence briefings." Crowley also asked whether he'd learned anything in his briefings that gave him second thoughts about any of the policies he advocated during the campaign. "I'm going to skip that." (Obama did talk at some length about buying a dog for his daughters.)

Obama's second press conference focused on the economy. The president-elect had come out in favor of some kind of stimulus package—something he hoped would pass "either before or after inauguration." Reporters, not unreasonably, wanted a little better idea of what he actually wanted. So the first question was: "What are the details on your proposed stimulus package: how much it's going to cost, where the money's going to come from, and when do you want to see it enacted?"

Obama said he wanted it quickly but was short on specifics. "I want to see it enacted right away. It is going to be of a size and scope that is necessary to get this economy back on track. I don't want to get into numbers right now."

Obama seems to get annoyed at perfectly reasonable questions that have nothing at all to do with his one-president-at-a-time position. Indeed, his campaign emulated the "Bush model" of tight information control.

Another reporter wanted to know whether he intended to repeal the Bush tax cuts or simply let them expire at the end of 2010. Obama offered some of the platitudes leftover from his campaign and then deferred his answer. "Whether that's done through repeal or whether that's done because the Bush tax cuts are not renewed is something that my economic team will be providing me a recommendation on."

A third reporter noted that Senator Schumer had suggested a $700 billion stimulus package and pointed out that a noted investor thought $1 trillion would be better. She asked Obama for a range. "I'm not going to—I'm not going to discuss numbers right now, Kim, because I think it's important for my economic team to come back with a recommendation."

And on it went. At press conference after press conference, Obama introduced his new appointees and took a few questions. But only rarely did he give a direct and substantive answer.

To a certain extent, Obama's reluctance to answer is understandable. After all, as he put it in the opening statement of his initial press conference as president-elect: "The United States has only one government and one president at a time." He is right, of course, and it's smart—or at least defensible—for him to pass on questions that might make the current president's job more difficult.

But Obama seems to get annoyed at perfectly reasonable questions that have nothing at all to do with his one-president-at-a-time position. When the president-elect introduced Hillary Clinton as his choice to become secretary of state, Peter Baker from the *New York Times* asked him an obvious question. Noting that Obama had mocked Clinton's foreign policy experience during primary season, Baker wondered why he had settled on her to lead his administration's foreign policy team.

Baker: Going back to the campaign, you were asked and talked about the qualifications of the—your now—your nominee for secretary of state, and you belittled her travels around the world, equating it to having teas with foreign leaders; and your new White House counsel said that her résumé was grossly exaggerated when it came to foreign policy. I'm wondering whether you could talk about the evolution of your views of her credentials since the spring.

Obama: Look, I'm in—I think this is fun for the press, to try to stir up whatever quotes were generated during the course of the campaign.

Baker: Your quotes, sir.

Obama: No, I understand. And I'm—and you're having fun. (Laughs.)

Baker: I'm asking a question.

Obama: And there's nothing wrong with that. I'm not—I'm not faulting it.

The president-elect suggested that those things he said during the campaign might not be all that reliable. "I think if you look at the statements that Hillary Clinton and I have made outside of the—the heat of a campaign, we share a view that America has to be safe and secure and in order to do that we have to combine military power with strengthened diplomacy."

He finished with a testy statement of the obvious. "I think she is going to be an outstanding secretary of state. And if I didn't believe that, I wouldn't have offered her the job. And if she didn't believe that I was equipped to lead this nation at such a difficult time, she would not have accepted. Okay?"

In a *New York Times Magazine* profile of Robert Gibbs, the incoming White House press secretary, Mark Leibovich reveals that the Obama campaign emulated the "Bush model" of tight information control. Campaign manager David Plouffe acknowledged that they "talked a lot about the Bush model" inside the campaign and, like the Bush White House, sought to limit the spread of information internally so as to avoid the leaking that badly damaged the campaigns of Obama's rivals.

There are other similarities. During the 2004 election, Dick Cheney famously kicked the *New York Times* off his campaign plane. Obama apparently did the same to three newspapers this fall—the *Washington Times*, the *New York Post*, and the *Dallas Morning News*—all of which had endorsed John McCain. At the time, the Obama campaign cited space concerns. But when Leibovich asked Gibbs whether reporters were kicked off the plane for considerations other than space, Obama's spokesman first said "no" but later amended his response. "On occasion, yes," Gibbs said, adding that such instances were infrequent. "I mean, were there occasions? Sure."

How does that square with Obama's promise to move beyond politics and to run the most transparent and open White House in history?

Just let him eat his waffle. ♦

Euthanasia Comes to Montana

Courtesy of judicial activism.

BY WESLEY J. SMITH

On December 5, Montana District judge Dorothy McCarter ruled in *Baxter* v. *Montana* that the state law banning assisted suicide violates not only the right to privacy guaranteed in the Montana constitution but also the constitutional clause that reads, "The dignity of the human being is inviolable." McCarter found here a "fundamental right" for the terminally ill to "die with dignity"—meaning in the case at hand, to commit suicide by drug overdose.

McCarter also ruled that doctors have a concomitant right to be free from "liability under the State's homicide statutes" if they help a patient commit death with dignity: "If the patient were to have no assistance from his doctor," she explained, "he may be forced to kill himself sooner . . . in a manner that violates his dignity and peace of mind, such as by gunshot or by otherwise unpleasant method, causing undue suffering to the patient and his family." That suicide is not a necessity apparently never entered the judge's mind.

Still, McCarter wasn't totally insensitive to the charge that she—like too many judges—would have courts settle all the controversial social questions rather than the people through the democratic process. She just saw no reason to wait for the political branches of government to recognize that the time had come to legalize assisted suicide. "Here, the Court is simply the first in line to deal with the issue," she wrote, "followed by the legislature to implement the right. Thus, both the courts and the legislature are involved."

Montana's attorney general has announced that the state will appeal *Baxter*, and McCarter's ruling may or may not be affirmed in the state supreme court. The courts of Florida, Alaska, and California have rejected a right to assisted suicide as part of their states' respective constitutional rights to privacy—decisions McCarter acknowledged but then ignored. Already, though, the implications of her decision bear exploring because they illustrate the radical scope of the putative "right to die" and illuminate the larger cultural transformations that are being furthered by radical judicial rulings.

The Montana case involves a terminally ill man (who died before the opinion was issued) seeking the right to assisted suicide. His position is supported by physicians who want to write lethal prescriptions for their dying patients. The broad wording of the *Baxter* opinion, however, including McCarter's elevation of assisted suicide to the level of a "fundamental right," would seem to preclude any meaningful limitations on who can receive death with dignity and who can help end the lives of the suicidal.

A premise of McCarter's ruling is that people have the right to decide for themselves what constitutes "dignity" according to their personal beliefs. To reach this conclusion, the judge cited an overbroad Montana Supreme Court abortion ruling, *Armstrong* v.

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Montana, from 1999. She also quoted a law review article and made reference to a controversial section of a major abortion decision of the United States Supreme Court.

Here is the passage of *Armstrong* that McCarter quoted:

> Respect for the dignity of each individual—a fundamental right protected by . . . the Montana Constitution—demands that people have for themselves the moral right and moral responsibility to confront the most fundamental questions . . . of life in general, answering to their own consciences and convictions.

And here is the quotation from a *Montana Law Review* article published in 2000:

> The meaning of the concept of individual dignity . . . may be directly assailed by treatment which degrades, demeans, debases, disgraces, or dishonors persons, or it may be more indirectly undermined by treatment which either interferes with self-directed and responsible lives or which trivializes the choices persons make for their own lives.

Finally and not surprisingly, she cited U.S. Supreme Court justice Anthony Kennedy's infamous "mystery of life" passage from the 1992 abortion case *Planned Parenthood* v. *Casey* (even though the Supreme Court unanimously refused in 1997 to apply the statement to assisted suicide—or create a federal right to assisted suicide):

> The most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, choices central to personal dignity and autonomy are central to liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.

In essence, Judge McCarter ruled that the individual's right to act upon such metaphysical beliefs trumps all but the most compelling state interests. But if that is so, how can assisted suicide possibly be limited to the terminally ill? Many people suffer more profoundly—and for longer—than people who are dying. Thus, once the right to end suffering through "death with dignity" is deemed "fundamental," how can people with debilitating chronic illnesses, the elderly who are profoundly tired of living, those in despair after becoming paralyzed, or indeed anyone in other than transitory existential agony be denied the same constitutional right as the terminally ill to end it all? Already in the Netherlands, people in these circumstances receive euthanasia and assisted suicide. "Suicide tourism" is a growth industry in Switzerland, with distressed people flying in from around the world to die at the hands of lay assisted-suicide groups. Indeed, the Swiss supreme court recently ruled that people with mental illnesses have a constitutional right to assisted suicide—an opinion cheered last year in an article published in the prestigious American bioethics journal *Hastings Center Report*.

And why should the participation of doctors be limited to writing lethal prescriptions? Once they are relieved of liability under Montana's homicide statutes, shouldn't doctors be permitted to provide lethal injections—particularly since studies from the Netherlands demonstrate that active euthanasia is less likely than assisted suicide to cause disturbing side effects, such as nausea and extended coma? Moreover, why require doctors at all? It's my life, so why shouldn't I choose to be killed by whomever I want?

Kathryn Tucker, legal director for the assisted-suicide advocacy organization Compassion & Choices and the lawyer who filed all the assisted suicide cases mentioned here, has already opined that some of the protective guidelines found in Oregon may be too strict for Montana's constitutional right to assisted suicide. She told Oregon Public Broadcasting: "Let's take the example of the waiting period. In Oregon there's a minimum 15-day waiting period. That provision very possibly would not survive constitutional scrutiny [in Montana] because it would be unduly burdensome."

It is possible that the *Baxter* decision is just the latest sign that we are heading toward a society ruled by radical libertarianism, with our only uniting value being "choice." But I think not. Judicial activism is really about imposing upon the rest of us the mores and social values favored by liberal intellectual elites—whose interests the courts tend to serve and whose views they reflect. And while personal autonomy and an end to moralizing are certainly a large part of this agenda, they aren't the crux of it.

Just as the personal behaviors favored by the liberal intelligentsia are being transformed by courts into constitutionally protected activities, the personal behaviors *disfavored* by these same powerful forces are likely to be held controllable by the state. Thus, courts probably won't protect the conscience rights of medical professionals who do not wish to be complicit in abortion or assisted suicide—even though to be consistent, these choices should be entitled to the same constitutional protection under the "mystery of life" analysis as any other.

The same paradigm is likely to prevail in fields beyond bioethics. Courts will probably bless the imposition of norms favored by liberal elites in total disregard of "choice" by dissenters. For example, the time is probably coming when we will not be allowed to drive a car that gets eight miles per gallon, or burn a fire in the fireplace, or develop natural resources on our land if doing so is deemed to harm the "rights" of nature (already protected by the constitution of Ecuador).

Cases such as *Baxter*, *Armstrong*, and *Casey*—among many others—are really part of a slow motion *coup de culture*, a steady drive to topple the social order rooted in Judeo-Christian/humanistic moral philosophy and replace it with a dramatically different value system founded in utilitarianism, hedonism, and radical environmentalism. Once that process is complete, the courts will quickly make it clear that "choice" has limits. ♦

The City Where the Sirens Never Stop

Detroit is dying.
But, it is not yet dead.

RANDALL WILCOX

By Matt Labash

This is the place where bad times get sent to make them belong to somebody else, thus, it seems easy to agree about Detroit because the city embodies everything the rest of the country wants to get over.

—Jerry Herron, *AfterCulture: Detroit and the Humiliation of History* (1993)

Detroit

My plane hadn't even finished descending through the snow-drizzly sheets of December gray, when already, I heard someone crack on it. "Ladies and Gentlemen," a Northwest flight attendant announced, "Welcome to lovely Detroit, the one and only home of the Detroit auto worker of America. Happiness is a way of travel, not a destination."

The lawyer sitting next to me sniggered. He was only buzzing in for a day or so, but knowing I was a reporter, come to write a story on the city, he asked, "How long are you in for?"

"About a week," I responded.

"Good luck with that," he said, piteously shaking his head. "It sucks."

Before I'd left, I'd asked an acquaintance if he was from Detroit. "Indeed I am," he said, "Give me all your f—ing money." Another colleague, always mindful of my desire for maximum material, suggested, "You should go when it's warm, you'd have a better chance of getting hurt."

Somewhere along the way, Detroit became our national ashtray, a safe place for everyone to stub out the

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The half-abandoned Detroit neighborhood of Highland Park was home to Chrysler's headquarters from 1925 to 1992 when the car company moved to Auburn Hills, about 50 miles north.

butt of their jokes. This was never more evident than at the recent congressional hearings, featuring the heads of the Big Three automakers, now more often called the Detroit Three, as that sounds more synonymous with failure. Yes, they have been feckless and tone-deaf in the past, and now look like stalkers trying to make people love them with desperation moves such as Ford breaking the "Taurus" name out of mothballs, or Chrysler steering a herd of cattle through downtown Detroit for an auto show (some of the longhorns started humping each other in front of reporters, giving new meaning to the "Dodge Ram," which they were intended to advertise).

But with millions of jobs on the line, including their own, the Detroit Three honchos went to Washington to endure the kabuki theater, first in their private jets, then in their sad little hybrids. All to get their slats kicked in by Congress (and who has been more profligate than they) in order to secure a bridge loan to withstand an economy wrecked by others who'd secured no-strings bailouts before them. The absurdist spectacle was best summed up by car aficionado Jay Leno: "People who are trillions of dollars in debt, yelling at people who are billions of dollars in debt."

It happens, though, when you're from Detroit. In the popular imagination, the Motor City has gone from being the Arsenal of Democracy, so named for their converting auto factories to make the weapons which helped us win World War II, and the incubator of the middle class (now leading the nation in foreclosure rates, Detroit once had the highest rate of home ownership in the country), to being Dysfunction Junction. To Detroit's credit, they've earned it.

Before arriving, I conducted an exhaustive survey, reading everything I could about Detroit, including and especially the journalistic labor of the diligent if shell-shocked scribes of the *Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free Press*. How bad is Detroit? Let's review:

Its recently resigned mayor, Kwame Kilpatrick, he of the Kangol hats and five-button suits, now wears jailhouse orange as he's currently serving a four-month sentence as part of a plea agreement for perjuring himself regarding an extramarital affair with his chief of staff, which yielded soupy love-daddy text messages that would make Barry White yak in his grave. Those in Detroit who are neither recipients of sweetheart contracts nor Kilpatrick family members on the city payroll at inflated salaries think he got off easy. Because what led to the perjury was concealing an $8.4 million payout from city coffers to settle a whistleblower suit brought by cops who'd been fired for investigating, among other things, the murder of a stripper named Strawberry who, prior to her death, was allegedly beat up by Kilpatrick's wife when she caught her entertaining her husband.

One of an estimated 60,000 abandoned dwellings in Detroit

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In a city often known as the nation's murder capital, with over 10,000 unsolved murders dating back to 1960, the police are in shambles through cutbacks and corruption trials. (They have a profitable sideline, though, as one of the nation's largest gun dealers, having sold 14 tons of used weapons out-of-state.) Their response times are legendarily slow. Their crime lab is so inept that it has been closed. One Detroit man found police so unresponsive when trying to turn himself in for murder that he hopped a bus to Toledo and confessed there instead.

Detroit schools haven't ordered new textbooks in 19 years. Students have reported having to bring their own toilet paper. Teachers have reported bringing hammers to class for protection. Declining enrollment has forced 67 school closures since 2005 (more than a quarter of the city's schools). The graduation rate is 24.9 percent, the lowest of any large school district in the country. Not for nothing did one frustrated activist start pelting school board members with grapes during a meeting. She probably should've reached for something heavier.

An internal audit, which was 14 months late, estimates next year's city deficit to be as high as $200 million (helped along by $335,000 embezzled from the Department of Health and Wellness Promotion). With a dwindling tax base—even the city's three once-profitable casinos are seeing a downturn in revenues (the Greektown Casino is in bankruptcy)—the city has kicked around every money-

making scheme from selling off ownership rights to the tunnel it shares with neighboring Windsor, Canada, to a fast food tax. It's perhaps unsurprising that Detroit now has the most speed traps in the nation.

It also has one of the highest property tax rates in Michigan, yet has over 60,000 vacant dwellings (a guesstimate—nobody keeps official count), meaning real estate values are in the toilet. Over the summer, the *Detroit News* sent a headline around the world, about a Detroit house that was for sale for $1. But it's not even that uncommon. As of this writing, there are at least five $1 homes for sale in Detroit.

The city council has been such a joke that one former member demanded 17 pounds of sausages as part of her $150,000 bribe. Its prognosis for respectability hasn't grown stronger with Monica Conyers, wife of congressman John Conyers, taking the helm. She has managed to get in a barroom brawl, threatened to shoot a mayoral staffer as well as have him beaten up, and twice called a burly and bald fellow council member "Shrek" during a public hearing. But with all the problems facing the city, the council still found time to pass a nonbinding resolution supporting the impeachment of George W. Bush.

How bad is Detroit? It once gave the keys to the city to Saddam Hussein.

Over the last several years, it has ranked as the most murderous city, the poorest city, the most segregated city, as the city with the highest auto-insurance rates, with the bleakest outlook for workers in their 20s and 30s, and as the place with the most heart attacks, slowest income growth, and fewest sunny days. It is a city without a single national grocery store chain. It has been deemed the most stressful metropolitan area in America. Likewise, it has ranked last in numerous studies: in new employment growth, in environmental indicators, in the rate of immunization of 2-year-olds, and, among big cities, in the number of high school or college graduates.

Men's Fitness magazine christened Detroit America's fattest city, while *Men's Health* called it America's sexual disease capital. Should the editors of these two metrosexual magazines be concerned for their safety after slagging the citizens of a city which has won the "most dangerous" title for five of the last ten years? Probably not: 47 percent of Detroit adults are functionally illiterate.

On the upside, Detroit ranks as the nation's foremost consumer of Slurpees and of baked beans on Labor Day. And as if all of this isn't humiliating enough, the Detroit Lions are 0-14.

The best description of the feel of the place came to me from Jason Vines: "We're all Kwame-fatigued, the economy is crap, and the Lions suck. We're tired." A former executive with both Ford and Chrysler, Vines spun me around the decimated, half-abandoned neighborhood of Highland Park, which Chrysler left in the early '90s for the greener pastures of Auburn Hills. It's hard to fault them, he notes, since bullets used to occasionally whiz into the Chrysler buildings from the surrounding neighborhood.

Like many Detroiters (he lives in a posh suburb, where houses on his block have remained unsold for six years), he's bracing for one or all of the Big Three going down. He predicts millions will be thrown out of work, right down to the diner owner in Utah who serves lunch to the people who produce the screws which are bought by the widget manufacturers who produce a component that goes into a seat of a Ford automobile. The diner owner thought he wasn't in the auto business. "But he was," says Vines. "He just didn't know it."

Precisely what caused all this mess is perhaps best left to historians. Locals' ideas for how it happened could keep one pinned to a barstool for weeks: auto companies failing or pushing out to the suburbs and beyond, white flight caused by the '67 riots and busing orders, the 20-year reign of Mayor Coleman Young who scared additional middle-class whites off with statements such as "The only way to handle discrimination is to reverse it," freeways destroying mass transit infrastructure, ineptitude, corruption, Japanese cars—take your pick.

Detroit has ranked as the most murderous city, the poorest city, the most segregated city, and as the place with the most heart attacks, slowest income growth, and fewest sunny days.

What's clear, though, is that Detroit has failed, that it's broken and cracked. It is dying. But it's not yet dead. Although it has lost over half its population since 1950, 900,000 people still live there. I went to Detroit to experience a cross-section of those who live between its cracks, who either choose or are stuck with living among the ruins.

For many, Detroit is identified with cars or soul music, with the novels of Elmore Leonard or the architecture of Albert Kahn. If they really hate Detroit, they might recall that its suburbs coughed up Madonna. But for me, Detroit has become synonymous with one man: Charlie LeDuff.

Currently a metro reporter at the *Detroit News*, Charlie crossed my path in 2003 when he was a hotshot national correspondent for the *New York Times*. Stuck on a press bus trailing Arnold Schwarzenegger in the last days before the recall election, I spied a madman a few rows ahead banging on the window as a jubilant crowd in Bakersfield mistook ours for the candidate's bus. Pounding away, Charlie fed back their mistaken adulation. "I'M THE MEDIA! YOU LOVE THE MEDIA!" he bellowed.

Anti-Kwame Kilpatrick graffiti at the abandoned Michigan Central Station

I errantly asked someone what motorcycle magazine he worked for, thinking him an out-of-work biker/pirate since he looked like the bastard spawn of Sonny Barger and Jean Lafitte—I described him at the time as "a leathered scribe with bandito facial hair." Part Cajun, part Native-American (he says his Indian name is "White Boy"), Charlie was as much performer as reporter, walking around in sleeveless *New York Post* baseball jerseys, once breaking a wine glass on his head to keep campaign staffers offbalance. "It's a trick," he told me quietly, "the glass is thin up at the top."

But Charlie was also writing some of the best newspaper feature stories in the country. His beat involved covering what he calls "the hole," forgotten people in forgotten places. He smuggled himself over the Mexican border with coyote-guided migrants and manned the lobster shift with a Burger King drive-thru attendant trying to support her two kids on $252 a week (before taxes). He won a Pulitzer with a piece in which he went to work in a North Carolina slaughterhouse. His editors pulled him out after a month, though he wanted to stay for six. He still thinks he'd have gotten a better ending, since he's convinced somebody on the killing floor would've gotten stabbed.

Charlie grew up in Livonia, a working-class suburb of Detroit, wanting to be a forest ranger. His stepfather had a quick fist and a big ring. The aggression that bred might explain how Charlie could start at nose tackle in high school (nickname: "The Missile") weighing 130 pounds. Feeling adrift after attending the University of Michigan, he took two years off to roam the world. He rode the Trans-Mongolian railways and slept in the Gobi Desert. He was a bartender in Australia, a baker in Denmark, and worked at a cannery in Alaska, where he lived in a treehouse, after chasing the woman who became his wife up north. (Upon seeing her trip at a party, bump her head on a stove, and lie sprawled on the floor laughing, he thought, "What an ass. I love her!")

Still drifting, he ran into a friend at a party who said he was going to journalism school. "Not trying to paint myself as a rube," says Charlie, "but I'd never heard of journalism school. I never thought I was a genius, but I'm not stupid. This looked good." He applied to Berkeley and got in, though he at first missed the acceptance letter on account of living in the treehouse. As a journalism student, he applied everywhere for internships with clips he picked up at the *Alaska Fisherman's Journal*. Nobody was interested except for one paper: the *New York Times*. "Luck counts too, doggie," he says.

The internship turned into a trial, the trial turned into a marquee gig, in which he got to write a bar column called "Bending Elbows" and a roaming column called "American Album." Charlie also did a participatory documentary series on the *Times*'s Discovery Channel in which he might, for instance, ride a bull in a gay rodeo or get clobbered in an Oakland fight club. "I had whiplash for six months," he says.

But even though he became a fully made man over his decade at the *Times*, it was always a trial of a sort in that politicized meat-grinder. "My stomach hurt every

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morning," he says. It had been happening for a while, but by 2006, in real-estate bubble-wrapped America with no recession in sight, Charlie felt himself having to fight to get his kind of stories into a paper where they were once welcomed. So he walked.

The bubble burst shortly thereafter. Charlie didn't get as much money out of his overpriced L.A. house as he'd assumed, but he wrote a book, played Mr. Mom to his infant daughter, and did some top-shelf magazine work, such as traveling to China for *Vanity Fair* with legendary 84-year-old photographer Robert Frank, who nearly died in Charlie's arms in a soup shop.

But earlier this year, as the nation was roiling and the Detroitification of America was set to explode with the mortgage crisis and massive layoffs, Charlie moved home to work for the *Detroit News*. "I chose them because they chose me. . . . They let me do human," he says. At first, I felt sorry for him. After all, who goes back to Detroit willingly to find work these days? There was a notes-from-Siberia feel to the whole enterprise. When I talked to Charlie on the phone, passing on an idle bit of media gossip, then insisting it stay in the cone of silence, he'd say, "Who am I going to tell, Matt? I'm in Detroit."

But I stopped feeling sorry for him when his pieces started arriving in my inbox like a steady drip. Charlie was back in "the hole" with a vengeance.

He rode around with a near-suicidal Jack Kevorkian in Kevorkian's new egg-shaped electric car. Fresh from prison, Dr. Death now lived in a dumpy apartment, wore Salvation-Army clothes, and told Charlie he wished he'd never been born. He hung with Dead-Squad cops, who told stories of how more Detroiters get killed before Christmas so the murderers can avoid buying Christmas gifts, while puzzling how one murder victim had her feet removed ("Why did they take the feet? We can't use the feet").

He profiled a repo man, who with business now booming in the economic downturn, was suddenly able to remodel his bathroom, send his child to private school, and shop for vacation property. While everyone has done the white-flight story, and a few more have done the black-flight story, Charlie did "The Flight of the Dead." He got the idea while putting around the streets of Detroit in his 1973 Checker Cab ("made in Kalamazoo," he says proudly), cruising past a cemetery where someone was getting disinterred. Turns out, a lot of people were. Charlie found out that Detroit has now gotten so sketchy, that for every 30 living human beings who leave Detroit, a dead one is brought along too.

I go see Charlie at the paper, and find him standing in the freezing weather outside the building having a smoke. He's in his traditional winter-wear: Carhartt jacket, slouchy ski hat, motorcycle boots, and leather work gloves. He looks less like a newspaperman than an undercover narcotics cop in one of those '70s Sidney Lumet movies: the guy who's been on the street too long, who the desk sarge can't reel back into HQ.

Charlie moves abruptly and fast, like he's being chased by something, and maybe he is. He admits he was affected by the scenes he witnessed after 9/11, when he covered the firehouses of Manhattan for weeks. It seems to have sped up his metabolism. "I have a short wick. I don't eat much. I smoke a lot," he says. "Then I crash. Then I get up and go again. I don't think I'm going to have a long time. It's just the speed of my organism."

Charlie LeDuff

STEVE LOPEZ / THE DETROIT NEWS

The *New York Times* may have recently had to mortgage its building, but it is obvious that the *Detroit News* is no longer the big leagues. Charlie shows me a big screen in the lobby on which some scenes-from-Iraq loop has been repeating itself endlessly, tormenting the front-desk guy. "Nobody can figure out how to change it," says Charlie. "The guy who did it before took another job. NPR, I think. Everyone's jealous," he jokes. "He got out!"

But Charlie's stomach doesn't hurt anymore, and he almost seems to glory in being back in the minors. He shows me his desk, surrounded by empty cubicles, colleagues now gone from buyouts. Unlike in his *Times* days, his cell phone has no international service. His desk phone only has one line. His chair is broken. But he seems strangely energized, ricocheting around the halls like a pinball.

He talks to a woman in an elevator, saying he should've

taken the stairs, but he just wants to ride it one last time before the paper has to sell it off. He also calls dibs on a historic plate honoring the service of Detroit newsmen in World War II. He barks at a newsroom television screen flashing the Detroit Three congressional hearings, saying, "Just give them the money or don't! Why are we your kickin' boy?" His outburst earns tepid applause from colleagues, who mostly mind their knitting in a newsroom as quiet as a public library.

A week or so later, there will be an announcement that the *Detroit News* will curtail home delivery to just two days a week. Like all reporters these days, Charlie knows that the American auto industry isn't the only one that's dying. He barges into the deputy managing editor's office to introduce me. "Leaner and meaner, eh?" says Charlie, of the changes that are coming. "Leaner, anyway," shrugs his editor.

There is block after block of boarded windows and missing doors, structures tilting like the town drunk after a vicious bender.

Despite the monumentally low morale in journalism at the moment (Gannett whacked 2,000 jobs the week I was in Detroit, and the Tribune Company filed for bankruptcy), Charlie believes in reinvention through a simple mantra: "Don't be boring." Along with his shooter/videographer, Max Ortiz, he makes himself a double threat on the *News*'s website, not only hosting a show called "Hold the Onions" out of the American Coney Island diner downtown, but also doing video pieces that stretch the definition of by-the-numbers journalism.

When councilwoman Monica Conyers got in hot water for calling her colleague "Shrek," Charlie arranged to have her sit down on-camera for an interrogation by a group of middle schoolers. She proceeded to get a condemnatory lecture on how to behave like an adult from the kids. Charlie then interviewed her, convincing her to recite lines from the infamous *Shrek*-ish city council meeting, with him playing the part of her, in her sassiest Detroit voice. ("You know you not my daddy!" he said.)

It was a good stunt, as evidenced by its getting picked up (without attribution) by a number of national media outlets. But then he turned around and wrote a wrenching story on the girl who schooled Conyers—a 13-year-old who is ashamed to be poor, whose parents sell candy out of the trunk of a rattletrap Cadillac, who is not allowed to bring her books home from school because there aren't enough, and who dreams of escaping this city.

One night over dinner, Charlie admits that he knows most people think he's gone back to a dying newspaper in a dying town. But he feels he has work to do here. Not the kind of work that makes *Gawker*. Real work. He's always wanted to write about "my people," as he calls them—Detroiters in the hole—but he wasn't ready before. Now he is. He sneers at books like Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?* which treat human beings like electoral blocs to be extrapolated from. "We're not stupid," he says. "We do count, you know. All those statistics you're going to lay out? Fine. But we know how to make s—. We know how to fix s—. We do know how to read. Saved the union a couple of times, you know what I mean?"

He says there has to be room for the kind of journalism "where it's not a fetish, where it's not blaxploitation, where you are actually a human being with a point of view. The city is full of good people, living next to s—." But most media-types don't bother to ask since they view those people as "dumb, uneducated, toothless rednecks. They're ghetto-dwelling blacks. Right? They're poor Mexicans. They're a concept, not a people."

Regardless of media-industry misfortunes, work lies before him. "God gave me something to do, and I'm not turning my back on it. I'm trying really hard. Maybe I'm not great. I'm always nervous, never sure if it's any good. But I'm just trying. What's wrong with trying?"

Detroit has always been a city of fire. Nearly all of it was destroyed by fire in 1805, more of it burned in the Detroit Race Riot of 1863, and over 2,000 buildings were consumed in the Twelfth Street Riot of 1967. Even its flag contains fire; its Latin motto translates, "We hope for better things; it shall rise from the ashes."

About a week before I left for Detroit, I got a message from Charlie, in which he was laughing, saying he was supposed to be at a big media day for firemen. "We were gonna put out some fake fires," he said, "but had to call it off because the fire simulator's broken. Good metaphor." A day later, he left another message, but this time he wasn't laughing.

One of the most popular firemen in the ranks of the Detroit Fire Department, Walter Harris—a biker, minister, and mean firehouse cook—had died that night fighting an arson fire in a house that had burned before, but had yet to be knocked down by the city. Walt had gone upstairs looking for victims, since empty houses in Detroit are often occupied—by everyone from drug

addicts to homeless families. The roof collapsed on him, ending a 19-year-career and leaving his six children fatherless (one of whom he adopted out of the ghetto as a teenager and who has become a firefighter himself).

Back in April, Charlie had done a story and video about the men of Squad 3/Engine 23, which included Walt. It was more of an angry cry than a piece. The details of what the firemen endured in this dysfunctional city were nearly unbelievable. Charlie relayed how the average Detroit fireman faces twice as many fires as his New York counterpart, but in much more adverse conditions. In a city of looters, these firefighters once went out on a call in the middle of dinner, only to find upon returning that their meal had been stolen, as had the truck of one of the men. In fact, after one deranged woman set fire to a house, she tried to drive away in their firetruck as they were putting out the blaze.

The city is so cash-strapped that firefighters have to purchase their own toilet paper and cleaning supplies. Their aging bunker gear is coated in carbon, "making them the equivalent of walking matchsticks." The firehouses' brass poles have been removed and sold off by the city.

When I get to town, Charlie wants me to meet his new friends. Even after his story, he kept stopping by the firehouse regularly, chancing to hear Walt's final prayer on the last day of his life. Being a minister, Walt often said pre-meal prayers. During his last one, Charlie disrupted it with laughter, he says, as the television above Walt's head incongruously showed a "cheerleader with budding nipples coming through a chiffon dress," while the big man was asking Jesus to bless the food.

A burned-out house in the Brush Park Historic District of Detroit

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We take off in the newspaper's pool car, a Plymouth Neon, and Charlie drives me through blighted neighborhood after blighted neighborhood. I suggest I'm prepared for this, as I watched the Eminem film, *8 Mile*, before coming. Charlie, mistakenly convinced he's better than Eminem, decides to freestyle by ticking off the scenery before us: *Liquor Store / Liquor Store / Nail Salon / Pawn Shop / Car Parts / Get your Jesus on.*

We tear through the ravaged east side—not to be confused with the ravaged west side. When he was growing up, Charlie's mom had a flower shop down here, but there are almost no signs of commerce now. In my line of work, I've seen plenty of inner cities, but I've never seen anything in a non-Third World country like the east side of Detroit.

Maybe the 9th Ward of New Orleans after Katrina. But New Orleans had the storm as an excuse. Here, the storm has been raging for 50 years, starting with the closing of the hulking Albert Kahn-designed Packard Plant in 1956, which a half century later, still stands like a disgraced monument to lost grandeur.

There is block after block of boarded windows and missing doors, structures tilting like the town drunk after a vicious bender. Some houses have buckled roofs, some have blue tarps, some have no roof at all. Which is not to say nobody lives in them. A mail carrier I see on the street says desperate squatters will frequently take up residence, even switching house numbers as it suits them. Not all fires are started maliciously. With no utilities, they'll often make warming fires on the floor. At one point, we stop the car just to count how many burned-out houses we can see without moving. We count six, all from different fires.

Mike Nevin and the late Walt Harris at the Squad 3/Engine 23 firehouse

We enter the firehouse of Squad 3/Engine 23, or the "Brothers on the Boulevard," as they are nicknamed. It looks like a very orderly frathouse. There is Dalmatian statuary, in lieu of a real dog, a mounted swordfish, a photo of Walt holding a giant sub on the bulletin board. It is ordinarily a place filled with mirthful gregariousness, a place where new recruits might get dropped to their knees with buckets of water, or where middle-aged men play air guitar to Thin Lizzy solos coming from radio speakers.

But today, nobody's in the mood to smile. In a 90 percent black city, a firehouse is one of the only truly integrated places. The photo that ran with Charlie's April story contained white Sgt. Mike Nevin, smoking one of his ever-lit Swisher Sweets, clapping black Walt on the shoulder. They looked like ebony and ivory, living together in perfect harmony. They faced death together every day. When they call each other "brother" around here, they mean it.

Several wear shirts memorializing their fallen brother. A black wreath commemorates him on one wall. Charlie and I hang out for the better part of a day, and the stories come fast and furious. Firemen tell me that the safest time to be here now is Devil's Night, the infamous night before Halloween for which Detroit earned its title as the arson capital of the world. With Angel's Night counter-programming, which sees more cops and neighborhood patrols on the street, they've managed to whittle the over 800 fires they suffered in 1984 down to 65 fires this October 30. Only in Detroit could 65 arsons in one night be considered a success.

They tell me of getting their ladders stolen off trucks, and then sold for scrap, how 90 percent of the fires are in vacant homes which the city takes at least a year to tear down, if they ever do tear them down. They tell how they have even walked up on people having wakes for dead loved ones in which they deliberately burn abandoned houses in a "Detroit-style campfire." I hear from one firefighter, Wes Rawls, that he actually had his car stolen from outside the church at Walt's wake. He didn't really sweat it, since it was the fourth time his car has been stolen. (The third time it happened, he was conveniently coming out of anger management class.)

When Mike Nevin walks in, Charlie suggests I call him Sgt. Mullet since he sports one. "I'm a hockey player first, fireman second," explains Nevin. Charlie tells me, "Look at this s—," pointing to Nevin's gear. Ordinarily, cities might replace a fireman's turnout gear every six months or so. Nevin's had his for nearly a year and a half, and it looks like it. There are random rips. The white outlines of his harness straps are evident from where flames have licked around them. There is a hole in his crotch, which could theoretically leave his chestnuts roasting on an open fire.

The station fire bell is itself a Rube Goldberg absurdity. When the house gets a call, it comes by way of fax from the central office. The printer paper comes out and pushes a door hinge, which then falls onto a screw that's wired to an alarm. They had to rig it themselves.

I ask how this could be, where is their funding? "I'll tell you what happened to our funding," Nevin says, stomping over to pick up a newspaper with a picture of Kwame's mistress copping a plea. "Kwame Kilpatrick, who is a f—

STEVE PEREZ / THE DETROIT NEWS

ing retard. There's 20 years of Coleman Young, who is a f—ing retard." He doesn't limit it to black Detroit politicians. He suggests that Congressman Sandy Levin, who represents most of Detroit's northeastern suburbs, "can suck my nuts." Nevin is furious. His friend is dead. He's tired of do-nothing politicians who cuddle up to firemen like kewpie dolls during election time, then underfund them and fail to demolish the thousands and thousands of structures that burn again and again. The surprise isn't that Walt's dead, it's that more of them aren't. (When I ask Nevin later if he wants to exhibit such candor, he reconsiders, "You'd better have Levin kiss my balls," he says, much more gingerly.)

Charlie and I later meet up with Nevin at the house where Walt perished. Nevin leads us up a rickety, charcoaled staircase, and we stand atop what's left of the second floor in the frigid wind. Nevin shows us the spot where the flimsy roof crushed his friend, his boot pawing the ash-caked floorboards with bitter regret. He doesn't care if his complaints sound impolitic. "We're doing the f—ing job," he says. "We're scoring the touchdowns. We're the guys running down the sidelines with s—y gear, okay? Not them."

Nevin loves what he does. He bleeds for his city, even if he had to move out of it a few years back because he was worried for his family's safety. Being a fireman on the east side, what the boys call "the old third battalion," involves more than just putting out fires. Nevin calls his men "urban soldiers," and says, "I swear to God, I feel like our helmets should be light blue with 'U.N.' on the side." Detroit police are so outmanned that many citizens call in fires when they have other problems, such as domestic disturbances. The bad guys "hear these big chariots coming, man, they're out of there."

Aside from the troublemakers and firebugs, there is an odd kind of trust between the firemen and the neighborhoods they are paid to protect. "These people love us, and we love them too," Nevin says. When Walt died, wellwishers streamed in with baked goods and covered dishes. Old women came by in church hats out of respect.

Children often stop in, so firemen can pump up their bike tires. When one boy showed up in his underwear, complaining that his mom was getting beat up by her boyfriend again, "We put him in fire clothes," says Nevin. "You're safe, man," they told the child. "As long as you wear this sweatshirt. You show them that." They visited his mom, telling her, "'You need to get out of this neighborhood, quit dealing with this a—hole, and move.' She did. She got away."

Nevin told me they recently fought a fire resulting from a man illegally siphoning gas with a rubber hose. He blew up an entire block. "They had kids in the street, glass sticking out of their head," he says. But, as horrible as it was, he says, "The guy's got four kids. And there's no jobs. And you know, he's got to keep the kids warm. So they come out, and they cut the gas off. Everybody looks to dad. 'Hey dad, I'm cold. Hey dad, I'm hungry.' It breaks your f—ing heart, man. You're dad. You're superman. So what do you do? 'I've got to pull something by hook or crook, man.' You know, it's like everybody is just trying to get by right now."

Nevin says that the contained redevelopment in the downtown area is well and good, but everyone can't work at the Hard Rock Café or pour beer at Ford Field. As the car companies moved outside the city, Nevin says, he watched the east side wither. The tool and die shops went away. The mom and pop groceries all folded. He has no soft spot for the Big Three, who he thinks abandoned Detroit in order "to chase the sun."

Nevin calls his firefighters 'urban soldiers,' and says, 'I swear to God, I feel like our helmets should be light blue with "U.N." on the side.'

But what he really hates, what makes him seethe, is the mismanagement of what's left, the fact that all these "mousetraps" as he calls all the wrecked, abandoned homes that dot the city like tombstones, are not taken down. That the house that killed Walt is still standing now. "Hear the sirens?" Nevin asks. "Someone is going to a fire. That's all day long. This is a city where the sirens never stop."

This place, he says, "It's like a forgotten secret. It's like a lost city. And they never really talk about the f—ing truth about what is going on with this town." Of the house we stand on, he says, "We want it down. It symbolizes nothing. It symbolizes failure. We lost one of the best men this job will ever have or see. . . . And yet, this carcass still sits here. Arson is done. This is not a crime scene anymore. There's no tape. There's no one watching it. It just sits there to remind us that the city we work for has failed."

The city's ombudsman, a good, honest woman named Durene Brown, who is a regular thorn in the side of those who wish to turn a blind eye to the city's problems, shows me the figures. In 2005-06, the city demolished 909 structures, but they're only proposing 522 in 2008-09. Be it ineptitude, lack of funds, environmental disposal con-

The interior of the Albert Kahn-designed Packard Plant, which closed in 1956

RANDALL WILCOX

siderations, concern over lawsuits, you name it, there is always an excuse. Meanwhile, Detroit keeps burning, and Nevin and the Brothers on the Boulevard have to keep risking their hides in mousetrap infernos. The firemen need this house to come down, and Charlie has promised to help them.

There is something about the unsettledness of Detroit that forces its inhabitants to confront it. Therefore, many of them tend to have the most vivid of worldviews. Take political consultant Adolph Mongo.

He is one of Charlie's regulars, both in print and on his web show. This is no easy feat for Charlie, since Mongo's favorite word, one he uses every five sentences or so, is "motherf—er." A large black man who favors Versace glasses adorned with gemstones, he's known as the local flamethrower, unafraid to compare his opponents to Hitler or to run anti-lynching ads in support of his client, Kwame Kilpatrick, who sources say owes Mongo money that he'll never see.

Still, throwing a curveball, Mongo wishes me to know he's practically a conservative and asks for a column at this magazine. "I'm for low taxes, kicking people in the ass, tough on crime, and don't bail out motherf—ers. No welfare state. . . . We need to destroy the school district," he says, advocating "charters, vouchers, everything. My wife [a former public school teacher] is going to die if she reads this s—."

Mongo says he has black clients and he has white clients. "I'm not a bigot, I'm a pro." He worked for Kilpatrick, of whom he once was a fierce critic. Kilpatrick offered to hire him because "I beat his ass for two years." And he's worked for some of the people who put Kilpatrick in jail as well. "People ask me what I do," says Mongo. "I f— with people. I know how to debate. You've got to know both sides of the issue. I can be for you. I can be against you. I'm like a prostitute in the night. Nobody wants to admit that they've been with me, but they come seek me out."

Suckled in the Coleman Young machine, Mongo freely admits to playing the politics of race, because in Detroit, that's the way it works. "Black people stick together," he says, while he admits the downside: "We accept mediocrity." Those politics are played against Detroit all the time, too, he wishes me to know. And not just from white suburbs. Look what's happening now, he says, with the Big Three congressional hearings.

When white politicians want to get elected around here, explains Mongo, "They don't say 'n—er' anymore, they say 'Detroit.'" And so, while the Big Three have been running away from Detroit for years, they "got a rude awakening when they went to D.C." Mongo holds that when congressmen associate automakers with Detroit, what they're intending to associate them with are all the inept black people who come from there. Or as he puts it, when they say "'Detroit,' they really said, 'they the new n—s.' Welcome to the club."

'Detroit's history has gone the way of Rome and Athens and Constantinople. It is what history does. History moves on.'

– L. Brooks Patterson

Charlie then takes me to see L. Brooks Patterson at the Mesquite Creek steakhouse in Clarkston, outside the city. He's another of Charlie's regulars, who Charlie introduces as "the head honky in charge." Patterson, who looks like everybody's best golfing buddy, is the longtime executive of Oakland County, Michigan, which contains Detroit's affluent northern suburbs. A pro-sprawl Republican who used to regularly buck up against Coleman Young when he worked as a prosecutor, Patterson has suggested that the dysfunctional members of the city council belonged in the Detroit Zoo, causing one of them to refer to him as "the Grand Dragon of Oakland County."

Patterson laughs at the charge. He's not a racist, and doesn't hate Detroiters. He is a Detroiter. He grew up in the city, and he's friends with Mongo (two sides of the same coin, Charlie calls them "Dee and Dum"). The problem, Patterson says, is his county is "tired of being Detroit's ATM machine." If Detroit's repeatedly disastrous decisions hurt his taxpayers, he will oppose them. "Once you understood that, everything I do and say makes sense."

The demographics of his own county are changing with black flight from Detroit, and he understands why people can't wait to leave. When automotive parts supplier BorgWarner was deciding whether to relocate from Chicago to Auburn Hills, Patterson says, "We had to send what I would call grief counselors over . . . to convince them it ain't that bad. We actually did videos saying, 'You are not going into the war zone. You are not going into the deluge. You are coming to Oakland County.'" Patterson adds, "I would love to see the city come back for a lot of

reasons. It would make my job easier. But nothing works."

As the night wears on, Charlie grows defensive, and almost defiant, about Detroit. He recounts everything it's done for the country, insists the city still matters and won't disappear, speculates about the potential for it to become a major port since "water is the new oil," and

Martha Reeves, as city councilwoman, above; with the Vandellas, at right

insists that Henry Ford is more important to history than Jesus Christ since "even Muslims drive Toyotas." At this, Patterson, a good Catholic boy, leans into my tape recorder, "That was Charlie. . . . When I go home tonight, I will make the sign of the cross and pray to Henry Ford."

Charlie heads for the restroom, and Patterson grows philosophical: "Detroit's history has gone the way of Rome and Athens and Constantinople. It is what history does. History moves on. And history has moved away from the Babylonian Empire. It moved away from Egypt. It be what it be. . . . I think Detroit sees itself in its rearview mirror. But Detroit will never again be where those other cities were, including Detroit."

Later, I ask Charlie why he was pushing so hard, aside from his blood-alcohol content. After all, Patterson didn't say anything that Charlie hasn't said to me about his city. He explains it thus: "Living in Detroit is like having a retarded brother. You are allowed to make jokes, but once anybody else does, you are allowed to light them the f— on fire, man."

Despite all the ugliness during my week in Detroit, I discover pockets of grace. The first finds me in the backseat of a black Crown Victoria. Former Motown superstar and current city councilwoman Martha Reeves, of Martha and the Vandellas, sits in the front seat. Maxine Powell, a crisp 84-year-old, sits beside me. She now works in Reeves's office, but used to be Motown's finishing instructor, teaching poise classes for two hours a day. She showed the entire Motown stable how to do everything from walk to dress. "Class, style, and refinement turned the heads of kings and queens," she informs me. Reeves's driver is Ulysses, who has two gold teeth and wears a coat that must've meant the end for an entire mink ranch. (He promises me that if any PETA members throw ketchup on him, they won't be around to throw it on anyone else.)

I've talked Reeves into showing me around Hitsville USA, Motown's first headquarters and now a museum. Along the way, she does her part as civic booster. Ulysses drives us through a shiny new townhouse complex that used to be a housing project. All the streets are named after Motown stars. Though Reeves is a little cross that hers is abbreviated "M. Reeves." Ulysses says her full name would be too long. "No longer than the Temptations," she huffs. The rest of the drive is through the typical blight. Reeves admits it's affected her too. Recently, someone broke into her late father's old east side house, a house where the doors never used to be locked, unless she didn't make it home by midnight, in which case, her father locked the doors on her. The thief boosted $100,000 worth of recording equipment, which she hasn't managed to replace.

Then there was the time three decades ago when she'd just returned to Detroit from Los Angeles. While she was getting out of a Mercedes and going into a house, a mugger grabbed her purse, the strap of which was wrapped tightly around her hand. He dragged her for 500 yards. I ask if she was hurt. "Scratched up knees, torn stockings, and my pride was just killed," she says.

Hitsville sits next to a funeral home. We cover every inch of the museum. She knows every drummer and backup singer and secretary in every photo. She tells of the '62 tour in a broken down bus with no toilet, in which Little Stevie

TOP: RICARDO THOMAS / THE DETROIT NEWS

Wonder wouldn't let anybody sleep. She sings into the trademark Motown echo chamber which provided much of its fabled sound. She dances and harmonizes to every other song playing over the speakers, songs by Smokey and Marvin and Shorty Long with that walking bass line beckoning us to his "Function at the Junction."

the Spirit of Detroit, the Marshall Fredericks monument in which a seated man holds a gilt bronze sphere which emanates rays meant to symbolize God.

Or at least we see its silhouette. Night's fallen, and this being Detroit, the lights are off. "He's out in the dark," says a puzzled Reeves. "Ain't he scared?"

Inside Michigan Central Station, which saw its last train in 1988

She takes me into the studio, where the floor has heel damage behind the sound boards from long-ago engineers, now "gone to heaven" in her words, who were keeping time with the music. She shows me the exact mike where she sang behind Marvin Gaye, who she'd flirted with.

As she tells me these stories, she attracts a small crowd, all of them white people, who periodically sing along with her. A woman who left the city long ago—though she still wears a Red Wings jersey—tells me she misses it while getting an autograph from Reeves. "It was once a great town," she says.

Reeves is 67 years old, but as we walk the halls, about 40 of those years fall away. "You see the pride and happiness I have coming in here," she tells me. Ulysses chauffeurs us back to my truck, parked behind the Coleman Young Municipal Center downtown. As we ride up on it, we see

"He's got a ball in his hand," says Ulysses. "He awright. He got people with him. He's cool."

The second pocket, I discover by accident. Charlie once quoted Sam Riddle, a local political warhorse, as saying that the only difference between Detroit and the Third World, corruption-wise, is that "there are no goats in the streets in Detroit."

Actually, there are. With so much empty space these days in Detroit, "urban farming" has taken off—vegetable patches right in the middle of the city. And I'm told someone keeps goats a few blocks away from my hotel, the gleaming MotorCity Hotel and Casino, which sits in a downwardly mobile neighborhood with businesses like Goodwill Industries, a sewing machine repair shop, and liquor stores.

RANDALL WILCOX

While combing the streets of the North Corktown neighborhood, unable to find the goats, I see a black man carrying a box. I stop to ask directions. He offers to show me, so I tell him to hop in my truck. I take him for a construction worker or mover or something, but he's homeless.

His name is Wayne Williams, and he has a gentle spirit. We get to talking, and I quickly lose interest in the goats. He says he moved to Detroit two years ago. He was a gravedigger back in Alabama, and he came here to get a better job.

"You came to Detroit to get a better job?" I ask.

"Yeah," he says, smiling. "I know better now."

He says he's tried to get a job in over 100 places, everywhere from construction to fast food to gravedigging again, but hasn't managed. The box he is carrying is full of clothes that he got out of a dumpster. He walks the empty streets waiting for passersby, seeing if they want to buy any. His own clothes are all from charity, which might explain why he wears snowboots that look like they belong to a 10-year-old boy.

I ask him where he lives, and he shows me. He lives beneath a Rosa Parks Boulevard underpass, in the shadow of Tiger Stadium, which has been mostly torn down, though the preservationists are trying to save the last of it. The Tigers now play at Comerica Park, though the company the park's named for has fled to Dallas.

He shows me his lean-to boxes and blankets, and a Bible sitting on a bridge girder as though it were his bookshelf. I ask how he could sleep, it's so incredibly noisy. He's used to it, he says, and he wants the traffic. That's why he's there. He figures there's less chance of getting killed if he sleeps where motorists can see him. A few months ago, he was robbed and thrown off an overpass. He shows me his still-swollen thumb and the scars on his head and back. "I feel safe under the bridge," Wayne says.

We go back to my truck. He asks me for nothing. But I tell him I'll give him a lift to wherever he's going since he's been a good guide, and also slide him twenty bucks. He offers me a breast-cancer awareness pin. He found a bunch of them in a dumpster and is going to try to sell them, but thinks I should have one for free.

We talk local politics a little. With time on his hands, he reads all the newspapers he finds. He's disappointed in Kwame: "Great leaders take care of their people." He says he would make a good one because "I love the human race." He prays for them, as well as for Detroit, he says, which he worries about. I ask him if he gets lonely out here. He says yes, he does, but a red-tailed fox sometimes comes to visit him, though it's too scared to approach, so he'll roll food down the overpass embankment to it. Plus, he talks to God a lot. He calls him "my partner."

"All I want to do is live to be an old man," Wayne says. "That's what I ask my partner for."

I ask Wayne if he has a substance-abuse problem. He says he's never been drunk in his life. And even if he was a drunk, he adds, he couldn't afford to be out here, in case he has to defend himself. But he does admit he smokes pot "about five times a year." Recently, he said, he was scoring some weed at a nearby drug house. What he saw there, he says, he'll never, ever forget, no matter how hard he tries.

The wrecking of the house where Walt Harris died—a gift from Charlie LeDuff

"What?" I ask.

He's extremely reluctant to tell. He breaks eye contact, and looks to the sky in pain. "I can't believe the things I've seen," he says, "Some are hard to talk about." I prompt him some more, and the details start tumbling forth. He says he saw a young woman there: very attractive, nice body. There were about nine men there as well. For their benefit, or maybe for the benefit of their drugs, says Wayne, "She was having sex with a pit bull."

I stop writing. "C'mon," I say in disbelief.

Wayne looks at me as though he's hurt that I'd doubt his story and shoves the $20 bill I gave him back at me. "Take this if you don't believe me," he insists. I shove the money back at him. "If I'm lying," he says, "then God is gay. And I know He ain't gay, cause He's my partner."

He shakes my hand, starts to get out of the truck, then shakes my hand again. "I have a hard time saying goodbye to people I like," he says. "That's what I don't like about the

PHOTOS BY MAX ORTIZ / THE DETROIT NEWS

human race. You meet people you like, then there's no way of seeing their face again."

He asks me if I'd stop by to bid him farewell before I leave. I say I will. "What time?" he asks. I tell him I have a lot of appointments, so I can't predict, and I don't want to hold up his schedule. "Okay," he says. "If I'm not there, just leave a note in my Bible." He gets out, shuffles off to White Castle, but after about 30 yards, he turns around again and waves.

The last pocket is found by exploring Detroit with Randy Wilcox, a photographer and artist who combs the ruins of Detroit and posts his riveting studies of the city on detroitfunk.com. He knows every inch of Detroit, from underground tunnels and abandoned auto factories to the empty skyscrapers that make the skyline of Detroit at night look like what he calls, "a smile with broken teeth."

Lt. Steve Kirschner, left, is hugged by Mike Nevin moments before the house was torn down

He comes from a Big Three auto family, and so wearing a bomber jacket and a plaid stocking hat, he dutifully drives us around in a Ford Taurus with a crack all the way across its windshield because, he says, "I can't afford a Honda." We park his car far away from the buildings we crash, to avoid detection by police (not that we ever see any). We hit the hotspots, such as the old Packard Plant, which he calls a "whore" ("a building that everybody has had"), and the beautiful ruins of the once-magnificent Beaux-Arts Michigan Central Station, which saw its last train in 1988 and which from afar looks like a porous cheesecloth.

He ticks off all the injuries he's gotten exploring, from scratches to sprains to nails through the shoe. He gives me the taxonomy of who he runs into, from drug addicts to scrappers to historians to foreign tourists to ghetto dogs to "Vikings," troublemakers who just come to break things more than they're already broken.

Wilcox is the opposite of a Viking. He is an aesthete and amateur historian with an appreciation of architectural detail and a story for every streetcorner. As we walk through various ruins, seeing old commodes and junked files and discarded boats, we run into no trouble, though we hear Vikings on the prowl here and there. Most don't want a confrontation and make their escape like specters.

Wilcox walks me all around the poorly lit edifices, except for where the roof is missing and snow drifts in, pointing out curios like discarded "whore bags"—condom-filled duffels that prostitutes use to ply their trade. I have notebook pages filled with descriptions of what we saw, but reading it now, all the wreckage runs together.

Wilcox drives me all over the city, pointing out missed urban-planning opportunities and eyesores. He takes me downtown to what the locals call "Skyscraper Graveyard," where the clock seems to have stopped in the Art Deco period and high-rise after high-rise sits empty. He points out the landmark Book Tower, a 38-story building finished in 1926, which he says is now vacant except for Bookies Tavern on the first floor. Wilcox's lawyer told him he'd been "the last tenant there. He had to downsize. People are too broke to sue people. He's now switching to bankruptcy law to try to save his house."

I come to think of Wilcox as the curator of a museum that's been overturned and looted. The prize of his collection, or what could have been his collection, is the detailed production notes he found written in Marvin Gaye's own hand for the legendary *What's Going On* album. He found them, along with other treasures from artist itineraries to expense accounts, in the Motown Center, which housed the label, then sat empty for 30 years, until it was knocked down in 2006 to make way for Super Bowl parking. Wilcox witnessed the demolition, which was typical of Detroit's callous disregard for its own history: "Motown letterhead was blowing down the road."

When NPR did a story on Wilcox's find, the phone calls started flooding in, plenty from people trying to muscle him for the rights to the production notes. His solution? He gave them to the Detroit Public Library. When I ask him why on earth he didn't keep them or flip them on eBay, he says it's because he made two decisions: One, that he didn't want to get sued. The other, "that I am not a looter." "I am

a steward," he says. "I am just in possession of stuff until it gets where it is supposed to be."

I ask him if he ever feels that in spending so much time among the ruins, he's feeding off a carcass. "No," he says. "I'm part of the carcass."

On a sunny, cold morning, we all stand in front of the house where Walt Harris died: two of Walt's sons and Mike Nevin and the Brothers on the Boulevard and a few city council members and reporters and neighbors and more firefighters and the Axemen, the motorcycle group Walt rode with. Charlie LeDuff is there too, which is only fitting, since he's pretty much the reason we all came: to watch this mousetrap inferno get crushed liked charred Lincoln Logs.

Charlie had gone to New York for Thanksgiving, but promised Nevin that if that house was still standing when he got back, he'd start rattling cages and kicking in doors. The house was standing, and that "monument to failure," as Nevin called it, would've kept standing, as 60,000 others do, for infinity, because the city is too poor, too concerned about procedures and lawsuits, too inept to knock them down.

On this very block, I count five or six more mousetraps that Nevin and his gladiators will inevitably be revisiting, piling off their chariots, swinging their axes, hoping the roof doesn't come down on their heads.

Charlie started working the phones, and after runarounds and dead ends, found a sympathetic city councilwoman, Sheila Cockrel, who fast-tracked the demolition at his behest, as a favor to the mourning firefighters.

Still wearing his ever-present ski-hat, Charlie has shed the Carhartt work jacket and today has on his three-quarter length brown dress-leathers. It's a special occasion. There's not even a notebook in sight. He doesn't want to write. He just wants to take it in, as there are not a lot of days of similar triumph working for a dying newspaper in a dying town.

As we watch the wrecker take the house down, I'm struck by the fact that rather than sadness, there is almost a note of celebration. How could anyone with eyes celebrate? Just looking around this very block, I count five or six similar houses, mousetraps that Nevin and his gladiators will inevitably be revisiting, piling off their chariots, swinging their axes, hoping the roof doesn't come down on their heads.

I stand next to Charlie, as he toasts up a Winston. I put the question to him: How could these guys celebrate? Just look at what surrounds them.

He exhales a funnel of smoke, shaking his head in assent. But he corrects me. "No one's going to cover this place in chrome tomorrow, or anything. But you've got to let the people have some hope. It matters."

With the house now in a heap, the grateful firefighters are hugging it out. They hug everybody. Each other. Charlie. Me. Since his wife dropped him off, Charlie asks me if he can bum a ride back to the newspaper. As we start heading to my truck, he catches a black man and woman on the porch across from the house that killed Walt. He'd interviewed them previously and had apparently made promises to more than just Mike Nevin and the men of Squad 3/Engine 23.

"Merry Christmas," Charlie bellows, pointing at them. "I told you we'd get that house knocked down."

The black man rises and starts toward Charlie, beaming and nodding his head. "Thank you," he says. "Thank you."

Then, he comes to a stop and his smile fades as he surveys the wreckage around him. "But what about the rest of it?" he asks.

On the way to the airport, I have one last stop to make: to bid farewell to my homeless guide, Wayne Williams, as promised. I park my truck near what's left of Tiger Stadium, and make my way down to the bridge overpass that Wayne calls home. I can see his boot prints in the light snow, heading out from underneath it. He's not home, nor is the Bible he instructed me to leave a note in.

His blankets and boxes are still there, however. So I place on them a book I bought for him the day before. Wayne seemed to be into the religious material, so I bought him a slim volume called *God's Promises*: Bible extracts, the good parts without all the genealogies and oxen sacrifice. It breaks verses out by subject, for occasions such as when you're afraid or lonesome. I mark a passage for him from Psalms:

> The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? . . . Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear, though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.

I wait around a few minutes, but he doesn't return, and I have to make a flight. Maybe he's at White Castle. Maybe he's out peddling breast cancer awareness pins. But it is Sunday. So he could be in church, talking to his partner about the human race or Detroit.

Detroit should hope so. Wayne's partner is the only one who can save it now. ♦

Las Vegas by night

Learning from Venturi

'Maximum feasible dissent' on architecture

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

Time has killed off a lot of modernist art. College courses that teach Gertrude Stein must be awfully undersubscribed today, assuming they are offered. Modernist sculpture and painting still receive respectful attention, but this is largely because people have so much money invested in them. It will be surprising if Mark Rothko, Henry Moore, Josef Albers, and Andy Warhol are still preoccupying any serious person (let alone commanding top dollar) 50 years from now. People who don't like them (most people) can avoid them.

But the architectural remnants of the age cannot be avoided. They endure—with their windowless façades, their human-repelling scale, their masses of dirty concrete and their self-conscious wish to shock. Worse things happened in the 20th century, but few were more puzzling than the way Americans let their landscape be ravaged by architects and planners, particularly in the years between World War II and the 1980s. Here a neighborhood of elegant storefronts would be demolished "for parking." There a row of century-old trees would be uprooted so that cars could whiz by at 60 rather than 45 miles an hour. Josep Lluís Sert's ghastly Holyoke Center still occupies the spot in Harvard Square where Massachusetts Avenue's beautiful line of Victorian brick was ripped apart to make way for it in the 1960s. Gerhard Kallmann's Boston City Hall still sits like a Stalinist mausoleum on an empty, windswept plaza, for which dozens of ancient city blocks were razed. You can work westward from there.

Yet, while ugly buildings still get built, spectacularly arrogant ones have had their day. Around 1980, at the very moment these horrid buildings seemed to be proliferating uncontrollably, legitimacy was somehow stripped from orthodox Modernist architecture, through a process as mysterious as the one by which it was conferred. Some of the credit goes to one of the most bizarre books in the history of architecture: *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), by the Philadelphia architect Robert Venturi, his architect wife Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour.

The book is a diptych. The first half catalogs, soberly, the architectural features and design logic of the casinos and motels along the Strip (today Las Vegas Boulevard). This part of the project was undertaken with the help of graduate students working inside the Yale School of Art and Architecture—a building, designed by the school's own dean Paul Rudolph, which can lay a plausible claim to be the ugliest structure ever built in the United States.

The second half of *Learning from Las Vegas* is a polemic (generally

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a polite one) against Rudolph and other myrmidons of the Swiss master theorizer and charlatan Le Corbusier. Modernist architects sneered at commercial strips as tacky, simplistic, and bourgeois. Venturi et al. pitted the unruly architecture of Las Vegas (most of it designed by private businessmen) against the logical, doctrinaire architecture of the academic modernists (most of it designed for the public sector) as a way of showing up the latter. What makes *Learning from Las Vegas* so fascinating is this trick of deploying one kind of crap to discredit another.

Las Vegas is disorienting, and disorienting in a way that can be expected to generate bad architecture. Very fast automobile traffic is to blame. On highway off-ramps, you turn right to go left, Venturi notes. A person can no longer trust his sense of where he is and where he is going; he needs to be told. In Las Vegas, signs perform this function. What they tell you is to enter this or that casino. They need to do this as simply as possible, since the readers of those signs are operating a dangerous piece of machinery at 70 mph. So complex manipulations of space, the modernists' bread and butter, were out of the question. Symbolism had to be blunt, unchallenging, and appeal to some prejudice or preconception: Roman columns on Caesars Palace, an Arabian lamp on Aladdin's. Nothing could be tackier.

It is in the course of defending this tackiness—or as he would put it, "messy vitality"—that Venturi wheels around to make his frontal attack on modernism. Las Vegas's symbols look cheap and inauthentic, but this does not mean they are newfangled. Oddly enough, something reconnects them to the historical allusions of 19th-century eclecticism, when Tudor and Queen Anne thrived in England and Renaissance was the style of choice in France. "Banks were Classical basilicas to suggest civic responsibility and tradition; commercial buildings looked like burghers' houses; universities copied Gothic rather than Classical colleges at Oxford and Cambridge," wrote Venturi. "The hamburger-shaped hamburger stand is a current, more literal attempt to express function via association." Sometimes he calls the language of Las Vegas architecture "heraldic."

The modernists despised heraldry, whether it took the form of banks pretending to be temples or of hamburger stands pretending to be hamburgers. Architecture was about architecture, they insisted. Borrowing forms and motifs was uncreative, decadent, and bourgeois. Venturi insisted this was not so, or at least that it was not avoidable. Modern architects borrowed forms, too; they were just too dim to recognize it. They were fascinated with 19th-century factories, he noticed, and continued parodying the forms of manufacturing technology well into a 20th century in which most of the technology was electronic. The result was the same warmed-over Corbusierism, building after building after building.

Robert Venturi

As Venturi put it:

> all those residential, civic, and institutional buildings whose thin complexities (stepped terraces; accordion sections, or plans, or elevations; cantilevered clerestories; diagonal zoots; textured striations and flying bridges or buttresses) almost parallel the strident distortions of a McDonald's hamburger stand but lack the commercial program and distracting setting that justify the stridency of Strip architecture.

Boston City Hall—for which, as we mentioned, hundreds of office buildings were demolished—is a bore, in Venturi's view. "A conventional loft would accommodate a bureaucracy better," he writes, "perhaps with a blinking sign on top saying I AM A MONUMENT." It resembles not just a Corbusier monastery in France and Ulrich Franzen's Cornell agronomy building but also (and he has the photos to prove it) a Neiman Marcus outlet in Houston. It also resembles (although Venturi does not cite it) Georgetown University's Lauinger Library, by John Carl Warnecke, a building that may undercut our earlier assertion about Paul Rudolph's having designed the ugliest building in U.S. history.

Modernism in architecture was, above all, about the grandeur and genius of the *artiste*. But if this sort of thing was what resulted from a quest for the "heroic and original," then Venturi thought that architects would be better off designing buildings that were "ugly and ordinary." He urged "a humbler role for architects than the Modern movement has wanted to accept." This would result in buildings that are "socially less coercive and aesthetically more vital than the striving and bombastic buildings of our recent past."

What did he mean by socially coercive? Consider Earl Carlin's Central Fire Station of New Haven, a photo of which is reproduced in *Learning from Las Vegas* alongside an unpretentious firehouse Venturi himself built in Indiana. Carlin's building is a forbidding wall of cement. It was meant to house a government service on which depend the lives of the people who paid for it. And yet the message it sends to anyone whose house is on fire is: "This had *better* be important." Orthodox Modernist architecture was hard to distinguish from a political project. It put the state on a higher plane than the citizen, whether accidentally or on purpose.

Actually, it was on purpose. Las Vegas's casino developers may have been slavishly dependent on outdated architectural motifs, but their modernist detractors were slavishly dependent on utopian doctrines. At one point, Venturi calls these doctrines "progressive, if not revolutionary, utopian, and puristic"; at another he mentions

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Modernism's "reformist-progressive social and industrial aims." It is clear throughout that he is looking for a polite way to say "authoritarian":

> Revolutionary eras are given to didactic symbolism and to the propagandistic use of architecture to promote revolutionary aims. This is as true for the symbolism of today's ghetto rebuilders (African militant or middle-class conservative) as it was for the Romantic Roman republican symbolism of revolutionary France.

Modernist architecture does not give us new ways of seeing. It is an impoverishment, in fact. It ignores a varied cultural vocabulary accumulated over the centuries, because that vocabulary might endanger Modernism's political purpose. As a project, it resembles Kemal Atatürk's purging of the Turkish language to eliminate words with Persian, Arabic, or European roots.

The case can be made that Venturi is merely advancing a phony dissent of the sort that John Kenneth Galbraith mocked in academic social-science departments, where "considerable store is set by the device of putting an old truth in a new form, and minor heresies are much cherished." Tom Wolfe took this view of Venturi's own building designs in his 1981 lament over modern architecture, *From Bauhaus to Our House*. "If he was departing from modernism," Wolfe wrote, "he was backing off gingerly."

Venturi's departures from modernist orthodoxy were indeed more timid than his theoretical pronouncements. He was a respecter of progressive taboos. He and his partner Denise Scott Brown were given to denouncing as sexists those critics who did not give her full credit as a coauthor of *Learning from Las Vegas*. (So please understand "Venturi" in the foregoing to mean "Venturi et al."!) They also occasionally backpedaled, unsaying some of their strongest criticism. "Because we have criticized Modern architecture," they wrote near the book's beginning, "it is proper here to state our intense admiration of its early period when its founders, sensitive to their own times, proclaimed the right revolution." (Not just admiration but "intense" admiration for the "right revolution.")

This, of course, is the way many Hungarian, Czech, and East German dissidents talked in the 1980s. To ask for more, as Wolfe and others did, was to ask an awful lot of Venturi. If Venturi could not come out and declare himself an enemy of the revolution all at once, that may be a testament to the revolution's power, rather than his own pusillanimity. The boy who says the emperor has no clothes does a service even if he has no "blueprint for governance."

Venturi et al. professed themselves shocked at being compared (as they frequently were) to Nixonites: "One does not have to agree with hard-hat politics," they wrote, "to support the rights of the middle-middle-class to their own architectural aesthetics." No, one doesn't, but Venturi's critics were not stupid. They saw that his dissent, small though it appeared to outsiders, was the maximum dissent feasible. Venturi was suggesting that the ideas of the modernists had become involuted, illogical, and monumentally arrogant, and that the general public, choosing in a slapdash way and for the crassest possible reasons, could be trusted to do no worse. There was, indeed, something Nixonian about *Learning from Las Vegas*, or at least reminiscent of those 1970s conservatives who swore they would rather be ruled by the first 200 names in the Boston telephone book than the Harvard faculty. They would not have disagreed that 200 random property developers in Las Vegas could build a more humane and habitable environment than the faculty of the Yale School of Art and Architecture. ♦

BC&A

One for All

The sociopolitical virtue of selfless action.

BY MARK BLITZ

On Thinking Institutionally is intelligent, deeply felt, and engagingly written. Were academic social scientists to glance at it, it might open their reptilian squints. Conservatives and community-minded liberals will recognize that Heclo brings to light a phenomenon that causes many of their complaints; namely, the neglect or abuse of our institutions. From this abandonment stems much of the selfishness, immorality, and rootlessness that plagues us.

On Thinking Institutionally
by Hugh Heclo
Paradigm, 232 pp., $19.95

Heclo's goal is to counteract these ills by defending the possibility of "thinking institutionally." He means by this "living out" the "appreciative stance" that characterizes someone who takes "the internal point of view of institutional values." This "respect-in-depth" involves looking to its long-term health, as a classic steward presides over the property with which he is entrusted.

Although one might imagine that Heclo has in mind only broad and compelling institutions—church, country, family—he begins by contrasting the Barry Bondses of the world who use the game only to advance themselves with the Cal Ripkens and Ryne Sandbergs who play the game the right way and modestly respect baseball's traditions and forebears.

Mark Blitz, the Fletcher Jones professor of political philosophy at Claremont McKenna College, is the author, most recently, of Duty Bound: Responsibility and American Public Life.

As examples of those who think institutionally, Heclo names, among others, Enron and WorldCom whistleblowers, military officials who complained about Abu Ghraib or fought to have it investigated honestly, George Washington, James Madison (as opposed to Thomas Jefferson), and Colin Powell. Thinking institutionally means living by an institution's rules even if this diminishes one's immediate pleasure and success, or living within the duties that constitute one's office or job.

One might say (although Heclo does not say it precisely this way) that our problem is that too few people attend to the general conditions that make possible their own success in business, politics, and the professions.

Heclo supplements his constructive understanding of institutions with a fine presentation (and criticism) of social science's alternative view of them, and of some academics' current infatuation with "critical thinking." Social scientists discuss institutions more than they did a generation ago. But they do not grasp what it is like to think within an institution, to absorb, see, and react within its point of view. Heclo patiently shows how the rational choice account of the birth and utility of institutions misses this inwardness. As with critical thinking, social science stops short where the important problems of what is worth choosing, and why powerful men sometimes limit the aggrandizement open to them and instead serve common goods, begin.

Heclo further enhances his account by discussing the source of our anti-institutionalism. One reason we abuse and do not care for our institutions is that they have failed us. Heclo presents a disturbingly instructive five-page chart of business and political scandals from 1958-1999, and points to the continuing scandals in the years since, and to failings in churches, the media, law, and sports. The deeper reason we neglect institutions is that our individualism, our wish to stand apart, or to make of our own lives works of art, corrodes them. The same selfish, individualistic, nonevaluative point of view that limits social science's understanding and makes "critical thinking" pointless or harmful opposes our ordinary ability to think institutionally. We forget that freedom must be formed and elevated if it is to be sufficiently worthwhile.

Despite its considerable virtues, Heclo's argument is limited and, in certain ways, misleading. Discussing these limits is the proper way to give his significant discussion the attention it deserves.

One difficulty is that Heclo does not differentiate types and varieties of institutions. His illustrations range from plumbing to philosophy. (Even Socrates, that master of impudence, might be amused to read that irresponsible plumbers "ultimately" are betrayers "of being.") Therefore, some of the powerful things he says that arguably are true of one set of institutions are not true of others. This is important practically, not just theoretically, because it means that how one might shore up institutions differs in different cases. Some institutions have offices well positioned to care about or enforce practices that often are not in participants' immediate interests but are needed by all, as judges differ from attorneys. Others do not.

One also might well argue that an institution's purpose, which Heclo believes is its heart, is sometimes better served by changing the institution than by preserving it. The practice of medicine does not suit physicians as well as it once did, and some of its elements are also more annoying to patients. But for many, lives are longer and health is better.

There are few enforceable standards for the media, for example, yet some outlets exist whose audience and family control enable them to take risks that others might not, or to take responsibility for the whole. When the leading papers and networks no longer believe themselves able financially to conduct business the old way, however, there is no one to fire or hector, because no equivalent to judges or baseball commissioners existed in the first place.

A related difficulty is that Heclo does not effectively distinguish between thinking institutionally and devoting oneself to a particular instance of an institution. In some cases, the site for one's attachment is largely an accidental place where one's general institutional connection comes to rest, as this parish or college might be subordinate to the Church or to Learning. In other cases it is not, as love of one's own family differs from commitment to marriage or family generally. Love and spirited protection of particular things explains much of our devotion to what stands beyond our selfishness. Heclo too much absorbs these passions into commitment to institutions, many of which are more abstract than concrete, however appreciative our stance toward them.

One also might well argue that an institution's purpose, which Heclo believes is its heart, is sometimes better served by changing the institution than by preserving it. The practice of medicine does not suit physicians as well as it once did, and some of its elements are also more annoying to patients. But for many, lives are longer and health is better.

Heclo sees much of this, of course, and he is concerned about institutions' penchant for stultification. But he does not make this concern an active part of his analysis. To consider an institution's purpose is already to step outside it and no longer to think within it. It opens possibilities for radical reform, and for

newly weighing the rank of ends and their possibilities for being achieved.

Heclo believes that George Washington thinks institutionally when he serves the cause of "republican liberty." Were the Founders primarily institutionalists, however, they would have remained loyal to the Crown. Their stance toward the principles of natural rights is inherently radical and universal. It looks beyond seeing institutionally, even when it is combined with love of a Constitution that conserves these principles.

Connected to this question is Heclo's not following through the implications of the distinction he must make between good and bad institutions. He recognizes that one might say that slavery and the Third Reich look suspiciously like the institutions that he favors, with their long time horizons, apparent self-sacrifice, affective stance, and seeming respect in depth. Of course, they are evil. What makes them so? Institutions ultimately serve what "is good for us as human beings," and "human beings flourish in seeking conditions of justice, freedom, equality and community with each other."

This "wisdom . . . is not obscure or inaccessible to the common man," he writes.

We should see, however, that the standpoint of the human good places us outside any authoritative institution, and that the meaning and bearing of the goods Heclo mentions are not as easily grasped or maintained as he suggests. Preserving the possibilities of radical questioning and of equality in individual rights is no easier (perhaps, in the course of time, more difficult) than advancing authoritative institutional perspectives, and is no less (indeed, perhaps, more) important.

By sometimes identifying serving higher purposes with having an institutional point of view, and by absorbing the particular and passionate within the institutional, Heclo risks misjudging (in the conservative direction) the proper combination of radical and authoritative that we must attempt to achieve. We should attend to the dangers to which Enlightenment individualism is prone, but in these days especially we also should defend the Enlightenment and its natural sources.

I wonder if, by looking so much at contemporary individualism's excesses, Heclo has not underestimated our original Enlightenment individualism, and its resources for directing us toward common goods? All our attachments today are voluntary and optional, not simply, but to an unprecedented degree. This fact makes wholesale allegiance to at least the deeper kinds of institutions that Heclo has in mind unlikely.

How, then, can one retain some direction to institutions given this fact, which stems from rights and freedoms one would not want diminished? One answer is to see that individualism based on equal rights is not only a matter of restricted self-interest, but also involves its own strength of character. Many modern institutions are rational economically, but they also become a field in which the character we require to use our rights effectively stretches itself, taking on larger and larger responsibilities.

For some to significant degree, and for almost all to some degree, the "self" and its interests expand. We obey the law and defend the country. We attend churches and synagogues. We devise new media that, as a whole, are as attentive to politics as the old ones. The reason is not only (and in most cases not primarily) the echo of old ways, to which Heclo is impressively attentive; it is also the link between the virtues we require to exercise our rights equally with others, and the self-direction of these virtues to larger institutions.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2002

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Indeed, there is an odd absence of discussion of character here. Heclo's frequent invocation of the need for (or presence of) "commitment" to institutions sounds too much like the artistic creation of self that he decries. But we need less irrational commitment, even if we are committed to good things, and more character—good dispositions open to (practical) reason.

Good character goes much of the way toward securing professional reliability and competence, assuming the skill is there. It fits together with much respect for institutions, yet is portable in a way that respect in depth for particular institutions is not. It is not easy to achieve, yet is still the norm in our country, despite our concerns. It allows one to serve others, yet (and this is a source of strength) accords with self-interest, generously understood.

What the useful plumber and plutocrat share is responsibility and industry in pursuing their equal rights. This will lead some—the plumber who becomes George Meany or the privileged son who becomes Franklin Roosevelt—to pay attention to the "institutional" conditions that make possible, or might make possible, their own freedom and success.

Good character and judgment that remain allied with individual interest are not enough to secure attention to common forms, for one also needs regulation, and punishment of rule-breakers. Moreover, they do not obviate the need for reflection on what is genuinely good, or altogether displace the need for reverence, including reverence for some institutions. Yet they go a long way toward alleviating many of our institutional ills without requiring a degree of respect in depth that is at odds with our voluntarism. If most baseball players were decent, it would hardly matter that almost none shared a quasi-mysticism about The Game.

Heclo, of course, may believe some or all of my concerns are misguided or addressed sufficiently in his discussion. But I mean them to encourage argument, and not to discourage potential readers, for this fine and intelligent book surely deserves serious reflection. ♦

BCA

Campus Confidential

Loving to learn, and learning to love, in America.

BY EVE TUSHNET

GEORGE MARKS / RETROFILE / GETTY IMAGES

Recently, Charles Murray and others have argued that too many people go to college. If enough parents read Donna Freitas's fascinating, flawed, and provocative new book, that problem will solve itself.

Sex and the Soul
Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance, and Religion on America's College Campuses
by Donna Freitas
Oxford, 328 pp., $24.95

Freitas takes an in-depth look at the sexual and spiritual cultures of seven colleges—two Catholic, two evangelical, and three nonreligious—and paints a picture that should disturb even the most complacent chancellor or alumnus donor.

Freitas grouped the nonreligious and Catholic schools together as "spiritual" schools, because no religious ethos pervades or even chastens their students in the sexual realm. These are the schools of "hookup culture," where oral sex is less intimate than handholding and undergraduate women attend theme parties in which, no matter whether the men are "CEOs" or "Sports Pros," the coeds are always some variation of "ho." And interestingly, these are the schools where very bright students become incoherent or

Eve Tushnet, a writer in Washington, blogs at eve-tushnet.blogspot.com.

clichéd when asked to describe how their spirituality and their sexuality interact.

But Freitas doesn't spare the evangelical schools, either. She delineates the gossip culture common to both evangelical and "spiritual" schools—even though, for the evangelicals, such gossip ought to be as sinful as premarital sex. She gives poignant examples of the anxieties and confusion caused by the evangelical colleges' "senior scramble" for (in what's become a campus proverb) "ring by spring or your money back!"

Freitas is keenly aware of how the evangelical-college pressure to find a spouse by graduation falls most heavily on women. She notes that evangelical women do find ways to evade or subvert the passivity they're assumed to embody—even a Sadie Hawkins dance offers more diverse gender expression than these women's dating manuals and campus culture!—but she doesn't detail those methods, preferring to emphasize the fears and silences which make it hard for evangelical college women to date, and nearly impossible for them to understand how they might respond to a premarital sexual encounter.

Sex is treated as a marker of Extreme Sin in a way that many other sins aren't, Freitas argues, and this creates a campus culture of quiet neurosis, in which repentance and forgiveness are rarely modeled and therefore rarely practiced.

So far, maybe so obvious. But despite Freitas's obvious discomfort with ring-by-spring culture, it's hard not to think that the Catholic and nonreligious colleges come off even worse in her account.

At the "spiritual" colleges, the promise that sexual liberation would walk hand-in-hand with women's liberation has been effectively debunked. Students of both sexes long for romance, but since dating is so *dated*, their only path to romance is through anonymous hookups which leave them conflicted at best. Freitas argues that the hookup culture is maintained largely through embarrassed silence: Although most students don't feel great about it, they have no language for confronting it, and a great deal of shame over not being sufficiently good-time-girl or stud-guy about it, and so everyone assumes that hookup culture is as good as it gets.

Moreover, and perhaps more troubling even for anything-goes deans and college presidents, Freitas found that students at the "spiritual" colleges were shockingly inarticulate when they tried to grapple with the interaction of body and soul. The evangelical colleges at least produced students who could *discuss* sex, bring their intellects to bear on their impulses. The spiritual colleges produced students who fumbled and fell back on clichés.

The one area where "spiritual" colleges' students found their voices was in their rejection of any religious authority, especially or perhaps most emblematically the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Freitas several times describes evangelical students as "smug." But a similar air of self-satisfaction can be discerned in the "spiritual" students when they say things like, "I decided that it is perfectly plausible that people developed the idea of a Higher Being because of the fear of the unknown. . . . I think that a man like Gandhi or Jesus did not act virtuously because of a belief in a higher being, rather they were virtuous because that is the best thing to be."

Freitas portrays "spiritual" students as prone to exoticism, glib in regard to the traditions in which they were raised, intensely misogynist despite their best efforts, and—most poignantly—utterly tongue-tied when asked to connect sex and God.

Fortunately, Freitas is willing to give practical advice to both evangelical and "spiritual" colleges and their likely customer bases. She offers a series of questions with which parents, professors, and administrators might fruitfully challenge colleges of both stripes.

Her fundamental position is in favor of *intellect*, in favor of open discussion, in favor of explicitly and rigorously connecting the spiritual and sexual realms. Anyone with any interest in mentoring young people should read this book and its recommendations, because there's great hope and wisdom in them.

Perhaps her greatest fault in *Sex and the Soul* is that Freitas doesn't bother to articulate her own sexual and spiritual ethos. She assumes a standard of sexual "health" which seems to mean something like "ability to find meaning in one's sexual choices, whether that means sex in a loving and demi-committed relationship or whether that means no sex 'til marriage."

This is really not up to any standard of intellectual rigor, and it's sad to find it at the heart of a book otherwise so passionately in favor of the body, the mind, and the soul. How I feel is conditioned in large part by my society and its messages—the very thing Freitas wishes to combat. It's conditioned in large part by my biology, by wishful thinking, and by pride.

The culture of "committed relationships"—as journalist and recent graduate Helen Rittelmeyer puts it, "Like marriage, only smaller"—seems more like an underspiced, self-comforting mix of these influences than a sign of spiritual depth.

In his introduction to *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis described two kinds of religion: the apprehension of the Numinous—the fear and awe of the sublime—and the following of a moral code. And he noted how bizarre it was that Judaism and Christianity had brought the two together:

> We desire nothing less than to see that Law whose naked authority is already unsupportable armed with the incalculable claims of the Numinous. Of all the jumps that humanity takes in its religious history this is certainly the most surprising. It is not unnatural that many sections of the human race refused it; non-moral religion, and non-religious morality, existed and still exist.

In Freitas's "spiritual" interviewees, the numinous and the moral have re-separated, to the benefit of few. In her evangelical interviewees, the moral may crowd out the numinous. Getting these two elements back together would be the most intellectually stimulating "hookup" of them all. ♦

Veep-Hunting

Looking for the party line on Cheney? Here it is.

BY CHRISTOPHER WILLCOX

Anyone still interested in the sorry state of mainstream journalism should have a good, long look at Barton Gellman's blistering portrait of Dick Cheney. Despite some labored huffing and puffing over Cheney's behind-the-scenes role on everything from surveillance techniques to global warming, Gellman adds very little that is new to the historic record. What *Angler* is most notable for is its obvious animus and its disregard for the traditional newsman's separation of church (editorial opinion) and state (fact-based reporting).

Angler
The Cheney Vice Presidency
by Barton Gellman
Penguin, 384 pp., $27.95

Gellman, who won a Pulitzer Prize for a series of stories in the *Washington Post* on which this book is based, is a prime exemplar of the new kind of journalism that conflates reportage and opinion in ways that, not long ago, would have outraged news editors. But not only are some of today's senior editors tolerant of such front-page editorializing, they are critical of reporters who don't provide it.

In an astonishing recent review of Bob Woodward's latest book on the Bush administration, Jill Abramson, the *New York Times* "managing editor for news," had this to say about that:

> What is most consequential . . . is the evolutionary shift it marks for the author. Woodward is famous for his flat, just-the-facts-ma'am style, if one can call it that. It is the old fashioned newspaperman's credo of show, don't tell. He rarely pauses in his narratives to synthesize or analyze, let alone judge his powerful subjects, especially those who have been his sources. . . . In contrast to his other Bush volumes [this] does provide interstitial analysis and judgments throughout. It also renders an extremely harsh, final appraisal of President Bush.

Later in the same review, Abramson declares that Woodward's books "offer a chilling lesson in how not to lead."

Statements like this apparently don't disqualify Jill Abramson from directing the *Times* news coverage of the Bush administration, but they certainly confirm a popular riff on the *Times*'s famous motto: Is it All the News That's Fit to Print, or All the News That Fits? Whatever the answer, it is clear from the ongoing Pew Foundation report on public attitudes toward the media, and from other similar studies, that the liberal bias of the mainstream media is an established fact for most consumers. What is interesting about this is that, not only are the practitioners not on their guard to appear unbiased, they seem to have decided that they may as well enjoy their bad reputation and take their best shots.

Angler is neither well written nor particularly instructive on the motives and methods of a vice president who has exercised enormous influence over the last eight years. Much of the material on Cheney's reticence with the press—surprise!—and his conviction that the presidency had been weakened by an overzealous Congress, is deeply familiar. But the volume is a treasure trove of journalistic techniques deployed to bag the quarry.

There is the bogus use of comparative statistics. For Sept. 11, the National Center for Health Statistics recorded a 44 percent spike over the expected daily death rate, followed by a return to normal on Sept. 12. The year-end tally showed 2,922 lives lost to "terrorism involving the destruction of aircraft (homicide)," a figure that was comparable to the 3,209 pedestrians killed by cars, pick-up trucks or vans. (Non-terrorist homicides exceeded 17,000.) The economic damage was extensive, but no match for the losses of Hurricane Katrina or the subprime mortgage meltdown in Bush's second term.

Whatever one might think of this dismissal of the September 11 horrors, it is entirely in keeping with the author's apparent conviction that terrorism is essentially a matter for the police and that the Bush administration's response is a greater threat than terrorism itself. "The vice-president shifted America's course," writes Gellman, "more than any terrorist could have done. . . . Decisions made in the White House, in response [to terrorism] had incomparably greater impact on American interests and society."

Then there is the use of the unattributed quotation when a sharp knife is required. One commission insider, a Cheney admirer who did not want to be named, said the vice president and his staff "had their plans" for presidential succession "and their plans were going to be by fiat." This comes at the end of a chapter alleging the vice president's efforts to get the speaker of the House removed from the chain of succession should the president and vice president be incapacitated in a terrorist attack.

There is the cherry-picking of evidence. Much is made, for example, of an Australian intelligence report debunking the purchase by Saddam Hussein's Iraq of electronic maps of the United States and of the doubts regarding aluminum tubing suspected of being useful in making centrifuges for a nuclear bomb. *Angler* reflects almost none of the fairly consistent foreign intelligence agreement that Saddam had, or was close to having, weapons of mass destruction. The fact that Saddam used such weapons on the Kurds is not even mentioned.

Christopher Willcox, former editor in chief of Reader's Digest*, was deputy assistant secretary of defense during 2001-05.*

And finally, there is the use of political enemies to skewer the prey. Every sentient being inside the Beltway knows that former Majority Leader Dick Armey hates Cheney, so who does Gellman call for the money shot on the Cheney legacy? Here's Armey on Cheney: "I think that most of the time history is about a presidency, and a president. And the vice president is almost always a footnote in that story. But I believe that in this case history is going to treat both the president and the vice president unkindly almost in equal part."

History may well judge this vice president and his boss harshly. They certainly were dealt a turbulent eight years, and historians will be sifting the evidence for years to come. But *Angler* won't be a must-read for historians. Perhaps some fair-minded journalism professor will serve it up someday as a case study in media bias. ♦

BCA

Between the Wars

When the European powers had a League of their own.

BY EDWARD SHORT

Virginia Woolf once remarked of Edward Gibbon's great work, "Few people can read the whole of the *Decline and Fall* without admitting that some chapters have glided away without leaving a trace . . . many pages are no more than a concussion of sonorous sounds . . . and innumerable figures have passed across the stage without printing even their names upon our memories." Readers might feel similarly stupefied by Zara Steiner's history of international relations between 1919 and 1933, a volume in the Oxford History of Modern Europe series launched by Allan Bullock back in the 1950s. A sequel, *The Triumph of the Dark 1933-1939*, will follow.

The Lights That Failed
European International History 1919-1933
by Zara Steiner
Oxford, 960 pp., $54.99

The ground the present book covers is enormous. It provides a comprehensive account of the Treaty of Versailles, showing how this and related treaties played out in Western and Eastern Europe, as well as in the Middle East and Asia. It charts in detail the diplomatic history of the League of Nations. There are also chapters on the repartitioning of the Middle East after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire; the rise of Mussolini; the diplomacy of the Depression; the Manchurian Crisis; and the hapless fortunes of disarmament in a world never convinced that internationalism would root out militarism. Preparedness, not pacifism, carried the day—though too late for the many millions who never survived the Second World War, which Versailles had been convened, in part, to prevent.

Despite its daunting length, the book is worth reading. One does not have to share Steiner's affection for the League of Nations to recognize the usefulness of a book that studies so closely the "supple confusions"—to use T.S. Eliot's memorable phrase—that often inform even the best-laid plans of diplomatists.

The plans that Georges Clémenceau, David Lloyd George, and Woodrow Wilson laid at Versailles were never entirely coherent. Clémenceau insisted that the treaty give France security from German *revanche*; Lloyd George was equally insistent that it enable Germany to rejoin the economic and diplomatic comity of nations; Wilson, the wild card of the peacemakers, whose Fourteen Points generated so much unfulfilled promise, initially spoke of the need for a "just peace" but eventually proved nearly as merciless as Clémenceau.

"Paris was a nightmare, and everyone there was morbid. A sense of impending catastrophe overhung the frivolous scene; the futility and smallness of man before the great events confronting him; the mingled significance and unreality of the decisions; levity, blindness, insolence, confused cries from without—all the elements of ancient tragedy were there." This was how the peace conference struck John Maynard Keynes, the glib economist whose *Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919) popularized the notion that the treaty was too punitive to be constructive.

Steiner contests this, persuasively arguing that the treaty "was not a 'Carthaginian peace'" and Germany was not brought to her knees. Indeed, as Steiner notes, Germany's recovery might have been deliberately delayed "in order to obtain a reduction in reparations." One need only recall the truly vindictive peace that the Germans exacted from the Russians at Brest-Litovsk (1918) to see how comparatively magnanimous the Versailles Treaty was.

Steiner concedes that the treaty had its flaws:

> It failed to solve the problem of both punishing and conciliating a country that remained a great power despite . . . its military defeat. It could hardly have been otherwise, given the very different aims of the peacemakers, not to speak of the multiplicity of the problems they faced, many well beyond their competence or control.

The Congress of Vienna (1815) proved more durable, but it had only one *capomaestro* in Metternich and nothing like the fundamental problems that exercised the Big Three at Versailles. When one considers those problems—the fierce ethnic enmities that the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire unleashed in the Balkans, the question of what to do

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with Poland *vis-à-vis* France and Germany, the disposition of the Rhineland and the Saar—it is surprising that the treaty accomplished so much. With all its shortcomings, until Hitler came to power in 1933, the treaty did create, as Steiner demonstrates, "a legitimate post-war order that the defeated as well as the victor nations could accept"—though Lloyd George must have spoken for many when he said that "we shall have to do the whole thing over again in twenty-five years at three times the cost."

What is less persuasive is Steiner's contention that "the establishment of the League of Nations, whatever the reservations of the victor powers, held out the promise of a more just international regime which the excluded could one day join."

The League of Nations was the brainchild of Lord Robert Cecil (1864-1958), who once recalled that it was the absence of the rule of law at Eton that first gave him the idea for an international body that would prevent war and promote peace. The chivalrous son of Lord Salisbury could no more abide the bullying of little boys than the bullying of little states. Readers interested in the prototype of the United Nations should read Kenneth Rose's witty biography of Lord Robert and his siblings, *The Later Cecils* (1975), which highlights the widespread skepticism that the new body inspired.

As Rose relates, "The intruder at a meeting of the League of Nations, who declaimed through his megaphone, 'Robert Cecil, you are a bloody traitor,' was both rude and wrong. But he echoed the suspicions of very many Tories who felt that dependence on the whims of any international assembly was both corrosive of national sovereignty and an insult to the millions who had fought, died and suffered for their country during four years of war."

Winston Churchill, although fond of Cecil, never extended that fondness to the League.

> It seems a mad business to confront these dictators without weapons or military force, and at the same time to try to tame and cow the spirit of our people with peace films, anti-recruiting propaganda and resistance to defense measures. Unless the free and law-respecting nations are prepared to organize, arm and combine, they are going to be smashed up.

In fairness to Cecil, if he was passionate about doing what he could to promote peace, he was free of the pacifism that muddled so many League supporters. He never advocated dismantling Europe's defenses in pursuit of a peace that would only have served the dictators. For Cecil, the League was a pragmatic means to rein in Germany; he made no grandiose claims for its moral imperative.

Lord Robert Cecil

On this score he was shrewd enough to take Wilson's measure. "I do not quite know what it is that repels me: a certain hardness, coupled with vanity and an eye for effect," he wrote. "He supports idealistic causes without being in the least an idealist himself." When it came to the claims many liberals made on behalf of the League—and still make—Cecil would have agreed with his cousin, the historian Algernon Cecil, who exclaimed: "God help the world . . . if the League of Nations is its only hope!"

It has to be said that the thesis of *The Lights That Failed* is trite. It amounts to this: The Treaty of Versailles did not cause the Second World War. Steiner quotes an article from the *Economist* claiming that the "harsh terms" of the treaty "would ensure a second war" to suggest that this view is somehow widely accepted. Yet readers will not find it in the pioneering work that Ian Kershaw has done on Hitler and the Nazis, or in Hew Strachan's definitive history of the First World War, where he says explicitly that "there was no inevitable link between [the Treaty of Versailles] and the outbreak of a second world war twenty years later."

The only person who consistently argued that Versailles caused World War II was Hitler. Steiner's thesis is a nonthesis. It is reminiscent of the *ignoratio elenchi* that propels so much academic debate, or what the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as an "Argument that appears to refute opponent while actually disproving something not advanced by him."

This caveat aside, *The Lights That Failed* is a welcome book at a time when we must decide ourselves whether we shall meet the threats of proven aggressors with happy talk or preemption. For those who find the book a little overwhelming, I would recommend reading it in tandem with Ronald Blythe's *The Age of Illusion* (1963), which is at once very insightful and very funny. In studying what Steiner calls "the crooked path to Armageddon," we need the odd laugh. And for true gallows humor, there is nothing better than this from the once hugely popular Labour leader George Lansbury, who told the House of Commons on the day that the Second World War began:

> The cause that I and a handful of friends represent is this morning going down to ruin. But I think that we ought to take heart and courage from the fact that after two thousand years of war and strife, at least those who enter upon this colossal struggle have to admit that force has not settled and cannot settle anything.

What is not so funny is that the ghost of George Lansbury haunts us still. ♦

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Frost the Snowman

A magical transformation of nothing into something.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Classic interviews have a way of fastening themselves like barnacles to the reputations of their subjects—as when Roger Mudd asked Teddy Kennedy why he wanted to be president and Kennedy found himself entirely unable to answer, or when Ted Turner got so enraged at Peter Ross Range's probing questions for *Playboy* that he ripped the tape recorder from Range's hands and smashed it. Something was crystallized in these moments, something about the character of the subject that had never quite come into focus before. That is what happens when an interview really matters. The only comparable moment in recent times was Sarah Palin's encounter with Katie Couric; time will tell whether the residue of it interferes with Palin's future prospects.

Frost / Nixon
Directed by Ron Howard

One interview that did *not* succeed in this way was David Frost's marathon grilling of Richard Nixon in 1977. The Frost interview ran for six hours over four nights, everybody in the world watched it, and no one ever gave it a second thought. Twenty-eight years later, the British playwright Peter Morgan decided to use it as the basis for *Frost/Nixon*, a docu-play that was a sensation in London, a modest hit on Broadway, and has now become an Oscar-hungry film directed by Ron Howard. The film is made with Howard's characteristic immediacy and force. He is the most skilled craftsman among present-day Hollywood directors, and he keeps *Frost/Nixon* moving at a runaway pace that makes its remarkably banal storyline—essentially, the preparation for and filming of a TV chat—seem exciting and even important.

Nonetheless, the movie is malarkey, if for no other reason than that it treats the interview as an earthshaking event—as the judgment of history itself on Richard Nixon (Frank Langella). Because he resigned before he could be impeached and was pardoned by Gerald Ford, Nixon was never compelled to answer hostile questions about Watergate in court. One of the film's characters says the interview, for which Frost paid Nixon $600,000 (the equivalent of $2 million today), should be "the trial Nixon never had."

The question the movie poses is whether Frost is up to the challenge of being the prosecutor in that trial, as he is, in Morgan's reckoning, a lightweight television celebrity of no standing whatsoever, a combination of Regis Philbin and Ryan Seacrest. And according to Morgan, Frost is on the verge of letting Nixon get away with it until a late-night phone call from the former president reveals the great man's essential psychosis. Frost comes to life and decides he is going to get Nixon to talk.

That phone call never took place. Nor, for that matter, did Frost succeed, as the film proposes, in cornering Nixon and forcing him to acknowledge the nature of his own criminality. Michael Sheen, who does a wonderful job as Frost, actually widens his eyes in shock when, in the midst of a question about Watergate, Nixon informs him, "When the president does it, it is not illegal." But in the interview itself, as John Taylor of the Nixon Center has noted, Nixon used those words not in relation to Watergate but rather in a discussion of an aborted anti-domestic terrorism effort called the Huston plan, which he was likening to Abraham Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus during the Civil War.

Nixon appears shattered when he says, as he did in the interview, "I let the American people down." Frank Langella, the onetime matinee idol, is shot in extreme close-up as he speaks the words, which seem to emerge from his mouth almost unbidden, the result solely of Frost's insistent questioning. Ridiculous. Nixon was anything but shattered during the interview or by the interview. Saying "I let the people down" was exactly Nixon's way of refusing to answer specific questions about the nature of his role in the original crime and the cover-up. He allowed those answers to go to the grave with him, which certainly suggests he played a larger role than we will ever know now.

Even more breathtakingly false are the film's closing captions, which attempt to place the interviews in historical context. According to those captions, Frost was celebrated around the world for his brilliant job, which transformed his career and made him into a wise man of the medium. Nixon, the captions suggest, never recovered from the damage done to him by the interview.

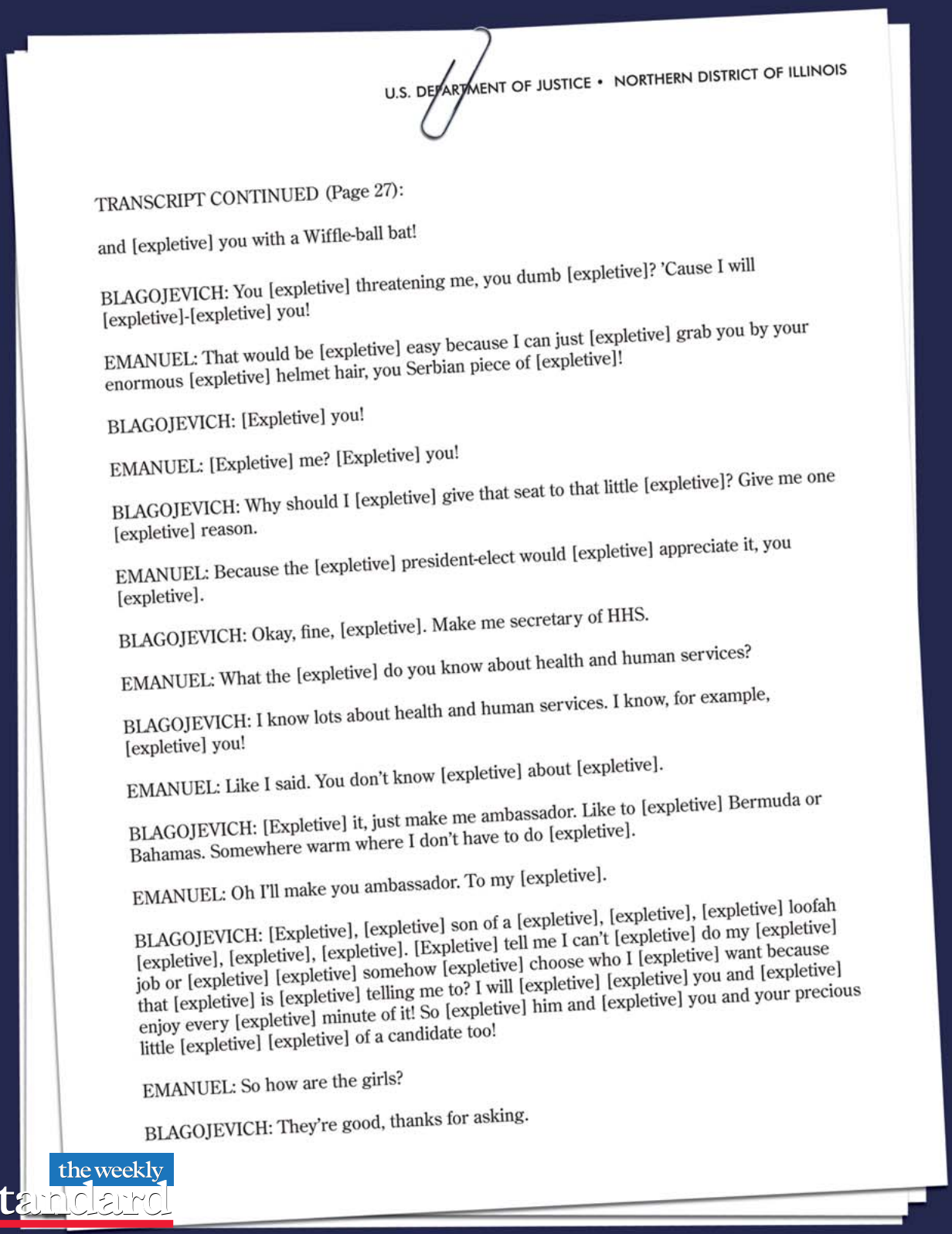
Now this is comic. Frost did little of note after the interview, while Nixon underwent the most unlikely and unexpected rehabilitation of any political figure in history. He wrote a series of bestsellers, was consulted by Republicans and Democrats alike, and received a grand funeral upon his death during which he was eulogized by five presidents. He had come full circle, and the first stop on his path to rehabilitation was the interview with David Frost.

"You were a worthy adversary," Nixon tells Frost in a parting moment at the end of the film. No, actually, Frost wasn't, and among the many strange features of *Frost/Nixon*—notably the wildly unconvincing performance of the still-gorgeous and plummy-voiced Frost Langella—the strangest is its attempt to transform a skilled television presenter into a slayer of presidents when anyone alive today who was paying attention 30 years ago knows that isn't what happened at all. ♦

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

"President-elect Barack Obama's incoming chief of staff Rahm Emanuel had a deeper involvement in pressing for a U.S. Senate seat appointment than previously reported, the Sun-Times has learned. Emanuel had direct discussions about the seat with Gov. Blagojevich, who is accused of trying to auction it to the highest bidder."

—Chicago Sun-Times, *December 18, 2008*



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TRANSCRIPT CONTINUED (Page 27):

and [expletive] you with a Wiffle-ball bat!

BLAGOJEVICH: You [expletive] threatening me, you dumb [expletive]? 'Cause I will [expletive]-[expletive] you!

EMANUEL: That would be [expletive] easy because I can just [expletive] grab you by your enormous [expletive] helmet hair, you Serbian piece of [expletive]!

BLAGOJEVICH: [Expletive] you!

EMANUEL: [Expletive] me? [Expletive] you!

BLAGOJEVICH: Why should I [expletive] give that seat to that little [expletive]? Give me one [expletive] reason.

EMANUEL: Because the [expletive] president-elect would [expletive] appreciate it, you [expletive].

BLAGOJEVICH: Okay, fine, [expletive]. Make me secretary of HHS.

EMANUEL: What the [expletive] do you know about health and human services?

BLAGOJEVICH: I know lots about health and human services. I know, for example, [expletive] you!

EMANUEL: Like I said. You don't know [expletive] about [expletive].

BLAGOJEVICH: [Expletive] it, just make me ambassador. Like to [expletive] Bermuda or Bahamas. Somewhere warm where I don't have to do [expletive].

EMANUEL: Oh I'll make you ambassador. To my [expletive].

BLAGOJEVICH: [Expletive], [expletive] son of a [expletive], [expletive], [expletive] loofah [expletive], [expletive], [expletive]. [Expletive] tell me I can't [expletive] do my [expletive] job or [expletive] [expletive] somehow [expletive] choose who I [expletive] want because that [expletive] is [expletive] telling me to? I will [expletive] [expletive] you and [expletive] enjoy every [expletive] minute of it! So [expletive] him and [expletive] you and your precious little [expletive] [expletive] of a candidate too!

EMANUEL: So how are the girls?

BLAGOJEVICH: They're good, thanks for asking.